

Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism

**CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES ON CAUSES,
CONTEXTS, AND RESPONSES**

STUART GOTTLIEB, EDITOR

Yale University



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does poverty serve as a root cause of terrorism?

NO: Poverty is a weak causal link
James A. Piazza, *University of North Carolina, Charlotte*

YES: Poverty is an important cause
Karin von Hippel, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*

The notion that poverty is a root cause of terrorist violence is widely asserted, particularly in the Western world. This assertion is not surprising considering how well it fits with basic liberal economic theory, which presupposes that individuals are motivated primarily by material well-being. Those who have opportunities to sustain and better themselves will likely accept the system in which they live and behave peacefully. By contrast, those confronting socioeconomic distress and deprivation are more likely to be drawn to radical and possibly violent movements, including terrorist movements.

This view has a long-standing pedigree. In 1994, for example, President Bill Clinton said that "the forces of terror and extremism . . . feed on disillusionment, on poverty, on despair." The way to end terrorism is, in his judgment, to "spread prosperity and security to all."¹

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the poverty-terrorism thesis was further bolstered. In December 2001, World Bank president James Wolfensohn remarked, "This war is viewed in terms of the face of bin Laden, the terrorism of al-Qaeda, the rubble of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but these are just symptoms. The disease is the discontent seething in Islam, and more generally, the world of the poor."² Secretary of State Colin Powell concurred, saying in 2002, "I fully believe that the root cause of terrorism does come from

situations where there is poverty, where there is ignorance, where people see no hope in their lives.”³

This thesis, however, has one glaring problem: it flies in the face of most evidence. Take the 9/11 hijackers. If one were to base an analysis solely on the biographies of those nineteen individuals, one would conclude that the root cause of terrorism is not poverty and despair, but privilege, education, and opportunity.⁴ In fact, study after study, performed both before and after 9/11, confirms that most terrorists come from backgrounds more privileged than that of the average member of their national or regional population.⁵ Furthermore, many of the poorest countries in the world experience no terrorism at all, while some of the wealthiest have been confronting terrorism for decades.

How can an assumption based on such deductive logic and enjoying such a renowned following be so wrong? The answer is that it may not be. Although both poverty and terrorism have been around for a long time, rigorous research into connections between the two is a relatively new phenomenon, and the jury is still out on definitive conclusions. Equally important, the criteria for judging the poverty-terrorism thesis may contain faulty assumptions—for example, perhaps poverty does not *directly* spawn terrorism, but rather provides an important *context* in which radicalism and other support structures of terrorism may benefit. Most terrorists may not come from poverty, but their radical movements—be they religious, ideological, territorial-separatist, and so forth—gain influence when the communities they purport to represent suffer under dire socioeconomic conditions.

In this chapter, James Piazza and Karin von Hippel agree that terrorism is a highly complex phenomenon and that uncovering silver bullet causal explanations is unlikely. They differ, however, on the relationship between poverty and terrorism. Piazza maintains that the critics of the poverty-terrorism thesis have it right. Using the most current data available, he shows there to be little (if any) connection between poverty and terrorism at the global, national, and individual levels. These findings will not bring comfort to policymakers who, he says, have treated the poverty-terrorism thesis as gospel. But it will allow for a more honest—and ultimately more fruitful—investigation into the real roots of terrorism.

Von Hippel agrees that there is a paucity of reliable data supporting the poverty-terrorism thesis. But this does not mean the evidence against it is any more reliable. In fact, she argues that most research to date has been too narrowly focused and does not include many relevant countries and regions, rendering current findings inconclusive. In addition, most analyses

fail to account for the ways in which terrorist elites take advantage of impoverished communities in order to expand their support base. This, she says, illustrates the specific ways in which poverty may play an important role in increasing both radicalism and terrorism—both certainly vital public policy concerns.

Irrespective of its relationship with terrorism, addressing global poverty remains an important humanitarian goal. But in order to devise better strategies for reducing both poverty and terrorism, policymakers need to have clear, fact-based assessments on the relationship between the two. The authors of this chapter take crucial steps in that direction.

Poverty is a weak causal link

NO: James A. Piazza, *University of North Carolina, Charlotte*

Poverty and Terrorism: A Hypothesis in Search of Evidence

Poverty poses a serious threat to human life. It is responsible for an estimated one-third of all deaths each year worldwide. Roughly fifty thousand people die from poverty-related causes every day, and poverty has killed an estimated 270 million people since 1990, more than double the total casualties suffered by all sides during World Wars I and II.⁶ Poverty also places a heavy toll on international security and political order. Poverty, unemployment, and income inequality have contributed to higher violent crime rates worldwide.⁷ Unequal distribution of land and unequal access to material resources are key ingredients of civil wars, armed ethnic and sectarian conflicts, and riots.⁸ Poverty and loss of livelihood help armed rebel movements and insurgencies with their recruitment efforts.⁹ Economic distress as a result of poverty contributes to military coups, regime collapse, and the onset of nondemocratic rule.¹⁰ Poverty also breeds social upheavals that produce refugees and illegal migrants, both of which have been linked to violence and armed conflict in the areas to which they migrate.¹¹

But does poverty cause terrorism? In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States and subsequent attacks in Indonesia, Spain, Britain, Morocco, and Turkey, national politicians and United Nations officials were quick to identify poverty, global income inequality, unemployment, and low levels of education as key causes of terrorism. The reasoning behind their conclusion was straightforward: poor people who lack economic opportunities are resentful about their socioeconomic status and become alienated from mainstream society. This smoldering resentment is exacerbated by the large and growing gaps in living standards among rich and poor people, which result in intense feelings among the poor that they are being unfairly deprived of proper living standards and opportunities—a phenomenon that political scientist Ted Robert Gurr labeled “relative deprivation” and linked to increased likelihood of civil strife.¹² In this state of rage and hopelessness, the poor are more susceptible to the lures of political extremism.

Ordinary law-abiding citizens who are placed under economic distress or who are confronted with opulence while they struggle to make ends meet become primed to the anti-status quo message that is part and parcel of many terrorist group ideologies, and therefore they are more likely to sympathize with terrorists. This sympathy can even lead them to aid, shelter, and provide information to terrorists, to refuse to cooperate with government agents fighting terrorism, and to be more likely to join terrorist groups themselves.

Thus poverty and inequality are deemed the natural fertilizers for terrorism. It stands to reason that the appropriate response to the threat of terrorism, as argued by a surprisingly wide range of public officials, is to increase aid to impoverished countries to foster economic development and to bridge gaps in wealth. More aid would remedy what President Bill Clinton called the "dark side of globalization," the fact that nearly half of the world's population survives on roughly \$2 a day, despite the remarkable economic growth worldwide over the last fifteen years. President George W. Bush outlined a new international security imperative affixed to the traditional moral imperative of foreign aid and poverty alleviation, famously stating before the 2002 Monterey Development Summit, "We fight poverty because hope is an answer to terror."

