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Women & Terrorism: The Growing Trend of Women Suicide Terrorists

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## Abstract

[150 words max]

## Introduction

## Today in the United States, there are many preconceived notions about terrorism. One of them is that terrorist groups are all radical religious groups. Although not fully correct, this notion is a more accurate depiction of the current terrorist groups that the United States is fighting in its “War on Terror”. The trend of religious fundamentalist terror groups today drives this preconceived notion about terrorism. A similar increasing trend in terrorism is the trend of female participation. This trend however goes against many preconceived notions of culture and traditions in society. In the world of terrorism, although mostly dominated by men, women are now joining terrorist groups and becoming involved with terrorist activities, specifically suicide bombings.

Since women are not traditionally used as suicide bombers by terrorists groups, the use of women by terrorist groups is an interesting phenomenon. The issue with the growing trend of female terrorists counters many pre-conceived notions of the role of women in society. As these notions about women are shattered, questions arise about the motivational factors that drive women to become suicide bombers. Strong religious belief for any terrorist, man or woman, associated with a religious fundamentalist group is undeniable, so the issue of concern becomes whether there are other motivating factors that are gender specific that drive women to join terrorist groups and whether these gender differences also translate to gender differences in the utility of female suicide bombers over male suicide bombers.

The goal of this paper is to approach this issue from both a political and economic perspective by striving to test the following hypotheses:

H1: Motivations for joining terrorist groups and becoming a suicide bomber are not gender specific.

H2: Terrorist recruitment differs in regards to gender.

H3: For terrorist groups, utility of recruits (whether male or female) is gendered.

To test these hypotheses, the following elements will first discussed previous research in the topic of women and terrorism that concerns the gender differences in motivations of suicide bombers and the characteristic differences that affect recruitment, and the utility of female suicide bombers that accounts for the differences in religious fundamental terrorist groups that utilize women suicide bombers. It is the goal of this paper to address these questions, because of the growing concern that an increase in female participation may lead to an increase in the number of terrorists thus perpetuating the terrorist cause and increasing the difficulty of national strategies to stop terrorism. As such, understanding this trend of female terrorism is an essential to providing an overall solution to the current strategies employed by the United States in the Middle East, where it is continuing its fight against terrorism. By knowing the motivations of women in becoming female terrorists, and targeting this source of potential recruits to terrorist organizations, the U.S. can target this and reduce the utility and desire of women to join terrorist groups while at the same time creating a more stable democratic society.

**Background**

In studying the phenomenon of terrorism and suicide bombers, there are two important elements to understand: the motivations that drive individuals to join terrorist groups, and the recruitment tactics terrorist groups use. The study of women in terrorism looks as each of these elements to find gender specific motivations and tactics, as well as allows for the examination of the utility for terrorist groups in using women over men.

*Motivations*

“Worldwide terrorism uses people as bombs under [the] guise of addressing human problems” (Zedalis, pg. 12). This guise that Debra Zedalis refers to, in *Female Suicide Bombers*, addresses the excuses of terrorist groups that involve issues such as claims of abuse and discrimination. These claims however must not be confused by the motivations of individuals to join terrorist groups and become suicide bombers. Previous studies have examined characteristics of suicide bombers such as age, education level, and economic status (Zedalis). The only truly accepted factor, according to Zedalis, is age. In both genders, the younger ages are associated with suicide bombers. The study of superficial characteristics of individuals, like age do not illustrate the true motivations that individuals have for becoming suicide bombers. As such since then, there have been more studies on the psychological motivations of individuals. Recently in 2008, a psychological approach of the gendered differences in motivations for becoming a suicide bomber was done by Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor. They conclude that women were motivated more by “personal events” like ----, while men were more motivated by religious and nationalistic factors (Jacques and Taylor, 2008).

*Recruitment*

The next element necessary to understand is the recruitment of individuals.

Females were equally likely as males to be recruited through peer influence, exploitation, or self promotion, whereas males were more likely to be recruited as a result of religious persuasion (Jacques and Taylor, 2008).

Zedalis-gender characteristic differences of suicide bombers that affect recruitment

Bloom- Female Suicide Bombers

Ruether-Fundamentalism

THEORY: Hoffman- Suicide Terrorism

**Model**

2 player game: individual recruit (male or female) and the terrorist organization

Faria and Arce- recruitment model

Frey and Leuchinger- effective anti-terrorist policy

## Conclusion & Implications

As such, understanding this trend of female terrorism is an essential to providing an overall solution to the current strategies employed by the United States in the Middle East, where it is continuing its fight against terrorism. By knowing the motivations of women in becoming female terrorists, and targeting this source of potential recruits to terrorist organizations, the U.S. can target this and reduce the utility and desire of women to join terrorist groups while at the same time creating a more stable democratic society.

**References**