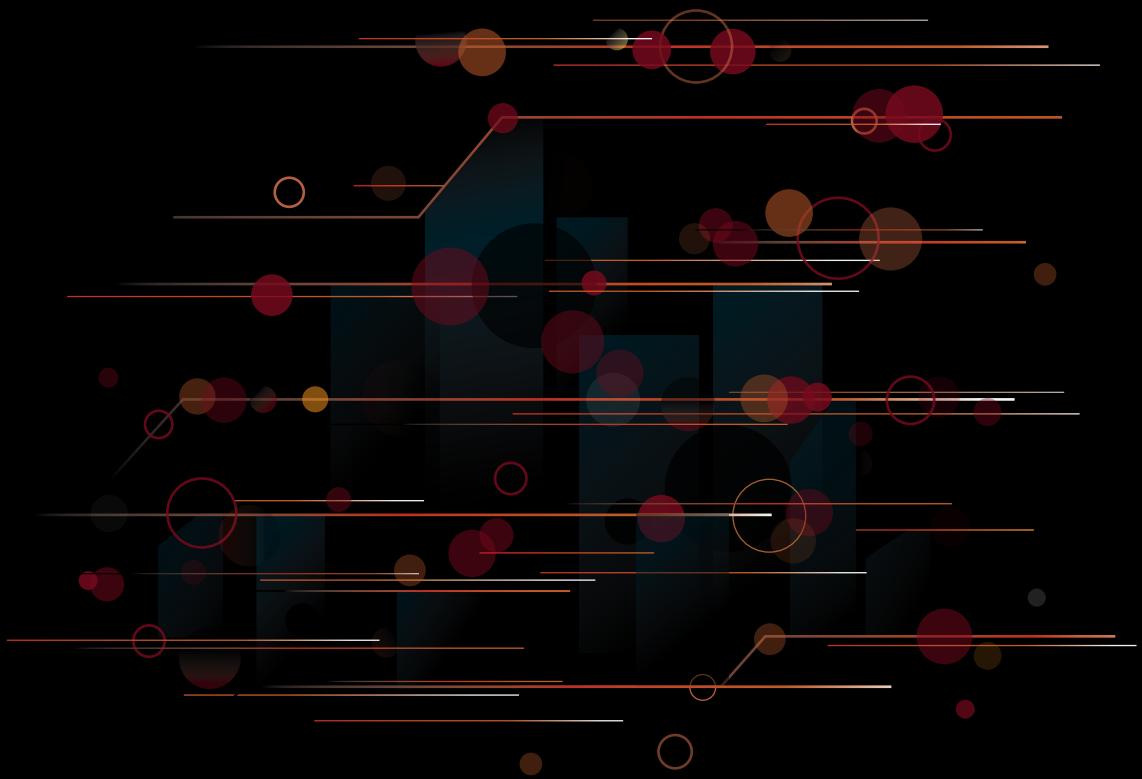
Measuring the Impact of Terrorism

Global Terrorism Index 2026

- Global Results
- Trends in Terrorism
- Terrorism and Borderlands
- Youth Radicalisation



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The GTI uses Dragonfly's TerrorismTracker database, which contains detailed and structured event records of every terrorist incident reported in open sources since January 2007. Dragonfly is a leading risk intelligence and data company that specialises in global security, geopolitics, crises and instability.

TerrorismTracker is the most comprehensive, current and methodologically robust dedicated open-source terrorism incidents database available. It is widely used for professional applications in countering terrorism, by law enforcement, government, military, in the private sector, in academia, and among insurers.

Further information about Dragonfly is available at **www.dragonflyintelligence.com**

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Executive Summary

This is the 13th edition of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), which provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns in terrorism over the last two decades.

This year's Index recorded a substantial fall in terrorism worldwide. Deaths from terrorism fell 28 per cent to 5,582, while the number of attacks declined by nearly 22 per cent to 2,944. The improvement was widespread, with 81 countries recording improvements. Only 19 countries deteriorated, the lowest number of deteriorations in the Index's history. However, there was a significant increase in terrorism in Western countries, which accounted for seven of the 19 deteriorations.

Whether the improvements recorded in 2025 will be sustained remains uncertain. Given the current state of emerging global conflicts, a rise in terrorism is likely.

Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the deadliest terrorist organisation in 2025, although the group was active in fewer countries, dropping from 22 to 15. The four deadliest terrorist organisations in 2025 were IS, Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. They were collectively responsible for 3,869 deaths, or 70 per cent of all terrorism fatalities. Three of the four groups recorded a decrease in deaths, with TTP being the only one to record an increase.

Terrorism remains highly concentrated. Just under 70 per cent of deaths from terrorism occurred in only five countries: Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Six of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism are in sub-Saharan Africa, now the global epicentre of terrorism.

For the first time, Pakistan recorded the highest score on the Index and is the country most impacted by terrorism. This follows a sharp resurgence in terrorist activity driven in part by the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021. Pakistan's strained relations with its neighbours, combined with rising violence from TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), have created significant security risks. Deaths from terrorism in Pakistan are now at their highest level since 2013, with the country recording 1,139 terrorism deaths and 1,045 incidents in 2025.

Nigeria recorded the largest increase in 2025, with fatalities rising by 46 per cent to 750. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram were responsible for 80 per cent of all terrorism deaths in the country.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) also recorded a significant increase in terrorism, reaching its worst ever position on the Index. Deaths in the DRC rose by nearly 28 per cent to 467, driven by attacks carried out by the IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which targeted civilians, churches, hospitals, and funerals.

Colombia fell into the ten most impacted countries for the first time since 2013. Terrorism deaths in Colombia increased by 70 per cent, and attacks rose by nearly 47 per cent, driven primarily by dissident factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). Both groups have adopted drone warfare, drawing direct inspiration from the battlefield innovations seen in Ukraine, with 77 drone attacks recorded between 2024 and 2025.

Deaths in sub-Saharan Africa fell in ten countries while rising in just four. Deaths in the Sahel region accounted for more than half of all terrorism-related deaths globally.

Five countries in the Sahel recorded falls in both the number of deaths and incidents from the year previous. Nigeria is the only country in the region to experience an increase in both categories. Burkina Faso, the most impacted country in 2023 and 2024, recorded the largest decrease in deaths globally, with fatalities falling by 686, or 45 per cent. Despite this decline, lethality increased, reflecting a pattern of fewer but deadlier attacks. The main driver of the decline was a steep reduction in civilian casualties, which fell by 84 per cent.

The year was marked by the absence globally of large-scale attacks. The deadliest attack killed 120 people, compared to 237 in 2024 and over 1,100 in 2023. It was also the only attack in 2025 that killed more than 100 people, compared to five attacks of that magnitude in the prior year. Average lethality also decreased, from 2.1 to 1.8 deaths per attack.

Islamic State continues to function as a loosely affiliated global network. In 2025, it was active in 15 countries across six regions. Despite a 15 per cent fall in the number of attacks attributed to the group, IS was responsible for just under 17 per cent of all attacks worldwide. A notable shift occurred in the group's regional focus: attacks in sub-Saharan Africa almost doubled in the past year, rising from 111 to 221 incidents, while attacks in the Middle East and North Africa fell by 39 per cent.

Syria experienced the most IS attacks, with 238 incidents. The collapse of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in North-Eastern Syria, the withdrawal of US troops and mass escapes from detention camps holding former IS fighters, are likely to shape the security environment in Syria and Iraq in 2026. Nigeria saw a dramatic increase in IS activity, with IS attacks jumping from 20 in 2024 to 92 in 2025.

Al-Shabaab, while experiencing a decline in terrorist deaths for the third consecutive year, launched its Shabelle Offensive in early 2025, overrunning government positions across central Somalia. By mid-year the group had advanced to within 50 kilometres of Mogadishu. The offensive exploited the transition between African Union peacekeeping missions, political fractures between the federal government and regional states, and an arms pipeline from Yemen's Houthis.

The increasingly fragmented global political environment, described in IEP's Great Fragmentation report, is reflected through a rise in politically motivated terrorist attacks, which increased by almost 20 per cent in 2025. South America accounted for 75 per

cent of all terrorism deaths linked to political ideology. Despite the high media profile of attacks in the West, the primary driver of terrorism remains conflict. Only one per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2025 occurred outside conflict-affected countries.

In the West, deaths from terrorism rose sharply, increasing by 280 per cent to 57 deaths. This increase was largely driven by several mass-casualty attacks, including the New Orleans truck attack in the United States in January, and the Bondi Beach shooting in Australia in December. The Bondi Beach attack, carried out by two jihadist extremists who killed 15 people in a targeted attack on Jewish Australians, is now that nation's worst terrorist attack and its deadliest mass shooting since 1996. Several other high-profile attacks in the West were politically motivated, including the assassination of US conservative political influencer Charlie Kirk and the killing of two Israeli Embassy staff members in Washington DC.

Youth radicalisation has emerged as one of the most pressing security concerns in the West. Youth and minors accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025, a threefold increase since 2021. The average radicalisation timeline has contracted dramatically, with radicalisation now capable of occurring within a matter of weeks, driven by short-form online propaganda, algorithmic amplification, and the exploitation of youth developmental vulnerabilities.

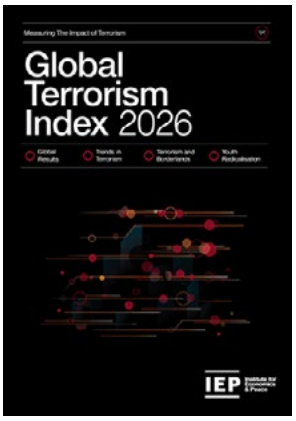
Motivations for youth radicalisation vary by region. In the West, alienation and social isolation are the key factors. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, 71 per cent of recruits cited human rights abuse by state security forces as the tipping point for joining a violent extremist group, while a quarter cited a total lack of job opportunities.

In the West, it is estimated that 87 per cent of radicalised minors had a history of neglect or psychological abuse while 77 per cent had a history of abandonment. Terrorist attacks involving minors are also far more likely to be foiled, with 97 per cent intercepted by security services between 2022 and 2025, compared to 68 per cent for adult-only plots. Lone-wolf actors carried out 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West over the last five years and were three times more likely to successfully execute an attack than groups of two or more plotters.

Border proximity is a defining feature of modern terrorism. Over 41 per cent of terrorist attacks occurred within 50km of an international border, and 64 per cent occurred within 100km. Terrorism in border areas has become more common over the past 15 years, with attacks occurring over 100km from a border falling from 38 per cent in 2011 to 23 per cent in 2025.

Borderlands represent authority gaps where state control is weakest, and the inability of states to effectively manage cross-border counterinsurgency has been a key factor in the spread of terrorism in multiple regions. Several of the world's most persistent terrorism hotspots are concentrated along border regions, including the Colombia-Venezuela frontier, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, the Central Sahel tri-border area, and the Lake Chad Basin. Cross-border militant activity in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands was the primary driver of the escalation to open conflict between the two countries in February 2026.

Despite the substantial fall in terrorism deaths, the findings of the 2026 Index underscore the shifting nature of global terrorism. While overall levels of terrorism are decreasing, the growing concentration of attacks in border regions, the rise of youth radicalisation, and the spread of terrorist activity across sub-Saharan Africa highlight the persistent and adaptive nature of the threat.



At the time of writing, the geopolitical landscape has deteriorated sharply and the outlook for terrorism in 2026 is concerning. In sub-Saharan Africa, the improvements recorded over the past year mask the territorial gains of the jihadists. They are lessening their terrorist attacks on civilians as they attempt to win hearts and minds and consolidate recently gained territory. They are also expanding activities by imposing economic blockades on major cities.

> The Sahel remains the global epicentre of terrorism, accounting for over half of all terrorism-related deaths in 2024 with the number of countries affected increasing.

In South Asia, the long-running tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan erupted into open conflict in February 2026, with Pakistan declaring a state of war and launching airstrikes on Kabul and Kandahar. Open conflict between the two countries is likely to displace populations, weaken border controls, and create the security vacuums in which groups like the TTP and ISKP have historically thrived.

In Syria, Islamic State announced a new phase of operations in late February 2026. The mass escape of over 20,000 individuals from detention facilities holding IS-affiliated fighters and families earlier in the year represents one of the most significant emerging terrorism risks globally.

The joint US-Israeli military operation against Iran, launched on 28 February 2026, greatly escalates the risk of future terrorism. Iran's retaliatory missile strikes against Israel and US allies in the Gulf, combined with its long-standing relationships with proxy networks including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, mean that the consequences of this escalation will affect the entire region and beyond. The risk of proxy-inspired terrorist attacks against US, Israel, and allied interests, both within the Middle East and in Western countries, has risen substantially.

In the West, the underlying conditions that drove the 280 per cent increase in terrorism deaths in 2025 are unlikely to abate. Political polarisation, rising antisemitic violence, and the rapid online radicalisation of young people continue to create an ongoing environment where terrorism remains a serious threat. Taken together, these converging crises suggest that the global improvement in terrorism recorded in 2025 may prove to be a temporary reprieve for many countries, rather than the beginning of a sustained downward trend.

Key Findings

1 Results

- Terrorism remains a significant global threat. In 2025, 5,582 people were killed in terrorist attacks across 2,944 incidents.
- Despite terrorism remaining a significant threat, deaths fell 28 per cent and incidents 22 per cent last year.
- The impact of terrorism fell in 81 countries, the highest number of annual improvements since 2021, while rising in just 19 countries.
- Although sub-Saharan Africa remains the epicentre of terrorism, there was some improvement. Deaths fell in ten countries while rising in just four.
- The four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2025 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. TTP was the only one of these four groups to record an increase in the number of deaths from terrorism over the past year.
- Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2025, with the group carrying out attacks in 15 different countries compared to 22 in the prior year.
- There was a noticeable increase in IS attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 467 people killed in IS attacks in 2025, compared to 360 in 2024.
- Pakistan was the country most impacted by terrorism this year, the first time it has been ranked at number one on the Index. It has been ranked among the ten countries most impacted by terrorism every year since the inception of the Index.
- Just under 70 per cent of deaths from terrorism occurred in only five countries: Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the largest increases in deaths from terrorism, with rises of 237 deaths and 102 deaths respectively.
- Although it was the country most impacted by terrorism in 2023 and 2024, Burkina Faso recorded the largest decrease in the number of deaths from terrorism, with total deaths falling by 686, or 45 per cent, in 2025.

2 Trends in Terrorism

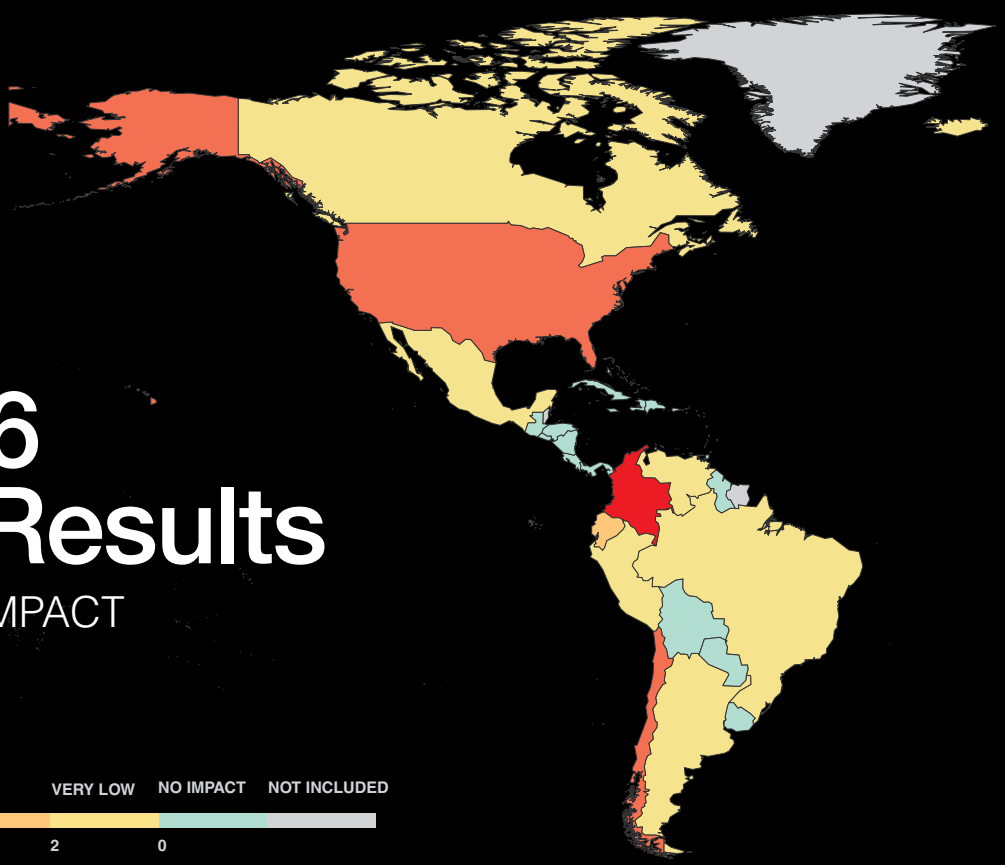
- Deaths from terrorism have fluctuated significantly since 2007, peaking at 10,882 in 2015 and reaching a low of 5,582 in 2025. During this period, the epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa, into the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa.
- The Sahel region accounted for more than half of all deaths in 2025 from terrorism, compared to under one per cent of deaths in 2007.
- The largest percentage falls in terrorist activity since 2007 have occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan, with deaths from terrorism in these countries falling by 99 and 95 per cent respectively.
- The impact of terrorism has become more geographically concentrated in recent years. In 2015, 57 countries recorded at least one death from terrorism. By 2025, this number had dropped to just 36 countries.
- Of the 163 countries in the GTI, only 25 have not recorded a single terrorist incident since 2007.
- After falling for several years, deaths from terrorism in the West rose sharply in 2025 with 57 deaths recorded, a 280 per cent increase from 2024. Australia experienced its worst ever terrorist attack, when 15 people were killed in the December 2025 Bondi Beach shooting.
- Deaths from terrorism also rose in the US, with 28 people killed in terrorist attacks, many of which were politically motivated. This was the highest number of people killed from terrorism in the US since 2019.
- Despite the high media profile of attacks in the West, the primary driver of terrorism remains conflict. Only one per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2025 occurred outside conflict-affected countries.
- Over the past decade the average impact of terrorism has decreased in every region other than sub-Saharan Africa. Deaths from terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa have fallen by 95 per cent in the last ten years.
- Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia accounted for just under 94 per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2025.

3 Terrorism and Borderlands

- Border proximity is a defining feature of modern terrorism. Just over 41 per cent of attacks occur within 50 kilometres of an international border, and 64 per cent occur within 100km.
- Borderlands often represent authority gaps: remote areas where state control is weakest. Difficult terrain and distance from major cities create spaces where terrorist groups can recruit, train, and operate with relative freedom.
- Borders restrict the ability of security forces to pursue terrorist groups, who can much more easily cross into neighbouring countries.
- Poor coordination and competing interests between neighbouring states can amplify terrorism risk. Where governments lack alignment or use non-state actors as proxies, borderlands become ungoverned grey zones.
- Terrorism in border areas has become more common in the last 15 years. Attacks that occurred over 100km from a border fell from 38 per cent in 2011 to 23 per cent in 2025.
- Terrorist groups are less likely to claim responsibility for attacks near borders, particularly those targeting civilians. In 2025, claimed attacks within 50km of a border accounted for just 24 per cent of total attacks, the lowest since 2013.
- Several of the world's most persistent terrorism hotspots are concentrated along border regions: the Colombia-Venezuela frontier, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, the Central Sahel tri-border area, and the Lake Chad Basin.
- All these hotspots share common features: porous borders, under-governed territory, and connected communities that span national boundaries.

4 Youth Radicalisation

- Youth radicalisation has been increasing rapidly in the past three years. Children and adolescents accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025, a threefold increase since 2021.
- In 2024, teenagers were involved in nearly two-thirds of IS-linked arrests in Europe, and the total number of terrorist incidents in the West rose to 52, up from 32 the previous year.
- The average radicalisation timeline has contracted dramatically: from 18 months in 2005 to 13 months in 2016. Today, radicalisation can occur within a matter of weeks.
- An estimated 87 per cent of radicalised minors had a history of neglect or psychological abuse, and 77 per cent had experienced abandonment prior to radicalisation.
- Although youth radicalisation is becoming more common, plots involving youth are planned less well and more likely to be caught by security services. Between 2022 and 2025, 97 per cent of terrorist plots involving a minor were foiled, compared to a 68 per cent foil rate for adult-only plots.
- Lone-wolf actors carried out 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West over the last five years and were three times more likely to successfully execute an attack than groups of two or more plotters.
- Motivations for youth radicalisation vary by region. In the West, alienation and social isolation are the key factors. In sub-Saharan Africa, 71 per cent of recruits cited human rights abuse by state security forces as the tipping point for joining a violent extremist group, while a quarter cited a total lack of job opportunities.



GTI 2026 Overall Results

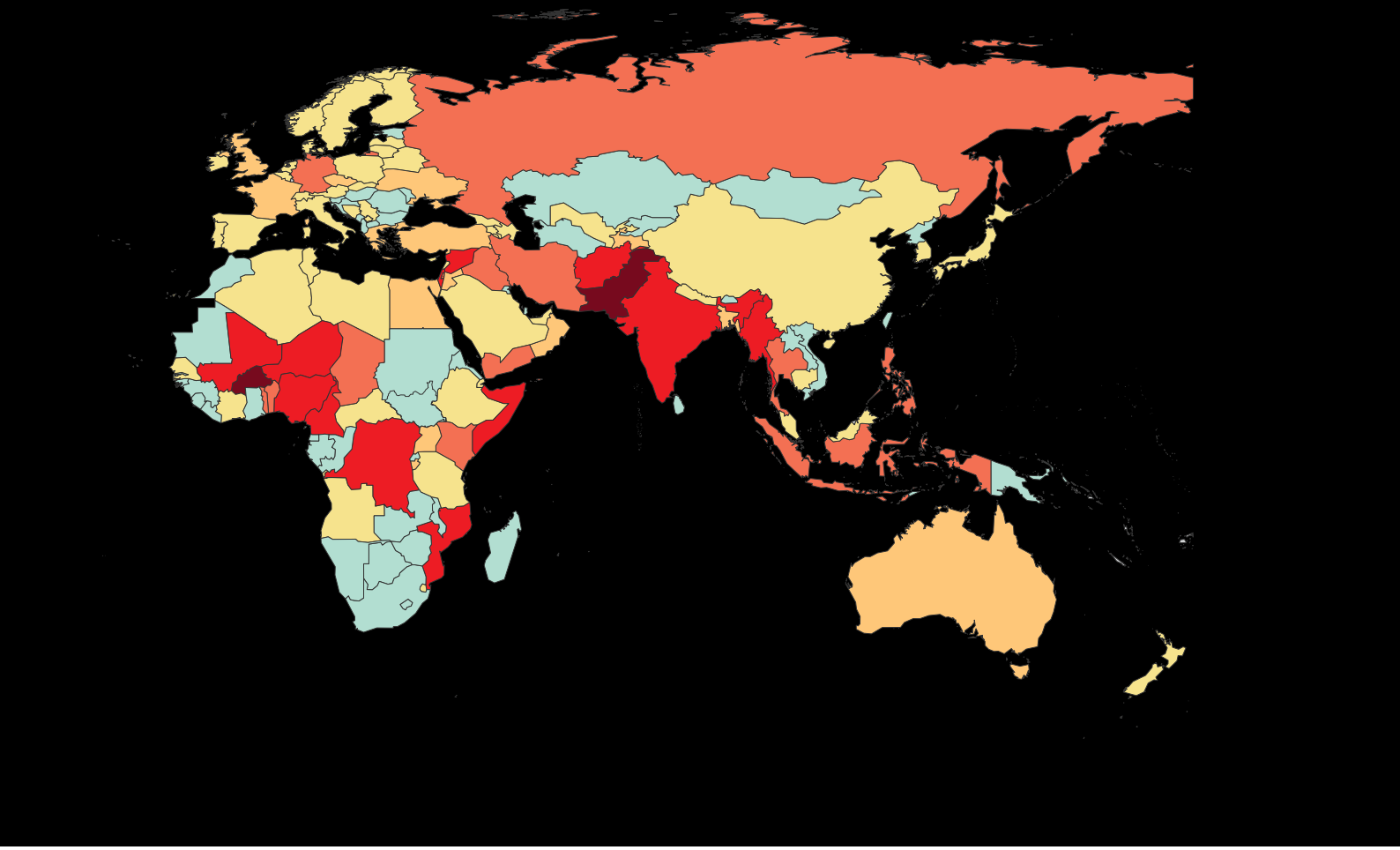
MEASURING THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM

THE IMPACT OF TERRORISM

VERY HIGH | HIGH | MEDIUM | LOW | VERY LOW | NO IMPACT | NOT INCLUDED

10 8 6 4 2 0

Rank	Country	Score	Rank Change
1	Pakistan	8.574	↖1
2	Burkina Faso	8.324	↘1
3	Niger	7.816	↖2
4	Nigeria	7.792	↖2
5	Mali	7.586	↘1
6	Syria	7.545	↘3
7	Somalia	7.391	↔
8	Democratic Republic of the Congo	7.171	↖4
9	Colombia	7.116	↖5
10	Israel	6.79	↘2
11	Afghanistan	6.678	↘2
12	Cameroon	6.593	↘2
13	India	6.428	↖2
14	Myanmar	6.245	↘3
15	Mozambique	6.022	↖1
16	Iraq	5.822	↘3
17	Russia	5.593	↔
18	Iran	5.477	↔
19	Benin	5.434	↖8
20	Thailand	5.275	↖6
21	Kenya	5.088	↘1
22	Palestine	4.8	↖2
23	Philippines	4.719	↘2
24	Indonesia	4.714	↖6
25	Yemen	4.653	↘2
26	Chad	4.625	↘7
27	Chile	4.553	↘5
28	United States of America	4.521	↖6
29	Germany	4.447	↘1
30	Togo	4.305	↘5
31	Australia	3.732	↖14
32	Egypt	3.465	↘3
33	Burundi	3.361	↘2
34	Uganda	3.25	↘1
35	France	3.224	↖6
36	Türkiye	3.212	↘4
37	Ecuador	3.063	↖20
38	United Kingdom	2.936	↖2
39	Ukraine	2.927	↖8
40	Greece	2.788	↘5
41	Tajikistan	2.602	↖10
42	Bangladesh	2.286	↘6
43	Oman	2.282	↘6
44	Jordan	2.268	↘6
45	Czechia	2.261	↘6
46	Sweden	1.839	↖4
47	Algeria	1.766	↘5
48	Poland	1.682	↘2
49	Peru	1.572	↘5
50	Tunisia	1.522	↘7
51	Austria	1.498	↖34
52	Netherlands	1.475	↖10
53	Canada	1.333	↘5
54	China	1.311	↘5
55	Belgium	1.198	↖3
56	Angola	1.136	↘3
57	Malaysia	1.092	↘3
58	Senegal	1.07	↘2
59	Libya	1.007	↘4
60	Italy	0.999	↖3
61	Djibouti	0.925	↘2
62	Brazil	0.909	↘1
63	Tanzania	0.888	↘1
64	Spain	0.794	↖1
65	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.782	↖2
66	Serbia	0.782	↖20
67	Switzerland	0.749	↘3
68	United Arab Emirates	0.749	↖2
69	Norway	0.725	↘1
70	Denmark	0.72	↖10
71	Côte d'Ivoire	0.702	↘11
72	Lebanon	0.648	↘6
73	Slovakia	0.616	↘2
74	Finland	0.582	↖1
75	Japan	0.571	↘2
76	Central African Republic	0.556	↘4
77	Georgia	0.506	↘1
78	Kosovo	0.465	↖1
79	Argentina	0.455	↘2
80	Saudi Arabia	0.443	↘5



Rank	Country	Score	Rank Change
81	Armenia	0.423	↘ 1
82	Ireland	0.423	↘ 1
83	Lithuania	0.423	↘ 1
84	Portugal	0.423	↖ 20
85	Venezuela	0.396	↘ 1
86	South Korea	0.333	↘ 1
87	Mexico	0.325	↘ 2
88	Ethiopia	0.288	↘ 10
89	Nepal	0.288	↘ 18
90	Cambodia	0.233	↘ 1
91	Latvia	0.233	↘ 1
92	Cyprus	0.176	↘ 1
93	Azerbaijan	0.123	↘ 1
94	Belarus	0.123	↘ 1
95	New Zealand	0.114	↔
96	Uzbekistan	0.114	↘ 3
97	Iceland	0.059	↘ 1
98	Eswatini	0.044	↘ 1
99	Bahrain	0.03	↔
100	Albania	0	↖ 1
100	Bhutan	0	↖ 1
100	Bolivia	0	↖ 1
100	Botswana	0	↖ 1
100	Bulgaria	0	↖ 1
100	Costa Rica	0	↖ 1
100	Croatia	0	↖ 1
100	Cuba	0	↖ 1
100	Dominican Republic	0	↖ 1
100	El Salvador	0	↖ 1

Rank	Country	Score	Rank Change
100	Equatorial Guinea	0	↖ 1
100	Eritrea	0	↖ 1
100	Estonia	0	↖ 1
100	Gabon	0	↖ 1
100	Ghana	0	↖ 1
100	Guatemala	0	↖ 1
100	Guinea	0	↖ 1
100	Guinea-Bissau	0	↖ 1
100	Guyana	0	↖ 1
100	Haiti	0	↖ 1
100	Honduras	0	↖ 1
100	Hungary	0	↖ 1
100	Jamaica	0	↖ 1
100	Kazakhstan	0	↖ 1
100	Kuwait	0	↖ 1
100	Kyrgyz Republic	0	↖ 1
100	Laos	0	↖ 1
100	Lesotho	0	↖ 1
100	Liberia	0	↖ 1
100	Madagascar	0	↖ 1
100	Malawi	0	↖ 1
100	Mauritania	0	↖ 1
100	Mauritius	0	↖ 1
100	Moldova	0	↖ 1
100	Mongolia	0	↖ 1
100	Montenegro	0	↖ 1
100	Morocco	0	↖ 1
100	Namibia	0	↖ 1
100	Nicaragua	0	↖ 1

