

Discouraging state support for schools teaching radical ideologies will reduce VEO activity.

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General Description of the Literature:

A number of political science scholars have argued that ideology is a root cause of terrorism and that governments should attempt to soften the material that is imparted in schools where radical ideology is taught. However, the literature does not directly address the relationship between state support for schools teaching radical ideologies and the amount of VEO activity. Madrassas are types of schools that have been closely associated with teaching such material in the Islamist context and have previously been linked to extremist violence. Blanchard (2007) writes that madrassas in many countries promote an Islamic, religious based curriculum and operate separately from government institutions that mostly control public and private education. Even though madrassas in Pakistan have been the types of schools most closely associated with VEO violence (ICG 2002), public and private schools have been accused of teaching radical ideology as well. Most scholarly discussion of schools teaching radical ideologies has focused on madrassas; furthermore, the relationship between madrassas and militancy has been debated by authors and the support for this claim varies. Blanchard (2007, 1) states that madrassas have been accused of promoting “Islamic extremism and militancy and are a recruiting ground for terrorism.” Winthrop and Graff (2010), however, argue that there is no relationship between madrassas and militancy. ICG Asia (2002) reports that most madrassas do not receive monetary support from the government and are funded through outside sources. Therefore, this suggests that merely reducing the amount of government support or discouraging such support for madrassas may not have much of an impact. Instead, the government could place sanctions on madrassas and attempt to reform their curricula. Outside of Pakistan, another example cited in the literature is Saudi Arabia, where religious extremism is also taught (Shea and Eid 2010). However, Saudi Education Minister Mohammed Rasheed claims that the public education system in general has no influence over the levels of radicalization and violence, because if this were the case, many more people who were educated in the system would be committing these acts (Glasser 2003).

There is evidence of a link between VEOs and the influence of schools teaching radical ideology. Some studies suggest that taking control of schools and their curricula is applicable to influencing VEOs. However, there is little hard evidence that shows whether or not this approach is actually working. Overall, these empirical investigations are not strong in supporting the hypothesis, since they contain many helpful suggestions but offer little in the way of solid evidence showing the actual impact of reform policies on VEO activity. Or, they show how reforms have been attempted, but little progress has actually been made, showing the entrenched nature of the problem

Detailed Analyses

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Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: ICG (2002) concludes that reforming the madrassa education system to include a broader range of subjects will help contain extremism in Pakistan because students will have a better chance at gainful employment opportunities, which will help keep them from becoming radicalized later on. However, the report also outlines challenges to the reforms, such as allowing madrassas to voluntarily submit to governmental regulation instead of

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requiring it. The report also notes that most madrassas have turned down any incentives offered in exchange for reforming their curriculum. Using Saudi Arabia as an example, Shea and Eid (2010) find that, although in its seventh year, the government's counterterrorism program has failed to purge inflammatory writings from its textbooks, and little progress is actually being made. Blanchard (2007) offers a brief overview of the accusations that madrassas promote extremism, but also points out the importance of madrassas in countries where poverty is high and the state educational infrastructure is not strong. Blanchard also states that madrassas have often been blamed unfairly for promoting anti-Western sentiments. Winthrop and Graff (2010) support this claim, stating that madrassas are not the main problem and that a small number of militant schools are a serious concern, though most are not linked to extremist organizations. The Glasser article (2003) outlines major changes that Qatar has made, including rewriting textbooks and reducing the number of Islam classes that are required each week for students, however, the article also details the severe criticism that the reforms have met. The article also mentions what the leaders hoped the outcome would be, but does not directly state what influence the reforms might have on VEOs. Ray (2006) encourages focusing counterterrorism efforts on reforming the education system in order to reduce the threat of radicalization.

In addition to this somewhat positive assessment, two additional studies offered evidence of positive educational changes that have been achieved. Schmidt (2008) cites the government of India, which has encouraged madrasa reform by suggestion rather than force, and has seen moderate success in schools accepting the grants that it offers. McGlinchey (2005) shows how aid for educational programs had a positive effect in Georgia, where a reformist opposition capable of overthrowing authoritarian rule emerged, with the peaceful revolution that brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power in 2004. However, neither of these examples are directly relevant to influence on VEO activity and instead only list moderate successes of other governments with educational reform.

Most of the relevant literature and studies address the process (and difficulty) of states reforming extremist curricula without testing the actual effect on VEO activity.

Empirical Support Score: 0 = No empirical support (for or against the hypothesis)

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: N/A.

Applicability Score: N/A

General Comments:

In the Saudi context, official school texts contain inflammatory writing. Since many of the 9/11 perpetrators hailed from Saudi Arabia it is reasonable to believe that the rhetoric from the texts can lead to radicalization

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