The alleviation of poverty *should* be a top priority for developed countries, and wealthy countries should increase their international development and aid budgets. Doing so will undoubtedly produce humanitarian benefits and will likely yield real security dividends. However, humanitarian and development aid is not likely to reduce the threat of terrorism. Despite the very well-intentioned statements of policymakers eager to address the root causes of terrorism in the modern world, there is an absence of hard evidence that poverty, socioeconomic inequality, or low levels of economic development cause terrorism or elicit public sympathy for terrorist movements. Indeed, the experts that study terrorism agree on very few root causes of terrorism, but they have begun to produce a consensus that terrorism is not the direct by-product of economic factors.¹³ As social scientists gain access to more comprehensive and precise data on human living standards, or what is known among development economists as "human development indicators," as well as better statistics on terrorism and other types of political violence, the argument that poverty causes terrorism has begun to erode. Simply put, there is little empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that poverty, poor economic performance, or socioeconomic inequality are related to patterns of terrorism at any of the levels on which the causes of terrorism are traditionally investigated: the global level, the national level, and the individual level.

In this essay, I dissect and analyze the available empirical data to pinpoint vast evidentiary holes in the hypothesis that poverty causes terrorism. I do so

from three perspectives: global, state, and individual. The essay concludes with a discussion of other possible root causes of terrorism that merit more attention.

TERRORISM AND GLOBAL POVERTY

The alleviation of global poverty has been a goal of the international community since the end of World War II. The urgent need to reduce poverty and to promote economic prosperity on the grounds that they both foment political extremism and increase the potential for violent conflict was a precept of the United Nations Charter drafted in San Francisco in 1945 and was a foundational concept upon which the U.S. Marshall Plan was built in 1947.

The threat of poverty to international order and the possibility that it could stoke terrorism was raised more recently in the negotiations that produced the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration. A by-product of this concern is a voluminous body of international statistics on poverty and on various types of political violence. Examination of these statistics reveals that global rates of terrorism, which increase and decrease in cyclical waves over time, are out of sync with changes in global poverty rates and measurements of global inequality, which do not show cyclical dynamics. As the percentage of the world's population living in poverty has steadily *declined* from about 66 percent in 1981 to about 47 percent in 2006,¹⁴ the annual rate of transnational terrorist attacks has *fluctuated wildly*, exhibiting peaks of activity in the mid-1980s, around 1991, and between 2001 and 2005, and a steady decline in the mid- to late 1990s.¹⁵ A similar pattern is found when one looks at casualties—persons injured or killed—in transnational terrorist attacks. By contrast, although global inequality, defined as differences in the gross domestic product (GDP) between the rich and poor countries of the world, has steadily increased since the 1970s,¹⁶ the sharpest growth in the wealth gap, which occurred in the mid-1990s, was accompanied by the sharpest decrease in transnational terrorist attacks. It cannot be demonstrated that either economic good news—greater global prosperity—or economic bad news—a wide and growing gap in the global distribution of wealth—conforms to patterns of international terrorist activity.¹⁷ This finding is a problem for the argument that poverty causes terrorism.

Another way to look at this argument is to examine the distribution of terrorism by regions of the world and by countries arranged by their level of economic development. Table 2-1 arranges terrorist activity by major world regions for the period 2000–2006. If economic privation were a cause of terrorism, it would be reasonable to expect that the poorer world regions would

Table 2-1

Regional Distribution of Terrorism, 2000–2006

	Sub-Saharan Africa	Middle East	East Asia and Pacific	Latin America	South Asia	Eastern Europe and CIS	Western Europe and North America
Total incidents of terrorism ^a	148	10,953	1,362	1,470	3,295	1,898	2,425
Total casualties due to terrorism ^b	1,806	59,180	6,355	3,758	17,586	4,714	6,787
"Source" incidents of terrorism ^c	258	328	171	128	56	370	283
Number of active groups ^d	79	320	92	133	143	75	380
2005 regional Human Development Index ^e	.493 (Low)	.699 (Medium)	.771 (Medium)	.803 (High)	.611 (Medium)	.808 (High)	.916 (High)
Number of countries	39	16	17	21	6	28	19

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2007/2008* (Washington, D.C.: UNDP, 2008); Rand-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base (www.tkb.org).

Note: CIS = Commonwealth of Independent States (former Soviet Union).

^a Total terrorist attacks occurring within region.

^b Total persons killed, injured, detained through a hijacking, or kidnapped through terrorist incidents within region.

^c Total terrorist attacks launched against third countries, within or outside of the region, by locally based terrorist groups.

^d Total groups listed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to have an active presence within countries in region.

^e UNDP-reported 2005 Human Development Index measurement for region, accompanied by categorization of level of development: "High" (.968–.800), "Medium" (.798–.502), or "Low" (.499–.336).

experience the most terrorism and would produce or house a greater number of terrorists than wealthier regions. However, this is not the case. The poorest world region—determined by comparing regional United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index scores that incorporate GDP per capita with literacy and life expectancy rates¹⁸—is sub-Saharan Africa. This region also experienced the *fewest* number of terrorist attacks during the period, suffered the fewest number of casualties from terrorism, and, despite its poor level of economic development, can be said to be a relatively poor place for terrorist groups to operate. Compare Africa with the Middle East, a medium human development region home to several wealthy states that both sustains and produces the lion's share of contemporary terrorist activity in the world. It is also particularly striking that the wealthiest and most developed region, Western Europe and North America, countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), hosts the largest number of active terrorist groups, while sub-Saharan Africa hosts the second fewest. Again, the pattern expected by the popular wisdom—that poor regions are more likely to be afflicted with terrorism—is not evident.

Analogous results are produced when one sorts terrorism globally by rich, middle-income, and poor countries irrespective of region, as illustrated in Table 2-2. Nationals of *Low Human Development* countries, classified using the UNDP's Human Development Index, committed fewer transnational terrorist attacks than the global average, experienced fewer terrorist attacks than the global average, and saw their national territory used as a base of operations by fewer terrorist groups than the global average during the period 2000–2006. The *Medium Human Development* countries, not the poorest states, were the biggest contributors to transnational terrorism and the sites of the largest concentration of terrorist activity in terms of attacks.¹⁹ By contrast, the wealthiest countries—that is, those classified by the UNDP as *High Human Development* countries—produced a higher average number of transnational attacks and sustained a higher average number of terrorist attacks than the *Low Human Development* countries. It is a particularly striking feature of Table 2-2 that the richest countries had the highest average number of active terrorist groups operating within national boundaries, while poor countries had the lowest.

TERRORISM AND POOR STATES

A closer look at individual states is revealing. Do the poorest and least-developed states produce and experience the highest levels of terrorism? Are socially stratified countries more likely to produce resentment that

Table 2-2**Distribution of Terrorism by Level of Human Development, 2000–2006**

	Average transnational terrorist attacks produced by:	Average terrorist attacks occurring in:	Number of active terrorist groups operating out of:
High Human Development countries (n = 56)	4.8	108.3	10.3
Medium Human Development countries (n = 66) ^a	7.4	218.5	8.9
Low Human Development countries (n = 26) ^b	3.1	46.8	2.7
All countries (n = 146)	5.6	147.6	8.4

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2007/2008* (Washington, D.C.: UNDP, 2008); RAND-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base (www.tkb.org).

^aIncludes 1995 classification of North Korea, 1998 classification of Micronesia, and 1999 classification of Iraq.

^bIncludes 1993 classifications of Somalia and Afghanistan.

manifests itself in terrorist activity per the relative deprivation model? Do economically stagnant countries experience more terrorism, and can afflicted countries therefore *grow* their way out of terrorism through economic development?