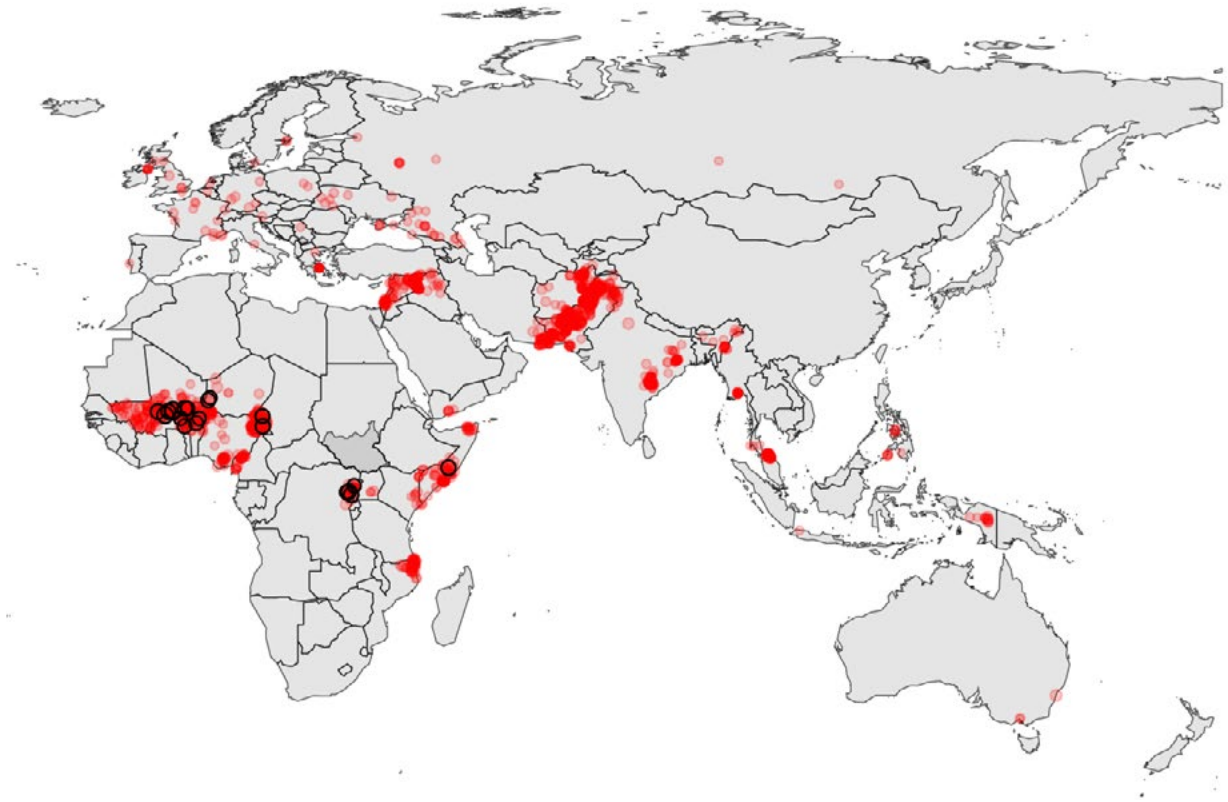
Rank	Country	Score	Rank Change
100	North Korea	0	↖ 1
100	North Macedonia	0	↖ 1
100	Panama	0	↖ 1
100	Papua New Guinea	0	↖ 1
100	Paraguay	0	↘ 2
100	Qatar	0	↖ 1
100	Republic of the Congo	0	↖ 1
100	Romania	0	↖ 1
100	Rwanda	0	↖ 1
100	Sierra Leone	0	↖ 1
100	Singapore	0	↖ 1
100	Slovenia	0	↖ 1
100	South Africa	0	↖ 1
100	South Sudan	0	↖ 1
100	Sri Lanka	0	↖ 1
100	Sudan	0	↖ 1
100	Taiwan	0	↖ 1
100	The Gambia	0	↖ 1
100	Timor-Leste	0	↖ 1
100	Trinidad and Tobago	0	↖ 1
100	Turkmenistan	0	↖ 1
100	Uruguay	0	↘ 1
100	Vietnam	0	↖ 1
100	Zambia	0	↖ 1
100	Zimbabwe	0	↖ 1

20 Deadliest Attacks

The 20 most fatal terrorist attacks in 2025

- All attacks in 2025 scaled by number of fatalities
- Worst attacks in 2025

							Description
1	COUNTRY	BURKINA FASO	PROVINCE	SAHEL	DEATHS		Assailants attacked a military position between Djibo, Soum province, and Namsiguia, Bam province, on 9 October. Over 120 soldiers were killed and 30 were reported missing. The perpetrators also stole ammunition and military vehicles. Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	9/10/2025	GROUP	JNIM	120		
2	COUNTRY	BURKINA FASO	PROVINCE	BOUCLE DU MOUHOUN	DEATHS		Assailants carried out coordinated attacks on multiple villages including Debe, Gouran, Guiedougou, Lanfiera, and Yaran in Sourou province, Boucle du Mouhoun region, between 1 and 3 April. They killed at least 100 people, including civilians and Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) personnel, and abducted at least ten others. The attackers also destroyed local infrastructure. No group had claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing, but based on the target, tactics, and location, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) was probably responsible.
	DATE	1/4/2025	GROUP	JNIM	100		
3	COUNTRY	BURKINA FASO	REGION	SAHEL	DEATHS		Assailants launched coordinated attacks on multiple locations, including a military camp, in Djibo, Soum province, Sahel region, at approximately 0600hrs on 11 May. At least 100 people were killed. They temporarily took control of the military camp and set fire to shops. Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	11/5/2025	GROUP	JNIM	100		
4	COUNTRY	NIGER	PROVINCE	TILLABÉRI	DEATHS		Gunmen attacked villagers near the local mosque in Manda, Tera department, Tillaberi region, around 2000hrs on 20 June. At least 71 people were killed and 20 were wounded. The assailants also set fire to several houses. No group had claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing, but local media sources attributed the attack to Islamic State - Sahel Province.
	DATE	20/6/2025	GROUP	ISLAMIC STATE (IS)	71		
5	COUNTRY	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	PROVINCE	NORD-KIVU	DEATHS		Assailants attacked civilians in a funeral in Ntoyo, Bapere sector, Lubero territory, North Kivu province, around 2200hrs on 8 September. 71 people were killed and 15 were wounded. The perpetrators also set fire to several houses. Islamic State - Central Africa Province claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	8/9/2025	GROUP	ISLAMIC STATE (IS)	71		
6	COUNTRY	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	REGION	NORD-KIVU	DEATHS		Assailants killed at least 70 Christian civilians by beheading in Lubero territory, North Kivu province on 13 February. The victims, primarily women, children, and the elderly, were abducted from Mayba village and taken to a Protestant church in Kasanga. Assailants set fire to some of the bodies and houses. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, attributing the attack to its 'Central Africa Province'.
	DATE	13/2/2025	GROUP	ISLAMIC STATE (IS)	70		
7	COUNTRY	MALI	REGION	SÉGOU	DEATHS		Assailants attacked two villages, Samabougou and Timissa, Tominian cercle, Segou region, around 1700hrs on 3 June. At least 66 people, including 23 Dozo militiamen, were killed. No group claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing, but local media sources attributed the attack to Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).
	DATE	3/6/2025	GROUP	JNIM	66		
8	COUNTRY	BURKINA FASO	REGION	NORD	DEATHS		Assailants attacked a military camp in Koumbri, Yatenga province, Nord region, at approximately 0600hrs on 1 June. At least 50 soldiers and 15 members of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP) were killed. Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	1/6/2025	GROUP	JNIM	65		
9	COUNTRY	SOMALIA	PROVINCE	HIIRAAN	DEATHS		Al-Shabaab gunmen attacked and seized the town of Mahaas, Mahaas district, Hiiraan region, on 27 July. The assault began with a suicide car-bombing and was followed by anv infantry attack. In a media statement, al-Shabaab claim to have killed 63 government troops and wounding 84 more. Official casualty figures are not known however.
	DATE	27/7/2025	GROUP	AL-SHABAAB	63		
10	COUNTRY	NIGERIA	PROVINCE	BORNO	DEATHS		Gunmen attacked the village of Darajamal, Bama local government area, Borno state, on 5 September, killing 58 villagers and 5 soldiers. 30 of the gunmen were reportedly killed by the Nigerian army after the attack. No organisation has claimed responsibility for the assault at the time of writing, although local media sources have attributed the attack to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).
	DATE	5/9/2025	GROUP	ISLAMIC STATE WEST AFRICA PROVINCE (ISWAP)	63		



							Description
11	COUNTRY	**NIGER**	PROVINCE	**TAHOUA**	DEATHS		Assailants simultaneously attacked two military camps in Eknewane, Tillia department, Tahoua region, on 25 May. According to the authorities, at least 58 people, including soldiers and civilians, were killed. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	**25/5/2025**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE (IS)**	**58**		
12	COUNTRY	**NIGERIA**	REGION	**BORNO**	DEATHS		Jihadists attacked the neighbouring villages of Mallam Karamti and Kwatandashi in Kukawa local government area, Borno state on 15 May. According to local press reports, approximately one hundred civilians were rounded up and taken into the forest with fifty-seven bodies later recovered and seventy individuals still missing. Media reports attribute the attack to Boko Haram's JAS faction.
	DATE	**15/5/2025**	GROUP	**BOKO HARAM**	**57**		
13	COUNTRY	**BENIN**	REGION	**ALIBORI**	DEATHS		Gunmen killed 54 soldiers in an attack on the 'Triple Point' military position in the W National Park, Karimama area of Alibori department in the morning of 17 April. According to local media sources, security forces repelled the attack and killed at least 11 assailants. Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility.
	DATE	**17/4/2025**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**54**		
14	COUNTRY	**BURKINA FASO**	REGION	**CENTRE-EST**	DEATHS		Gunmen attacked a military barracks in Soudougui, Koulpélogo province, Central-East on 23 April. Fifty-four soldiers were believed to have been killed in the attack, while the number of wounded is unknown at the time of writing. The assailants made use of a UAV to monitor the barracks before the attack with much of the attack filmed. JNIM has claimed responsibility for the assault.
	DATE	**23/4/2025**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**54**		
15	COUNTRY	**BURKINA FASO**	CITY	**CENTRE-NORD**	DEATHS		Assailants attacked a military base in Dargo, Namentenga province, Centre-Nord region, on 29 July. At least 50 soldiers were killed. The perpetrators also looted ammunition, motorcycles, and military equipment, and set the base on fire. Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	**29/7/2025**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**50**		
16	COUNTRY	**NIGER**	REGION	**TAHOUA**	DEATHS		Armed assailants killed at least 46 Nigerien Defense and Security Forces (SDF) soldiers and captured 12 in an ambush attack on 1 February. The attack took place on a Nigerien military post in Iknewane, Tilia department, Tahoua region; the assailants seized military vehicles and ammunition. No group had claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but local media outlets suspected Islamic State (IS) was probably responsible.
	DATE	**1/2/2025**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE (IS)**	**46**		
17	COUNTRY	**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**	REGION	**NORD-KIVU**	DEATHS		Assailants attacked villagers with machetes in Bapere, Lubero territory, North Kivu province, on 14 August. At least 45 civilians were killed and an unconfirmed number were abducted. The perpetrators also set fire to several houses. Islamic State - Central Africa Province claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	**14/8/2025**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE (IS)**	**45**		
18	COUNTRY	**NIGER**	CITY	**TILLABÉRI**	DEATHS		Gunmen stormed a mosque and opened fire on worshippers in Fambita village, Kokorou commune, Tera department, Tillaberi region during the afternoon of 21 March. At least 44 people were killed and 13 were injured. Authorities attributed the attack to the Islamic State - Sahel Province.
	DATE	**21/3/2025**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE (IS)**	**44**		
19	COUNTRY	**NIGER**	REGION	**DOSSO**	DEATHS		Assailants attacked military patrol boats along the Niger River bank near Natangou village, Falmey department, Dosso region, around 1500hrs on 26 May. At least 44 soldiers were killed, seven were wounded, and an unconfirmed number were missing. No group had claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing, but local media sources suspect Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) was probably responsible.
	DATE	**26/5/2025**	GROUP	**JNIM**	**44**		
20	COUNTRY	**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**	REGION	**ITURI**	DEATHS		Assailants attacked worshippers with bladed weapons in a church in Komanda, Irumu territory, Ituri province, at approximately 0100hrs on 27 July. At least 43 civilians were killed. The perpetrators also set several houses and shops on fire. Islamic State - Central Africa Province claimed responsibility for the attack.
	DATE	**27/7/2025**	GROUP	**ISLAMIC STATE (IS)**	**43**		

Deaths
5,582

Incidents
2,944

Terrorism remains a significant global threat. In 2025, 5,582 people were killed in terrorist attacks across 2,944 incidents.

The impact of terrorism fell in 81 countries, the highest number of annual improvements since 2021, while rising in just 19 countries.

Deaths in SSA countries
10 ↘ | 4 ↖

Although sub-Saharan Africa remains the epicentre of terrorism, there was some improvement. Deaths fell in ten countries while rising in just four.

Deaths
28% ↘

Incidents
22% ↘

Despite terrorism remaining a significant threat, deaths fell 28 per cent and incidents 22 per cent last year.

The four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2025 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. TTP was the only one of these four groups to record an increase in the number of deaths from terrorism over the past year.

Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates remained the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2025, with the group carrying out attacks in 15 different countries compared to 22 in the prior year.

70%

Just under 70 per cent of deaths from terrorism occurred in only five countries: Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Pakistan was the country most impacted by terrorism this year, the first time it has been ranked at number one on the Index. It has been ranked among the ten countries most impacted by terrorism every year since the inception of the Index.

Trends

2025 **467** | 2024 **360**

There was a noticeable increase in IS attacks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 467 people killed in IS attacks in 2025, compared to 360 in 2024.

237 | **102**

Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the largest increases in deaths from terrorism, with rises of 237 deaths and 102 deaths respectively.

Although it was the country most impacted by terrorism in 2023 and 2024, Burkina Faso recorded the largest decrease in the number of deaths from terrorism, with total deaths falling by 686, or 45 per cent, in 2025.

1 Results

Terrorism in 2025

Overview

In 2025 incidents, deaths, and injuries from terrorism all recorded substantial falls, with hostages being the only indicator to record a deterioration. This increase in hostages was largely due to the hijacking of the Jaffar Express train in Pakistan, where 442 hostages were taken. If this incident had not occurred, the overall number of hostages would have decreased by 30 per cent from 2024 to 2025.

The decline in deaths and incidents was reflected in an improvement in the impact of terrorism across much of the world. In 2025, 81 countries improved their scores on the GTI, the second highest year over year improvement in the history of the Index. Only 19 countries deteriorated, the lowest number on record.

Three of the four deadliest terrorist groups recorded fewer deaths in 2025 compared to 2024. Deaths attributed to Islamic State (IS) decreased by 12.5 per cent, al-Shabaab decreased by 23.9 per cent, and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam and Muslimeen (JNIM) decreased by 12.5 per cent. The exception was the world's third-deadliest group, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which saw a 14.8 per cent increase in deaths. The global footprint of the four deadliest terrorist groups also decreased, with the number of countries they were active in dropping from 22 in 2024, to 16 in 2025.

Terrorism deaths in the past year were heavily concentrated in five countries: Burkina Faso, Pakistan, Nigeria, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Together these five countries accounted for 70 per cent of global fatalities. However, Burkina Faso had the largest absolute drop in the number of terrorism deaths in 2025, which went down by 686 deaths or 45 per cent. Niger recorded a major decline in deaths as well, with total deaths dropping from 944 to 703. The fall in deaths in the Central Sahel reflects the shifting nature of the conflict in the region, with JNIM now targeting supply chains to undermine state economic capacity.

Nigeria saw the largest increase in deaths, which were 237 higher in 2025. The DRC also saw deaths rise sharply as the IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) carried out several highly lethal attacks. Total deaths in the DRC rose from 365 to 467, a 28 per cent increase.

Pakistan was ranked as the country most impacted by terrorism for the first time since the inception of the Index. This follows a sharp resurgence in terrorist activity, driven in part by the breakdown of regional alliances and the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021.

Pakistan's strained relations with its neighbours, combined with rising violence and terrorist activity from groups such as the TTP and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), have created significant security challenges that will require coordinated military, political, and socio-economic responses to address. Terrorism in Pakistan had been declining from 2014 to 2019. However, Pakistan experienced six times as many terrorist incidents in 2025 as in 2020. Deaths from terrorism are now at their highest level since 2013.

Australia, Ecuador, Ukraine, the United States, and Austria were the five countries where the impact of terrorism increased the most in 2025. Australia's score deteriorated as a result of the Bondi Beach shooting, an armed attack carried out by two jihadist extremists who killed 15 people and injured 42 in a targeted attack on Jewish Australians. A similar surge in terrorist activity was seen in the US, which recorded 13 attacks and 28 deaths in 2025. These incidents included a vehicle attack claimed by IS that killed 14 people, and the assassinations of conservative political influencer Charlie Kirk and two Israeli Embassy staff members in Washington DC.

The increasingly fragmented global political environment was reflected through the rise of the number of politically motivated terrorist attacks, which increased by almost 20 per cent in 2025. South America accounted for 75 per cent of all deaths linked to political ideology. Most of these deaths were attributed to attacks carried out by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia.

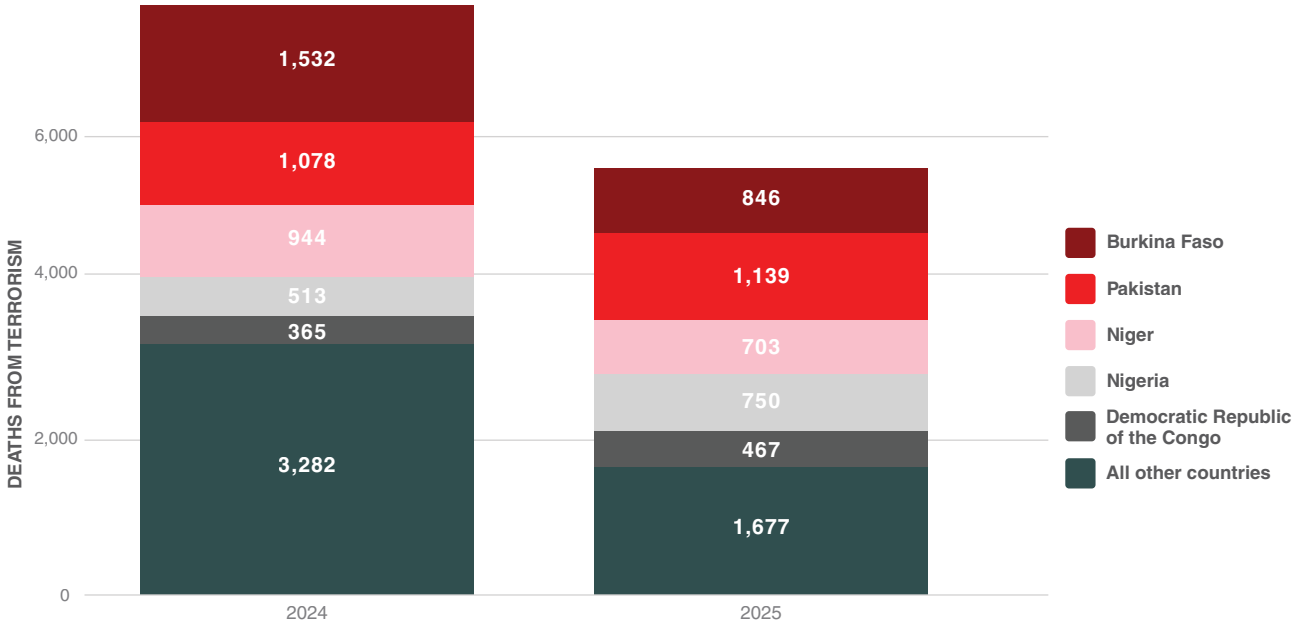
Overall, fewer people were killed by terrorist incidents in 2025, with deaths falling from 7,714 to 5,582, a decrease of nearly 28 per cent. The year also was marked by the absence of large-scale attacks, with the deadliest attack killing 120 people, compared to 237 in 2024 and over 1,000 in 2023. This was also the only attack in 2025 that killed more than 100 people, compared to five attacks of that magnitude in the prior year.

GTI 2026 Results

FIGURE 1.1

Total terrorism deaths by country, 2024–2025

Total terrorism deaths decreased by 27.6 per cent from 2024 to 2025.



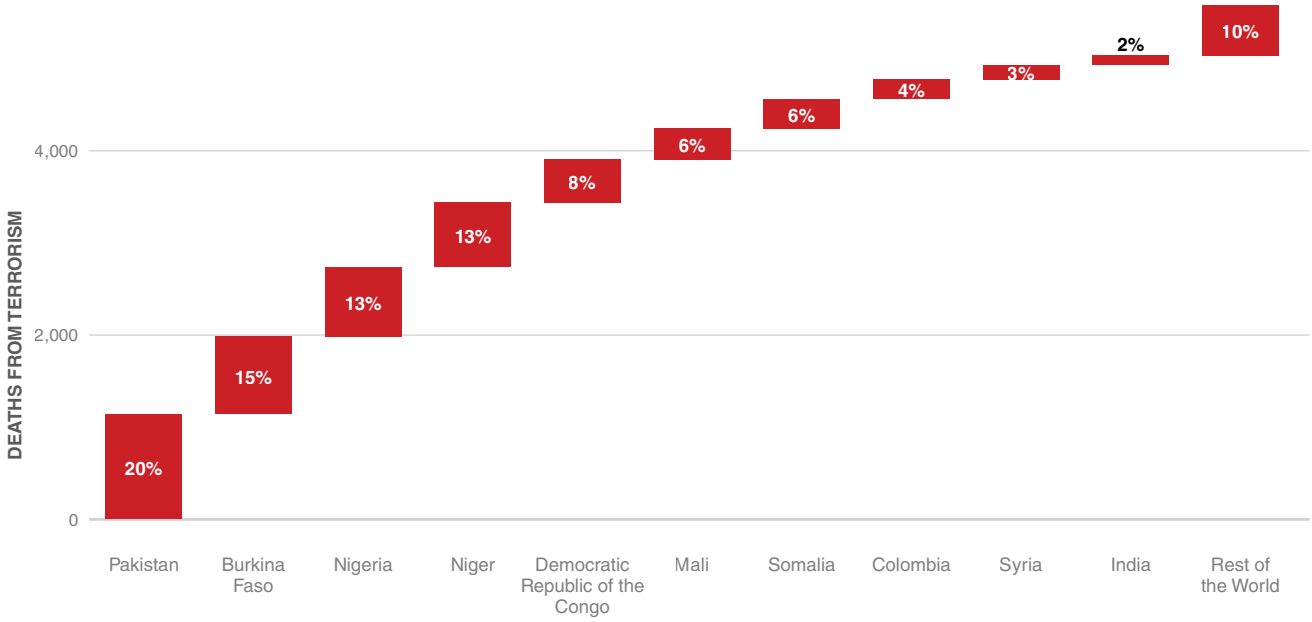
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

As shown in Figure 1.1, terrorism deaths declined markedly between 2024 and 2025. However, trends varied across some of the world's most affected countries. Burkina Faso recorded a 44.8 per cent decrease, while Niger experienced a reduction of 25.5 per cent. By contrast, Pakistan recorded an increase of 5.7 per cent and the DRC recorded a 28 per cent increase over the same period. Nigeria experienced a significant increase in deaths with an increase of 46.2 per cent and had the largest absolute increase in deaths from terrorism in 2025.

FIGURE 1.2

Distribution of deaths from terrorism by country, 2025

Five countries accounted for 70 per cent of deaths from terrorism.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Figure 1.2 shows the distribution of deaths among the ten countries that recorded the highest number of terrorism-related fatalities in 2025. Terrorism-related fatalities remain heavily concentrated in a small number of areas, with 70 per cent of all global terrorism deaths recorded in just five countries.

Over the past decade, the epicentre of terrorist activity has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to sub-Saharan Africa and specifically the Sahel, with six of the ten countries in Figure 1.2 being countries in sub-Saharan Africa. However, all three of the central Sahel states recorded falls in number of deaths from terrorism over the past year, along with three other countries: Somalia, Syria and India. By contrast, Pakistan, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Colombia all experienced an increase in deaths from terrorism.

Figure 1.3 highlights the countries that recorded the largest decreases in terrorism-related deaths in 2025. Burkina Faso recorded the largest decline in terrorism-related fatalities, with deaths falling by 44.8 per cent. Despite this overall decline, lethality increased to 14.3 deaths per incident, reflecting a pattern of fewer but deadlier attacks. Police and military fatalities increased sharply, from 419 deaths across 40 incidents in 2024 to 643 deaths across 34 incidents in 2025, indicating intensified conflict between security forces and militant groups. The main driver of the decline in total deaths was a steep reduction in civilian casualties, which fell from 996 in 2024 to 157 in 2025, an 84 per cent decrease.

In 2023, Burkina Faso recorded its peak level of terrorism-related fatalities from armed attacks, with 1,067 civilian deaths and 616 police and military deaths. That year marked a major expansion by Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), which expanded its operations from the northeastern areas into western regions of the country. Terrorism-related deaths declined throughout 2025, with civilian fatalities falling to their lowest level since 2019. However, police and military forces experienced another peak in fatalities in 2025, with deaths rising to 643.

From 2023 to 2025, Burkina Faso relied heavily on poorly trained government forces tasked with retaking territory from JNIM. During this period, JNIM adopted new tactics characterised by fewer but more lethal attacks. Lethality associated with armed attacks against police and military forces increased from 10.5 deaths per incident in 2024 to 18.9 in 2025, underscoring a shift toward more deadly engagements despite the overall decline in attack frequency.

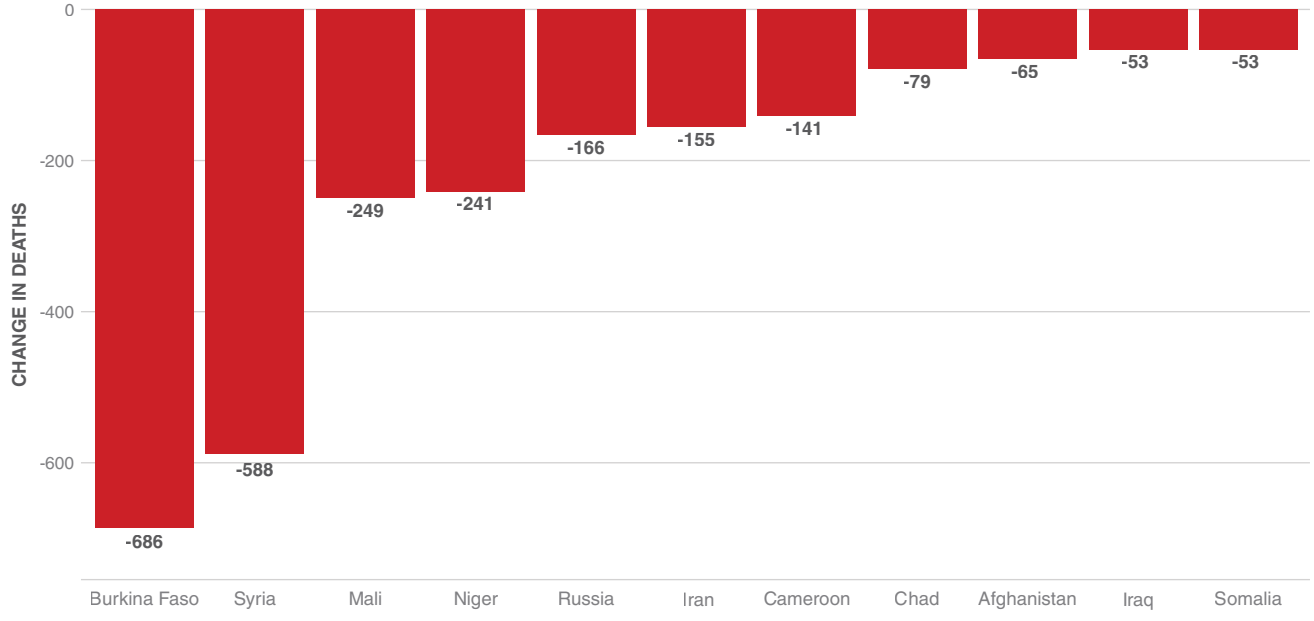
After two consecutive years as the country most impacted by terrorism, it now ranks second on the Index. The country's deadliest attack in 2025 occurred in October in Djibo, a major town in the north near the border with Mali. JNIM militants launched a coordinated assault on a Burkinabé army base, while simultaneously attacking a police station and a local market.

Syria recorded the second-largest improvement in terrorism-related deaths in 2025, although it remains in sixth place on the Index. Despite the reduction in deaths, the country remains marked by deep political uncertainty and ongoing instability in the post-Assad era, where fragmented authority and unresolved security challenges continue to be enablers to extremist violence. IS continues to be the deadliest terrorist group in Syria, a position it has held for more than a decade. The group accounted for just under 80 per cent of all deaths and 98 per cent of all recorded incidents in the country in 2025.

FIGURE 1.3

Largest decreases in deaths from terrorism, 2024–2025

Burkina Faso recorded almost 700 fewer deaths from terrorism in 2025.

