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To banish hatred, we must understand it

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Terrorism can sustain economic analysis that paves the way for a mechanism to deal with its fundamental causes, argue Andrew Leigh and Justin [Wolfers](#).

In the aftermath of the Bali bombing, Australians have confronted the difficult question ``why do they hate us so much"? while politicians have asked ``what can we do to stop this happening again"? Yet these questions are two sides of the same coin: to determine how to respond to October 12, we must first understand its causes.

While intellectuals have often claimed that hatred defies comprehension, a recent study by Harvard economist Edward Glaeser argues just the opposite. He contends that the market for hate is open to economic analysis.

Hatred, Glaeser argues, is supplied by political entrepreneurs to satisfy demand from citizens. Extremist political figures sow hatred against minority groups as a means of gaining political support. Why? Because redistributive policies help one group but harm others, politics usually requires trade-offs. By fostering hate, politicians can get credit for both those they help and those they hurt.

The supply of hate can be directed not merely against minority groups, but also against powerful outsiders. As Glaeser points out, there was very little anti-Americanism in the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s, but after the US-backed coup in Iran, and subsequent support for the Shah, opposition politicians were able to exploit anti-Americanism to undermine their more moderate opponents.

How can hatred be tackled?

Economics tells us that raising costs can lower demand. Glaeser notes that hatred usually involves extreme characterisations of the hated and as such, repeated social interactions can make the beliefs of haters both more costly and harder to sustain.

Another effective way of reducing hatred is by turning the very same emotional mechanisms against the haters themselves. Glaeser terms this ``hating the haters". The images of Gandhi's supporters being clubbed by British troops in India, or of Martin Luther King's followers being attacked by hoses and police dogs, fuelled hatred against the perpetrators of such violence.

When these self-correcting forces are absent, hatred is likely to prosper. Australia is an outsider in Indonesian politics and, as Glaeser's analysis predicted, hatred has prospered.

Since it is likely that some element of anti-Australianism was behind the attack in Bali, we believe there are three lessons our policy makers can draw from Glaeser's research.

The first is that we should raise the "cost" of hating Australians by increasing the number of interactions between ordinary Indonesians and ourselves. While it may be prudent for some Australians to leave now, it is in our long-term interest to foster closer social and cultural ties between our nations.

Second, by eliminating arbitrary redistribution between groups and requiring equal treatment, the rule of law reduces the scope for policies that profit from hate. As the International Crisis Group pointed out in a report released two days before the Bali bombing, rivalries between the Indonesian army and police are rife. Australia should consider providing resources to help build the troubled Indonesian police force, with the aim of re-establishing the rule of law, and thereby reducing the scope for hateful policies.

The third lesson is perhaps the most counter-intuitive. Because of the way in which hatred is fostered, Australia should avoid being seen to publicly oppose fundamentalist Islamists. Doing so only makes it more profitable for fundamentalists to exploit anti-Australian sentiment, instead of seriously engaging the issues.

When we contacted him recently, Glaeser argued that Australia faced the same challenge in Indonesia as the US does in the Middle East: "I think that the worst thing that the US can do, from a hatred point of view, is to embrace the moderate Iranians. As much as we in our hearts applaud what they are doing, by publicly supporting them, we doom them," he said.

For Australia, Glaeser's view was that this meant that we should be perceived as "supporting both sides". He suggested that Australia might want to "publicly appeal to radical Muslims and talk about how, while you condemn violence, you support their rights".

Thinking about the factors underpinning the supply and demand of hatred is a complex and uncomfortable exercise. But we are living dangerously, and Australian policy makers must understand the factors that produce hatred before they decide how to respond.

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