In 2005 the ten poorest countries in the world, measured using the Human Development Index, were in order Sierra Leone (poorest), Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Chad, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although many of these countries have indeed experienced civil war and serious political strife, terrorism has for the most part failed to appear in their lists of security challenges. Collectively, only 2 percent of all transnational terrorist attacks from 2000 to 2006 were committed by nationals of these least economically developed countries, and only one of them, Ethiopia, experienced significant terrorism within its borders (the perpetrators of most of these attacks were believed to be Muslim radicals of the al-Ittihad al-Islamiya movement based across the border in Somalia). Three of these countries—Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, and Central African Republic—experienced and produced no terrorism whatsoever during the period, while Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, and Chad each saw only one transnational attack launched from their territory, all of which resulted in no casualties.

By contrast, the countries that face the most serious challenges from terrorism seem to have no coherent socioeconomic profile. Table 2-3 lists in rank order the ten most terrorism-afflicted countries from 2000 to 2006, along with some of their macroeconomic indicators. One of them, Afghanistan, is without a doubt acutely underdeveloped as a result of more than thirty years of severe political turmoil and internal armed conflict. Both Pakistan and Iraq also face significant economic challenges, though they are classified by the UNDP as *Medium Human Development* countries and are far wealthier than most sub-Saharan African countries. Indeed, Pakistan's economic growth rate consistently outstripped global averages from its independence in 1947 until the present day with a short pause in the 1990s. Iraq, prior to the imposition of UN sanctions in 1991, had an industrial, health, and educational infrastructure that was widely admired throughout the Arab world. The Russian Federation, India, Colombia, Thailand, and the Palestinian territories are also all middle-income countries characterized by pockets of significant poverty alongside industrial development, functioning educational systems, relatively high literacy rates, and, with the exception of Russia, rising rates of life expectancy. Two countries in Table 2-3, Spain and the United Kingdom, are OECD countries marked by the highest levels of economic development and relative affluence.

Table 2-3

Economic Development in the Most Terrorism-Challenged Countries, 2000–2006

	Number of transnational terrorist attacks produced	Number of terrorist attacks sustained	Number of active terrorist groups operating out of country	GDP per capita (2005 US\$)	Gini coefficient	GDP growth, 1990–2005 (percent)
Iraq	140	7,327	77	\$466	42.0 ^a	n.a.
Palestinian territories	140	2,748	59	1,107	37.0 ^b	-2.9
India	23	1,770	74	3,452	36.8	4.2
Colombia	39	1,212	15	2,682	58.6	0.6
Afghanistan	46	921	16	290	60.0 ^a	n.a.
Pakistan	60	731	36	711	30.6	2.5
Spain	12	772	14	25,914	34.7	2.5
Thailand	16	826	15	2,750	42.0	2.7
United Kingdom	13	597	35	36,509	36.0	2.5
Russia	2	610	24	5,336	39.9	-1
Group average	49.1	1,751.4	36.5	7,921	39.8	1.5
World average	5.6	147.6	8.4	9,221	40.8	1.7

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2007/2008* (New York: UNDP, 2008); RAND-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base (www.tkb.org).

Note: n.a. = not available.

^a Figure obtained from Global Peace Index, www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi/home.php.

^b Figure obtained from Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of the Palestinian People," 2006.

The countries listed in Table 2-3 are not noticeably unequal societies, as indicated by the Gini coefficients—a measurement used by development economists to determine income inequality in countries; the coefficient ranges between 100, indicating pure inequality of distribution, and 0, indicating pure equality. The countries mirror closely the rates of inequality found in the rest of the world with two exceptions. Both Afghanistan and Colombia have extremely high Gini scores, placing them in the top ten most economically stratified societies in the world. However, it is necessary to recognize complexities regarding both of these countries that muddy a straightforward relationship between inequality and terrorism. In the case of Afghanistan, it is difficult to determine whether economic inequality has been the source or the *product* of its acute security turmoil over the past several decades. The 1979 Soviet invasion prompted the emigration of six million Afghans, devastating the country's agricultural production, the mainstay of its employment and GDP, while exacerbating rural-urban gaps in development. Furthermore, Soviet counterinsurgency policy in the 1980s involved the destruction of irrigation infrastructure, roads, and communications in the rural areas of Afghanistan to weaken the armed resistance based there. This approach caused the standard of living to plummet in the hinterland relative to the cities, where the Soviet-backed Afghan regime was more firmly in control. The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 ushered in a decade-long civil war that chased away foreign aid and investment while giving rise to an opium industry that enriched local warlords. After removal of the Taliban regime by the United States and coalition forces in 2001, Afghanistan received a sizeable infusion of humanitarian and reconstruction aid from the international community. However, distribution of the aid monies remains uneven because of bureaucratic inefficiencies, corrupt Afghan politicians and officials, and the fact that security remains poor in the Taliban strongholds in the southern Pashtun regions bordering Pakistan.

As for Colombia, Latin American countries are traditionally characterized by high levels of socioeconomic inequality, and Colombia's Gini coefficient is close to the regional median of 53.7 and is indeed lower than that of Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil, three countries with insignificant levels of terrorism. Table 2-3, then, provides little indication that domestic inequality produces terrorism. This result is further validated by other evidence. On average, the twenty most unequal countries in the world actually produce fewer transnational attacks (3.1), sustain fewer terrorist attacks (72.8), and host fewer terrorist groups (5.3) than the world average.²⁰

But what about growth? If a paucity of economic opportunities creates pools of disaffected and alienated people from which terrorists can garner

support and recruit, then economic growth is surely a panacea for terrorism. Terrorism would then be a feature of countries with stagnating economies, whereas countries experiencing rapid economic growth would produce and sustain less terrorism. The countries listed in Table 2-3, as a whole, mirror worldwide GDP growth rates, though it is striking that many of them have experienced rapid GDP growth in the past decade and a half. One of them, India, a country with one of the most vibrant and rapidly growing economies in the world and with a burgeoning middle class, has endured some of the longest internal terrorism campaigns in the world, including a dramatic spike since the 1980s in Islamist-separatist terrorism related to the Kashmir crisis. Another, Thailand, has seen a resurgence since 2001 of intense separatist terrorism in its Muslim-majority Pattani region bordering Malaysia, even though it is one of the so-called East Asian Tigers—a group of Southeast Asian countries noted for their spectacular rates of economic growth and export-led rapid development in the 1980s and the 1990s. In the shorter term, Afghanistan grew by 12.4 percent in 2007 in the midst of an impressive spring offensive launched against Afghan government and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops by Taliban extremists.

Only the Palestinian territories conform with the stereotypical profile of a terrorism-plagued country. They have experienced negative economic growth, mostly attributable to the limitations imposed by the forty-year Israeli occupation, and are plagued by a notoriously corrupt domestic administration, the Palestinian Authority, and unemployment rates that reach 20 percent in Gaza. However, the Palestinian territories receive significant foreign assistance, benefit from preferential trade agreements from the European Union, and are marked by literacy rates higher than those found in other Arab countries. Thus the territories are solidly within the *Medium Human Development* cohort.

As was true for level of economic development, a broad survey of countries' economic growth rates also fails to reveal a pattern consistent with the argument that economic stagnation generates terrorism. Indeed, some of the data provide evidence to the contrary. Looking beyond the countries listed in Table 2-3, of the twenty-nine countries that experienced negative growth during the period 1990–2005, seventeen of them experienced no terrorism at all, while all but two—the Russian Federation and the Palestinian Occupied Territories—experienced significantly lower than average levels of terrorist activity. Yet the cohort of fastest-growing countries in 2007 includes a sampling of countries with significant terrorism challenges: Georgia, Jordan, Venezuela, Uzbekistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. However, in general, countries that produced and experienced higher than average levels of terrorism from 2000 to 2006 are

distributed across all levels of economic growth, from high growth (India and Algeria) to medium growth (Turkey and Thailand) to low growth (Nepal).