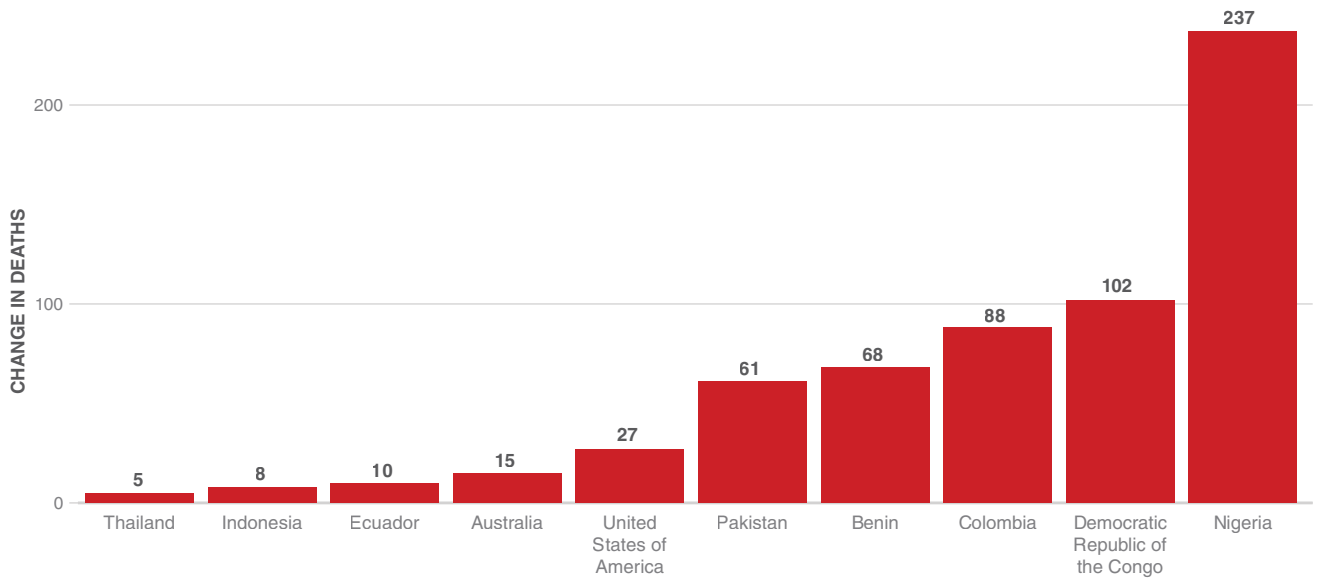


Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 1.4

Largest increases in deaths from terrorism, 2024–2025

Nigeria recorded the largest absolute increase in deaths from terrorism in 2025.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Figure 1.4 shows the countries with the largest increase in terrorism deaths in 2025. Nigeria recorded the largest increase and has experienced a steady rise in terrorism-related deaths since 2022, recording 237 more fatalities in 2025 than in 2024. The increase in terrorist activity comes amidst a surge in both ideological and criminal violence in the country. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram were responsible for 82.8 per cent of all terrorism deaths in the country in 2025. The rise in Islamic State activity led to US-backed strikes on the group in north-Western Nigeria in late 2025.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded its highest impact of terrorism in the history of the Index, with deaths increasing from 365 to 467 in the past year, amidst a wave of violence targeting civilians on the country's eastern border. On average, over 13 people were killed in each incident, the highest lethality rate in the country in more than a decade. The majority of attacks in the DRC were targeted at civilians, who accounted for 447 of the 467 deaths. Every single attack in 2025 was attributed to groups affiliated with Islamic State, as the group further expanded its presence in the region.

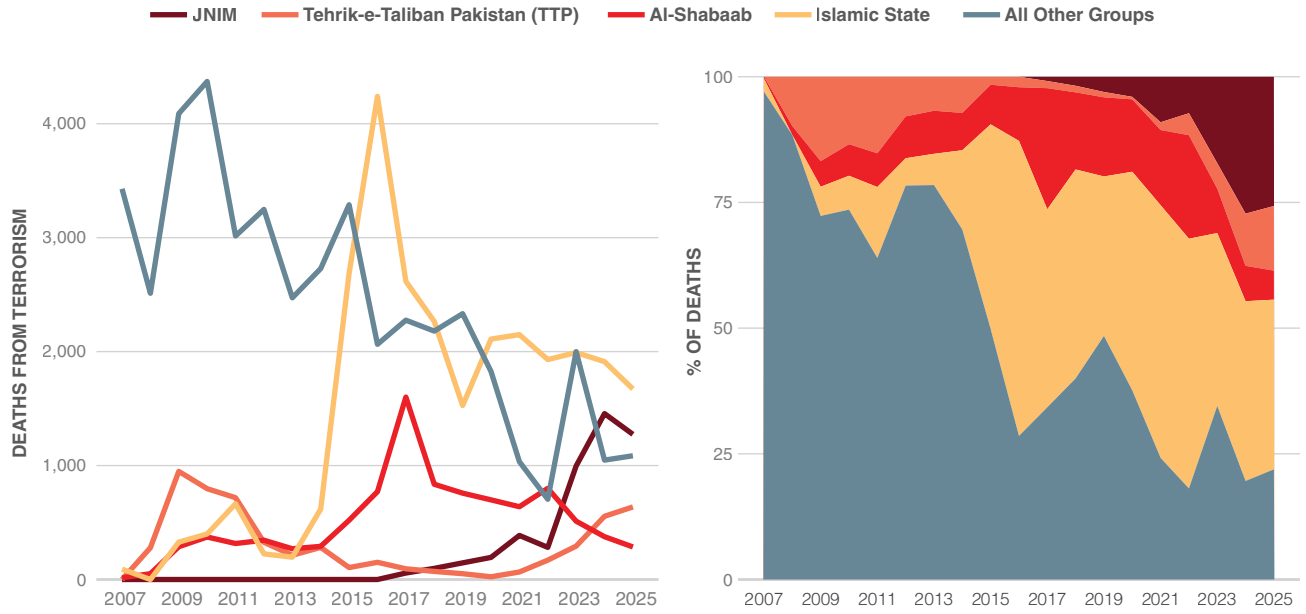
Colombia recorded its largest-ever annual increase in terrorism deaths in 2025, with fatalities rising by 70 per cent, and the number of attacks also increasing by 47 per cent. The primary targets were Colombian military and police forces, who accounted for 94 of the 213 terrorism-related deaths in 2025. The scope of the conflict in Colombia increased significantly in 2025, with tens of thousands forcibly displaced and the government declaring a national emergency.

Terrorist Groups

FIGURE 1.5

Deaths from terrorism by group, 2007–2025

Islamic State has been the world's deadliest terrorist group for most of the past decade.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Determining the most active terrorist groups, based on the deaths and attacks for which they are responsible, can be challenging. Many prominent terror organisations have affiliate groups or subdivisions that are still in partnership with, or partially commanded by, a major group. In addition to this, it is not uncommon for groups to decline to take responsibility for the attacks they commit, often due to them occurring in areas of high conflict.

In conflict environments, attacks resulting in either abnormally high or low numbers of casualties often remain unclaimed. Conversely, groups responsible for highly lethal attacks may avoid claiming them to prevent backlash from government or local populations, which could hinder recruitment efforts or provoke intensified counterinsurgency operations against them. For attacks with minimal impact, terrorist groups may see little benefit in taking responsibility, as such incidents could be perceived as failures, undermining their influence.

The four deadliest terrorist groups in 2025 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. The trend in deaths for these groups is shown in Figure 1.5. These four groups were attributed to 3,869 or 70 per cent of terrorism deaths in 2025, while 89 per cent of total terrorism deaths were attributed to a specific group in 2025. In 2015, the same groups, minus JNIM, contributed to nearly 46 per cent of deaths.

In this report, IEP consolidates data on terrorist groups and their affiliated chapters operating under the same organisational name. For instance, Islamic State (IS), also known as Daesh, encompasses both the core group and its affiliated chapters, such as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISK) and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). When referring to a specific affiliate, the chapter's name will be explicitly stated.

A higher percentage of terrorist attacks were attributed to an identified group in 2025 than in 2024, increasing by nearly 14 per cent. Of the 2,944 total incidents in 2025, just under 78 per cent were attributed to a specific group or ideological grouping.

ISLAMIC STATE (IS)

Islamic State (IS) is a Sunni Salafi Islamic group that began operating in 1999 in Syria and Iraq. Initially, IS was an affiliate of Al-Qaeda; however, over time it became independent. In 2003, IS participated in the insurgency that followed the US invasion of Iraq. Islamic State used the porous borders between Syria and Iraq to grow its operation, moving back and forth to evade detection and capture from American troops. Islamic State activity expanded rapidly following the 2011 US withdrawal from Iraq and the beginning of the Syrian civil war. In 2014, the group captured significant territory in Syria and declared a caliphate.

IS adheres to a global Salafi jihadist ideology. It perpetrates violence against those who do not align with its own version of Islam, including Shi'a and minority sects. IS comprises multiple chapters or provinces around the world including Islamic

State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-SP), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and many others in Somalia, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The group's core mission remains the creation of an Islamic caliphate, encompassing Syria, Iraq and other elements of the Levant. However, the group's ideology has spread to North America, Europe, Asia, South Asia, Africa and Middle East regions, with splinter groups around the world. IS and its affiliates exploited tensions between the Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq and Syria, using Sunni disenfranchisement to capture and consolidate its control over areas of Iraq and Syria. IS adopted similar tactics in the Sahel, taking advantage of political instability and local grievances to recruit populations targeted by security forces. The group is estimated to include thousands of followers worldwide.

Changes in 2025

IS was the deadliest terrorist group again in 2025, a position it has held for most of the last decade. Despite its position as the world's most prominent terrorist group, the number of incidents attributed to the group last year fell by nearly 15 per cent, from 577 to 488 attacks. However, the actual number of attacks carried out by the group is likely to be much higher, as a significant percentage of total attacks are not attributed to any group, and there are a high number of unattributed attacks in regions where IS operates. Out of the 2,944 total incidents that occurred in 2025, Islamic State and its regional groups were responsible for just under 17 per cent of attacks, or nearly one in every six attacks worldwide.

Islamic State was active in 15 countries in 2025, down from 22 in 2024, across six regions: Western and Central Europe, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), North America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. IS was most active in the MENA region with 246 incidents. Although the group has been most active in this region for much of the last decade, there has been a rapid increase in the group's interest in sub-Saharan Africa since 2020. Attacks by the group in the region almost doubled in the last year, rising from 111 incidents in 2024 to 221 in 2025. By contrast, attacks by the group in its traditional stronghold in the MENA region fell by 39 per cent in the last year.

Syria experienced the most attacks carried out by the group with 238 total incidents, 123 deaths, 136 injured, and four hostages. The other seven incidents in the MENA region occurred in Iraq. 2025 marks the third consecutive year of Syria being the most impacted country by IS. In 2024, Syria experienced 369 attacks attributed to IS. The number of incidents decreased by 35.5 per cent in 2025, the largest decrease in incidents by Islamic State within Syria in the Index's history.

In comparison to the sustained activity in Syria, Nigeria experienced a dramatic increase in attacks by the group, with a jump from 20 in 2024 to 92 in 2025. Along with the increase in incidents, deaths increased by 131 per cent, from 166 to 384.

Niger also experienced a noticeable increase in IS activity, with 33 attacks in 2025 compared to 12 in 2024, and deaths increasing from 108 to 416 in 2025.

Tactics favoured by Islamic State

Armed attacks against military forces and civilians is Islamic State's primary tactic. In 2025, 78 per cent of incidents were armed attacks, with nearly 54 per cent of total targets being military and police forces. Bombings also play a role in IS tactics, accounting for nearly 16 per cent of attacks. Civilians accounted for nearly two-thirds of all deaths attributed to Islamic State, despite being the targets of 40 fewer attacks than military forces. The impact of attacks against civilians was particularly noticeable in the DRC, where there were seven separate attacks that killed at least 20 civilians, with these attacks targeting villages, churches, hospitals, and funerals.

Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)

Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) is a Salafi-jihadist terrorist group. The group was founded in 2017 in a merger of multiple smaller Al-Qaeda affiliated jihadist groups in the Sahel region. JNIM is a coalition between Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun, and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The group is the youngest of the four covered in this section. However, it is the second most lethal of the four groups with 8.7 deaths per incident in 2025.

The group's central goal is to dismantle and eliminate governments in the Sahel, with a particular focus on Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Benin. JNIM leaders seek to impose their ideology, including the implementation of Sharia Law. The group has drawn upon anti-colonial ideas and rhetoric, previously declaring its enemies to be France and other countries assisting France. Since the withdrawal of French and UN missions, this rhetoric has been largely targeted at Russia's Africa Corps troops, formerly known as the Wagner group.

JNIM maintains considerable territorial control, particularly in central Mali's Mopti, Segou and Timbuktu regions, as well as large areas of Burkina Faso, where it operates with relative impunity in rural areas with low state capacity. The group's strategic use of porous borders and challenging terrain has allowed it to evade direct confrontations with other groups and counterterrorism forces.

The persistence of JNIM underscores the complexity of the security environment in the Sahel. Governments face mounting pressure to not only address the group militarily, but also to tackle the underlying socio-economic and governance issues that fuel its recruitment and local support. Continued military campaigns, along with enhanced regional collaboration and international support, will be crucial to curbing JNIM's influence and securing long-term stability in the region.

Changes in 2025

JNIM was the second deadliest terror group in 2025 with 147 incidents and 1,274 deaths across four countries. It is the second year in a row that JNIM was responsible for over a thousand deaths. Like Islamic State, the number of both incidents and deaths is likely higher due to the difficulties of attributing responsibility for attacks in rural areas in the Central Sahel.

Compared to 2024, JNIM activity decreased across all four Index indicators: number of incidents, deaths, injuries and hostages. Similarly, the number of countries in which JNIM was active fell from five to four, with the group active in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Mali had the highest number of incidents with 76, but the group had the highest impact in Burkina Faso, where JNIM attacks resulted in 755 deaths. In contrast, the group was responsible for 519 total deaths in the other countries it was active. The group's attacks in Burkina Faso were also extremely lethal, with an average of 16 fatalities per attack.

As JNIM is conducting an insurgency against multiple governments, most of its attacks are targeted at military forces. Attacks on military forces accounted for nearly 42 per cent of incidents and 70 per cent of deaths attributed to the group. Only one of the ten deadliest attacks carried out by the group was targeted at civilians.

The scope and lethality of the group's activity can be seen in the number of high fatality attacks it carried out in the past year. Nineteen of the 50 deadliest attacks in 2025 were carried out by JNIM. The single largest terror attack in 2025 carried out by JNIM was in Burkina Faso, resulting in 120 deaths and 30 hostages.

The group has also begun to shift its territorial scope, moving into the gold rich Kayes region of Mali along the borders with Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania. It has imposed a strategy of de facto economic blockade against towns and cities in Southwestern Mali. In 2025, it sought to block fuel transports to Mali's capital Bamako by attacking fuel tankers with the aim of creating economic shocks and weakening the ruling military junta. Military convoys guarding tankers have broken the blockade, but JNIM remains a severe threat to the state in 2026.

Tactics favoured by JNIM

JNIM largely commits armed assaults, constituting 76 per cent of its total incidents in 2025 and predominantly aimed at military and security forces. Over 75 per cent of deaths attributed to the group were either a member of the military or the police. Historically, kidnapping hostages has not been a major tactic for JNIM. However, in 2025, the group captured 235 hostages, predominantly military force members, accounting for nearly 11 per cent of all hostages taken globally in 2025.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, is a Deobandi Islamist militant group centred predominantly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The group commits the most attacks and has claimed the most deaths of any group in Pakistan. TTP was founded in 2007 in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan. The group shares ideology with the Afghan Taliban and has collaborated with them consistently throughout its lifetime.

The TTP's main stated objective has been to overthrow the government of Pakistan by committing acts of terrorism against the Pakistan armed forces and members of the state. TTP does not hold territory within either Pakistan or Afghanistan, though its influence remains significant in areas such as North and South Waziristan and within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. The group uses the rough mountainous terrain to facilitate its movements and maintain operational mobility across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and to avoid Pakistani security forces.

TTP has had a contentious relationship with the government of Pakistan. When the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan, after the 2021 fall of the then Afghanistan government and US withdrawal from the country, attacks from TTP increased rapidly in Pakistan. Pakistan leadership stated that they believe TTP is being supported by the new Taliban led Government of Afghanistan. In 2017, Pakistani forces started construction on a border wall spanning the length of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The goal was to close the porous border between the two countries and to prevent the crossing of TTP and other groups into Pakistan as well as curb illegal smuggling.

TTP is the deadliest terrorist group in Pakistan. TTP attacks constitute over 67 per cent of total attacks in Pakistan since 2007. It is responsible for five times as many attacks in Pakistan as the second most active group, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA).

Changes in 2025

TTP was the third deadliest terrorist group in 2025, with increases in incidents, deaths, injuries, and hostages. It is the only group of the four deadliest to record an increase in the number of incidents over the past year. Incidents increased by 24 per cent in 2025, with 595 attacks compared to 481 attacks in 2024. All of the group's attacks occurred in Pakistan, primarily within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region near the border with Afghanistan.

There were 637 deaths attributed to the group in 2025, the most since 2011. The group was most active in the early 2010s, before it experienced a decline due to Pakistani government initiatives along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. It is now seeing a resurgence with its fourth consecutive year of increasing attacks.

The largest attack by the group in 2025 was an armed attack targeting military forces resulting in the death of 21 people. It also carried out an attack that led to the capture of 17 hostages. TTP kidnapped government officials working for the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission on a mining project.

Tactics favoured by TTP

TTP's predominant method of attack in 2025 was armed attacks, which accounted for 50 per cent of all incidents attributed to the group. Like JNIM, TTP's main target type was security forces (military and police), who accounted for 416 deaths of the 637 for which the group was responsible. The largest increase in attack style was the taking of hostages, which rose from 38 to 137 people taken. Civilian deaths decreased nearly 14 per cent from 2024 to 2025. However, police deaths increased by nearly 38 per cent, reflecting a change in the groups primary target type. Bombings increased by 32 per cent, along with a 450 per cent increase in assassination from eight deaths to 44 deaths.

AL-SHABAAB

Al-Shabaab is a Salafist militant group active in East Africa. It first emerged in a battle over Somalia's capital in the summer of 2006. As an Al-Qaeda affiliate based in Somalia and Kenya, al-Shabaab pursues Islamist statehood aspirations in Somalia. Al-Shabaab was estimated to have between 15,000 and 18,000 fighters as of 2022. It gained global recognition following several deadly attacks concentrated around the capital city of Mogadishu, as well as attacks in the neighbouring states of Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda in the 2000s. African Union peacekeeping forces, known as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), have been fighting al-Shabaab since 2007, supported by the US and United Nations.

In 2024, Somalia's offensive against al-Shabaab achieved significant gains, including the recapture of El Buur, a major militant stronghold. However, progress stalled due to al-Shabaab's counterattacks and internal challenges, such as looting of military convoys by local militias. Concerns over a potential security vacuum led Somalia to request a delay in the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) withdrawal, resulting in a four-month postponement. The year ended with the United Nations approving the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), set to begin in 2025, to strengthen counterterrorism efforts and support stabilisation initiatives.

Although the number of attacks and terrorism deaths attributed to the group fell in 2025, it remained highly active throughout Somalia. It launched its Shabelle Offensive in late February, overrunning government positions across Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle, and Hiran with coordinated ground assaults supported by suicide vehicle-borne IEDs. The group recaptured strategic towns including Moqokori, Tardo, and Buq-Aqable, and by mid-year had largely encircled Mogadishu, advancing to within 50 kilometres of the capital and prompting several foreign embassies to withdraw non-essential staff.

High-profile operations in 2025 included an attempted assassination of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in March, a mortar strike on the diplomatic Halane compound, and an October suicide assault on the national intelligence headquarters that freed dozens of prisoners. The offensive exploited the transition from ATMIS to the new AUSSOM peacekeeping mission, deep political fractures between the Federal Government and regional states that diverted military resources, and an overstretched national army that had suffered 10,000–15,000 casualties over the preceding three years. Al-Shabaab's capacity was further bolstered by a transactional arms pipeline from Yemen's Houthis and its substantial independent revenue base, making it al-Qaeda's wealthiest global affiliate. While US, Turkish, and Ethiopian airstrikes provided some support and joint operations recaptured individual towns, the overall trajectory left Somalia in a precarious security position.

Changes in 2025

Al-Shabaab was the fourth deadliest terrorist group in 2025, carrying out attacks in Somalia, Kenya, and a single attack in Uganda. In total, it was responsible for 93 terrorist attacks in the past year, resulting in 286 deaths. The vast majority of its terrorist activity was conducted in Somalia, although it did launch 15 cross-border attacks in Kenya that resulted in 24 deaths. Despite its resurgence as an insurgent group, 2025 was the third consecutive year that deaths attributed to the group fell, falling from 376 in 2024, to 286 in 2025.

Its largest single attack occurred in July 2025. Al-Shabaab gunmen attacked and seized the town of Mahaas, Mahaas district, Hiiraan region, on July 27th. The assault began with a suicide car-bombing and was followed by an infantry attack. In a media statement, al-Shabaab claimed to have killed 63 government troops and wounded 84 more.

Tactics favoured by Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab combines terrorist tactics with conventional insurgent warfare. Its signature method is the complex attack, a suicide vehicle-borne IED breaching a perimeter followed by armed assault teams exploiting the gap with small arms. This pattern has been used from the 2013 Westgate Mall attack to the 2025 assault on Somalia's intelligence headquarters. The group maintains a persistent pattern of roadside IEDs, mortar barrages, convoy ambushes, and targeted assassinations, while its 2025 Shabelle Offensive demonstrated a capacity for coordinated multi-axis conventional assaults. Cross-border raids into Kenya serve to pressure troop-contributing nations into withdrawing from peacekeeping missions.

Underpinning these operations is a sophisticated intelligence network, parallel governance and taxation systems, and an active propaganda apparatus that allow al-Shabaab to function simultaneously as an insurgency, a terrorist organisation, and a parallel state.

10
Countries Most Impacted by Terrorism

Table 1.1 highlights the ten countries most impacted by terrorism in the GTI 2026 and how their rankings have changed since 2011. There has been considerable variation among these countries over this period, with only three of the ten countries ranked in the ten most impacted in 2025 being among the ten most affected in 2011. However, the three countries that were ranked amongst the ten most impacted in both 2011 and 2025 (Pakistan, Nigeria and Somalia) have consistently ranked among the ten most affected countries over the whole period, highlighting the persistent challenges that some countries face in addressing terrorism.

The Index is a composite measure that evaluates the impact of terrorism through a weighted analysis of incidents, deaths, injuries and hostages taken. To provide a more nuanced perspective, the Index incorporates a five-year weighted lag, acknowledging the prolonged social and psychological effects terrorist activity can have on a country. Detailed information on the methodology used to calculate the Index is available in Appendix B.

In 2025, Pakistan surpassed Burkina Faso as the country most impacted by terrorism, continuing an upward trend since reaching a historic low in 2021. Pakistan is followed by Burkina Faso and Niger as the three most affected countries. Burkina Faso fell one position in the Index while Niger rose by two, marking the highest position Niger has held since the inception of the Index in 2011.

Nigeria rose two places while Mali fell one, ranking fourth and fifth respectively. Syria fell three positions to sixth place, while Somalia retained its position at seventh. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Colombia rose by four and five positions respectively, with Colombia entering the ten most impacted for the first time since 2020. Israel continued to experience a marked improvement, falling two positions to tenth place, as it has experienced no major terrorist attacks since the start of the conflict in Gaza.

This year marks the first time Afghanistan has not been in the top ten since the inception of the Index. However, while terrorist activity in Afghanistan has declined in recent years, this does not necessarily mean peace has been restored or that violence is not taking place in the country. The Index does not account for acts of state repression or violence by state actors, therefore, actions carried out by the Taliban are no longer included in the report.

The Sahel region has experienced the most significant deterioration in rankings since 2011. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, all of which were ranked outside the top 30 in 2011, have remained among the countries most affected by terrorism consistently since 2017. Further, six of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism in 2025 are in sub-Saharan Africa, underscoring the geographic shift in the epicentre of terrorism away from the Middle East and towards the Sahel and parts of East Africa.

TABLE 1.1

Ten countries most impacted by terrorism, GTI rankings 2011–2025

Pakistan surpassed Burkina Faso as the country with the highest impact of terrorism in 2025.

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Pakistan	2	2	2	2	4	4	5	5	5	8	9	7	4	2	**1**
Burkina Faso	114	113	111	110	52	30	21	15	7	6	4	2	1	1	2
Niger	50	60	45	34	19	19	18	19	14	12	8	10	10	5	3
Nigeria	8	5	5	3	2	2	4	4	4	4	5	8	8	6	4
Mali	40	22	19	21	16	13	10	9	8	7	7	4	3	4	5
Syria	19	4	4	5	6	7	7	8	6	5	6	5	5	3	6
Somalia	5	7	7	7	8	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	7	7	7
Congo, DRC	18	16	20	24	33	35	48	58	38	21	16	14	13	12	8
Colombia	11	12	10	12	15	17	16	14	12	13	14	15	16	14	9
Israel	22	18	22	23	29	31	33	31	34	34	35	26	2	8	10

Source: IEP

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Pakistan

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
1	8.574	1,139 DEAD
		1,595 INJURED
		1,045 INCIDENTS

In 2025, Pakistan surpassed Burkina Faso as the country most impacted by terrorism. The number of deaths from terrorist attacks rose by nearly six per cent over the past year to 1,139. It is the sixth consecutive year in which an increase in terrorism deaths was recorded in Pakistan. However, there was a slight decline in the total number of terror attacks, from 1,098 in 2024 down to 1,045 in 2025. Notably, there was a large spike in the number of hostages taken, from 101 in 2024 to 655 in 2025.

Pakistan has experienced a significant increase in terrorist activity since the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan in 2021. Militant groups operating from Afghanistan have continued to intensify their attacks, particularly along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remain the most heavily affected regions, with these western border areas accounting for over 74 per cent of terrorist attacks and 67 per cent of deaths in Pakistan in 2025.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) remains the deadliest terrorist organisation in Pakistan for the fifth consecutive year. The TTP continues to escalate and evolve, carrying out attacks on security forces as well as civilians. They have been utilising new technologies, like drones to carry out targeted bombings, resulting in more casualties. The TTP was attributed to 56 per cent of terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan in 2025. They carried out 595 attacks, resulting in 637 deaths, an increase of 13 per cent from the 555 deaths in the preceding year.

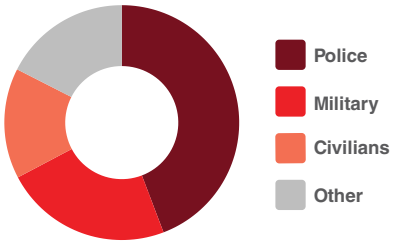
The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) was responsible for Pakistan's largest terror attack of 2025, when a group of armed terrorists seized control of a passenger train by bombing the tracks near Quetta railway station, holding 442 people as hostages. Reports indicate that 21 hostages, as well as four military members and 33 terrorists, were killed in the incident.[1]

The Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan profoundly impacted Pakistan's security and stability. It provided the TTP with the means and motivation to significantly expand their geographic reach and operational efficiency, resulting in a considerable rise in violent extremism in the region. To address the threat posed by this escalation of terrorist activity, the Pakistani government has introduced counterterrorism initiatives such as Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, which have had limited success so far.[2]

Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan has suffered greatly as they continue to accuse the Afghan government of sheltering and aiding the TTP, which the Taliban vehemently denies.[3] Cross-border militancy between the two countries has escalated in 2025, and repeated attempts by neighbouring countries to facilitate peace talks have failed. Pakistan's relationship with India has also sharply deteriorated this year. In May of 2025, the Indian Air Force carried out a series of overnight operations that involved launching missiles above multiple cities in Pakistan. This prompted swift retaliation from the Pakistan military which greatly intensified conflict along their mutual border.[4]

17,668 deaths from terrorism since 2007

Attack Targets in 2025



Worst Attacks

Federally Administered Tribal Area

Gunmen attacked the Haidar Kandao military camp in the Tirah Valley, Orakzai district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on 26 October. 21 military personnel were killed in the attack. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack and to have taken control of the military camp.

Baloch militant group activity has continued to increase in Pakistan in 2025. One group, the BLA has openly opposed the government's policies on resource extraction while also targeting foreign investments, particularly Chinese initiatives under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).[5] The BLA has escalated attacks on Chinese nationals and infrastructure, aiming to disrupt these projects and draw international attention to their cause.[6]

Pakistan's hostile relationship with its neighbours, coupled with the escalation of violence and terrorist activity from groups like the TTP and BLA, leaves it facing numerous security challenges that require a combination of military, political, and socio-economic measures to address.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Burkina Faso

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
2	8.324	**846** DEAD
		110 INJURED
		59 INCIDENTS

In 2025, Burkina Faso dropped to second place on the Index, following two consecutive years as the country most impacted by terrorism. The number of terrorism-related deaths fell by 45 per cent, declining from 1,532 in 2024 to 846 in 2025. Terror incidents mirrored this trend, with the number of attacks decreasing by 47 per cent, from 111 in 2024 to 59 in 2025. This is the first time in three years that fewer than a thousand people were killed in terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso.

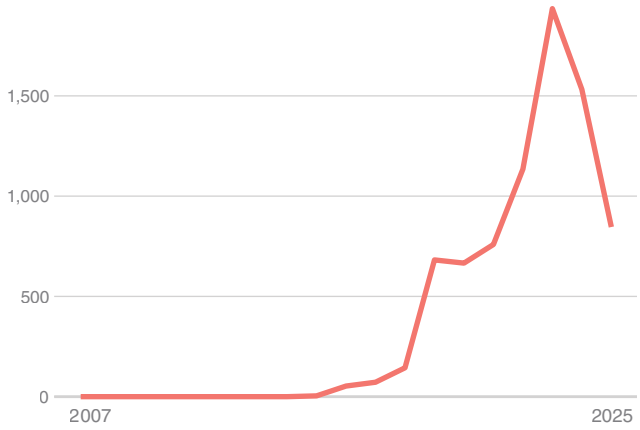
Northern and north-eastern Burkina Faso, near the country's borders with Mali and Niger, experienced the most terror attacks, accounting for over 50 per cent of all attacks in 2025. Of the country's 846 deaths in 2025, 513 occurred along the Niger and Mali borders in Sahel and Nord regions, with the Sahel province recording the highest death toll of the country's 11 administrative regions.

