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Professor's research examines link between poverty and terrorism

TIFFANY ADAMS
Editor in Chief

The events of Sept. 11, 2001 have sparked the interests of various researchers around the world and on Meredith's campus. Dr. James Piazza, Assistant Professor of Politics, began work on his research entitled *Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development and Social Cleavages* shortly after the infamous terrorist attacks.

In the summer of 2002 he was provided funding from the Meredith Undergraduate Research Program to hire Amy Hobbs, a student at the College, to help him collect the data needed for the project.

His study investigated acts of terrorism from 96 countries between the years of 1986 and 2002. He used regression analysis to look at all types of measures of poverty - literacy, Gross Domestic Product per-capita, caloric intake and income distribution.

The first round findings revealed there was no sta-

tistical link between poverty and the rate or intensity of terrorism in a country.

"Instead, I found that demographic and political variables were predictive [of terrorism]," said Piazza.

"The degree of ethnic and religious diversity in a country and the link between diversity and partisan stability is the main predictor of terrorism.

What this suggests is that countries marked by severe ethnic and religious conflicts that have governments qualified by contentious and unstable partisan conflict are unable to solve their problems peacefully through the political process," Piazza said.

He cited India as a classic example. "It is highly diverse in terms of linguistic groups and religious communities. It also has a crazy and highly contentious system of party government at the national level that really just undergirds the highly combustible divisions within Indian society. This combination is correlated with one of the highest rates of domestic terrorism in the

world," he said.

His basic findings that political factors such as ethno-religious diversity in a country and the stability of the country's political party system were significantly related to terrorist acts have several possible implications.

The first implication relates to the way society views terrorism. "The question of what causes terrorism is a bit more complex than world leaders have traditionally thought," said Piazza.

The second is that the elimination of poverty alone will probably not be enough to reduce terrorism. "We need to look at how countries deal with diversity," said Piazza, "Do they have political systems capable of negotiating ethnic or religious conflicts, or does their political system, rather, just encourage conflict?"

Although his findings thus far do not show a statistically significant relationship between poverty and terrorism, Piazza hopes that people do not disregard the importance of alleviat-

ing poverty in poor countries.

"Though it may not yield a benefit in fighting terrorism, scholars have shown pretty clearly that helping reduce poverty in poor countries yields both humanitarian and security benefits for the entire world," he said.

Piazza presented the first draft of the paper at the International Studies Conference in Richmond, Virginia in October, 2002. A month later, he presented it to the faculty at the College in a symposium. He revised the paper this past summer and submitted it for publication in a journal titled *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Piazza most recently presented his findings at the American Political Science Association conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

These first round findings revealed some interesting but inconclusive relationships between economic globalization and terrorism. Piazza has conducted research in the past on globalization of national economies, and he pub-

lished a book last year titled *Going Global: Unions and Globalization in the United States, Sweden and Germany* that investigated how globalization affects labor unions in the United States, Germany and Sweden.

"Perhaps a study of whether or not global integration increases the likelihood of terrorism and political violence, or rather decreases it. Scholars have argued both. It would be interesting to put their ideas to a statistical test," said Piazza.

Piazza has published several papers in journals such as *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *Party Politics* and *Southeastern Political Review*. He holds a master's degree in modern Middle East studies, specializing in the politics of Islamic radicalism, from the University of Michigan, and he holds a doctorate in politics from New York University.

He teaches several international politics courses, including the Model United Nations course at Meredith.

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