Finally, patterns of terrorist activity *within* states also fail to yield a discernible relationship between poor economic development and terrorism. The case of India is particularly useful here. At first glance, terrorist activity in India seems to vindicate the hypothesis that poverty and social class stratification incubate terrorist activity. Indeed, India has many poor people, and it has struggled for more than forty years against an internal Maoist terrorist insurgency—the Naxalites, recently renamed the People's War Group—that bases itself in impoverished rural communities and conducts terrorist attacks allegedly on behalf of peasants and low-caste Hindus exploited by rural landlords.²¹ However, an examination of the distribution of terrorist incidents across the states of India demonstrates that contemporary (1998–2006) terrorism plagues *both* poor and wealthy areas and that the pattern of terrorist activity is inconsistent with regional economic development rates.

The lion's share of Indian terrorism, over 60 percent, occurs in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, a region whose status has been disputed by India and Pakistan since 1947. Today, Jammu and Kashmir is the seventh least economically developed state of India. However, before intensification of its separatist insurgency in 1989 it was a middle-income state with a thriving tourist industry. Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir also has a transnational dimension that has little to do with the economic status of the residents of Jammu and Kashmir in that Kashmiri militants are alleged by Indian intelligence to be armed and trained by Pakistan (Pakistani officials counter that India is arming Baluchi separatists in Pakistan). Impoverished Indian states such as Assam and Chattisgahr share the dubious distinction of being high-terrorist activity states along with middle-income Andra Pradesh and wealthy Maharashtra and the Delhi municipality. The poorest Indian state, Madhya Pradesh, suffered *only one* terrorist attack between 1998 and 2006. The caste-based Naxalite terrorist movement accounts for most contemporary terrorist activity in the poor and middle-income states of Chattisgahr, Jharkhand, and Andra Pradesh. Terrorism in underdeveloped Assam is separatist-inspired and draws energy from ethnic conflict between the native Assamese population and recent immigrants from Bangladesh, whereas terrorism in rich Maharashtra and poor Uttar Pradesh is tied to religion-sectarian tensions between Hindus and Muslims in those states. This is all to say that empirical patterns of domestic terrorism in India mirror those found on the global level: poor places do not produce or experience more terrorism than rich places.

All of these outwardly contradictory empirical findings make sense once one considers the theoretical disadvantages poor societies foist upon terrorists as

opposed to the advantages that affluent societies offer terrorists. Like all organizations, terrorist groups need a stable, predictable environment in which to operate. Political scientist Ken Menkaus provides important insight in explaining that severely underdeveloped states such as Somalia, one of the poorest countries in the world, are actually suboptimal operational venues for terrorist groups because these states offer poor infrastructure, a paucity of desirable targets such as foreign firms or tourists, and expose terrorist cadres themselves to harassment, extortion, or co-optation by corrupt authorities.²² In theory, more developed countries are more attractive to terrorist groups because these countries have better transportation and communication infrastructures and are more likely to be political democracies that afford their residents rights of assembly and privacy and place constraints on police power. These features facilitate the free movement of terrorists, terrorist recruitment, and organization and training activities, and they hamper police counterterrorism efforts. More developed countries also contain an abundance of lucrative targets for terrorist groups and are more likely to have free media that will cover terrorist attacks when they occur, giving groups an outlet for their propaganda. In this sense, it is not the poverty of underdeveloped countries that incubates terrorism but the opportunities afforded to terrorist entrepreneurs by wealthier countries.

TERRORISM AND POOR PEOPLE

The release of the identities and biographies of the nineteen September 11 hijackers revealed a puzzling profile: all were well-educated young men with middle- and upper-middle class family backgrounds who had traveled, some extensively, in the West and had attended Western educational institutions. The lead terrorist, Muhammad Atta, an Egyptian national who had lived for a time in Hamburg, was a trained engineer. None of them seem to fit the profile of the poorly educated, economically deprived, and socially marginal individual that makes up the popular stereotype of a terrorist. The suspected perpetrators of subsequent al-Qaeda attacks in Madrid, London, Casablanca, Istanbul, and Bali also do not fit the popular profile. Notorious al-Qaeda leaders such as Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, and the recently slain Abu Musab al-Zarqawi tend to be significantly better educated than their co-nationals—bin Laden holds a degree in civil engineering, al-Zawahiri is a trained physician with surgery credentials, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad is a U.S.-educated mechanical engineer, and al-Zarqawi for a time worked as a journalist—and to have been born to economically comfortable families.

However, unlike tracking patterns of global, national, or subnational terrorist incidents, surveying socioeconomic profiles of individuals who join terrorist groups or participate in terrorist attacks is fraught with statistical difficulty. Because it is challenging for researchers to obtain a reliable and representative sample of individual terrorists, most surveys have been limited to specific groups or populations. Nevertheless, the existing studies of the socioeconomic backgrounds of terrorists and their supporters fail to provide evidence that poor people are more likely to become or to sympathize with terrorists. In fact, the opposite seems likelier. Statistical studies have shown that the individuals more likely to engage in terrorism are also more likely to come from materially better-off backgrounds, to have obtained higher levels of education, and to enjoy higher standards of living. And this finding seems to be consistent across groups, nationalities, and time periods.²³ The common experience for most terrorists has been recruitment while at university, rather than in the street, urban shanty, or poverty-stricken rural tract. The individuals who sympathize with terrorists—a critical population because many terrorist groups rely heavily on networks of noncombatant supporters who provide safe houses, material support, and information and who refuse to cooperate with police—are also not more likely to be poor, unemployed, or uneducated. Recent surveys of ordinary Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims show no correlation between income, employment status, and educational background and support for suicide bombings and the September 11 attacks.²⁴ As a consequence, constructing a discrete demographic profile that can be used to neutralize terrorism has been fruitless.

And, again, there are theoretical reasons that individuals with a higher socioeconomic status might be more likely to become terrorists than their down-trodden brethren. As counterintuitive as this observation may seem, terrorism expert Edgar O'Ballance explains that an effective terrorist operative must be able to carry out often complex logistical and technical tasks, must have sufficient intellectual sophistication to evade security personnel, must have the educational and social backgrounds—or have acquired the requisite social comfort—to appear inconspicuous when traveling abroad, and often must be able to communicate in one or more of the international business languages, particularly English.²⁵ In addition to being committed, terrorists need to be reliable, adaptable, and polished, not unlike an employee of a multinational business enterprise, in order to launch their attacks successfully. Officials of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas admit that because they are presently inundated with volunteers for suicide missions, they have implemented tough selection criteria for prospective martyrs that include educational achievement, intellectual ability, and social and professional aptitude.

WHAT, THEN, CAUSES TERRORISM?

These assemblies of empirical information do not provide much comfort to those who wish to reduce terrorism by attacking poverty and remedying economic inequality. The idea that poverty and inequality promote terrorism is, in many ways, a very attractive one because it gives policymakers a cogent tool to use in the fight against terrorism—promotion of economic development—and it fortifies humanitarians' pleas for more attention to alleviating poverty. But there simply is no evidence of a direct relationship between poverty and terrorism.