Burkina Faso's deadliest attack of 2025 occurred between Djibo, Soum province, and Namsiguia, Bam province, situated in the north near the Mali border. In October, a group of JNIM militants coordinated a massive attack on a Burkinabé military position between the two towns, also stealing ammunition and military vehicles. The group claimed responsibility for the attack, with external reports estimating the death toll at over 120 soldiers killed and 30 reported missing. This attack occurred despite Ibrahim Traoré, the current leader of Burkina Faso following the 2022 military coup, previously claiming the government had reclaimed significant territory across the country.[7]

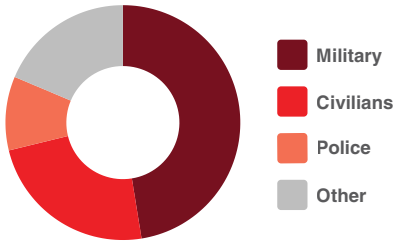
JNIM continues to be the most prominent terrorist group in Burkina Faso, carrying out over 80 per cent of the country's attacks in 2025. JNIM activity has decreased in the last year, with 48 attacks that resulted in 755 deaths in 2025, compared to the prior year's 49 attacks and 979 deaths. Comparatively, Islamic State operations in Burkina Faso slightly increased in 2025, with the group claiming responsibility for three attacks and 65 deaths, compared to one attack and 15 deaths in 2024.

Though Burkina Faso has been overtaken in the Index rankings by Pakistan, and the number of attacks and deaths have continued to decline, the threat posed by terrorism is still ongoing and significant. Since the 2022 military coup there has been a steady socio-economic decline as well as an increase in violence and civil unrest. Despite reports from the government that the Burkinabé military has been successful in reclaiming territory, external assessments suggest that the military has control of 30 per cent or less of the country. This is the result of militant Islamist groups such as JNIM laying siege to hundreds of towns and cities, blocking off essential routes through the country.[8]

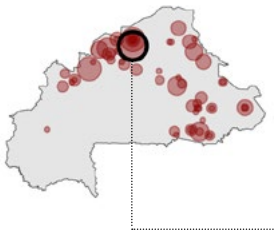
7,828 deaths from terrorism since 2007



Attack Targets in 2025



Worst Attacks



Sahel

Assailants attacked a military position between Djibo, Soum province, and Namsiguia, Bam province, on 9 October. Over 120 soldiers were killed and 30 were reported missing. The perpetrators also stole ammunition and military vehicles. Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.

International collaboration in the area has decreased significantly over the last few years. This is largely due to Burkina Faso's collapsing international alliances with the US and France and their hasty military withdrawals following the 2022 coup, as well as the withdrawal of Burkina Faso from ECOWAS.[9]

To prevent a future increase in terrorist activity, the Burkinabé government will need to prioritise counterterrorism efforts and address the underlying issues that continue to cause instability and civil unrest.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Niger

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
3	7.816	**703** DEAD
		157 INJURED
		88 INCIDENTS

Niger is the third most impacted country by terrorism in 2025, its highest ever rank on the Index and the second consecutive year ranking in the top five. Despite this position, Niger recorded a decrease in both terror attacks and deaths in 2025. The number of terror attacks fell to 88 incidents compared to 102 in 2024, a 14 per cent improvement. Deaths also fell 26 per cent from 944 in 2024 to 703 in 2025. Notably, civilian deaths surpassed military fatalities this year, and accounted for over half of terrorism-related deaths in the country.

The Tillabéri region remained the area with the highest level of terrorism in Niger. This region is in the unstable tri-border area shared with Burkina Faso and Mali and has been severely impacted by the Islamic insurgency in the Central Sahel. Terrorist attacks occurred across five of Niger's regions, with Tillabéri recording 56 per cent of the country's terrorist attacks and 62 per cent of fatalities. This has spread into neighbouring regions such as Tahoua, with attacks there increasing by nearly 60 per cent in 2025.

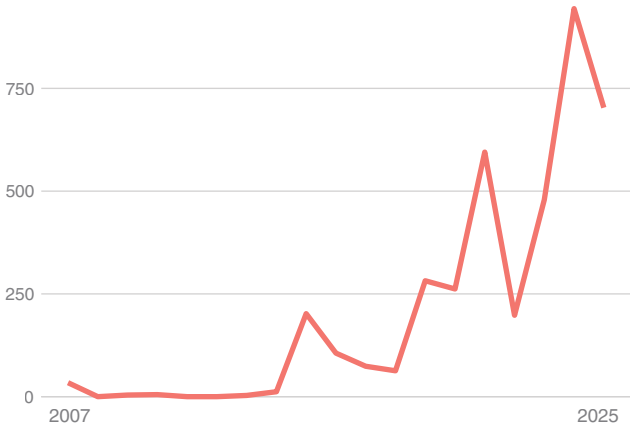
IS activity in Niger saw a substantial increase in 2025, with the group claiming responsibility for 33 attacks that caused 416 deaths, compared to 12 attacks and 108 deaths in 2024. This marks the highest number of deaths and attacks recorded by IS in the country to date. JNIM also remained active, claiming 15 attacks that resulted in 137 deaths, a slight increase from the previous year. Notably, in 2025 only 17 per cent of deaths and 42 per cent of attacks were unattributed, compared to 75 per cent of deaths and 66 per cent of attacks in 2024.

IS was responsible for Niger's deadliest attack of 2025, which occurred in Manda village, in the Tillabéri region. A group of IS-Sahel militants stormed a local mosque and opened fire on the worshipers inside, killing 71 civilians and injuring a further 20. The assailants also proceeded to loot and burn down homes in the village.[10]

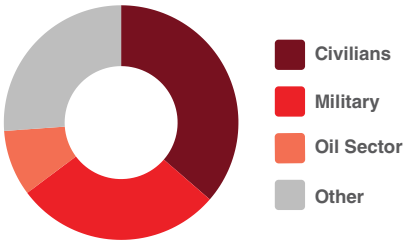
The July 2023 coup in Niger had significant ramifications for both counterterrorism and stabilisation efforts in the country. This event followed on from a failed coup attempt in 2021. However, this time the coup plotters succeeded in removing President-elect Mohamed Bazoum from office. The coup sparked international outrage, with ECOWAS even threatening military intervention. The coup leaders claimed their reasoning for overthrowing the government was to address the growing security crisis in Niger. However, historically the aftermath of a military coup tends to lead to greater insecurity, therefore heightening the risk of terrorist activity.[11]

Niger's foreign alliances have deteriorated in the wake of the coup, symbolised by the African Union suspending the country. However, neighbouring military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso supported the coup, signing a mutual defence pact with Niger to protect each other from foreign intervention. Niger's new government has also pivoted to focus more heavily on its partnership with Russia, which has not only caused its western allies to pull away, but also led to increased terrorist activity in the area due to repeated failures by Russian troops to respond to the threat.[12]

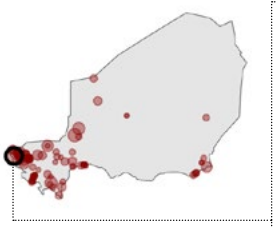
3,966 deaths from terrorism since 2007



Attack Targets in 2025



Worst Attacks



Tillabéri

Gunmen attacked villagers near the local mosque in Manda, Tera department, Tillabéri region, around 2000hrs on 20 June. At least 71 people were killed and 20 were wounded. The assailants also set fire to several houses. No group had claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing, but local media sources attributed the attack to Islamic State - Sahel Province.

The growing political instability in the country, combined with the power vacuum created by western allies withdrawing their support and Russia's regional counterterrorism failures has only deepened insecurity in the country and increased Niger's susceptibility to extremist violence.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Nigeria

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
4	7.792	**750** DEAD
		243 INJURED
		171 INCIDENTS

In 2025, Nigeria rose two places in the Index, reflecting the significant increase of terrorist activity in the country. Terror attacks in Nigeria increased by 43 per cent this year, from 120 incidents in 2024 to 171 in 2025. Deaths from terrorism have continued to rise, increasing by 46 per cent to 750 in 2025. This marks the highest death toll since 2020, driven by internal instability as well as ongoing conflict between ISWAP and Boko Haram. Together, fatalities attributed to these groups accounted for 80 per cent of all terrorism-related deaths in the country in 2025. Terrorist activity this year was heavily concentrated in the northeastern state of Borno, which experienced 67 per cent of attacks and 72 per cent of deaths in 2025.

Civilians continued to be the most targeted group in 2025, accounting for 67 per cent of fatalities, while military forces represented 19 per cent. This percentage has been steadily increasing over the last five years, highlighting a clear shift in terrorist targeting patterns in the country. Comparatively, in 2020 civilians accounted for 39 per cent of terrorism-related deaths, almost equalling military fatalities.

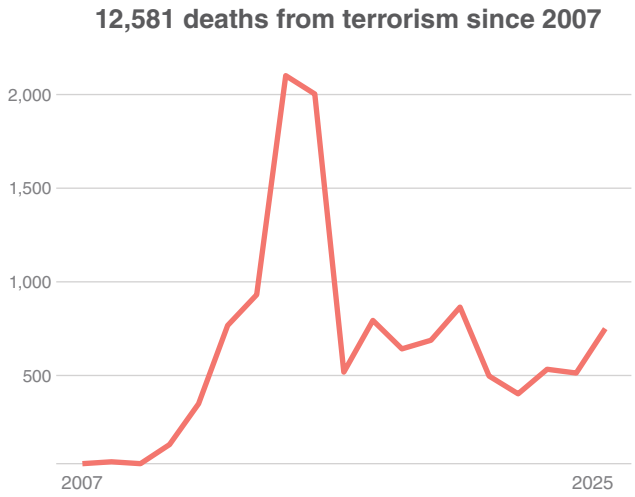
Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) reclaimed its position as Nigeria's deadliest terrorist group this year. In 2025, the group was responsible for over half of all attacks and deaths in the country. Despite a decrease in attacks in recent years, only claiming 20 in 2024, ISWAP has re-escalated and carried out 92 attacks this year, resulting in 384 deaths.

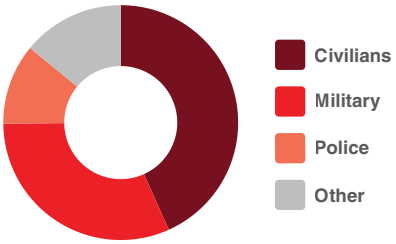
Despite being surpassed by ISWAP, Boko Haram continued to be active and increasingly lethal in Nigeria this year. The group carried out 43 attacks that resulted in 213 fatalities, compared to 26 attacks and 166 deaths in 2024. They also claimed responsibility for Nigeria's second most lethal terror attack of 2025, when armed militants raided the neighbouring villages of Mallam Karamti and Kwatandashi in Kukawa local government area, Borno State. Approximately 100 civilians were rounded up and taken into the forest, with 57 bodies later recovered and 70 individuals still missing, according to local press reports.

Lakurawa, a relatively new terrorist group that emerged in 2024 as an affiliate of the Islamic State Sahel Province, recorded ten attacks and 74 deaths this year. This is a sharp escalation from three attacks and two deaths in 2024.

Conflict over territory and internal factional fighting within and between Boko Haram and ISWAP continues to shape Nigeria's security landscape. Furthermore, the country also faces significant economic challenges that have fuelled social unrest and weakened governance, conditions that often facilitate terrorist recruitment and escalate militant activity.

Armed extremist groups continue to cause significant disruption within Nigeria and surrounding countries. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was formed in 2015 to address the rise of terror attacks, particularly around the Lake Chad Axis.[13] However, despite the dedicated efforts of this regional task force, terrorists continue to plague the area.





Worst Attacks

Borno

Gunmen attacked the village of Darajamal, Bama local government area, Borno State, on 5 September, killing 58 villagers and five soldiers. Thirty of the gunmen were reportedly killed by the Nigerian army after the attack. No organisation has claimed responsibility for the assault at the time of writing, although local media sources have attributed the attack to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

International involvement has become more prominent over the last few years in order to prevent the spread of violent extremism to other nations. On 25 December 2025, the US fired tomahawk missiles into northwest Nigeria, striking two IS camps. This strike was executed in cooperation with the Nigerian government as a part of joint counter-terrorism operations.[14]

The continued escalation in violence and terrorist activities in Nigeria highlights the urgent need for increased counterterrorism initiatives, as well as heightened measures to improve internal stability.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Mali

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
5	7.586	**341** DEAD
		89 INJURED
		106 INCIDENTS

Terrorism deaths and attacks in Mali fell for the third consecutive year in 2025, with the country recording 341 deaths from 106 attacks. This represents a 42 per cent and 47 per cent decline, respectively, compared to the previous year. However, despite the falling levels of terrorism within the country, extremist groups continue to exploit the ongoing instability in Mali. The country has yet to restore civilian rule since the 2021 coup, with the deadline set for elections passing in February 2024 and no further date being set.

Mali's border with Niger and Burkina Faso continues to be the area most impacted by terrorism, with 65 per cent of attacks and deaths occurring in those regions. However, terrorism has decreased in most others regions of Mali, including Mopti, Gao, Koulikoro, Bamako and Kidal, which saw fewer attacks and terrorism-related deaths in 2025. Sikasso recorded the most growth in terrorist activity this year, with fatalities and attacks more than doubling since 2024.

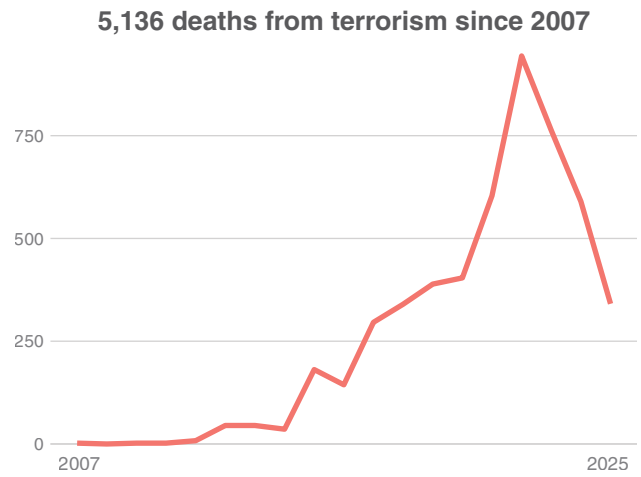
Jama'at Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) remains the most prominent terrorist group in Mali, recording 76 attacks and 286 deaths in 2025. The group's activity has decreased slightly this year, with deaths falling by seven per cent and attacks remaining stable. IS activity has also declined in Mali, recording an 80 per cent drop in deaths and a 50 per cent drop in attacks compared to the previous year. However, 23 per cent of total attacks and 14 per cent of total deaths were attributed to undetermined jihadist groups, which are likely unclaimed attacks by either JNIM or IS militants.

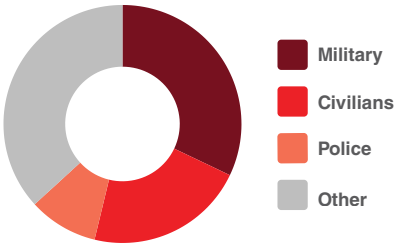
JNIM was responsible for the country's deadliest attacks in 2025, executed primarily in the Mopti and Segou regions. The most lethal attack resulted in the deaths of at least 66 deaths. Assailants attacked two villages, Samabougou and Timissa, Tominian cercle, Ségou region, on 3 June. Following the deadliest attack, there was a series of attacks in Mopti region attributed to JNIM that killed 130 military and security force members. JNIM often ambushes military camps and then sets large fires.[15]

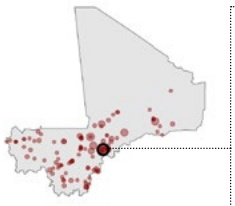
Mali has been subject to three military takeovers since 2012. The most recent two were just one year apart, in 2020 and 2021, with democratically elected leaders Amadou T. Touré and Ibrahim B. Keïta being forcibly removed from office. The military regime has since proceeded to repeatedly delay elections, preventing the country from returning to civilian rule, resulting in both internal and international criticism.[16] This degree of political instability fosters an ideal environment for terrorist organisations such as JNIM to exploit and thrive, particularly in areas with weak state capacity.

JNIM emerged in 2017 as a convergence of four different organisations. This support allowed the various groups to consolidate their resources and expand their area of operations, greatly increasing the threat the group poses to Mali and neighbouring countries. Despite regional and international intervention, the threat of terrorism posed by groups such as JNIM remains very prevalent. Following the two successive coups, Mali pressed for the end of the UN, US and French presence in the country, all of which withdrew. Mali has since built relations with Russia and Africa Corps, formerly known as Wagner Group, has become a key strategic ally. However, the Wagner Group has suffered several significant defeats, and the Mali government currently has very little authority in the north, and is constantly fighting over control of the central region.[17]

If left unaddressed, the persistent lack of government stability, combined with the setbacks faced by Africa Corps in the country, may fuel a significant increase in terrorism within Mali in the near future.







Worst Attacks

Ségou

Assailants attacked two villages, Samabougou and Timissa, Tominian cercle, Ségou region, around 1700hrs on 3 June. At least 66 people, including 23 Dozo militiamen, were killed. No group claimed responsibility for the attack at the time of writing, but local media sources attributed the attack to Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Syria

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
6	7.545	156 DEAD
		220 INJURED
		243 INCIDENTS

Although terrorism in Syria remains a serious threat, attacks have reduced significantly, falling by 44 per cent to 243 in 2025, compared to 430 in 2024. Deaths also decreased, falling 79 per cent to 156 deaths, compared to 744 in 2024. This decline is mainly due to the Islamic State being less active in the region this year, with the group carrying out 36 per cent less attacks and causing 83 per cent less deaths when compared to 2024. However, the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 sparked fears that IS could take advantage of the political instability and make a resurgence to reclaim its lost territory and re-establish its former power.

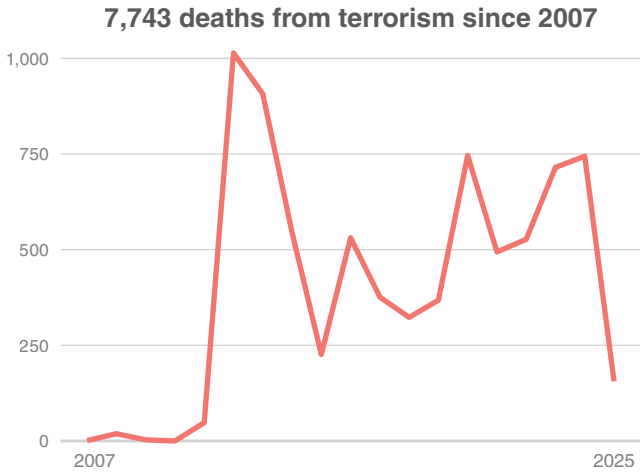
The eastern border governorates were the areas most affected by terrorism in 2025, with 84 per cent of attacks occurring in Dayr Az Zawr and Hims, both of which share a border with Iraq. However, deaths in this area fell by 81 per cent compared to the previous year. Dayr Az Zawr became the governorate with the most deaths with 80, followed by Rif Dimashq with 23 and Hims with 17.

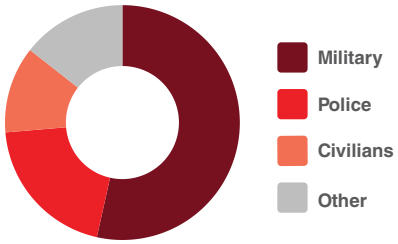
IS has remained the deadliest group in Syria, a position it has held for over a decade. The group was attributed to 83 per cent of all deaths and 98 per cent of all incidents in the country in the past year. A notable shift in IS strategy has been observed over the last five years, with a greater focus on targeting military forces and police, who accounted for 85 per cent of IS-attributed deaths in 2025.

Syria's deadliest attack of the year was claimed by jihadist group Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah via their online channels. The incident occurred in the town of Dweil'a inside Mar Elias Church, a Greek Orthodox place of worship, when a suicide bomber targeted the venue. Reports state that he first fired bullets into the crowd and then detonated the bomb, killing himself as well as 22 worshipers and wounding 63 others.[18]

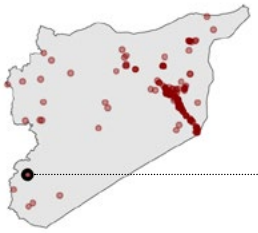
One year after the collapse of the Assad regime, Syria continues to struggle with uncertainty and insecurity.[19] Despite Syria ranking lower for this year's Index, reflecting a steep decline in attacks and deaths, IS remains a significant threat in the country.

Since the fall of the Assad government, there has been significant cooperation between the US and Syrian governments to improve joint counter-terrorism operations.[20] President Ahmad al-Sharaa has also made notable efforts to restore internal peace and stability in the country, such as establishing a provisional parliament and a technocratic government.[21] However, they continue to face several internal challenges due to significant political division, economic hardship, and profound poverty among the population.[22] These factors, combined with the persistent threat of terrorism and militant violence in the region, means that the future for Syria remains uncertain.





Worst Attacks



Rif Dimashq

A suicide bomber opened fire on worshippers before detonating an explosive vest in a church in Damascus, Damascus Governorate, on 22 June. At least 22 people were killed and 63 people were wounded. Authorities initially attributed the attack to the Islamic State, but on 24 June, jihadist group Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah claimed responsibility via their online channels.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Somalia

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
7	7.391	317 DEAD
		270 INJURED
		90 INCIDENTS

The impact of terrorism in Somalia declined in 2025, continuing a trend that began seven years ago. There were 317 deaths and 90 incidents in 2025, a decline of 14.3 per cent and 37.1 per cent respectively. This reduction marks Somalia's lowest death toll since 2019, driven by a fall in the number of terrorist attacks by al-Shabaab.

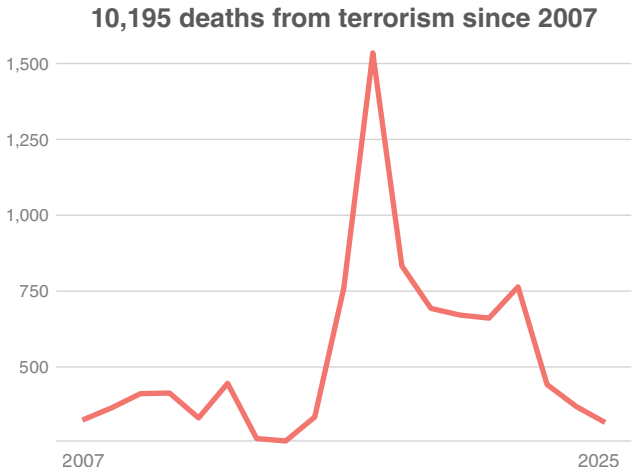
Al-Shabaab, Somalia's most lethal terrorist group, was responsible for 86 per cent of terrorist attacks and 82 per cent of deaths in 2025. Deaths attributed to al-Shabaab declined by 24 per cent over the past year, driven by successful military campaigns conducted through the Somali government, bolstered by collaboration with local militias in the fight against al-Shabaab. Additionally, support from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and US military interventions have strengthened Somali forces, improving their ability to counter al-Shabaab effectively.[23]

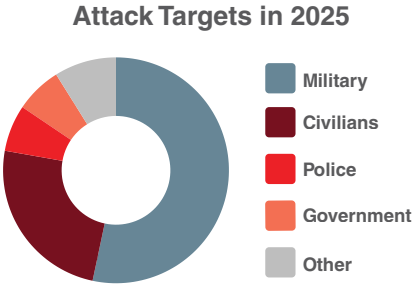
One of the most significant attacks carried out by al-Shabaab this year left 20 dead, and 15 critically injured, when a suicide bomber targeted a Somali army recruitment centre in the Hodan District of Mogadishu. Reports indicate that the victims included the bomber, 15 young male recruits and five civilians who were passing by. The group frequently launches attacks on military recruitment initiatives and government infrastructure as part of their campaign to hinder Somalia's security restoration measures.[24]

Terrorism became more concentrated in and around Hiiraan which is located in central Somalia. The number of terrorist incidents in the region quadrupled and fatalities increased considerably, rising from nine in 2024 to 151 in 2025. Bari, in the far northeast, also experienced a sharp escalation in terrorist activity, rising from five incidents in 2024 to 12 in 2025, with fatalities more than doubling. By contrast, terrorist activity in Banaadir, the home of Somalia's capital city Mogadishu, fell significantly. The region recorded 12 incidents and three deaths in 2025 compared to 38 incidents and 132 deaths in the prior year.

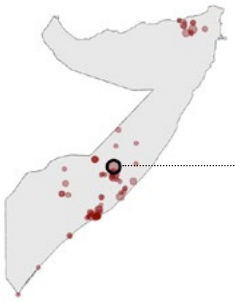
Between 2022 and 2024, progress was made in reclaiming territories from al-Shabaab through the combined efforts of the Somali government, US forces and a joint peace-keeping force, known as the African Union Transitional Mission to Somalia (ATMIS).[25] These coordinated operations contributed to a steady decline in terrorism-related incidents and deaths. However, al-Shabaab continues to pose a major security risk. There are growing concerns that the group could leverage escalating regional and domestic strife to regain momentum, potentially targeting Mogadishu, which is the government's main base of control.[26]

Furthermore, although the number of terrorist attacks carried out by al-Shabaab fell, other activity by the group intensified. The group overran strategic towns across central Somalia, attempted to assassinate the president in Mogadishu in March, and by July had advanced to within 50 kilometres of the capital before pausing. The offensive exploited fractures between the federal government and regional states, the troubled AU mission transition, and a new arms pipeline from Yemen's Houthis, while US airstrikes focused primarily on Islamic State cells in Puntland, rather than al-Shabaab's advance in the south and centre.





Worst Attacks



Hiiraan

Al-Shabaab gunmen attacked and seized the town of Mahaas, Mahaas District, Hiiraan region, on 27 July. The assault began with a suicide car-bombing and was followed by an infantry attack. In a media statement, al-Shabaab claim to have killed 63 government troops and wounding 84 more. Official casualty figures are not known however.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Congo, DRC

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
8	7.171	**467** DEAD
		30 INJURED
		35 INCIDENTS

In 2025, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) rose four places in the Index, moving into the top 10 countries impacted by terrorism. This is the highest rank on the Index that the country has ever held. The DRC deteriorated on every indicator except incidents, which decreased by one. The death toll increased by 28 per cent, from 365 deaths in 2024 to 467 deaths in 2025. Likewise, the injury rate rose 37 per cent compared to 2024. The DRC was one of only four countries in sub-Saharan Africa where deaths from terrorism increased with the others being Uganda, Benin, and Nigeria.

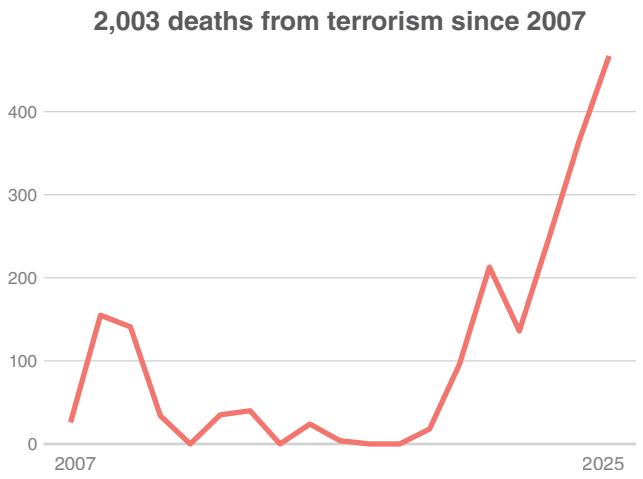
The impact of terrorism in the DRC peaked in the second half of the year. The impact of terrorism was highest in September with 109 deaths recorded, including the single deadliest attack. Members of the IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) attacked a funeral in Nyoto, killing 71 people.

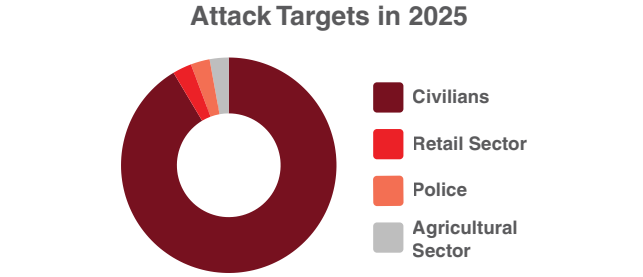
Although smaller groups exist, the ADF and M23 remain the most active armed extremist groups in the DRC in 2025. The two groups have yet to find themselves in conflict with one another but do overlap in certain areas.[27]

The ability of the government to combat the ADF has been hampered by the ongoing insurgency by the M23 rebel group. Named after the March 23, 2009, peace deal, M23 was largely inactive after 2013. However, in 2021, the group experienced a resurgence as it returned to defend the interests of the Tutsi population in the DRC. The group remains active around Masisi and Rutshuru near the DRC-Rwanda border.

Since M23 launched its rapid territorial expansion across North and South Kivu from late 2024, capturing the regional capital Goma in 2025, the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) have been forced to divert military resources away from counter-ADF operations, giving the group greater freedom of movement across Ituri and North Kivu. The ADF has deliberately exploited this diversion, targeting rural and Christian communities to foster fear, facilitate control over land and illicit resources, and generate recruits. The joint Uganda-DRC military campaign Operation Shujaa, expanded in early 2025, failed to curb ADF violence against civilians and may even have pushed fighters from border strongholds deeper into Congolese territory.

The violence has been concentrated in North Kivu's Beni and Lubero Territories and in Ituri Province, with attacks characterised by high levels of violence against civilians, arson, and the abduction of women and children. Among the most high-profile incidents were: the massacre of 70 Christians abducted from Mayba village and killed in a church in Kasanga in February; coordinated raids on two Christian villages in May that killed at least 13 and the attack on a night vigil at Saint Anuarite parish in Komanda on 27 July that killed at least 43 worshippers including nine children, with IS formally claiming the attack on its social media platforms.





