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Unconventional Wisdom

Richard Morin, Columnist

CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE

An item in the May 11 Unconventional Wisdom column incorrectly characterized the percentage of Muslims with above-average incomes or college educations who express support for terrorism. Of those who Gallup defined as "potential extremists," about 25 percent had higher-than-average incomes and 44 percent had college educations.

Casinos and Crime: The Luck Runs Out

By Richard Morin
Thursday, May 11, 2006

When it comes to crime, legalized casino gambling seemed to be a surprisingly good bet: Local unemployment went down, tax revenue went up and crime didn't increase when a casino opened. Some researchers even found that crime declined immediately after casinos came to town.



Legalized casino gambling once seemed to be an antidote to crime, but a study finds that the effect is short-lived. (By Jeff T. Green -- Getty Images)

Well, the casino cure for crime proved to be just as delusional as gamblers' luck, says University of Georgia economist David B. Mustard.

Mustard and Earl L. Grinols of Baylor University analyzed crime data collected from all 3,165 U.S. counties in the United States from 1977 to 1996 and looked at local crime rates before and after casinos opened.

They found that crime didn't budge when a casino began operating -- at least at first. Crime began to rise after the first year, slowly at first and then more quickly, until it had far surpassed what it would have been if the casino had never opened. By the fifth year of operation, robberies were up 136 percent; aggravated assaults, 91 percent; auto theft, 78 percent; burglary, 50 percent; larceny, 38 percent; and rape, 21 percent. Controlling for other factors, 8.6 percent of property crimes and 12.6 percent of violent crimes were attributed to casinos, he said.

But what about all those casino jobs and newly minted police? Mustard said the positive effects of casinos are fleeting -- payrolls and tax collections quickly plateau, and municipalities don't keep adding cops after the first wave of casino tax revenue rolls in.

What's more, Mustard said, crime rates didn't rise in neighboring counties while they soared in casino counties -- evidence that casinos create crime locally and don't merely attract it from somewhere else.

And here's sobering news for those in the District and Maryland who think casinos would jump-start the local economies: "Even using conservative estimates of costs and generous estimates of benefits, we still find the costs exceed the benefits," Mustard said.

A Terrifying Truth About Terrorism

Who supports terrorism in the Middle East? Not the people you'd expect, according to Dalia Mogahed of the Gallup Organization. Surveys in eight Muslim countries revealed that supporters of terrorism -- defined as those who applauded the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks -- were no more religious than other Muslims and tended to be better-educated and more affluent.

The polls found those who regularly attended prayer services were no more likely to back terrorism than those who did not. Nor were Muslims who agreed that religion "was an important part of your daily life."

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About 25 percent of all Muslims with higher-than-average incomes supported the Sept. 11 attacks -- slightly more than those who had below-average incomes or were poor. Among high school or college graduates, 44 percent held extremist views, compared with 38 percent of less-educated Muslims. And the unemployed were no more likely to back terrorism than those who worked full time, according to the poll of 8,000 Muslims in October.

What did distinguish terrorism supporters? Belief in self-determination, Mogahed found. Extremists were only about half as likely as moderates to believe that the United States would allow people in the Middle East to fashion their own political future.

The Experiment: Katrina

A new record: More than 1,000 people participated in our latest online experiment -- on the first day alone. But we're always looking for more volunteers willing to serve as cyber-lab rats in real experiments developed by Stanford University's political communication lab in collaboration with The Washington Post and washingtonpost.com. To participate, go to <http://www.washingtonpost.com/richmorin>, look for the box headlined "Post-Stanford Experiments" and choose survey No. 4.

Who Would Have Thought? Going Blind, Men Who Sing And Rainy-Day Women

"How Bad is a 10% Chance of Losing a Toe? Judgments of Probabilistic Conditions by Doctors and Laypeople" by Andrea D. Gurmankin and Jonathan Baron, *Memory and Cognition*, Vol. 33, No. 8. Harvard University and University of Pennsylvania psychologists found that people think going blind is almost as bad as dying and about as bad as having both legs amputated below the knees, while becoming deaf in one ear is worse than losing a toe but not as bad as having one leg amputated.

"Men in Chorus: Collaboration and Competition in Homo-Social Vocal Behaviour" by Robert Faulker and Jane W. Davidson, *Psychology of Music*, Vol. 34, No. 2. Two researchers from the University of Sheffield journey to rural Iceland to study an all-male choir and learn that singing together in harmony is an "essential and enriching way of relating to others, fulfilling basic needs for vocal and social connectedness."

"Under the Weather: Health, Schooling, and Socioeconomic Consequences of Early-Life Rainfall" by Sharon Maccini and Dean Yang, working paper, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. Researchers find that Indonesian women born in rainy years grow to be taller, stay in school longer and have husbands with higher earnings than women born in areas with low rainfall in the year of their birth, suggesting "a positive impact of rainfall on agricultural output, leading to higher household incomes and better health for infant girls." Rainfall in birth years had no impact on boys' lives.

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