So what does cause terrorism? A coherent answer to this question is obscured by the fact that terrorism is rare, erratic, and diverse in its manifestations. Terrorist group behavior, therefore, gives social scientists a small compendium of data points with which to work, and they are never sure it is a representative body of data. Terrorism is likely to be multicausal and is also likely to have multidirectional relationships with its causes. Is terrorism in a poverty-stricken area—for example, the underdeveloped northern region of Sri Lanka—prompted and sustained by the poor level of local economic development, or have thirty years of brutal attacks by Tamil separatists eroded local economic progress and increased poverty by scaring away investment? Terrorism scholars are only now starting to untangle these sorts of relationships.

I will, however, raise two potential precipitants of cross-national terrorist activity I uncovered in my own research that may have policy implications in the war on terrorism, and can at least partially explain the uneven success of America's counterterrorism efforts. First, there is some preliminary evidence that failed and failing states—states such as Afghanistan, Somalia, or Colombia that, because of severe political turmoil, are unable to govern or project power internally—are more likely to have their nationals join terrorist groups and commit attacks abroad and are more likely to suffer from high levels of domestic terrorist activity.²⁶ Of course, many failed and failing states, though not all, suffer from low levels of economic development and poor economic growth. But poverty and economic stagnation in these countries are more a consequence of the failure of state institutions and poor levels of internal security than the cause. The feature of failed and failing states that seems to correlate most strongly with terrorism is the presence of internally contested zones, more commonly referred to as stateless areas. These are swaths of territory in the hinterland of troubled states over which the central government has little or no control and in which nongovernmental actors such as rebels or terrorist movements operate with impunity. Some examples are the jungle provinces controlled by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

(FARC),²⁷ the mountainous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northern Pakistan where Osama bin Laden is thought to be in hiding, and the remote northern border territory of Uganda out of which the violent Lord's Resistance Army terrorist movement operates. This situation suggests that bilateral or multilateral efforts to remedy state failures could meaningfully reduce terrorist activity.

Second, human rights abuses seem to exacerbate terrorism. In a cross-national empirical study, my colleague James Walsh and I found that countries with poor human rights records were significantly more likely to be victims of both transnational and domestic terrorist attacks.²⁸ Basic counterinsurgency theory helps to explain why this is the case. Governments that face security challenges posed by irregular armed groups, such as rebel movements and, we would add, terrorist organizations, can only effectively counter such groups by maintaining general public support for governmental efforts and by winning the hearts and minds of populations out of which militants operate. When governments resort to abuse, torture, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, or extrajudicial killings in their campaigns against militants, they erode their own popular legitimacy. This erosion only weakens counterterrorist efforts by fueling domestic political opposition and alienating noncombatants who reside in the communities in which the terrorists are imbedded—that is, those who could otherwise provide critical intelligence and other assistance to security forces.

These two potential root causes of terrorism—state failure and human rights abuses—are supported by preliminary empirical evidence afforded by statistics on terrorist attacks worldwide. But, it is clear that scholars and others still have much to learn about patterns of terrorism, and they remain limited by the quality of their tools to examine those patterns.

Poverty is an important cause

YES: Karin von Hippel, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*

The Role of Poverty in Radicalization and Terrorism

Of all the debates on terrorism that have taken place in the eight-plus years since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the impact of poverty on terrorism has been the most emotional, the most anecdotal, and the least methodical. Several

prominent economists and researchers have mined the data to demonstrate that—contrary to conventional wisdom—terrorists are not poor and uneducated. If anything, they tend to come from the ranks of the middle and upper classes—the “haves” rather than the “have-nots.”²⁹ Alan Krueger concluded, “The bottom line . . . is that poor economic conditions do not seem to motivate people to participate in terrorist activities.”³⁰

Even when confronted by this research, world leaders tend to disregard it: they continue to blame poverty and its corollaries (alienation, humiliation, marginalization, and globalization) for “growing” terrorists, relying more on intuition rather than any rigorous research. At the March 2002 World Development Summit in Monterey, Mexico, leaders such as President George W. Bush and former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan declared that the fight against poverty was intrinsically linked to the fight against terrorism.³¹ In his farewell address to the United Nations on September 23, 2008, President Bush remarked, “The extremists find their most fertile recruiting grounds in societies trapped in chaos and despair, places where people see no prospect of a better life. In the shadows of hopelessness, radicalism thrives. . . . Overcoming hopelessness requires addressing its causes: poverty, disease, and ignorance.” These leaders’ proclamations have, in turn, put enormous pressure on bilateral and multilateral development agencies to formulate policies and programs to counter radicalization, based on an insufficient empirical database.

Should we spend more time educating leaders and policymakers so that we can officially close the case on this debate and move on to the arguably more important, hard-edged counter-terrorist challenges, such as policing and intelligence sharing? Or is there a chance that the emotion-driven, data-poor poverty defenders may at least be partially correct, while the cold-hearted, data-rich number crunchers may be overlooking critical aspects in the debate?

This essay indeed posits that the focus of the research conducted thus far has been too narrow and not current enough to rule out poverty as a critical contributing factor in terrorism. In particular, such research has not taken into account the socioeconomic dynamics of the communities in which terrorists operate (their support base); it has not fully explored the drivers for the ordinary foot soldiers; nor has it taken into account recent manifestations of the terrorist threat. This is not to argue that poverty is *the* primary cause of terrorism, but rather that socioeconomic conditions are relevant to understanding the rise of radicalism and the development and support for terrorism in a growing number of situations. An improved understanding of the connections between economic vulnerability, on the one hand, and radicalism

and terrorism, on the other, should help governments and multilateral agencies determine more appropriate and effective policies.

COMMUNITY DYNAMICS: THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Today, it is well recognized that the more successful terrorist groups (and insurgents) thrive by building and expanding their constituencies. For the al-Qaeda network and movement, this “enabling environment”³² includes potential sympathizers not only in the Arab and Muslim world, but also in Europe and North America. These adherents may not themselves use violence, but they either endorse the arguments and platforms of the terrorists or are intimidated into silence.

This wider community needs to be won over so that they *oppose* terrorism in their neighborhoods, cities, states, and critically, in the virtual world of the Internet, where many of the battles are taking place. Appealing to the enabling environment may be the only way in the long term to isolate terrorists and end terrorism. Severing the connection between terrorists and their constituents would allow the former to become much more vulnerable to informants and standard policing surveillance. Recent experiences in Northern Ireland, Greece, Yemen, and now even Iraq, demonstrate that this strategy can work, and that it can be internally or externally driven.

It is in the enabling environment that poverty is a factor. By providing the poor with social services, a number of nationally focused Islamist groups and political parties,³³ and the al-Qaeda movement more generally, have been able to significantly broaden their appeal. It is not yet clear whether this support has increased the numbers of people who have become fully radicalized, but evidence does exist that terrorist groups have expanded their influence in their constituencies because of the assistance.

The connection among religion, charity, and group solidarity is, of course, nothing new. In the late 1880s, the anticolonial Libyan insurgent hero and holy warrior Omar al-Mukhtar (“Lion of the Desert”) belonged to a conservative Islamic order, influenced by the radical Wahhabi movement. He was able to gain converts through the provision of social services such as schools and wells. Likewise, Christian missionaries in Africa during the colonial period competed for souls by providing health care and education.