Worst Attacks

Nord-Kivu

Assailants attacked civilians in a funeral in Ntoyo, Bapere Sector, Lubero Territory, North Kivu Province, around 2200hrs on 8 September. 71 people were killed and 15 were wounded. The perpetrators also set fire to several houses. Islamic State - Central Africa Province claimed responsibility for the attack.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Colombia

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
9	7.116	213 DEAD
		722 INJURED
		442 INCIDENTS

In 2025, Colombia rose into the top 10 countries most affected by terrorism, its highest position since 2013, reflecting a significant increase of terrorist activity in the country. Terror attacks in Colombia increased by nearly 47 per cent this year, from 301 incidents in 2024 to 442 in 2025. Deaths from terrorism have also continued to rise, increasing by 70 per cent to 213 in 2025. This marks the highest terrorism-related death toll in Colombia since the inception of the Index.

The southwestern regions of Colombia, particularly Cauca and Valle del Cauca, recorded the highest number of terror attacks this year, accounting for 84 per cent of all incidents in Colombia in 2025. Cauca experienced 181 attacks that resulted in 66 fatalities, while neighbouring Valle del Cauca experienced 59 attacks that resulted in 31 deaths.

Dissident factions associated with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) remain the most prominent terrorist group in Colombia, claiming responsibility for over 60 per cent of terrorist attacks and deaths in the country. The group's activity has continued to escalate this year, recording 283 attacks and 125 deaths in 2025, a 40 per cent increase from 2024.

The National Liberation Army (ELN) has also remained active, claiming 150 attacks and 88 deaths in 2025, a 32 per cent and 60 per cent increase respectively. Notably, despite terror attacks in Colombia being largely aimed towards military forces, police and the government, this year civilians accounted for over 50 per cent of total deaths.

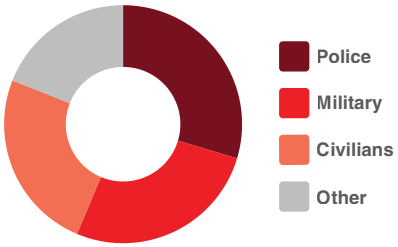
August 2025 was a particularly deadly month in Colombia. In one attack, the ELN initiated a 72-hour 'paro armado' (armed strike) in Chocó, restricting civilian movement and punishing or killing anyone who left their home. This strike resulted in at least six deaths and hundreds of people becoming displaced. The group claimed the incident was a form of protest to raise awareness of ongoing humanitarian issues in Colombia. However, some reports indicate that the strike was used to distract officials from ELN drug smuggling operations.[28]

These groups have expanded their use of new technologies in recent years. FARC dissident factions and the ELN have rapidly adopted commercially available drones as a core weapon in Colombia's evolving internal conflict, drawing direct inspiration from the battlefield innovations seen in Ukraine. Between 2024 and 2025, Colombia recorded at 77 drone attacks involving explosive-laden unmanned aircraft, killing 10 people and wounding over 134.

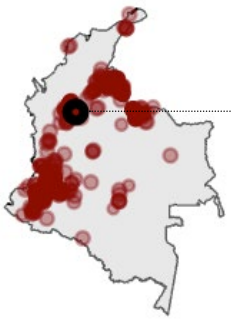
To address this escalation in violence and conflict, President Gustavo Petro announced a 'Total Peace' initiative in 2022 which allowed the government to negotiate with militant and criminal organisations.[29] Despite initial success, including establishing ceasefire agreements with several key aggressors, the initiative has largely failed to reduce violence in the country. Groups have exploited the agreements to expand their operations and ultimately disregarded the terms to resume inter-organisational conflicts over territory and continue attacks on the government and civilians.[30]

2,143 deaths from terrorism since 2007

Attack Targets in 2025



Worst Attacks



Antioquia

Assailants used explosive-laden drones to attack a police helicopter in Los Toros, Amalfi Municipality, Antioquia department on 21 August. thirteen police officers were killed, and four others were injured in the attack. The National Liberation Army (ELN) claimed responsibility for the attack.

10 COUNTRIES MOST IMPACTED BY TERRORISM

Israel

GTI RANK	GTI SCORE	
10	6.79	5 DEAD
		35 INJURED
		9 INCIDENTS

The impact of terrorism in Israel fell for the second consecutive year in 2025. Terrorism-related deaths in Israel fell significantly in the last two years, with five deaths in 2025 compared to 1,160 in 2023, a 99.6 per cent reduction. The number of attacks in 2025 mirrored this trend, falling from 28 in 2024 to nine in 2025. Notably, the GTI calculates a country's score based on a five-year weighted average, and the October 7th Hamas attacks accounted for such a large spike in deaths during 2023 that Israel remains among the ten countries most impacted by terrorism. This position comes despite recording a significantly lower number of attacks and deaths in subsequent years.

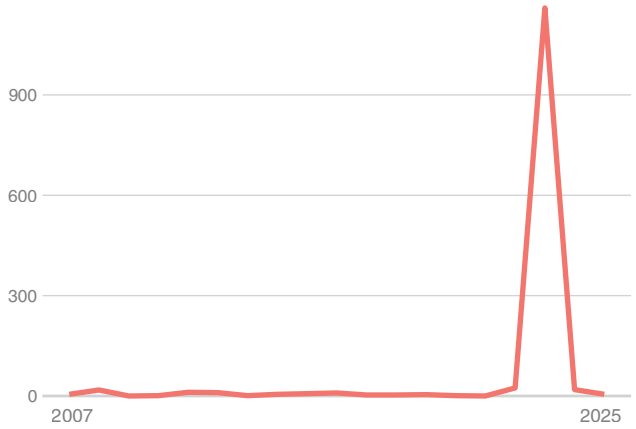
Israel experienced its lowest number of terror attacks in 2025 since the inception of the Index. None of the nine recorded attacks in the past year were claimed by a group, though it is speculated Hamas was involved in most, if not all, attacks.

Tensions between Israel and Palestine remain extremely high. In January, a six-week ceasefire and hostage exchange deal were negotiated between the two countries, but the deal collapsed after two months. Conflict escalated immediately, with Israel intensifying and expanding offensives into Gaza. Reports indicate that up to 90 per cent of Gaza's population has been displaced.

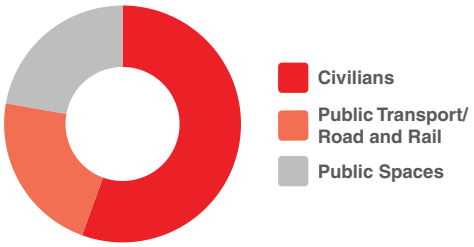
In September, several countries, including the UK and France, formally recognised Palestine as a state. A new, US-mediated peace-plan and hostage agreement took effect on October 10th, leading to the release of remaining Israeli hostages in exchange for almost 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and increased aid flow into Gaza. However, despite the ceasefire, reports of daily violations by Israel have continued, including restrictions on vital aid and hundreds more Palestinians killed in attacks since the agreement came into effect.[31]

Despite the current trend of declining terrorist activity, the persistent violence and evolving insecurity in Israel continues to foster an environment in which terrorism could make a resurgence. Groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis have bases in neighbouring Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen and could exploit this instability to further expand operations into Israel.[32]

1,286 deaths from terrorism since 2007



Attack Targets in 2025



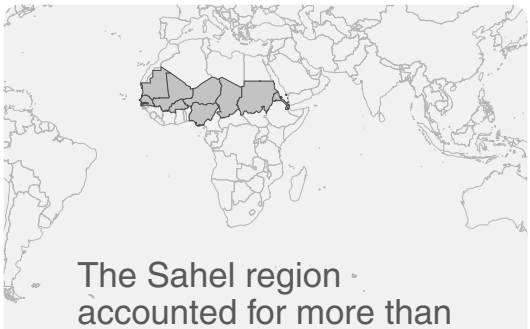
Worst Attacks

HaTzafon

A Palestinian assailant killed two and injured six others in a stabbing-and-ramming attack in Northern District on 26 December. The attacker first ran over a 68 year old man in Beit She'an, then fatally stabbed a 20-year-old woman near Kibbutz Ein Harod. The suspect was critically injured by gunfire while fleeing towards Afula. No group had claimed responsibility at the time of writing, but based on tactics, target and location, it is likely that the perpetrator was motivated by anti-Israel sentiment.

2015	2025
10,882	5,582

Deaths from terrorism have fluctuated significantly since 2007, peaking at 10,882 in 2015 and reaching a low of 5,582 in 2025. During this period, the epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa, into the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa.



The Sahel region accounted for more than half of all deaths in 2025 from terrorism, compared to under one per cent of deaths in 2007.

Iraq	Afghanistan
99% ↘	95% ↘

The largest percentage falls in terrorist activity since 2007 have occurred in Iraq and Afghanistan, with deaths from terrorism in these countries falling by 99 and 95 per cent respectively.

Of the 163 countries in the GTI, only 25 have not recorded a single terrorist incident since 2007.

The impact of terrorism has become more geographically concentrated in recent years. In 2015, 57 countries recorded at least one death from terrorism. By 2025, this number had dropped to just 36 countries.

Deaths from terrorism in the West

280% ↖

After falling for several years, deaths from terrorism in the West rose sharply in 2025 with 57 deaths recorded, a 280 per cent increase from 2024. Australia experienced its worst ever terrorist attack, when 15 people were killed in the December 2025 Bondi Beach shooting.

Deaths from terrorism also rose in the US, with 28 people killed in terrorist attacks, many of which were politically motivated. This was the highest number of people killed from terrorism in the US since 2019.

Despite the high media profile of attacks in the West, the primary driver of terrorism remains conflict. Only one per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2025 occurred outside conflict-affected countries.

Trends

95% ↘

Over the past decade the average impact of terrorism has decreased in every region other than sub-Saharan Africa. Deaths from terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa have fallen by 95 per cent in the last ten years.

94% ↘

Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia accounted for just under 94 per cent of deaths from terrorism in 2025.

2 Trends in Terrorism

Trends in Terrorism

TRENDS SINCE 2007

Deaths attributed to global terrorism peaked in 2015 at almost 11,000 fatalities and have been on a broad downward trend since, driven by major counter-terrorism successes in Iraq, Syria, and the wider Middle East. Deaths spiked temporarily in 2023, largely due to the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th, which alone accounted for 1,150 of the 8,654 deaths recorded that year. Normalising for that single event, the underlying decline continued. Over the past two years, the downward trend has reasserted itself, with global deaths falling 28 per cent between 2024 and 2025, from 7,714 to 5,582.

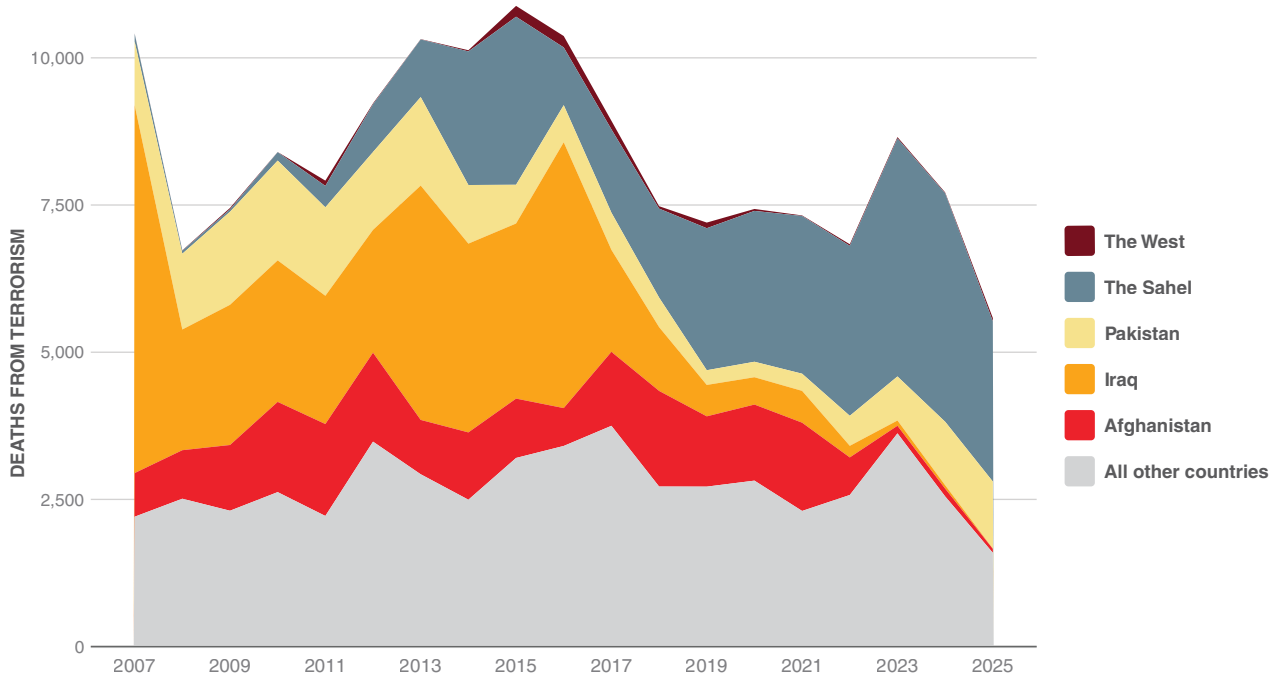
However, set against this broader decline is a dramatic rise in terrorism across the Sahel. Since 2009, both deaths and attacks in the region have increased roughly tenfold, and in 2025 fatalities in the Sahel accounted for over half of all terrorism-related deaths worldwide. The Gaza war and the escalation of terrorism in West Africa are the two defining developments of the past year, and together they underscore how the geography of terrorism continues to shift even as its overall scale diminishes.

Figure 2.1 shows that there have been several distinct phases in terrorist activity since 2007. In 2007 and 2008, most terrorist activity was concentrated in Iraq and Afghanistan in response to the US and its allies' interventions. This impacted Pakistan, leading to an escalation in terrorist activities from 2008 to 2013. The Arab Spring and the rise of Islamic State (IS) triggered a surge in terrorism across the Middle East from 2011 to 2013, particularly in Syria and Iraq, while the growth of Boko Haram led to terrorism increasing in Nigeria. Following the peak in 2015, from 2016 deaths from terrorism began to decline. Iraq saw a marked reduction in terrorism starting in 2017, whereas Afghanistan experienced an increase in terrorism from 2016 to 2021, followed by a notable decline in 2022 after the Taliban's ascension to power. During the same period, the Sahel region saw a significant rise in terrorist incidents and deaths, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Somalia. Since 2009, both deaths and attacks have risen by roughly tenfold.

FIGURE 2.1

Deaths from terrorism, 2007–2025

Terrorism deaths have been trending downwards in almost every major hotspot of terrorist activity.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Deaths from terrorism spiked again in 2023, with total deaths rising to 8,654, driven largely by the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel which resulted in 1,150 deaths. Terrorism also rose in the Central Sahel region in 2023, with Burkina Faso recording 1,935 deaths that year, or 22.4 per cent of the global total. However, the last two years have seen a fall in the total impact of terrorism. Between 2024 and 2025, there was a 28 per cent decline in overall deaths from 7,714 to 5,582. The average lethality of attacks also decreased from 2.1 to 1.8 deaths per attack.

Since peaking in 2015, the impact of terrorism has fallen the most in the Middle East and North Africa region, with incidents falling by almost 82 per cent and deaths falling by 96 per cent. The greatest counter-terrorism success in the region occurred in Iraq, where deaths from terrorism have fallen by 99 per cent in the past two decades. Deaths in Syria have also fallen dramatically, from a peak of 1,015 in 2012, to 156 in 2025.

Despite decreases over the past year, the Sahel remains the predominant global terrorist hotspot, accounting for over half of all terrorism-related deaths in 2025. This represents a dramatic increase from 144 deaths in 2010, though down from the region's peak of 4,043 in 2023. Burkina Faso remained the most impacted country in the region with 846 deaths in 2025, a 45 per cent decrease from 2024. Cameroon experienced the largest proportional decline, dropping nearly 64 per cent from 222 deaths in 2024 to 81 in 2025. Niger recorded 703 deaths in 2025, a 26 per cent decrease from the 944 recorded in the previous year. The increase in terrorism in the Sahel region over the past five years can be seen in Figure 2.2, which shows the areas with the biggest increases and decreases in terrorism over the past five years. Most of the activity in the Central Sahel has been concentrated around the tri-border region.

Terrorism has become more concentrated in the past few years, as shown in Figure 2.3. Over 40 countries recorded at least one death from terrorism every year between 2009 and 2024, with the number peaking in 2015 when 57 countries recorded at least one death. However, since that peak the number of countries affected by terrorism has fallen considerably. In 2025, there were 36 countries that recorded at least one death from terrorism. It is the first time since 2008 that fewer than 40 countries recorded at least one death.

There are 65 countries with an Index score of zero in 2025. This means that these countries have not experienced a single incident of terrorism in the past five years. By contrast, in 2015 when terrorism was its most widespread, there were only 57 countries with an Index score of zero. However, while the scope of terrorism has decreased globally in recent years, almost every country has been impacted by terrorism in the last two decades. Of the 163 countries in the GTI, only 25 have not recorded a single terrorist incident since 2007.

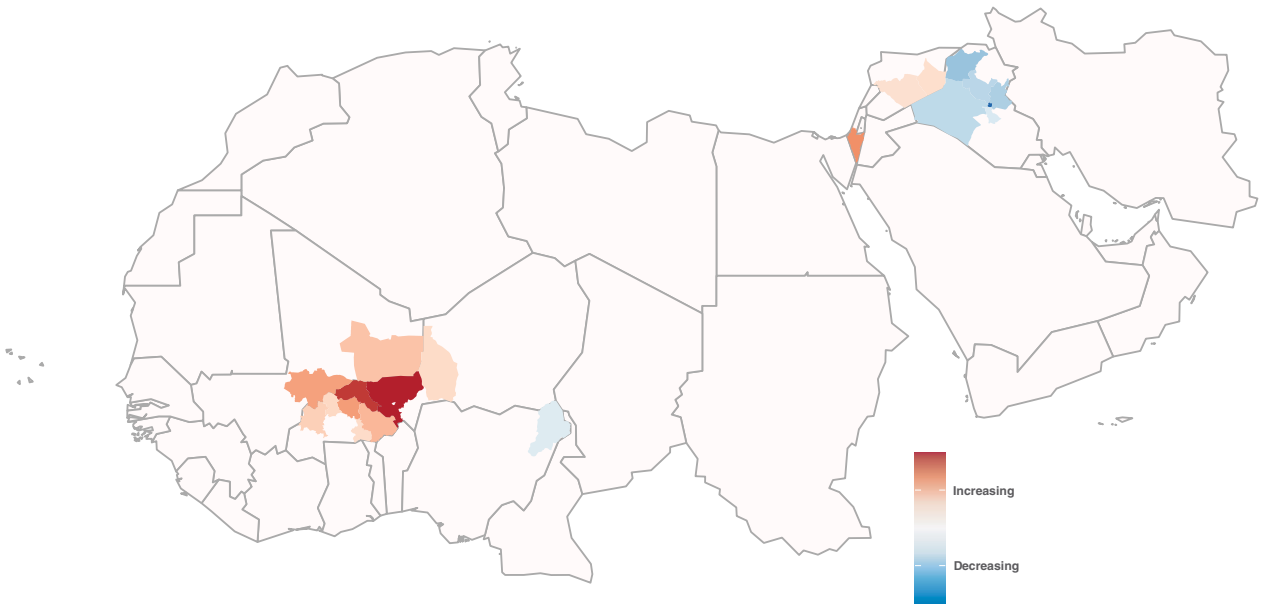
Conflict has been the primary driver of terrorism since 2007. There were 158,987 terrorism deaths between 2007 and 2025, of which 98 per cent occurred in countries that were involved in a conflict at the time of the attacks. In 2025, the ten countries most impacted by terrorism were all involved in at least one conflict in the past two years.

Countries involved in conflict are more susceptible to terrorism, in part because of the lack of a fully functioning state. Terrorism is also one of many tactics employed by insurgencies and paramilitaries in a civil conflict. For example, terrorist groups like IS and Boko Haram carry out conventional military attacks in the context of their respective conflicts, as well as undertaking extensive terrorist activity.

FIGURE 2.2

Most significant changes in deaths from terrorism, 2021–2025

Terrorism has surged in the Central Sahel in the past five years.

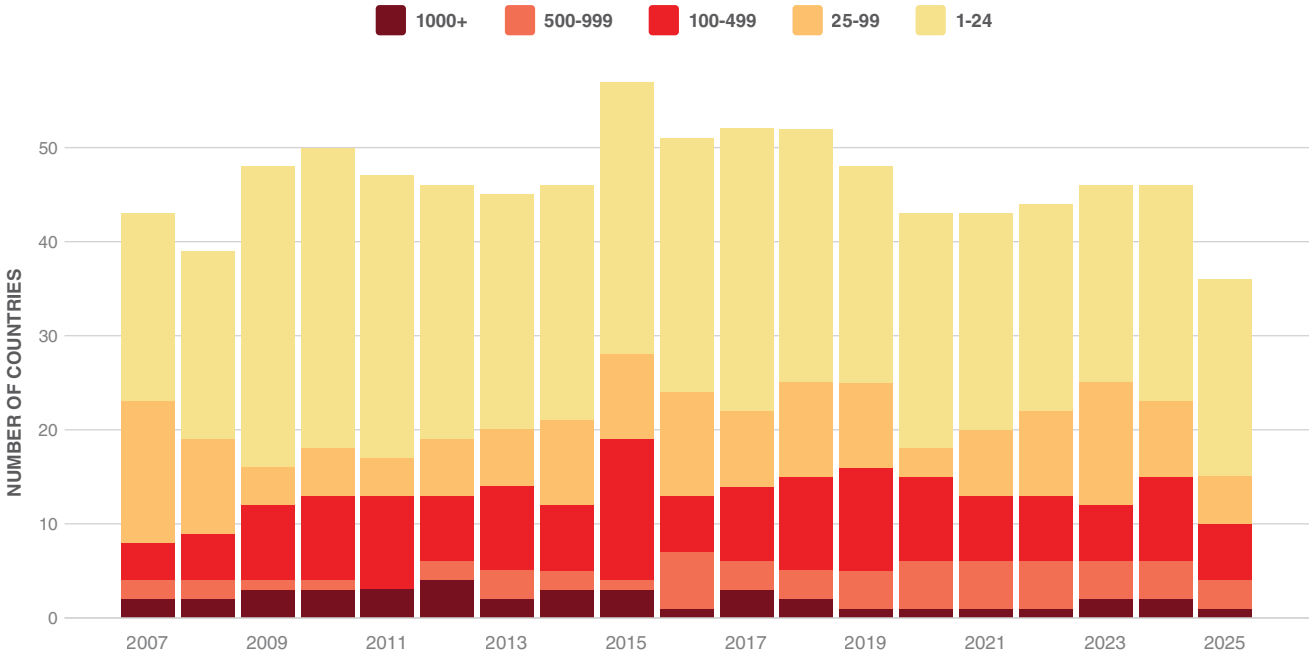


Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

FIGURE 2.3

Distribution of terrorism deaths intensity, 2007–2025

Fewer than 40 countries recorded at least one death from terrorism in 2025.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

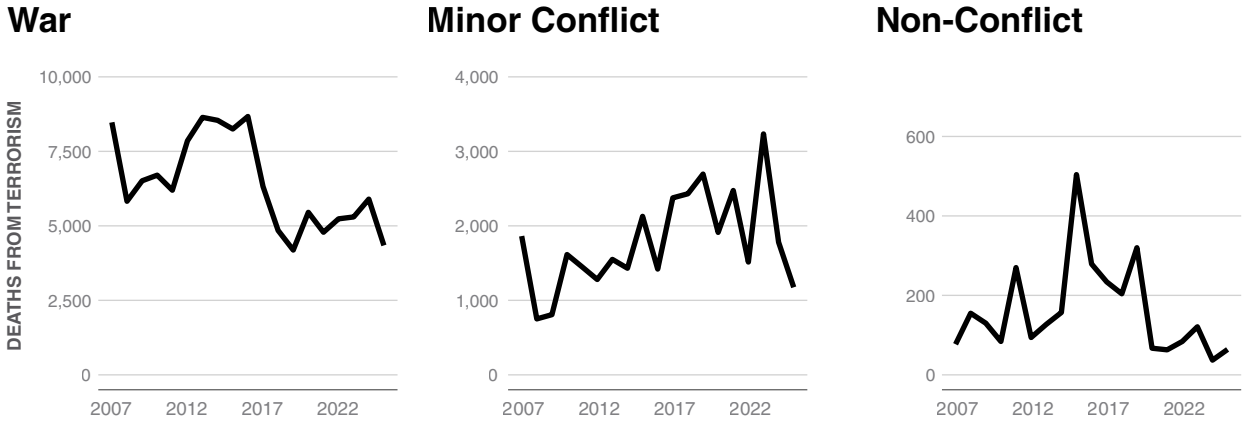
Figure 2.4 illustrates the deaths from terrorism by conflict type. A war is classified as a conflict with more than 1,000 deaths in a single year, while a minor conflict has between 25 and 1,000 deaths. In 2025, 98 per cent of terrorism deaths occurred in countries experiencing at least 25 battlefield deaths. The concentration of terrorism deaths in conflict zones has remained above 95 per cent since 2015. Terror attacks in countries in conflict also tend to be deadlier than those committed outside conflict zones, with attacks in conflict countries killing 2.2 people per attack, compared to 0.9 people per attack outside conflict zones.

Deaths from terrorism are highest in countries involved in an ongoing war. However, they have declined significantly over the past decade. Since peaking in 2015, the number of deaths from terrorism during war decreased from 8,474 to 3,824. Minor conflict zones experienced more volatility since 2007, with deaths fluctuating between 3,234 and 751. The category peaked in 2023 reaching 3,234 deaths before declining to 1,313 in 2025. The combined decline in both war and minor conflict categories accounted for all the global reduction in terrorism deaths between 2024 and 2025.

FIGURE 2.4

Deaths from terrorism by conflict type, 2007–2025

Deaths from terrorism in countries in war or minor conflict have fallen considerably.



Source: Terrorism Tracker; UCDP; IEP Calculations

Non-conflict terrorism deaths have remained relatively stable since 2007, consistently representing the smallest portion of global terrorism deaths. Non-conflict terrorism deaths peaked in 2016 with over 500 deaths, coinciding with increased large-scale attacks in Europe and other Western countries. In 2025, terrorism deaths outside of conflict areas accounted for approximately 1.1 per cent of total global terrorism deaths.

TRENDS IN THE WEST

There was a sharp increase in the impact of terrorism over the past year, with deaths increasing by 280 per cent. This increase can be largely attributed to several mass-casualty attacks, including the New Orleans truck attack in the US in January, and the Bondi Beach shooting in Australia in December.

However, the overall impact of terrorism in the West is lower now than a decade ago. Total deaths from terrorism peaked in 2016 when 194 people died, as shown in Figure 2.5. The number of attacks peaked a year later when 176 incidents were recorded. Most of these deaths and attacks were caused by jihadist groups or affiliated individuals. Between 2017 and 2025, the total number of yearly attacks in the West fell from 176 to 53. Total deaths have also fallen significantly over the same period, from 146 to 57, with average lethality declining from approximately 3.5 deaths per incident to just over one in the same period.

Most terrorist attacks in the West since 2007 have either been politically motivated or had no clear ideological motivation, as shown in Figure 2.6. Of the 1,449 terrorist attacks in the West since 2007, 30 per cent had a political motivation, with 32 per cent having no single clear ideological determinant. However, religiously motivated attacks were more lethal, despite comprising just over ten per cent of all attacks. Of the 990 deaths from terrorism in the West in the past two decades, 527 or 53 per cent occurred in religiously motivated terrorist attacks. Almost all the religiously motivated deaths in this period were caused by jihadist groups or individuals with a jihadist ideology.

For the past few years, there have been concerns that the war in Gaza might lead to an increase in antisemitic terrorist attacks in the West and rising anti-Islamic sentiment. Security services in Europe foiled several planned terrorist attacks in December 2023. These attacks were linked to Hamas, with some reported to have been targeting Jewish institutions in Germany.[1]

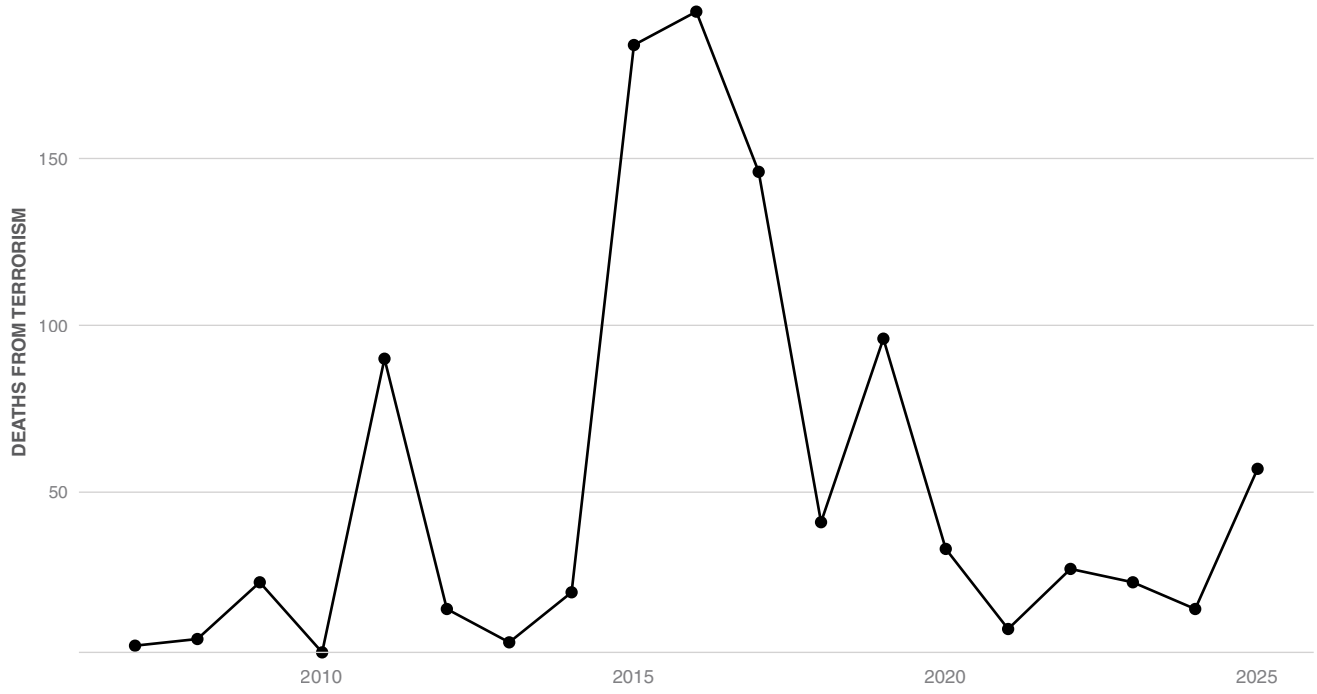
There has been a sharp increase in antisemitic violence and hate crimes across the West in the past few years, with attacks on synagogues recorded in Europe, Australia, and the US. The FBI's hate crime data shows a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents in the US, with total incidents increasing by over 270 per cent between September 2023 and November 2023.