Charity has been central to the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt and elsewhere in the Muslim world and of more nationally focused Islamist groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories. Many Islamic charities and their affiliated parent organizations are perceived as not being corrupt, and these charities often are the

first to arrive on the scene in a disaster or a war zone. For example, in the aftermath of the Pakistani earthquake, the charity group Jamaat ud-Dawa (JuD) was an early provider of relief.³⁴ JuD is accused of being affiliated with Lashkar-i-Taiba (LiT), a radical Islamist group fighting in Kashmir and an ally of al-Qaeda. LiT was blamed for several recent high-profile terrorist attacks, including the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India.

After the Israeli bombings in Lebanon in July and August 2006, the international press featured Hezbollah-sponsored charities bulldozing bombed-out areas and providing cash to families that had lost their homes, whereas international agencies and the Lebanese government were much slower off the mark. According to focus groups in Lebanon, Hezbollah's increasing popularity amongst the Shia population can be attributed to the view, as explained by one Shia resident, that "it is the only party that provides security and services while remaining transparent."³⁵

The sentiments toward Hamas are similar. Haim Malka wrote: "The centrality of welfare to Hamas's broad social agenda of Islamizing society has been Hamas's most effective form of activism."³⁶ An International Crisis Group (ICG) report also concluded that "the leaders of the movement themselves ascribe a significant if not primary role to Islamic social welfare activism in explaining the growth and enduring popularity of the Islamist movement."³⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the intensive fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza that began in late December 2008 and lasted about three weeks, Hamas distributed compensation and reconstruction assistance.

In other parts of the world, the results are similar. Theodore Gerber and Sarah Mendelson conducted surveys in the North Caucasus region and concluded, "Whoever gets there first and delivers social goods—the Russian government, the West, or radical Islamists—will shape the political trajectory of this region."³⁸ In Somalia, again according to the ICG, the fundamentalist movements "owe their rapid growth since 1990 less to genuine popularity than access to substantial external funding."³⁹ Mark Bradbury added that "the success of [the radical Somali Islamist group] Al Ittihaad has, in part, been based on investing in a social and economic welfare program that the West will not fund."⁴⁰

My interviews of Somalis and a review of the Somali press indicated that Somalis initially supported the radical Islamic Courts Union (ICU, which includes the former al-Ittihaad organization) when it took over much of southern Somalia in mid-2006, because the ICU established security for the first time since the state collapsed in 1991 and because of the social services provided by affiliated charities.⁴¹ Public support for the ICU was also intended as a rebuke of many of the warlords, who were deeply unpopular, responsible

for numerous human rights abuses and extortion, and perceived as uncaring about the suffering of ordinary Somalis.

Although some Islamic charities in Somalia—such as those managed by al-Islah—may not support extremist violence, other Somali Islamists, notably the Shabaab, a radical youth militia movement, do advocate more fundamental changes to Somali society and endorse violence as a strategy to achieve their goals.⁴² Therefore, much like in other parts of the world, providing the poor with social services has helped to broaden the appeal of fundamentalist and violent interpretations of Islam inside Somalia.

Some observers have argued that extremist groups provide charitable services in order to expand their political power base. A variation on this argument posits that many of the more radical Islamic organizations purposely link assistance with politics because the two are an inextricable part of their overall worldview, identity, and purpose (help for the poor is indeed core to all religions). Whatever the motive, it is clear that affiliated charities fulfill critical state functions in places where the state does not. The result may be that they successfully realign community loyalty in the direction of radicalism.

When an extremist nongovernmental organization (NGO) is the only service provider in an area and a beneficiary refuses to wear a head scarf, for example, she may not get any service at all. Even if a recipient complies only temporarily to receive the aid, such pressures can transform societies over the long term.⁴³ Significantly, this aid monopoly often results in members of the public being reluctant to speak out against terrorist acts in their communities, or to help government authorities locate suspects.

Increased support for Somali, Algerian, or Pakistani terrorist groups does not necessarily imply that more Somalis, Algerians, or Pakistanis will themselves become terrorists. But if the goal is to isolate terrorists and reduce their appeal, then effective provision of basic social services would be one way to do this. At the most basic level, it is often simply the dearth of government-provided services or international donor support that makes some people and communities vulnerable and susceptible to extremist ideology.⁴⁴

The sad fact is that the extremist charities in many fragile, weak, and even autocratic states receive very little competition from national capitals, Western donors, and multilateral agencies. The ideological viewpoint espoused by a radical group may not be the primary draw for many recipient families, but the lack of alternatives for schooling or health care fuels the growth of extremist movements. Because many developing states do not have the capacity to provide basic services for their inhabitants today and may not for the foreseeable future, Western assistance providers need to take a deeper look at their own

agenda—unlike in the Arab world where they do not play such a role.⁵⁰ Parts of Indonesia resemble the Indian subcontinent model rather than the Arab one, as do a growing number of regions in East and West Africa.

The Taliban leader Mullah Omar famously called on the Pakistani-based *madaris* to help with the fighting in Afghanistan during the Taliban takeover of the country in the late 1990s.⁵¹ In response, in 1997 Maulana Samiul Haq shut down his famous Haqqania madrasa in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan and sent all 2,800 students to the frontline. The word *Talib* itself means religious student, and indeed an estimated one-third of the original Afghan Taliban were educated in Pakistan's *madaris*.

Some may argue that the madrasa students were not attacking the West during the fight against the Soviets nor during their national struggle against the Afghan warlords and other rebel leaders, and thus they are not relevant to a discussion of international terrorism. Since 9/11, however, these same madaris are sending students and graduates to kill NATO troops and civilians in Afghanistan. Some are also targeting Pakistani and expatriate civilians inside Pakistan. Christine Fair adds, "Pakistan's *madaris* in FATA—especially in North and South Waziristan—are deeply implicated in the recruitment of suicide attackers in both Afghanistan and Pakistan."⁵² These madaris may also be providing short-term, "executive-level" education programs for European Muslims and other foreigners wishing to join the jihad (the July 2005 London bombers allegedly spent time in a Pakistani madrasa).

On a more general level, very few students from the world's *madaris* will become terrorists, even if there are some notable exceptions (such as in Afghanistan and Pakistan). And many of those who become terrorists will not be as skilled as their educated counterparts, accounting, perhaps, for some failed suicide bombing attempts. In many public schools in these same countries, students are also often offered a similarly violent worldview.

The madrasa has become the catchall for the debate on the root causes of terrorism, but as Fair and others point out, it is the quality of education—not whether it is religious or secular, public or private—that matters. As Fair explains, the available data suggest that in Pakistan's public schools, which educate 70 percent of Pakistan's children, "public school students have views only marginally more accommodating of domestic and external peace than those of madrasah counterparts. The same can be said of their teachers."⁵³ How many poorly educated public school students have joined terrorist groups is not known and should be an area of future inquiry.

Thus the data currently show that poverty and a lack of education can have a direct influence in some instances: some poor madrasa students do become terrorists. Poverty and lack of education also can play an indirect role:

the nonterrorist, impoverished student with a substandard education will gain few practical skills to prepare him or her for working in modern society.⁵⁴ These students and graduates will populate the enabling environment. Therefore, educational reform should become a top priority for counter-radicalization programs in the appropriate countries. The story is similarly nuanced for volunteers (or recruits) for suicide attacks.

Suicide Bombers

Because the families of “martyrs” are compensated by a number of charitable organizations (often very generously), it has been argued that the financial reward is an incentive for a poor family. Some families of suicide bombers are indeed elevated to a higher status in their communities, and receive financial help to start businesses or build new homes. Jessica Stern found from her interviews with those involved in the Kashmir dispute that “wealthy Pakistanis would rather donate their money than their sons to the cause, [and] families in poor, rural areas are likely to send their sons to ‘jihad’ under the belief that doing so is the only way to fulfill this spiritual duty.”⁵⁵ Peter Bergen also reported on fees paid to families of suicide bombers who carried out attacks in Afghanistan, some earning \$500, which Bergen described as “a good sum of money in a part of the world where many laborers only make a couple of dollars per day.”⁵⁶

A study of suicide attacks in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2007 conducted by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) found that children were recruited from both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and “these young children may be uneducated, ignorant, impressionable, brainwashed, and seeking money for their families.”⁵⁷ Although suicide bombers may be motivated by a mix of greed, grievance, and ideology, they are largely drawn from the ranks of the poor. Whether they do it for money or belief is less relevant here than the fact that poverty led them into the hands of radicals in the first place. The UNAMA study concluded: “Poverty and lack of education figure in all but one [sic] the interviews of the confessed perpetrators.”⁵⁸

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the connection appears to be direct. Evidence has also been found of indirect links. One study of the relationship among education, income, and support for suicide bombings in six Muslim countries (Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, and Turkey) found that “increased education reduces the probability of support for suicide bombings . . . in the case of attacks on civilians, but not in the case of attacks on foreign forces and supporting civilians occupying Muslim lands.”⁵⁹ Although this finding does not focus on the attackers themselves, it does fit into the

enabling environment discussion and thus is also relevant. The researchers conclude that “educated Muslims identify and confront the moral dilemmas that come with the killing of civilians better than less educated ones. They are also more capable of dealing with the clear Islamic prohibition on suicide that some extremist Islamist ideologues have undermined by reinterpreting suicide as ‘martyrdom.’”⁶⁰

Another study carried out by researchers at the University of Jordan concurred with these results, though on a more general level. Polls carried out by the research team showed that the better educated were more likely to define Islamic Jihad, Hamas, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria as terrorist organizations. By contrast, the less educated were more likely to view these same organizations—notably al-Qaeda—as legitimate.⁶¹

On the other hand, some researchers have found conflicting results. Nasra Hassan discovered in her study of Palestinian suicide bombers that they were mostly educated, middle-class men.⁶² Other studies seem to back her findings, though they tend to focus on longitudinal studies that stopped around 2001 or 2002 or only pertained to the Middle East.⁶³ Thus most of the research does not take into account the backgrounds of suicide bombers in Iraq since the U.S. invasion, the changing dynamics in Somalia, or the evolving situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where terrorists have attacked Western interests, soldiers, and citizens as well as local civilians. Motivation for these “new terrorists” will likely be a mix of factors, with poverty relevant in some instances and grievances or ideology in others.

The Peasants Revolt!

The research on the role of poverty is complex and demonstrates that there is no prototype terrorist. For example, at the leadership level most research has concluded that the bosses are typically educated and relatively affluent. Recent changes in the terrorist threat, however, indicate that there are more and more exceptions. Most of the leaders of the forty-plus militias in the loose network that comprises Pakistan’s Taliban (Tehrek-e-Taliban), parts of which are now working with al-Qaeda, come from humble backgrounds. Baitullah Mehsud, the militia commander in South Waziristan and self-proclaimed head of the Pakistan Taliban, is himself from a poor peasant family, as is Manghal Bagh, the militia head in Khyber agency, who previously swept buses for a living.⁶⁴ Many other militant leaders in FATA, NWFP, and Balochistan also come from deprived backgrounds, as did Mullah Omar, the reclusive Afghan Taliban leader. Some would argue that warlords or militia heads should not be evaluated in the

same way as terrorists, and yet today many of these leaders and groups have fused with al-Qaeda and are officially stamped with the terrorist label.

Although the leaders of terrorist organizations seem to come from both indigent and bourgeoisie backgrounds, that is not true of their humble servants. Strangely, most researchers recognize that poverty may be a factor among the lower ranks, but do not include the foot soldiers in their research or when aggregating data.

Returning to South Asia, the ordinary volunteer or recruit in Pakistan and Afghanistan has typically been poor. Daniel Markey explains, "In Pakistan, Taliban recruits are drawn from Afghan refugee camps and the network of extremist madrassas in the tribal areas. Taliban foot soldiers tend to be uneducated, poor Pashtuns with few other employment prospects."⁶⁵

According to the UN study in Afghanistan, "Given the low development of FATA and paucity of employment opportunities, unemployed youth have joined these local militant groups as a way of both earning a livelihood and as a means of enhancing their social status."⁶⁶ Bergen learned that Taliban fighters were paid about \$300 a month, "four times the wage of the average Afghan police officer."⁶⁷ Early indications are that at least one of the ten terrorists who committed the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 was motivated by poverty: the sole surviving gunman captured admitted that he joined LiT for the money.⁶⁸

Deprivation seems to be a common factor among recruits elsewhere. The infamous impoverished town of Darnah in Libya sent a disproportionate number of young men to fight in Iraq, and an equally disproportionate number of them volunteered for suicide missions.⁶⁹ As Kevin Peraino explains, "There is no doubt that economic misery and its social consequences have scarred Darnah's young people."⁷⁰

In Somalia—another country that has witnessed an unfortunate increase in al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism—poverty has convinced some young people to join the violent jihadist youth group Shabaab. Here the motivation for membership at the foot soldier level appears to be more about dollars than dogma. There are no reliable data to draw on in Somalia because of the eighteen years of state collapse, which also complicates efforts to disentangle the competing motivations for joining and leading such groups. The available data do indicate, however, that the lack of governance and inadequate economic opportunities have been persuasive at the lower ranks. Moreover, although the motivations at the leadership level may be a mix of ideology, opportunism, personal political ambition, greed, and grievance, the leaders have exploited the issue of poverty in Somalia as part of their public rhetoric and to attract more recruits to their movement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Returning to the question posed at the outset, it appears that the research on the relationship between poverty and terrorism is by no means conclusive and, if anything, reveals a mixed picture. Poverty plays a role in some instances and not in others. Certain terrorist movements have expanded their support base in the enabling environment by providing the poor with direct aid. Some volunteers for suicide missions and many ordinary foot soldiers come from impoverished backgrounds, and also attended the radical madaris. Thus poverty has played an indirect and direct role in the recruitment of terrorists in some critical cases.

Moreover, many of the more privileged terrorists use the plight of the poor as one justification for committing violence and for broadening their appeal. They claim to speak on behalf of the poor, just as other middle-class, well-educated ideologues have done in the past. This claim allows them to broaden their constituencies to include many marginalized communities throughout the world. Thus it is too early to shut the book on this debate, especially because poverty appears to be more relevant in today's hottest terrorist theaters, notably Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have become the main Taliban and al-Qaeda sanctuaries, breeding grounds, and training centers.

Indeed, over the past year in Pakistan militant activity and violence have spread throughout the poorest parts of the country, from South and North Waziristan into all seven agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, into settled parts of the North-West Frontier Province, and into Balochistan, where Afghan Taliban leaders regroup from fighting. The writ of the central government and traditional authority has steadily eroded in FATA, although proposals are on the table to integrate FATA into NWFP. This is not to say that the region is an "ungoverned territory" (an inappropriate term), but rather that this extremely impoverished and undergoverned region has been infiltrated by violent extremists over the years who have coerced, bribed, or killed local authorities when entrenching their authority.