There were several high-profile antisemitic terrorist attacks in the West in 2025. Two major IS-inspired antisemitic attacks targeted Jewish communities during religious observances in 2025. On October 2nd, a British-Syrian man drove a car into pedestrians and stabbed worshippers outside a Manchester synagogue during Yom Kippur, killing two congregants before being shot dead by police. On December 14th, a father-and-son pair opened fire on around 1,000 people attending a Hanukkah celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach, killing 15 people and injuring over 40 in Australia's deadliest terrorist attack and worst mass shooting since 1996. Both attacks prompted major security and legislative responses in both countries.

FIGURE 2.5

Deaths from terrorism in the West, 2007–2025

The number of terrorism-related deaths rose above 50 for the first time since 2019.

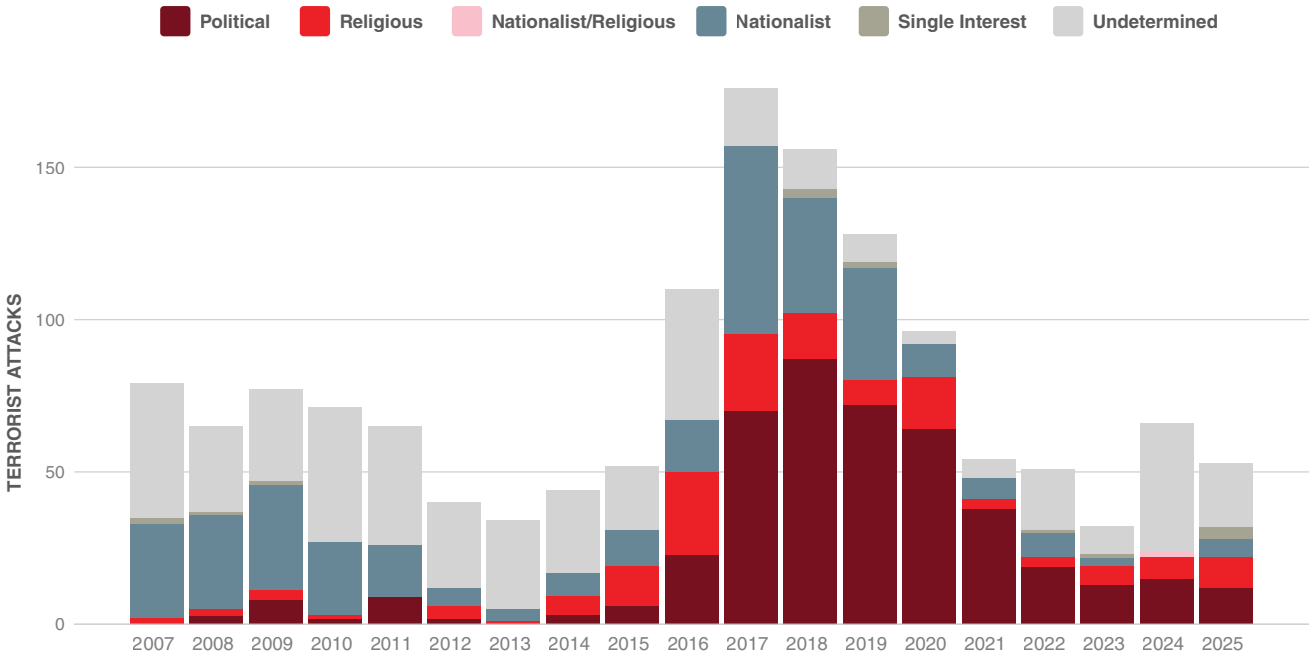


Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 2.6

Terrorist attacks in the West by ideology, 2007–2025

Most attacks in the West are politically motivated.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

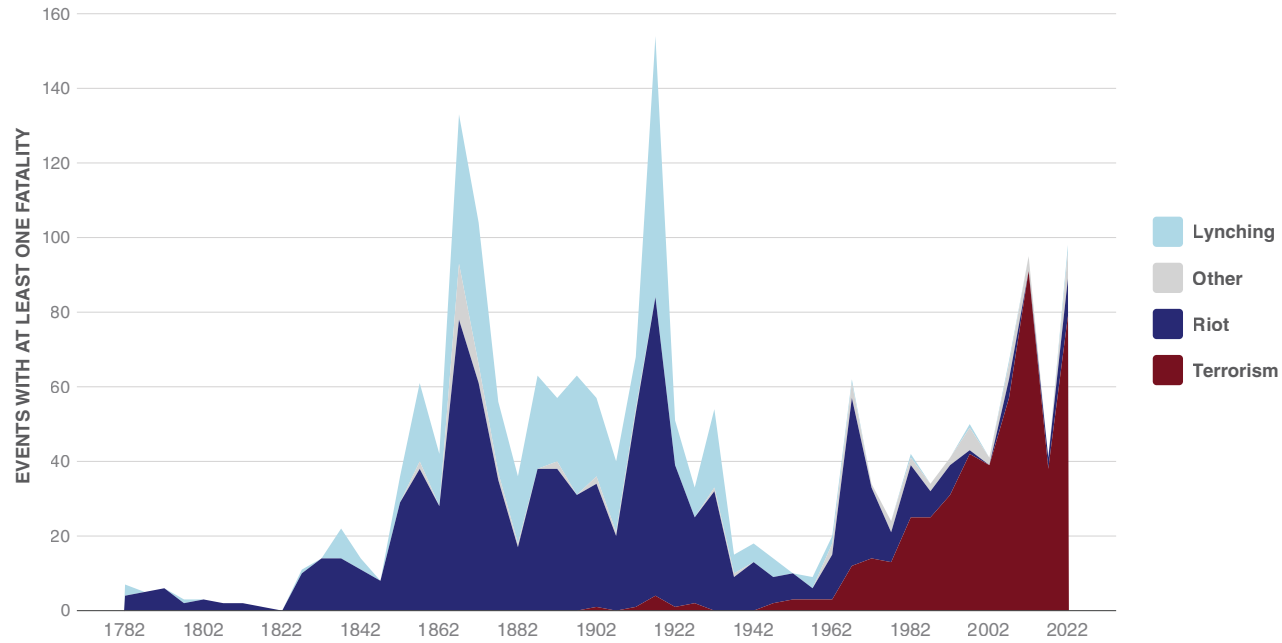
Concerns have also been raised about the possibility of a spike in politically motivated violence and political terrorism, given the levels of political polarisation and instability that have been seen over the past five years. In recent years, most terrorist attacks have been politically motivated. There were a number of high-profile politically motivated attacks in the West in 2025 and early 2026, including the assassination of the influential US conservative figure Charlie Kirk, the Dallas ICE facility shooting, and the attack on power infrastructure in Berlin that resulted in the longest blackout in the city in the past 80 years.

Figure 2.7 shows trends in the US Political Violence database,[2] which shows incidents of political violence that have led to at least one fatality. The data ranges back to 1780. For almost 200

FIGURE 2.7

Political violence in the United States, 1780–2025

Terrorism is now the predominant form of political violence in the US.



Source: USPV

years, the predominant form of political violence in the US was violent rioting, followed by lynching. However, over the past 40 years, almost all incidents of fatal politically motivated violence in the US have been terrorist attacks. From 2020 to 2026, 75 per cent of fatal political violence incidents in the US were terrorist attacks, up from 48 per cent between 1975-1979.

Much of the debate around political terrorism in the West has centred around which political ideologies have been responsible for the most attacks, or most deaths from terrorism. Over the last two decades far-left groups and individuals have carried out more attacks, but attacks by far-right groups and individuals have led to more fatalities. It should be noted, however, that almost all of these attacks, across both ideological positions, were carried out by individuals who were not affiliated with a particular terrorist group.

The rise in undetermined or unaffiliated terrorism has been a consistent feature of terrorist attacks in the West over the past two decades, as shown in Figure 2.8. In 2007, 44 per cent of attacks could be attributed to a specific group or organisation. However, this figure has not been higher than 26 per cent in the last decade, and in the last year under 20 per cent of attacks could be attributed to a specific group.

Between 2014 and 2023 there was a sharp rise in terrorist attacks carried out by individuals who were affiliated with a specific ideology, but not operating as part of a specific group. These ideologically aligned attacks rose from 20 per cent of attacks in the West in 2014, to a high of 76 per cent of attacks in 2020. Almost all of these attacks were individuals with a broad jihadist, far-left, or far-right motive.

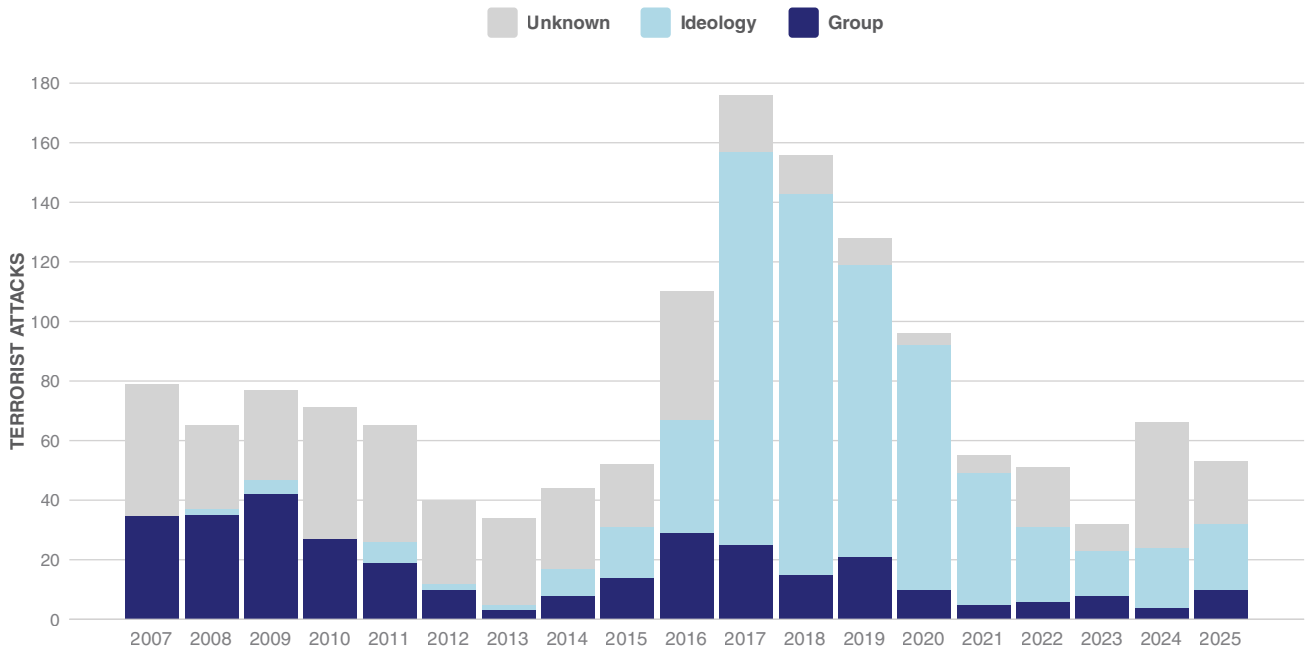
However, in the past few years there has been a noticeable rise in the percentage of attacks that cannot be attributed to any group at all. In 2025, 40 per cent of attacks could not be tied to either a specific group or a specific ideology. While part of this increase can simply be attributed to a lack of information about certain attacks, it may also reflect the rise of ideologically confused or unclear attacks, reflecting the broader political and social uncertainty.

Lone-actor terrorists often construct their own ideologies by piecing together elements from various, and sometimes contradictory, belief systems. This blending of ideologies isn't about strict allegiance to a single group or cause but rather reflects an attempt to justify violent actions. This approach complicates counterterrorism efforts, as it makes these actors unpredictable and harder to profile. This is especially true with regards to youth radicalisation, which is explored in more detail in Section 4 of this report.

FIGURE 2.8

Terrorist attacks in the West by ideology, 2007–2025

Fewer than 20 per cent of attacks in recent years could be directly attributed to a known terrorist group.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Regional Trends

Table 2.1 shows the average Index score for each region in 2025 and the corresponding changes over the past decade and previous year. In 2025, the impact of terrorism fell in seven of the eight Index regions, with only North and Central America recording an increase in impact. Despite this increase, it remains the region with the lowest overall impact of terrorism, with South Asia being the most impacted.

The most substantial improvement this year occurred in the Middle East and North Africa, where the impact of terrorism fell by 15 per cent from 2024 to 2025, reaching its lowest level since 2011. The region has seen reduced impact by terrorism for much of the past decade, with deaths falling by almost 96 per cent and incidents falling by 82 per cent since 2015. This decrease has occurred despite several high casualty events in recent years such as the October 7th, 2023 attacks in Israel, the 2024 Kerman Bombings in Iran, and the 2015 Sanaa Mosque Bombings in Yemen.

While terrorism in the MENA region has been declining, it has risen in sub-Saharan Africa over the same period, with deaths rising by seven per cent and incidents increasing by just under 25 per cent since 2015. Figure 2.9 shows the cumulative total of attacks and deaths by region for the period 2007 to 2025. Despite the fall in terrorism over the past decade, the MENA region has felt the greatest cumulative impact of terrorism over this period, with over 55,000 deaths from terrorism from just under 25,000 incidents.

TABLE 2.1

Average GTI score and change by region

South Asia remained the region most impacted by terrorism in 2025.

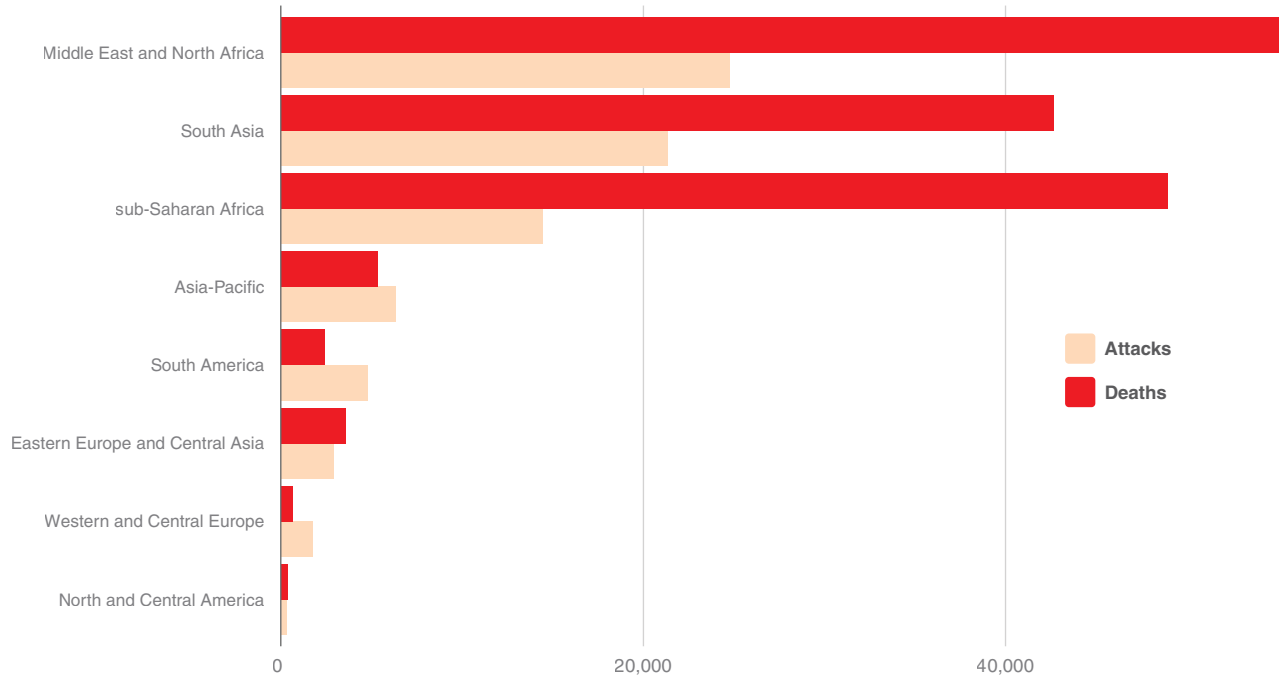
Region	Average Score	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
South Asia	3.465	-0.889	-0.292
MENA	2.463	-2.016	-0.439
sub-Saharan Africa	2.054	0.156	-0.167
South America	1.642	-0.068	-0.043
Asia-Pacific	1.492	-0.082	-0.043
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	1.042	-0.715	-0.039
Western and Central Europe	0.979	-0.025	-0.117
North and Central America	0.441	-0.285	0.007

Sub-Saharan Africa was the second most impacted, with nearly 50,000 deaths representing 31 per cent of the global total, followed by South Asia with over 42,500 deaths, representing 27 per cent of all deaths globally. Collectively, these three regions account for 95 per cent of all terrorism-related fatalities and 79 per cent of recorded attacks worldwide since 2007.

FIGURE 2.9

Attacks and deaths from terrorism by region, 2007–2025

The largest number of deaths related to terrorism were recorded in the MENA region, with almost 60,000 deaths since 2007.



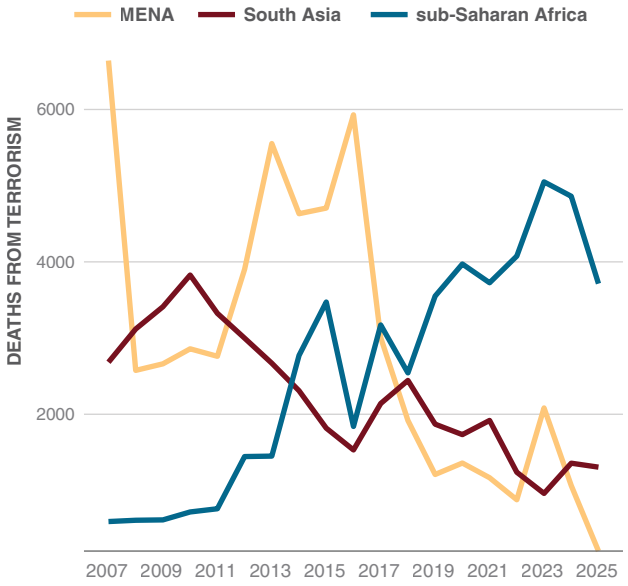
Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

The shift in terrorism across MENA, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa can be seen in Figure 2.10. Since 2017, the epicentre of terrorism-related deaths has moved from MENA to sub-Saharan Africa. The MENA region has experienced two spikes in terrorism with the Iraq war in 2007 and the Syrian civil war in 2016. The shift in the epicentre of terrorism was largely driven by the movement of terrorist networks from MENA into the sub-Saharan Africa region, the aftermath of the Libyan civil war, and the transformation of ethnic and other group-based conflicts into broader ideological insurgencies. While MENA experienced a 93 per cent decline in terrorism-related deaths between 2017 and 2025, sub-Saharan Africa saw deaths rise by 17 per cent over the same period.

FIGURE 2.10

Trends in terrorism deaths by region, 2007–2025

Sub-Saharan Africa region has had the most deaths per year since 2017.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Regional Profiles

Asia-Pacific

TABLE 2.2

Asia-Pacific GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Myanmar	6.245	14	2.819	-0.696
Thailand	5.275	20	-1.34	0.446
Philippines	4.719	23	-1.184	-0.521
Indonesia	4.714	24	1.017	0.338
Australia	3.732	31	2.127	1.62
China	1.311	54	-4.583	-0.552
Malaysia	1.092	57	-0.529	-0.534
Japan	0.571	75	0.148	-0.378
South Korea	0.333	86	-0.249	-0.249
Cambodia	0.233	90	0.092	-0.19
New Zealand	0.114	95	0.114	-0.103
Laos	0	100	0	0
Mongolia	0	100	0	0
Papua New Guinea	0	100	0	0
North Korea	0	100	0	0
Singapore	0	100	0	0
Timor-Leste	0	100	0	0
Taiwan	0	100	0	0
Vietnam	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			-0.353	-0.146

The average impact of terrorism improved in the Asia-Pacific region in the last year, with total deaths falling by 27.7 per cent and incidents by 37.6 per cent. Eight countries in the Asia-Pacific region improved in 2025, while three deteriorated, resulting in a decline in the overall impact of terrorism across the region and a return to the pre-2024 trend of improvement. A further eight countries showed no change in score when compared to the previous year.

Myanmar remained the most impacted country in Asia-Pacific for the fifth consecutive year, despite recording only 21 attacks and one death in 2025. Attacks fell 72 per cent while deaths fell 96 per cent over the past year. Both decreases can be attributed to increased government operations against anti-government groups and increased external support from China. Deaths from terrorism in Myanmar in 2025 were the lowest since 2014. In 2014, there were two attacks in Myanmar with zero deaths. However, in 2025, there were 21 attacks with one death.

Australia recorded the largest deterioration on the Index both in the region and worldwide, resulting from its deadliest mass shooting since 1996. The attack occurred when two heavily armed assailants opened fire on a Jewish Hanukkah service at Bondi Beach, Sydney, leaving 15 dead and a further 42 injured. This attack was the first mass casualty shooting in Australia since the Port Arthur Massacre in 1996, which left 35 people dead. The attack led to a significant public outcry, with the government promising expanded anti-hate speech legislation as a result.

Notable deteriorations were also recorded in Thailand and Indonesia, with terrorism deaths rising by nearly 28 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. All but one incident in Indonesia occurred in the West Papua region and was attributed to either the West Papuan Liberation Army or the Free Papua Movement (OPM). In Thailand, the attacks were carried out by undetermined nationalist groups, predominantly targeted at the police and military.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia

TABLE 2.3

Eastern Europe and Central Asia GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Russia	5.593	17	-0.02	-0.574
Türkiye	3.212	36	-3.708	-0.756
Ukraine	2.927	39	-1.534	0.924
Tajikistan	2.602	41	2.248	0.781
Georgia	0.506	77	-0.752	-0.335
Armenia	0.423	81	0.423	-0.297
Azerbaijan	0.123	93	-0.044	-0.11
Belarus	0.123	93	-1.408	-0.11
Uzbekistan	0.114	95	-0.329	-0.119
Bulgaria	0	100	-1.279	0
Kazakhstan	0	100	-1.04	0
Kyrgyz Republic	0	100	-0.782	0
Moldova	0	100	0	0
Romania	0	100	0	0
Turkmenistan	0	100	-2.502	0
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

Eastern Europe and Central Asia were the third least impacted region by terrorism. Overall, the region recorded 39 attacks with 18 deaths from terrorism in the past year, compared to 27 attacks and 185 deaths in 2024. Two-thirds of all attacks in the region took place in Russia, with another 25 per cent in Ukraine and the remainder in Tajikistan. Six countries within the region recorded scores of zero, meaning they had no incidents of terrorism in the past five years.

There was a significant rise in the number of incidents in both Russia and Ukraine. The number of incidents in Russia rose by 44 per cent, from 12 to 27. However, there were no high casualty attacks in the country in the past year, with deaths from terrorism falling by 90 per cent. Most of the attacks were sabotage, bombings, or arson attacks on infrastructure targets, by unknown or undetermined groups.

The third-most impacted country from terrorism in the region was Ukraine, with ten attacks recorded that resulted in four deaths and ten injured. It is the highest number of terrorist attacks in the country since 2016. All attacks were carried out by unknown groups or unidentified perpetrators, with the majority being bombings targeting civilians, police, and the military.

The largest attack in the region in 2025 was an armed attack killing three police officers in Makhachkala in Russia. Two assailants were shot dead at the scene while additional attackers fled, prompting a wider manhunt. The attack was the latest in a series of security incidents in the area, following the killing of four alleged IS fighters in March 2025 and a major assault on religious sites and police in June 2024 that left at least 20 dead.

Middle East and North Africa

TABLE 2.4

Middle East and North Africa GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Syria	7.545	6	0.021	-0.461
Israel	6.79	10	2.251	-0.674
Iraq	5.822	16	-3.773	-0.77
Iran	5.477	18	1.153	-0.605
Palestine	4.8	22	-0.161	-0.223
Yemen	4.653	25	-2.891	-0.427
Egypt	3.465	32	-3.853	-0.951
Oman	2.282	43	2.282	-0.645
Jordan	2.268	44	0.105	-0.645
Algeria	1.766	47	-3.153	-0.649
Tunisia	1.522	50	-3.984	-0.662
Libya	1.007	59	-5.545	-0.605
United Arab Emirates	0.749	67	-0.387	-0.429
Lebanon	0.648	72	-5.218	-0.589
Saudi Arabia	0.443	80	-4.568	-0.402
Bahrain	0.03	99	-3.419	-0.029
Kuwait	0	100	-4.677	0
Morocco	0	100	-1.092	0
Qatar	0	100	0	0
Sudan	0	100	-3.405	0
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

The impact of terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa region declined significantly in 2025, with the average country score improving by 15 per cent compared to 2024. No countries in the region recorded a deterioration in score on the Index over the past year, the first time this has occurred for the region since the inception of the Index. The overall number of terrorist incidents in the region fell by 56 per cent, from 646 in 2024 to 286 in 2025, while total deaths dropped 81 per cent, from 1,064 to 205.

Two countries in the region, Syria and Israel, were ranked among the 10 most impacted by terrorism globally. Syria had the highest level of terrorism in the region, despite experiencing a significant decline in terrorist activity in 2025. Total deaths in Syria fell from 744 in 2024 to 156 in 2025, and incidents fell from 430 to 243. This decline can be largely attributed to the substantial decrease in IS activity in Syria, with the group carrying out 36 per cent fewer attacks, resulting in 83 per cent fewer deaths, compared to 2024. The deadliest attack in Syria in 2025 occurred in Dweil'a, when a suicide bomber targeted the Mar Elias Greek Orthodox Church. The attack resulted in 22 fatalities and 63 injuries.

Israel also experienced a significant improvement in deaths and incidents in 2025, following the surge associated with the October 7th, 2023 Hamas attacks. However, because the Index is calculated using a five-year weighted average, the magnitude of the 2023 attacks continues to heavily influence Israel's score, keeping the country within the ten most impacted.

Libya recorded the largest regional improvement of the decade. There were no incidents or deaths from terrorism in Libya for the third consecutive year, with just ten deaths reported since 2020, compared to 463 deaths between 2015 and 2020.

The second largest improvement of the decade occurred in Lebanon, which also recorded no attacks or deaths in 2025. Over the past ten years, the country has experienced a significant reduction in terrorist activity, with its overall Index score declining steadily each year. At the peak of violence in 2014, Lebanon experienced 57 terror attacks that killed 69 people.

North and Central America

TABLE 2.5

North and Central America GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
United States of America	4.521	28	0.124	0.98
Canada	1.333	53	0.004	-0.617
Mexico	0.325	87	-1.075	-0.257
Costa Rica	0	100	0	0
Cuba	0	100	0	0
Dominican Republic	0	100	0	0
Guatemala	0	100	-0.901	0
Honduras	0	100	0	0
Haiti	0	100	0	0
Jamaica	0	100	0	0
Nicaragua	0	100	-2.134	0
Panama	0	100	0	0
El Salvador	0	100	0	0
Trinidad and Tobago	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

North and Central America was the region least impacted by terrorism in 2025. However, it was the only region to record an increase in the impact of terrorism over the past year, with deaths rising from just one in 2024 to 28 in 2025. All deaths occurred in the US. Eleven countries out of the 14 in the region recorded no terrorist attacks in the past five years, with only the US, Canada, and Mexico having recorded an attack in that period.

The US experienced the highest impact of terrorism in the region and was the most impacted of any Western country. It is currently ranked as the 28th most impacted country globally. There were 13 incidents in the US in 2025, including the assassination of the high-profile conservative figure Charlie Kirk, and a truck attack in New Orleans in early 2025 that killed 14 people and injured at least 57. There have been 308 fatalities from terrorist attacks in the US since 2007, with 71 of those being attributed to groups or individuals affiliated with Islamic State.

Canada recorded zero terrorist incidents in 2025 for the first time in the Index time series. There have been 39 terrorist incidents in Canada since 2007, resulting in 28 deaths. 2017 and 2018 were the two worst years for terrorism in Canada with 18 deaths and 52 injured.

While Central America has suffered from a high degree of criminal violence and political unrest in the last decade, this has not been reflected in an increase in terrorist activity. Besides the US and Canada, Mexico is the only country in the region to have recorded a terrorist attack in the past five years. The impact of terrorism has been falling in Mexico every year since 2017, and no deaths from terrorism have been recorded since 2018. The low levels of terrorism in Central America seen in 2025 mirror the trend for much of the past 15 years. In the region, US having a recorded attack in every year since 2007.