Yet much like in Somalia, and because few Westerners and Pakistanis visit most of FATA, Pakistani and American analysts and officials have only a rudimentary understanding of the complicated alliances, dynamics, and threats posed by the numerous groups operating in these areas, especially the Pakistan Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other militant groups.⁷¹ Nor does anyone seem to have a good grasp of who the "foreigners" are, and the alliances among and between Pakistanis, Afghans, Arabs, and Central Asians (for example, the Uzbeks, Chechens, Tajiks, Kazaks, and Uighurs). The lack of reliable data and information on this region (and other "ungoverned spaces") may

account for why these areas have not been integrated into previous studies on the relationship between poverty and terrorism.

When examining the research on the role of poverty in terrorism, it is therefore important to consider the areas excluded from the analysis and what creative tools can be used to learn more about these no-go territories so that they can be included in ongoing research. If these areas were factored in, more researchers would find that poverty is indeed an important concern in some of today's most pressing terrorist hot spots.

Much of the previous research that supposedly debunked the poverty-terrorism thesis concentrated on international terrorism and terrorism that targeted the West, not on nationally focused insurgencies. Yet as most researchers know, the al-Qaeda movement and network are extremely fluid and rapidly mutating. Over the last few years, many of the national and international groups have fused. For example, today the Somali Shabaab, Afghan Taliban, Pakistan Taliban, and Algeria's Armed Islamic Group are very different creatures from their predecessors or earlier iterations. Such groups collaborate and learn from each other as well as from their counterparts in places such as Iraq, Chechnya, and even Colombia. Policymakers and researchers need to ensure that the debate and response are also fluid, flexible, and able to adapt in real time.

Notes

1. President Bill Clinton, remarks to the Jordanian Parliament, Amman, Jordan, October 26, 1994, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=49373.
2. Transcription of *La Stampa* interview with James D. Wolfensohn, World Bank, December 7, 2001.
3. Quoted in Claude Berrebi, "Evidence about the Link between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 2.
4. For background on the 9/11 hijackers, see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: Norton, 2004), esp. chap. 5; and Terry McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
5. Daniel Pipes, "God and Mammon: Does Poverty Cause Militant Islam?" *National Interest* (Winter 2001/2002); Alan Kreuger and Jitka Maletkova, "Does Poverty Cause Terrorism?" *New Republic*, June 24, 2002.
6. World Health Organization, *World Health Statistics 2008* (Washington, D.C.: WHO, 2008).
7. Ching-Chi Hsieh and M. D. Pugh, "A Meta-Analysis of Recent Aggregate Data Studies," *Criminal Justice Review* 18, no. 2 (1993): 182–196.
8. James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97 (2003): 75–90.

9. Leif Ohlsson, "Livelihood Conflicts: Linking Poverty and Environment as Causes of Conflict," Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2000.
10. Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World 1950 to 1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J. B. Londregan and K. Poole, "Poverty, the Coup Trap and the Seizure of Executive Power," *World Politics* 42, no. 2 (1990): 151–183.
11. Aristide R. Zolberg and Peter M. Benda, *Global Migrants and Global Refugees* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001).
12. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971).
13. See, for example, James A. Piazza, "Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development and Social Cleavages," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18 (2006): 219–237; Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom and the Roots of Terrorism," *American Economic Review* 96, no. 2 (2006): 159–77; Claude Berrebi, "Evidence About the Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism Among Palestinians," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007). Note, however, that Quan Li and Drew Schaub, in "Economic Globalization and Transnational Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 2 (2004): 230–258, did find economically developed countries to be significantly less likely to experience terrorist attacks.
14. Figures derived from Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, "How Have the World's Poorest Fared Since the Early 1980s?" *World Bank Research Observer* 19, no. 2 (2004): 141–169.
15. For an overview of these terrorist attacks, see the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base (www.tkb.org).
16. UNDP, *World Development Report* (various years).
17. The time-series line graphs for these data can be found in James A. Piazza, "Global Poverty, Inequality and Transnational Terrorism: A Research Note," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 1, no. 4 (2007).
18. Explanations for the Human Development Index and data tables are available at the United Nations Development Program's website, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008>. The data used are from the UNDP's *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*.
19. The results in Table 2-2 are made more dramatic by the inclusion of Iraq in the Medium Human Development category, a country that has seen a dramatic increase in domestic terrorism since the United States toppled the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003. The most recent Human Development Index score available for Iraq, 1999, places it firmly in the Middle category. Even if Iraq is excluded from the data in Table 2-2, the overall results are the same: Low Human Development countries still produce the least transnational terrorism, sustain the lowest level of terrorism, and host the fewest terrorist groups.
20. The twenty countries are, in order from the most unequal, Namibia, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Botswana, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Haiti, Colombia, Paraguay, South Africa, Brazil, Panama, Guatemala, Chile, Honduras, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru, and the Dominican Republic.

21. For a full discussion of the Naxalites and their origins, see Dipak K. Gupta, "The Naxalites and Maoist Movement in India: Birth, Demise and Reincarnation," *Democracy and Security* 3, no. 2 (2007): 157–188.
22. Ken Menkhaus, "Quasi-States, Nation-Building and Terrorist Safe Havens," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (2003): 7–23.
23. Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 119–144; Berrebi, "Evidence about the Link"; Charles A. Russell and Bowman H. Miller, "Profile of a Terrorist," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (1977): 17–34.
24. Simon Haddad and Hilal Khashan, "Islam and Terrorism: Lebanese Muslim Views on September 11," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (2002): 812–828; Krueger and Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism."
25. Edgar O'Ballance, *The Language of Violence: The Blood Politics of Terrorism* (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1979).
26. See James A. Piazza, "Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?" *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2008): 469–488.
27. Though it should be noted that Bogota has made progress in increasing government control over rural regions in which the FARC operates since the inception of Plan Colombia, a U.S.-financed counterterrorism program that began in 1999.
28. James I. Walsh and James A. Piazza, "Why Respecting Physical Integrity Rights Reduces Terrorism," *Comparative Political Studies* (forthcoming 2010).
29. See Alan Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Krueger and Maleckova, "Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism"; Piazza, "Rooted in Poverty?" 159–177; Tim Krieger and Daniel Meier-rieks, "What Causes Terrorism?" Working Papers Series No. 2008-05, Center for International Economics, Paderborn, Germany, June 2008.
30. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist*, 12.
31. See "Poverty 'Fueling Terrorism,'" BBC News, March 22, 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/newsid_1886000/1886617.stm.
32. Louise Richardson at Harvard University originally coined this term. Another useful term is *complicit society*.
33. Interestingly, some of the more successful Islamist political parties have a social service wing, whereas secular political parties do not.
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69. Kevin Peraino, "Destination Martyrdom: What Drove So Many Libyans to Volunteer as Suicide Bombers for the War in Iraq? A Visit to Their Hometown—The Dead-end City of Darnah," *Newsweek International*, April 28, 2008.
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71. As diplomat Richard Holbrooke remarked in congressional testimony on May 7, 2008, "I don't have a clue what's going on in the FATA. And if anyone ever comes before this Committee and says so, you'd better ask twice, because it is one of the most elusive areas in the world."