South America

TABLE 2.6

South America GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Colombia	7.116	9	0.668	0.528
Chile	4.553	27	1.834	-0.615
Ecuador	3.063	37	2.557	1.513
Peru	1.572	49	-1.855	-0.588
Brazil	0.909	62	0.189	-0.521
Argentina	0.455	79	0.087	-0.346
Venezuela	0.396	85	-0.906	-0.314
Bolivia	0	100	0	0
Guyana	0	100	0	0
Paraguay	0	100	-3.318	-0.073
Uruguay	0	100	0	-0.059
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

South America had the fourth highest score of any region in 2025, although the average impact fell slightly in the past year. The majority of terrorism in the region is concentrated in Colombia, Chile, and Ecuador, with both Colombia and Ecuador recording increases in deaths from terrorism in 2025. They were also the only two countries in the region to record an increase in the overall impact of terrorism, compared to seven countries

where the impact of terrorism fell. Total deaths in the region rose from 126 to 224, with incidents also increasing from 360 to 465. Colombia is the most affected country in the region with 95 per cent of total incidents in the region happening in Colombia.

Colombia rose into the 10 most impacted countries in the Index in 2025, its highest position since 2013, with attacks increasing by nearly 47 per cent to 442 and deaths rising by 70 per cent to 213. It is Colombia's highest terrorism-related death toll since the inception of the Index. The violence was concentrated in the southwestern regions of Cauca and Valle del Cauca, which accounted for 84 per cent of all incidents.

FARC remained the most prominent terrorist group, responsible for over 60 per cent of attacks and deaths, while the ELN also escalated its activity, with both groups increasingly adopting drone technology as a core weapon. Notably, civilians accounted for over 50 per cent of total deaths in 2025, despite attacks being largely aimed at military and government targets. The government's 'Total Peace' initiative, announced in 2022 to negotiate with militant and criminal organisations, has largely failed to reduce violence, with groups exploiting ceasefire agreements to expand operations and resume attacks.

Chile was the second most affected in the region. However, it is also the country with the most improved score in 2025, dropping from 22nd to 27th in the rankings. Terrorism peaked in Chile in 2021, when groups associated with the Mapuche movement carried out multiple attacks against infrastructure, with the country recording 219 incidents that year. Since then, the countries score has decreased every year, with the number of incidents dropping to 22 in 2025 from 55 the year previously. Chile has not recorded a single death from terrorism in the past three years.

Ecuador recorded the largest deterioration in the region, rising 20 places in the Index with nearly 98 per cent change in its average score. The country had recorded low levels of terrorism with only three attacks until 2018, when attacks attributed to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) began to increase. Terrorism in Ecuador escalated further in 2025, driven primarily by a single high-casualty incident in the Amazon rainforest in which FARC members ambushed Ecuadorian soldiers conducting an operation to close an illegal mine, killing 11. While the attack was an isolated incident, it underscores the ongoing security threat posed by FARC activity near the Colombian border.

Four countries in the region have not recorded a single terrorist incident over the past four years: Bolivia, Guyana, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Further, Peru and Venezuela both reduced the number of deaths in the past few years. However, despite the reduction in deaths from terrorism in Venezuela, there is a high degree of terrorist activity near the Colombia-Venezuela border. Concerns have been raised about the potential complicity of Venezuelan state security forces in ELN activity.

South Asia

TABLE 2.7

South Asia GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Pakistan	8.574	1	0.205	0.201
Afghanistan	6.678	11	-1.827	-0.61
India	6.428	13	-0.415	-0.136
Bangladesh	2.286	42	-2.129	-0.677
Nepal	0.288	88	-1.867	-0.825
Bhutan	0	100	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	100	-0.192	0
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

In 2025, South Asia was the most impacted by terrorism and had the highest average score in the Index. It has been the region most affected by terrorism since 2016. However, despite being the most affected region, the impact of terrorism declined in 2025, with four countries recording improvements and only Pakistan recording a deterioration of its Index score. Overall, deaths in the region fell by nearly four per cent from 1,358 to 1,306, with total incidents falling 13.4 per cent, from 1,448 to 1,253.

Pakistan recorded the highest average impact of terrorism score in South Asia for the third consecutive year and now ranks as the country most impacted by terrorism globally. The regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were the most heavily affected, accounting for 97 per cent of total terrorism deaths in the country. The increase in terrorism was largely the result of increased activity by the TTP following their 'Al-Khandaq' spring offensive. The group is now conducting drone attacks in Pakistan and has developed a sophisticated propaganda network that allows them to share footage of their attacks.

Afghanistan recorded a decrease in the impact of terrorism for the fourth consecutive year, and is now ranked outside the ten countries most impacted by terrorism at number 11. Deaths from terrorism fell by just under 50 per cent in the past year, with incidents falling by 29 per cent. The fall in terrorist activity has been particularly noticeable around Kabul, with deaths falling from a peak of 580 in 2018, to just seven in 2025. Attacks conducted by anti-Taliban insurgent groups like the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) fell considerably, and incidents attributed to Islamic State fell to their lowest level since the group became active in Afghanistan in 2015.

Nepal recorded the largest improvement of any country in the region, with no terrorist attacks recorded in 2025. There have been no recorded terrorist attacks in the country since 2022, when the CPN-M became part of the governing coalition. Bangladesh and India also recorded significant improvements on the Index, with falls in the number of terrorist attacks of 100 per cent and 43 per cent respectively.

Sub-Saharan Africa

TABLE 2.8

Sub-Saharan Africa GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Burkina Faso	8.324	2	6.015	-0.257
Niger	7.816	3	1.888	0.029
Nigeria	7.792	4	-1.01	0.159
Mali	7.586	5	1.383	-0.31
Somalia	7.391	7	0.246	-0.235
Democratic Republic of the Congo	7.171	8	2.817	0.285
Cameroon	6.593	12	-0.207	-0.39
Mozambique	6.022	15	4.201	-0.229
Benin	5.434	19	5.434	0.632
Kenya	5.088	21	-1.565	-0.278
Chad	4.625	26	-1.409	-0.777
Togo	4.305	30	4.305	-0.699
Burundi	3.361	33	-0.825	-0.682
Uganda	3.25	34	1.181	-0.452
Angola	1.136	56	0.713	-0.521
Senegal	1.07	58	1.07	-0.508
Djibouti	0.925	61	-0.074	-0.536
Tanzania	0.888	63	-1.657	-0.913
Côte d'Ivoire	0.702	71	-0.883	-0.752
Central African Republic	0.556	76	-3.661	-0.401
Ethiopia	0.288	88	-2.917	-0.499
Eswatini	0.044	98	0.044	-0.043
Botswana	0	100	0	0
Republic of the Congo	0	100	0	0
Eritrea	0	100	0	0
Gabon	0	100	0	0
Ghana	0	100	0	0
Guinea	0	100	0	0
The Gambia	0	100	0	0
Guinea-Bissau	0	100	-0.217	0
Equatorial Guinea	0	100	0	0
Liberia	0	100	0	0
Lesotho	0	100	0	0
Madagascar	0	100	-1.95	0
Mauritania	0	100	-0.484	0
Mauritius	0	100	0	0
Malawi	0	100	0	0
Namibia	0	100	0	0
Rwanda	0	100	-1.947	0
Sierra Leone	0	100	-0.241	0
South Sudan	0	100	-2.966	0
South Africa	0	100	-0.423	0
Zambia	0	100	0	0
Zimbabwe	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

Sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a new epicentre of terrorism over the past decade, with six of the top ten countries in the Index located in the region. However, despite the longer-term trend of increasing terrorist activity, 2025 saw a reduction in terrorism in the region, with deaths falling by 23.5 per cent, and incidents falling by nearly 28 per cent. Only four countries recorded a deterioration on the Index in the past year, while 18 countries recorded an improvement.

The most noticeable improvement occurred in the Central Sahel region, with both Burkina Faso and Mali recording significant falls in both incidents and deaths from terrorism. Deaths from terrorism in Burkina Faso have fallen nearly 45 per cent in the past two years, from 1,532 to 846. The fall in terrorist activity has occurred as armed extremist groups in the region have shifted tactics, focusing more on economic blockades and other activities aimed at reducing state capacity.

Somalia and Cameroon both recorded noticeable drops in terrorist activity. Somalia recorded a 14 per cent drop in deaths and a nearly 52 per cent drop in injuries compared to 2024. However, al-Shabaab remains highly active within the country, and although terrorist activity carried out by the group fell overall, they were able to make significant territorial gains and were involved in an assassination attempt on the country's president. Deaths in Cameroon fell from 222 in 2024 to 81 in 2025, a 64 per cent reduction. This was largely due to a fall in activity by Boko Haram, with attacks by the group dropping from 77 in 2024 to 43 in 2025.

The largest increases in terrorism-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa occurred in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Total deaths in Nigeria rose by just over 46 per cent, with incidents rising by nearly 43 per cent. The rise in terrorist activity was largely driven by increased activity from Boko Haram and ISWAP, who accounted for 80 per cent of all terrorism related fatalities in the country. The number of attacks attributed to ISWAP increased by 360 per cent in the past year, rising from 20 to 92. Ongoing territorial disputes between extremist factions and economic instability fuelling recruitment have been key drivers in the increase in violence.

The DRC rose four places on the Index. It is the first time it has been ranked among the ten most impacted countries. Terrorism deaths increased nearly 28 per cent in the past year. The IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) drove much of the violence, taking advantage of the Congolese military's diversion toward combating M23's territorial expansion to intensify attacks across Ituri and North Kivu. ADF violence was characterised by extreme violence against civilians, particularly

targeting rural Christian communities through mass killings, abductions, and arson. The deadliest incidents included a funeral attack killing 71 in September and a church massacre of 43 worshippers in July. Joint counter-ADF operations like Uganda-DRC's Operation Shujaa failed to curb the violence and may have dispersed fighters deeper into Congolese territory.

Western and Central Europe

TABLE 2.9

Western and Central Europe GTI Score, Rank, and Change in Score, 2015–2025

Country	Overall Score	Overall Rank	Change 2015-2025	Change 2024-2025
Germany	4.447	29	1.975	-0.311
France	3.224	35	-2.713	0.477
United Kingdom	2.936	38	-0.537	0.154
Greece	2.788	40	0.823	-0.196
Czechia	2.261	45	1.541	-0.645
Sweden	1.839	46	-0.045	-0.003
Poland	1.682	48	1.682	-0.353
Austria	1.498	51	1.498	0.916
Netherlands	1.475	52	0.339	0.073
Belgium	1.198	55	-0.386	-0.337
Italy	0.999	60	0.025	-0.28
Spain	0.794	64	0.351	-0.462
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.782	65	-1.464	-0.436
Serbia	0.782	65	0.373	0.2
Switzerland	0.749	67	0.662	-0.516
Norway	0.725	69	-1.847	-0.473
Denmark	0.72	70	-1.164	0
Slovakia	0.616	73	0.616	-0.407
Finland	0.582	74	0.582	-0.367
Kosovo	0.465	78	-0.703	-0.317
Ireland	0.423	81	-0.292	-0.297
Lithuania	0.423	81	0.423	-0.297
Portugal	0.423	81	0.423	0.423
Latvia	0.233	90	0.233	-0.19
Cyprus	0.176	92	0.146	-0.171
Iceland	0.059	97	0.059	-0.064
Albania	0	100	0	0
Estonia	0	100	-0.128	0
Croatia	0	100	-0.18	0
Hungary	0	100	-0.233	0
North Macedonia	0	100	-2.883	0
Montenegro	0	100	0	0
Slovenia	0	100	0	0
Regional Average			**-0.353**	**-0.146**

The Western and Central Europe region had the second lowest average impact of terrorism in 2025. In 2025, the region had 14 terrorism-related deaths and 51 incidents, compared to 2024 with 25 deaths and 81 incidents. The average impact of terrorism decreased in the region in 2025, the first improvement in four years. Of the 33 countries in the region, only five recorded a deterioration in score: France, United Kingdom, Austria, the Netherlands, and Serbia.

Germany experienced the most deaths and injuries from terrorism in the region, with six deaths from five terrorist attacks. The largest attack occurred in Munich in February, when a 24-year-old man drove a car into a protest rally, killing two and injuring 43 people. Germany has recorded 221 attacks and 53 deaths from terrorism since 2011.

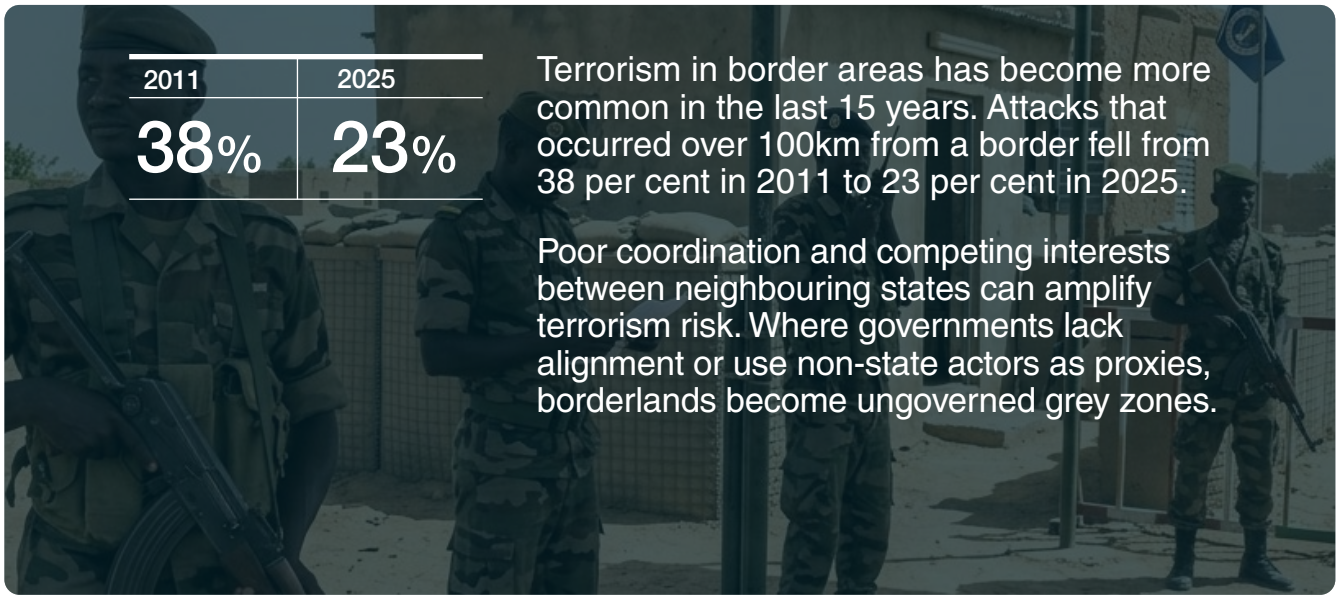
France and the United Kingdom were the only countries in the region other than Germany to record two or more deaths from terrorism in 2025. In the UK, two people were killed after an attack on a synagogue during Yom Kippur. The attacker pledged allegiance to Islamic State. There have been 442 terrorist incidents in the UK since 2007, resulting in 69 deaths. In France, there have been 281 fatalities from terrorist attacks since 2007. In 2025, France experienced 12 terrorist attacks resulting in the deaths of four people, with 18 more injured. It is the highest number attacks and injuries since 2020.

Czechia recorded the largest improvement on the Index in the region. Czechia has not recorded a terrorist attack since a mass shooting attack in 2023 that resulted in 17 deaths and 23 injuries. The country has largely been free of terrorist attacks over the past 15 years, with just six incidents recorded since 2011. No incident in that period other than the 2023 mass shooting resulted in any fatalities.

International border	
50 Kilometres	100 Kilometres
41%	64%

Border proximity is a defining feature of modern terrorism. Just over 41 per cent of attacks occur within 50 kilometres of an international border, and 64 per cent occur within 100km.

Borderlands often represent authority gaps: remote areas where state control is weakest. Difficult terrain and distance from major cities create spaces where terrorist groups can recruit, train, and operate with relative freedom.



2011	2025
38%	23%

Terrorism in border areas has become more common in the last 15 years. Attacks that occurred over 100km from a border fell from 38 per cent in 2011 to 23 per cent in 2025.

Poor coordination and competing interests between neighbouring states can amplify terrorism risk. Where governments lack alignment or use non-state actors as proxies, borderlands become ungoverned grey zones.

Terrorism in border areas

24%

Terrorist groups are less likely to claim responsibility for attacks near borders, particularly those targeting civilians. In 2025, claimed attacks within 50km of a border accounted for just 24 per cent of total attacks, the lowest since 2013.

Several of the world's most persistent terrorism hotspots are concentrated along border regions: the Colombia–Venezuela frontier, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, the Central Sahel tri-border area, and the Lake Chad Basin.

All these hotspots share common features: porous borders, under-governed territory, and connected communities that span national boundaries.

3 Terrorism and Borderlands

Why Borderlands Matter for Understanding Terrorism

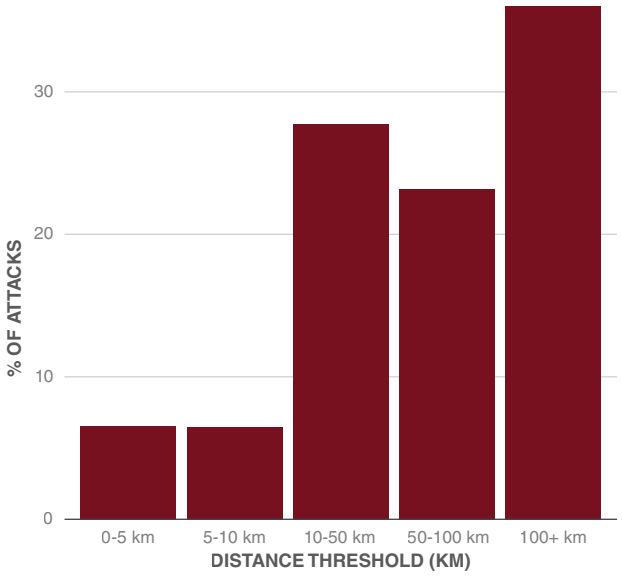
Borderlands play a central role in shaping where terrorism occurs, how it spreads, and why it persists. As shown in Figure 3.1, over 40 per cent of all terrorist attacks between 2007 and 2025 took place within 50 kilometres of an international border, and nearly two-thirds occurred within 100km. This is not coincidental. Borders are often drawn along difficult terrain, far from centres of state power, creating gaps in authority that terrorist groups exploit for recruitment, safe haven, and access to smuggling networks. At the same time, national boundaries constrain the ability of security forces to pursue groups across borders, giving those groups a persistent tactical advantage.

This section examines how borderlands interact with terrorism, from the geographic and political conditions that make border regions vulnerable, to the patterns of target selection and claiming behaviour that emerge in these areas, and the role that cross-border dynamics have played in the spatial spread of terrorism across entire regions. This section looks at several border areas that have become hotspots of terrorist activity: Colombia-Venezuela, Pakistan-Afghanistan, the Central Sahel tri-border area, and the Lake Chad basin.

FIGURE 3.1

Terrorist attacks by distance to an international border, 2007–2025

Over 40 per cent of attacks occur within 50km of an international border.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Terrorism in border areas usually occurs in the context of a broader conflict. Since 2007, over 98 per cent of deaths from terrorism have occurred in countries in conflict. Over 76 per cent of deaths from terrorism occurred in the context of a major armed conflict. Although attacks in non-conflict environments receive a proportionally higher level of media coverage, the primary driver of terrorist activity is violent conflict.

When operating in a conflict, armed extremist groups may engage in other activities like more conventional military attacks, criminal activity, and provision of services to local communities. Terrorism is thus a common tactic of armed extremist groups, but not necessarily their sole means of operation. Only incidents that have been classified as terrorism are included in the charts in this section.

THE PROPERTIES OF BORDERLAND TERRORISM

Borders have typically been drawn along physical features like mountain ranges, rivers, and forests, rather than around the communities that live in those areas. As a result, borderlands often sit at the edges of state power, far from capitals and difficult to govern. Where terrain is challenging and security forces are stretched thin, gaps in state authority emerge that terrorist groups can exploit for recruitment, training, and territorial control. In many states with low governance capacity, borders exist largely on paper, with few fences, checkpoints, or patrols to enforce them. Yet even where borders are weakly enforced, they still constrain state responses, as military and police forces generally cannot operate across a national boundary without joint operations or extensive coordination with their neighbours.

Illicit border economies

Borders serve as conduits for the movement of people, goods, and money, both legal and illegal. In conflict-affected areas, cross-border smuggling of arms, gold, minerals, timber, wildlife, and fuel often underpins the war economy. Borders are also the entry and exit points for fighters and refugees, and the flow of people in both directions, often with limited or no identity checks, provides cover for largely anonymous movement.

Smuggling may flow both in and out of conflict-affected states. Illicitly logged commodities such as timber may be smuggled from more peaceful states into conflict-affected states, where they can be sold and exported with minimal scrutiny. Such practices have been regularly followed in Coastal West Africa, with Ghanian rosewood being trafficked out of Ghana to be sold in neighbouring states.[1]

Border geopolitics

Borderlands are deeply shaped by regional and local geopolitics. Competing interests between neighbouring states, poor coordination, or outright hostility can create significant gaps in counterterrorism efforts. In some cases, states use non-state actors as proxies to advance their own interests or destabilise their neighbours.

Local populations often span both sides of a border, and in areas with difficult terrain, they may be largely self-governing simply because the state cannot reach them. This creates opportunities for terrorist groups to build alliances with local communities, whether through coercion, financial incentives, or cultural or ideological alignment. It can also become self-reinforcing: heavy-handed counterterrorism operations that target communities perceived as sympathetic to armed groups can themselves become powerful recruitment tools.

Recent decades offer numerous examples of this dynamic across the Middle East, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. In each case, terrorist groups operating in areas with minimal state presence, difficult terrain, and limited cross-border coordination have been able to sustain operations, control smuggling economies, and evade capture.

The spatial spread of terrorism across regions follows a clear pattern. Groups that face pressure from national armed forces, external actors, or multinational coalitions such as UN peacekeeping missions, frequently cross into neighbouring states to survive. This is compounded by ethnic and kinship ties that stretch across borders, enabling recruitment and mobilisation in new territory.

The clearest examples are in West Africa. The insurgency that began in Mali spread to Niger and Burkina Faso, and in recent years into coastal states like Togo and Benin, with growing threats to Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. Similarly, terrorist groups in Nigeria moved across borders into Cameroon, Niger, and Chad to evade Nigerian forces. The inability of states to effectively manage multi-state, cross-border counterinsurgency may be one of the key factors driving the spread of terrorism across entire regions.

Conflict in border areas between groups and state actors can increase the visibility of terrorist groups while garnering support from locals.[2] In the case of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the Pakistani military often closes the borders, which weakens the economy of tribal groups living along the border and who rely on the economic passage for resources. Groups like the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) can take advantage of this by using it to garner support for their cause.

Border terrain

The border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Colombia and Venezuela, and the tri-border of Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon all share one feature: extremely difficult terrain. Mountain ranges stretch across the Afghan-Pakistani and Colombian-Venezuelan borders, while the Sahel is largely desert and the Lake Chad basin is a mix of wetlands and valleys. None of these landscapes are easy to navigate or secure, whether with physical barriers or military patrols. This gives a natural advantage to terrorist groups willing to embed themselves in these environments. In Pakistan, members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda used the mountainous terrain of the Hindu Kush to evade detection for years. The harsher and more remote the landscape, the harder it is for states to maintain any meaningful control over border areas. These same landscapes also enable smuggling networks to operate with little interference, providing terrorist groups with a significant source of funding for their operations.[3]

Trends in border terrorism

There has been a gradual shift in where incidents happen in relation to a border, as shown in Figure 3.2. In 2011, nearly 39 per cent of attacks took place 100 kilometres or more from a border. By 2025, this number had fallen to just over 23 per cent.

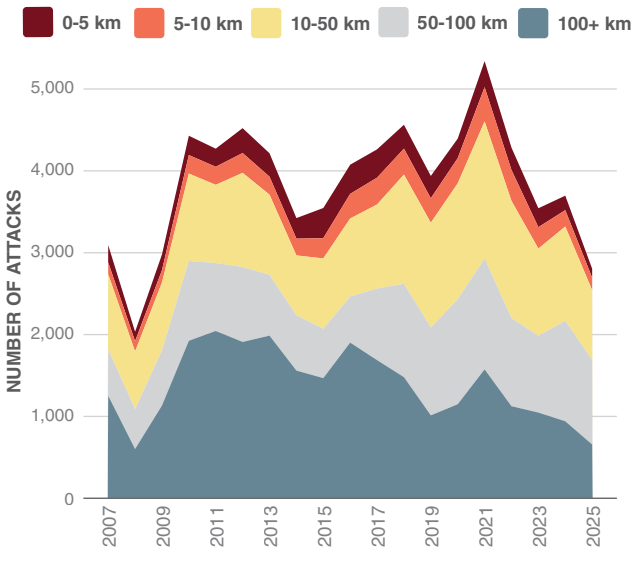
Target selection by terrorist groups reflects a trade-off between vulnerability and value.[4] Borders and border crossings tend to be more heavily secured, with higher concentrations of military and police than areas further inland. Major cities and capitals are also typically better protected. Conversely, remote areas may be easier to attack but offer fewer high-value targets. Thus, the 10-100km border zone is more likely to offer the optimal trade-off between a high value target and a highly vulnerable one.

Groups also tend to operate in areas where they have established networks and infrastructure, regardless of whether they are formally based there. Having a pre-existing presence across a border makes cross-border attacks far cheaper and easier than expanding into unfamiliar territory. Groups also avoid damaging the infrastructure on which they rely, so attacking border crossings, or the areas immediately around them, could harm their own future operations.

FIGURE 3.2

Trend in terrorist attack distance, 2007–2025

The percentage of attacks occurring over 100km from a border has been decreasing for over a decade.

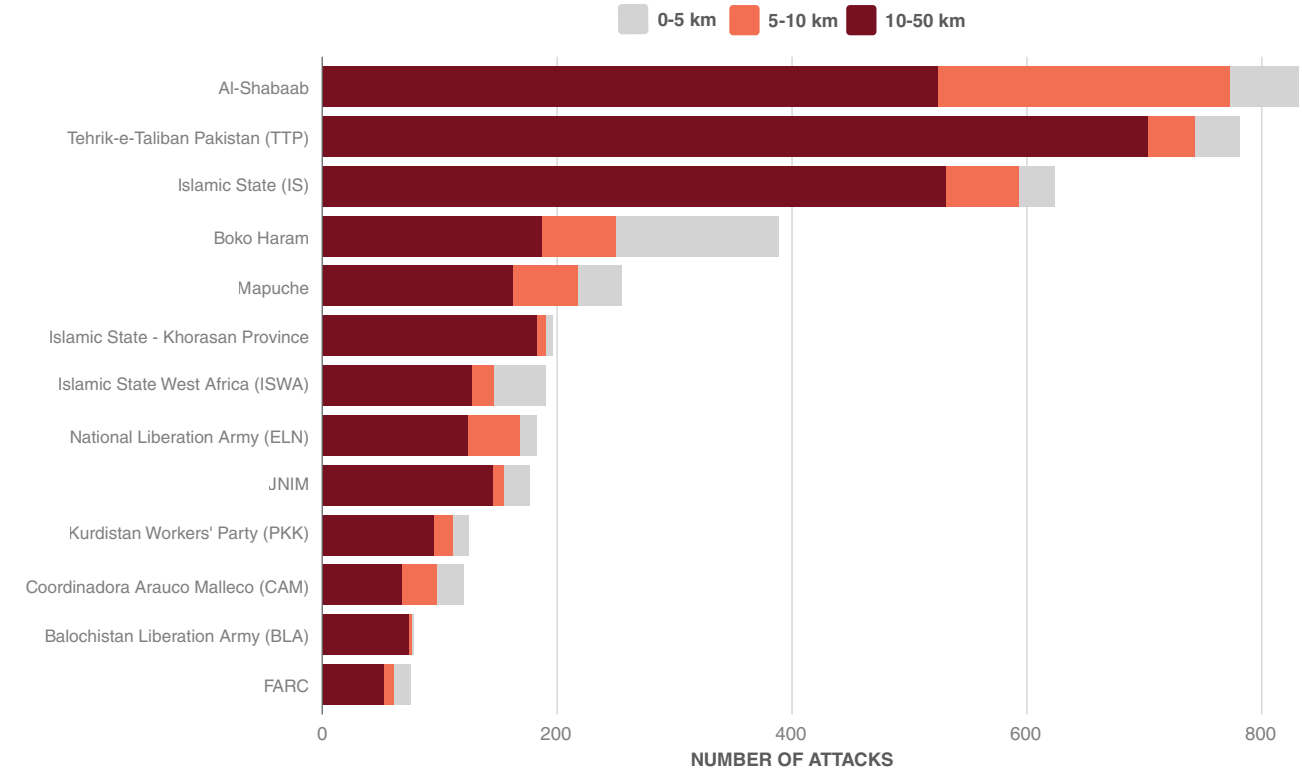


Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.3

Most active groups in border regions (<50km), 2007–2025

The TTP is now the terrorist group most active in borderland areas.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Figure 3.3 shows the terrorist groups which have had the highest number of attacks within 50km of a border. The Pakistani Taliban (TTP) have had the highest number of border attacks in the past two years, with the majority of those occurring between 10-50km from a border. Only 2.9 per cent of attacks attributed to the group occurred within five kilometres of a border, and less than one per cent took place in Islamabad province, which is over 100km from the border. Instead, 85 per cent of TTP attacks occurred in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, now merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the group was founded and where it has deep local support, established infrastructure, and easy movement back and forth across the Afghan border.

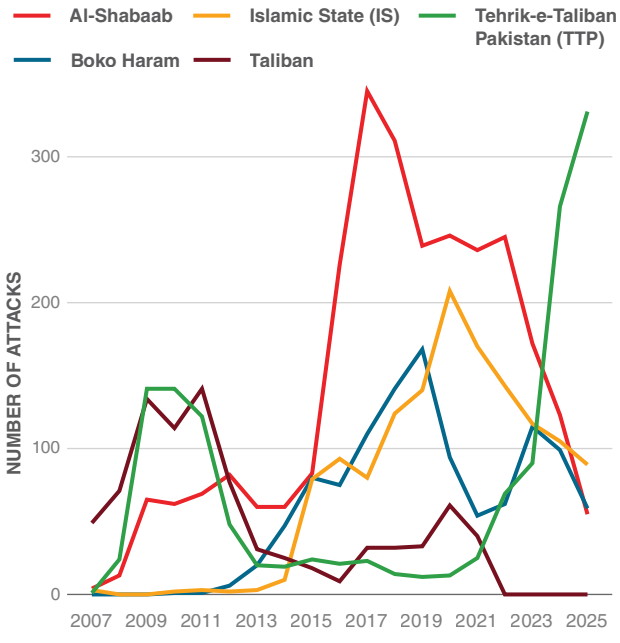
Al-Shabaab's activity has followed a similar pattern to the TTP. Over the last five years, al-Shabaab carried out more attacks within 50km of a border than any other group, as shown in Figure 3.4. Of its 831 recorded incidents, 736 took place in Somalia and the remainder in Kenya, with 46 per cent of all attacks occurring between 10-50km from a border.

Boko Haram is the most active group in the 0-5km band, responsible for nearly 27 per cent of all attacks in that range. Nearly 90 per cent of Boko Haram's attacks in this zone occurred along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Boko Haram operates as though national borders are largely irrelevant, carrying out attacks across the tri-border area of Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad without concentrating in any single country. The group exploits the Lake Chad basin's shifting jurisdictions and difficult terrain, and targets civilians more than any other category.

FIGURE 3.4

Borderland attacks by distance and group, 2007–2025

Boko Haram has the highest proportion of attacks in the closest border regions.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Attacks in border regions are less likely to be formally claimed by terrorist organisations. Groups are less likely to claim attacks that target civilians or that provoke significant public backlash in communities they are trying to influence. In 2025, just 24 per cent of attacks within 50km of a border were formally claimed. However, certain types of attacks are much more likely to be claimed. Explosive attacks and assassinations are the most frequently claimed, at around 42 and 46 per cent respectively. By contrast, armed attacks, which are the most common type overall with 2,356 incidents over five years, were claimed only about 35 per cent of the time.

Attacks in border areas are more likely to be claimed if they can enhance a group's reputation, like attacks on high profile figures or the police and military. Assassinations most often targeted government officials, with half of those attacks being claimed. Over half of explosive attacks against police and military were also claimed. Claiming an attack on the military can bolster a group's standing as a credible challenger to the state. Attacking civilians in areas where these groups seek influence, on the other hand, risks alienating the local communities upon whose support they depend.

Colombia-Venezuela: Borderlands, Terrorism, and Organized Crime

The Colombia-Venezuela border stretches over 2,200 kilometres across rivers, mountains, and countless informal crossings. This vast, under-governed frontier has long provided a haven for illegal armed groups. The National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissident factions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have increasingly exploited the border's permeability to expand their operations. Both Colombian and Venezuelan territory function as sanctuary and staging ground in equal measure, allowing these groups to carry out attacks, profit from illicit economies, and evade security forces by crossing the border when pressure mounts. Key border regions on both sides, Norte de Santander and Arauca in Colombia, and Táchira, Zulia, and Apure in Venezuela, serve as the main corridors for insurgent activity and criminal enterprise. The dynamics in these areas are shaped by strategic transit routes, inter-group rivalries, and the physical geography that enables both mobility and safe haven.

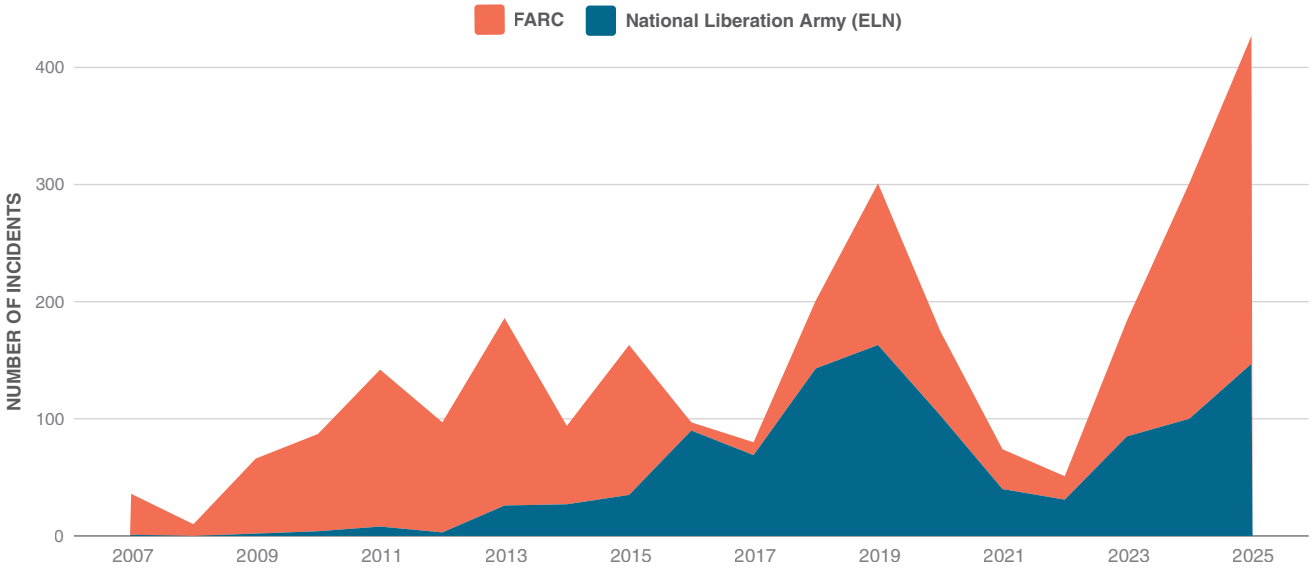
Figure 3.5 shows the trend in terrorist attacks by FARC and ELN from 2007 to 2025. There were over 3,000 terrorist attacks in Colombia and Venezuela in this period, resulting in just under 2,200 deaths. Decades of internal conflict in Colombia and state fragility in Venezuela have turned the border region into a grey zone of contested governance. After Colombia's 2016 peace accord with the FARC, many ex-FARC fighters rejected demobilisation and formed dissident groups. At the same time, Venezuela's state authority weakened under economic crisis and political turmoil, and its government adopted a permissive, and at times collusive, stance toward Colombian guerrillas operating on its soil. By 2019, an estimated 44 per cent of ELN fighters were based in Venezuela, concentrated in border states like Táchira, Apure, and Zulia.[5] This laid the groundwork for the unprecedented binational reach the ELN and FARC dissidents have now.

Figure 3.6 shows how the actions of both FARC and the ELN have turned the Colombia-Venezuela border into a hotspot of terrorist activity. Both the ELN and FARC dissident groups use the international border as a military buffer and refuge. When facing Colombian military pressure, guerrilla columns slip across into Venezuela, where Colombian forces cannot follow and Venezuelan troops have often turned a blind eye. Venezuelan border regions like Apure and Zulia have become vital rear bases where fighters can rest, train, and launch operations back into Colombia.

FIGURE 3.5

FARC and ELN terrorist attacks in Colombia, 2007–2025

Terrorist attacks by the two major groups in Colombia have soared in the past two years.

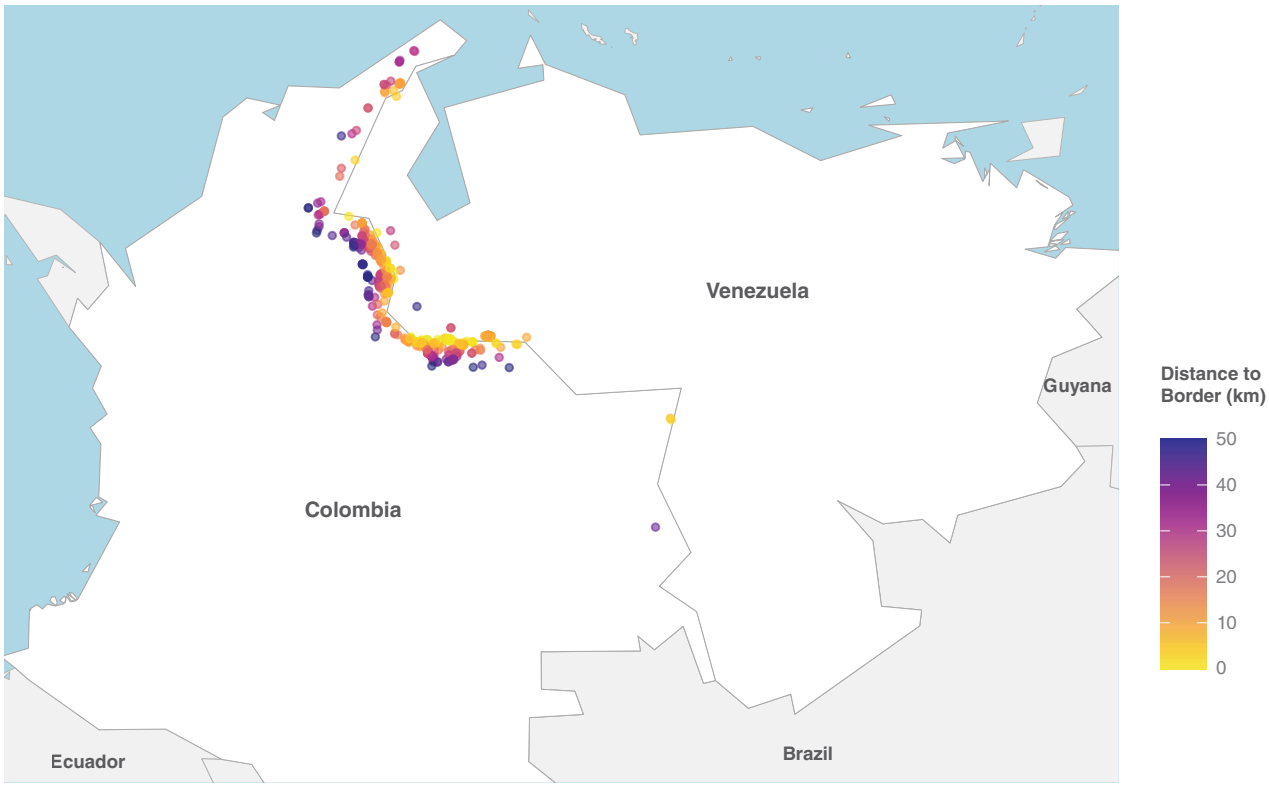


Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.6

Terrorist attacks on the Colombia-Venezuela border, 2007–2025

The Colombia-Venezuela border has emerged as a terrorism hotspot.



Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

For the ELN, Venezuela is not just a hiding place but a platform to project power. The group has dramatically expanded its footprint across Venezuela since 2018. By 2020, it was active in at least 13 of Venezuela's 24 states, up from a handful of border areas just a few years earlier.[6]

In the key frontier states of Zulia, Táchira and Apure the ELN has consolidated quasi-territorial control. Fighters patrol villages, run illicit enterprises, and even recruit locals into their ranks. In some areas, the ELN has usurped government functions like enforcing security, settling disputes, and distributing food.

STRATEGIC BORDER ZONES: CONTROL AND CONFLICT

While the ELN and FARC dissidents operate along most of the 2,219km border, certain departments and states are especially critical to their strategy.

Catatumbo Region (Norte de Santander, Colombia & Zulia, Venezuela)

The Catatumbo region, straddling Colombia's Norte de Santander department and Venezuela's Zulia state, is one of the world's most notorious insurgent enclaves. Its mountainous, densely forested terrain provides ideal conditions for both coca cultivation and guerrilla camps. In recent years, Catatumbo has become the epicentre of global cocaine production, with Norte de Santander now hosting Colombia's largest concentration of coca crops.[7] This booming drug economy is the primary driver of armed group presence in the region. The ELN and at least one FARC dissident group, the 33rd Front, jointly dominate Catatumbo's cocaine trade, filling the vacuum left by the FARC's demobilisation.[8]

The border in this area is largely an arbitrary line through wild terrain, and guerrillas and illicit goods move freely in both directions. Cocaine laboratories and airstrips have been detected in Zulia, suggesting that some processing and dispatch has shifted to Venezuelan soil to avoid Colombian surveillance.[9]

Civilians have borne the heaviest cost: between 2012 and 2019, over 9,000 murders occurred in the border area around Cúcuta and Ureña alone, roughly half on each side. Today, Norte de Santander, particularly Catatumbo, remains one of the most conflict-affected areas in Colombia, and Zulia and Táchira among the most lawless states in Venezuela. The ELN and FARC dissidents are deeply entrenched, funding themselves through cocaine and smuggling. Mexican traffickers, including Sinaloa Cartel operatives, have been observed in Catatumbo buying cocaine and even financing coca crops.[10] These cartels bring cash to Cúcuta and sometimes into Venezuela, adding another layer of complexity to the cross-border terror-crime nexus.

Arauca–Apure

The Arauca-Apure border is perhaps the clearest case of a guerrilla-dominated frontier. Arauca department in Colombia and Apure state in Venezuela face each other across the Arauca and Meta rivers, and the region has been an ELN stronghold since the 1980s. It also hosted several FARC fronts during the

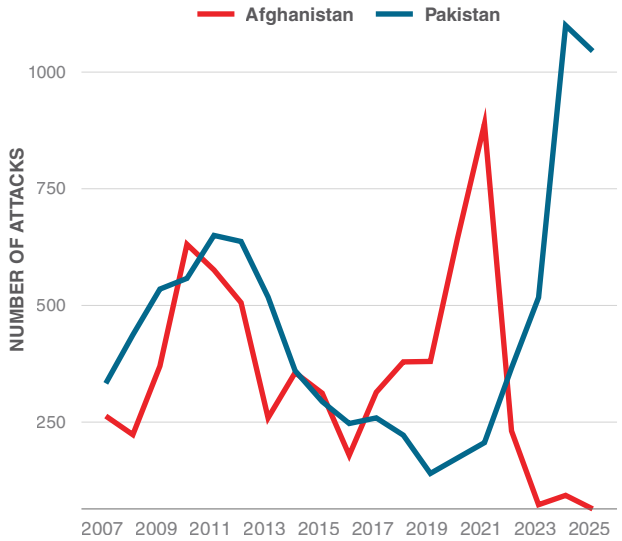
Colombian conflict. Between 2006 and 2010, the ELN and FARC fought a bloody war in the area over control of coca cultivation and trafficking corridors, killing over 800 people, many of them civilians. That feud ended with a truce in 2010, allowing the two groups to cooperate and divide territory between them. When the FARC demobilised in 2017, a small faction in Arauca refused to disarm and formed the 10th Front dissident group, inheriting the FARC's interests in the area. They initially maintained the non-aggression pact with the ELN, and for several years both groups operated side by side, even coordinating to some extent.[11]

The 2022 war in Arauca and Apure brought severe violence against civilians. In the first two months of 2022 alone, Arauca recorded 103 killings, the highest toll in years, as hitmen from both sides assassinated suspected collaborators and members of rival networks.[12] By mid-2022, the ELN had gained the upper hand in both Arauca and Apure. However, remnants of the FARC dissidents remain active deeper inside Venezuela and in other Colombian departments. Control of Apure is strategically valuable: the state borders not only Arauca but also connects northward to Táchira and Zulia and eastward along the Orinoco, providing access to smuggling routes that bypass Colombian authorities. The ELN has its own longstanding interests in Apure's routes and illicit economies.

FIGURE 3.7

Terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2007–2025

Terrorism increased drastically in Pakistan after falling to almost nothing in Afghanistan.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Border: Terrain and Geopolitics

Afghanistan's geography has profoundly shaped its security dynamics. Bordered by Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, and the Central Asian republics to the north, the country's mountainous frontiers have always been difficult to police. Since the 1990s, a range of insurgent and terrorist groups, including the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the Haqqani Network, TTP, and more recently IS-Khorasan Province (ISKP), have exploited these border regions for strategic advantage. Key border provinces became critical safe havens and transit zones: Nangarhar and Kunar in the east along the Pakistani border, Herat and Nimroz in the west along the Iranian border, and Badakhshan in the north bordering Tajikistan. These groups used the frontiers for sanctuary, for recruiting fighters from ethnic communities that span the border, for smuggling weapons, narcotics, and goods, and for launching cross-border attacks and incursions.

Figure 3.7 shows the trajectory of terrorist attacks in both countries. Pakistan's numbers declined steadily from 2013 to 2021 before spiking sharply from 2022 onwards, while Afghanistan's incidents dropped significantly after 2021. In the past three years there have been 2,892 terrorist attacks in the region, resulting in 2,965 deaths.

1990s: Afghan Civil War and Taliban Rise to Power

During the 1990s, Afghanistan's borders played a central role in the Taliban's emergence. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the collapse of the Moscow-backed regime in 1992, Afghanistan fragmented under competing warlords. The Taliban emerged from the south, likely with support from across the Pakistani border.[13] The Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, particularly the Pashtun tribal belt, was notoriously porous, allowing fighters and supplies to move across with little interference.[14] Taliban convoys from Pakistan crossed the border regularly.

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), made up of seven agencies and six frontier regions, sat technically within Pakistan but operated largely outside either government's control, governed instead by local tribal groups. The area is majority Pashtun, though composed of different clans, and the Pashtun population spans both sides of the border, making up around 42 per cent of Afghanistan's population and 15 per cent of Pakistan's. Jihadist groups in Afghanistan have long argued that FATA should be autonomous and belong to neither country. The TTP draws most of its fighters from Pashtun communities in the area, though multiple tribal groups are represented in its ranks. This cross-border ethnic continuity made the tribal belt a natural operating ground for armed groups on both sides of the frontier.

The Pashtun tribes straddling the Durand Line provided natural sanctuary and recruits for the Taliban. Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal agencies, including North and South Waziristan, Kurram, and Khyber, sit directly along Afghanistan's eastern and southern border. These areas, home to the same Pashtun communities as on the Afghan side, became rear bases where Taliban fighters could rest, train, and recruit with local support. Many early Taliban members were educated in Pakistani madrassas within Afghan refugee communities, and cross-border recruitment was driven by religious networks and the promise of restoring order to a war-torn Afghanistan. From its beginnings in 1994, the Taliban was essentially a cross-border movement.

The border's permeability also sustained a thriving smuggling economy that the Taliban used for revenue. Under the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement, goods intended for landlocked Afghanistan could enter Pakistan duty-free, but large quantities were diverted and smuggled back into Pakistani markets. By seizing border towns and highways, the Taliban began taxing this smuggling traffic. One estimate put the Taliban's earnings from taxing smugglers along routes like Kandahar-Herat and through the Khyber Pass at around 75 million USD in 1997.[15]

In 1996, after being expelled from Sudan, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda moved to Afghanistan, entering via Pakistan. The Taliban welcomed the group and granted them sanctuary, primarily in the eastern borderlands. Al-Qaeda established training camps in provinces including Khost, Paktia, and Kandahar. Throughout the late 1990s, militants from the Arab world, Pakistan, and Central Asia freely crossed the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to attend these camps before returning to their home countries or other conflict zones. The Haqqani Network, led by Jalaluddin Haqqani, played a key role in enabling this movement. Based in eastern Afghanistan and allied with the Taliban, Haqqani controlled cross-border routes through Waziristan in Pakistan and had hosted Arab volunteers since the 1980s. These same routes later facilitated al-Qaeda's relocation into Afghanistan.[16]

2001–2014: US-Led Intervention and Cross-Border Insurgency

The US-led invasion in late 2001 drove the Taliban from power, but Afghanistan's porous borders quickly became both an escape route and the staging ground for an enduring insurgency. After the fall of Kabul, thousands of Taliban, Haqqani Network, and al-Qaeda fighters fled across the Pakistani border to escape US airstrikes and the Northern Alliance advance. In December 2001, Osama bin Laden narrowly evaded capture at Tora Bora in Nangarhar before retreating into Pakistan's tribal areas. This established a pattern that would persist for years: whenever US or NATO forces applied pressure, insurgents would slip across the Pakistani frontier, where coalition troops could not follow.[17]

By 2003, the Taliban's leadership had regrouped in Pakistan's frontier regions. The so-called Quetta Shura, the movement's top leadership council, established itself in Quetta in Balochistan, while the Haqqani Network and affiliated Taliban fighters set up in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, particularly North and South Waziristan. Al-Qaeda's surviving leadership also found refuge in FATA or in Pakistani cities. Although Pakistan officially banned the Taliban as part of its post 9/11 alliance with the United States, the border areas remained largely ungoverned and porous. By 2005, a steady insurgent revival was underway. Taliban commander Sirajuddin Haqqani, based in Miram Shah in North Waziristan, orchestrated cross-border attacks into Afghanistan's neighbouring provinces of Khost and Paktia with impunity.[18] Between 2006 and 2008, the Taliban were launching large-scale incursions from Pakistan. The Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier had become the central front of the war: insurgents could train and rearm in Pakistan, then infiltrate through hundreds of mountain passes. US and NATO forces stationed along the border in Kunar, Paktika, Kandahar, and elsewhere faced a constant flow of fighters crossing from Pakistan at night. Coalition outposts like Wanat and Kamdesh in Kunar and Nuristan suffered deadly attacks orchestrated from Pakistani safe havens in the late 2000s. In response, the US increasingly turned to drone strikes in FATA between 2004 and 2011 to target insurgent leaders. Pakistan eventually began fencing the 2,600km Durand Line in the 2010s, but until then insurgents and smugglers moved freely.

The Haqqani Network was the clearest example of cross-border insurgency during this period. Headquartered in Pakistan's tribal areas, the network conducted high-profile attacks deep inside Afghanistan. Haqqani fighters would cross from North Waziristan into Paktia, Paktika, and even Kabul to strike targets, including the 2008 Serena Hotel bombing and the 2011 US Embassy attack, before retreating to their Pakistani safe haven. From 2001-2014, Pakistan-based sanctuaries used by the Haqqani Network and the Taliban were a linchpin of the insurgency that wore down NATO forces. At the same time, the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) emerged in these same border areas but directed its violence at Pakistan itself.

The lack of a centralised military or governing authority in FATA before 2018 created further opportunities for armed groups to move into the area and recruit. The tribal areas were made up of multiple agencies and clans with no unified command structure. Since 2001, Pashtun communities in FATA have relied on traditional mechanisms such as jirgas (tribal councils) and lashkars (community militias) to resist militant groups, drawing on Pashtunwali, the customary tribal code that governs social order and conflict resolution at the local level. In response, militant organisations have deliberately targeted jirga members and lashkars to weaken tribal authority and erode community resistance.[19]

2015–2021: Drawdown, Taliban Resurgence, and Evolving Border Dynamics

After NATO's combat mission formally ended in late 2014, the Taliban rapidly resurged. Afghan government control shrank, and militants of various kinds further entrenched themselves in border zones. The cross-border nature of the insurgency became increasingly two-directional: the Afghan Taliban continued to rely on Pakistani sanctuaries to wage war, while the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) increasingly depended on Afghan territory to escape Pakistan's military operations. This period also saw the emergence of ISKP in Afghanistan, introducing new cross-border threats extending into Pakistan, Central Asia, and beyond.

In 2015, as the Taliban intensified their nationwide insurgency, Pakistan launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb to clear militants from North Waziristan. The offensive targeted some Pakistani Taliban and foreign jihadists, but notably spared Afghan Taliban factions. Leaders of the Haqqani Network and the Quetta Shura were reportedly warned, allowing many to relocate their fighters before operations began.[20] However, Pakistan's campaign degraded TTP bases but did not permanently cut the Afghan Taliban's cross-border lifeline. Taliban fighters could still retreat into Pakistan whenever Afghan or US forces applied pressure, and this access to cross-border refuge was pivotal to the Taliban's survival during the Afghan government's attempts to defeat them.

At the same time, the TTP was regrouping in Afghan safe havens. By 2015 and 2016, many TTP leaders had settled in eastern Afghanistan under the protection of the Afghan Taliban, using the porous frontier to rebuild their networks. From Afghan soil, TTP militants could slip across the border to launch attacks in Pakistan. As shown in Figure 3.8, attacks in Pakistan are heavily concentrated along the Afghan border. The dynamic became symmetrical: each side's militants found sanctuary in the other's territory, and the border effectively functioned as an ungovernable buffer zone where Afghan and Pakistani Taliban fighters could manoeuvre freely, undermining both states. In 2017, Pakistan began accelerating the fencing of the border to curb this two-way infiltration, but progress in remote areas was slow.

A major new actor, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), announced itself in early 2015. The group was formed by breakaway factions of the TTP and Pakistani jihadists, along with some disaffected Afghan Taliban, and established its initial presence in eastern Afghanistan. The choice of Nangarhar was strategic: its mountainous border with Pakistan had long been beyond full government control. Over 2015 and 2016, ISKP built strongholds in Nangarhar's border districts, violently displacing established smuggling networks and even challenging the Taliban for control of the frontier.[21] The porous Pakistan-Afghan border was central to ISKP's emergence, as fighters loyal to Islamic State flowed in from Pakistan's tribal areas. The group also attracted Central Asian fighters, including former members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), who pledged allegiance to IS.

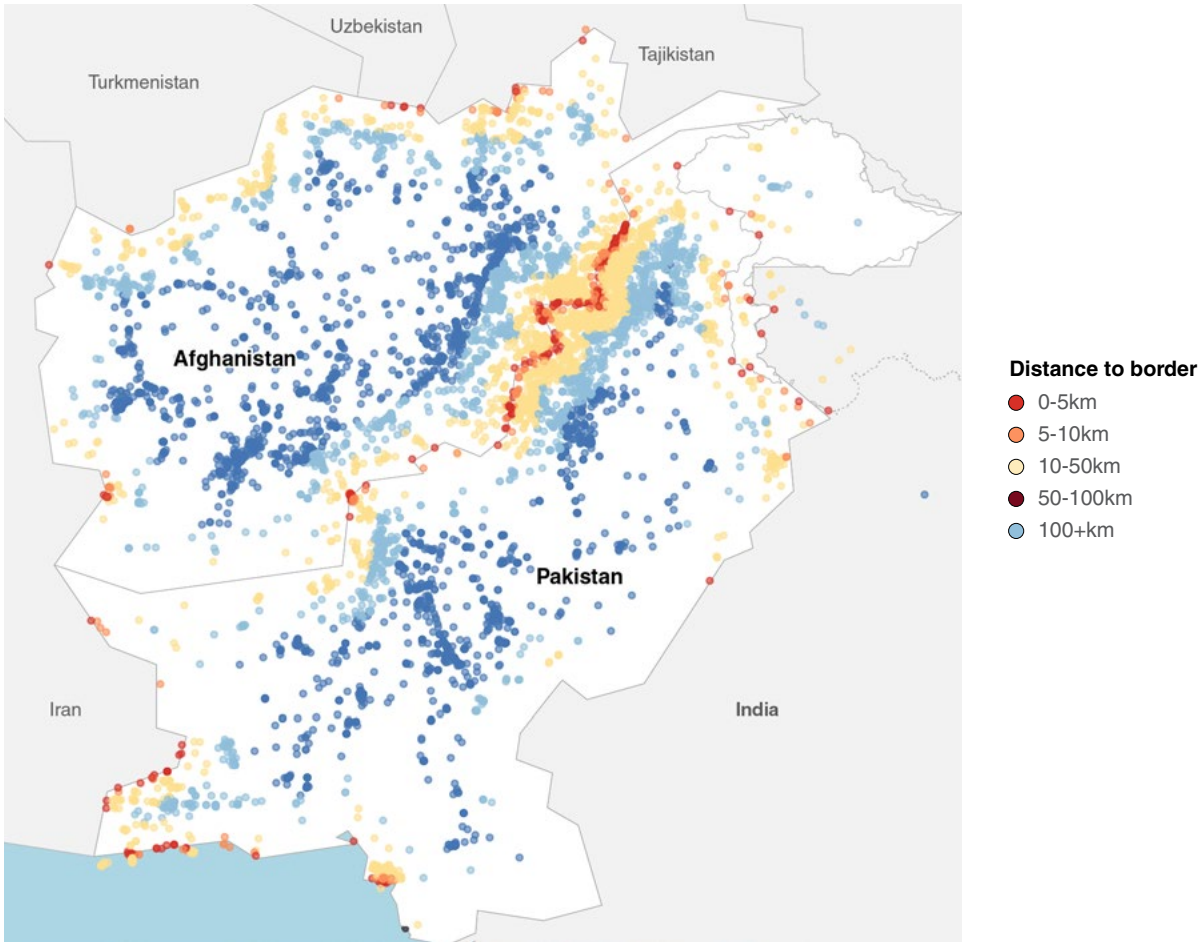
By 2018, ISKP had expanded northward, establishing cells in northern Afghanistan where it again exploited border dynamics. Jowzjan province borders Turkmenistan, and IS-K connected with IMU remnants operating there. The group's presence introduced a new cross-border threat extending well beyond Afghanistan. ISKP claimed responsibility for a 2018 attack in Tajikistan that killed four Western cyclists, and plotted attacks in Pakistan's major cities. It explicitly threatened neighbouring countries, issuing threats against the presidents of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in 2020 and stepping up propaganda and recruitment targeting Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz populations.[22]

With reduced international oversight after 2014, illicit smuggling intensified, benefiting militant groups on all sides. Opium production in Afghanistan hit record highs in the late 2010s, with narcotics flowing across all borders: south through Pakistan to Karachi or via Iran, and north through Central Asia toward Russia. The Taliban taxed the opium trade heavily to fund their war effort. Weapons continued to flow into Afghanistan via Iran and Pakistan, where black markets supplied the Taliban with explosives and ammunition. Human

FIGURE 3.8

Terrorist activity in Pakistan and Afghanistan, 2007–2025

Terrorist groups have been highly active on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

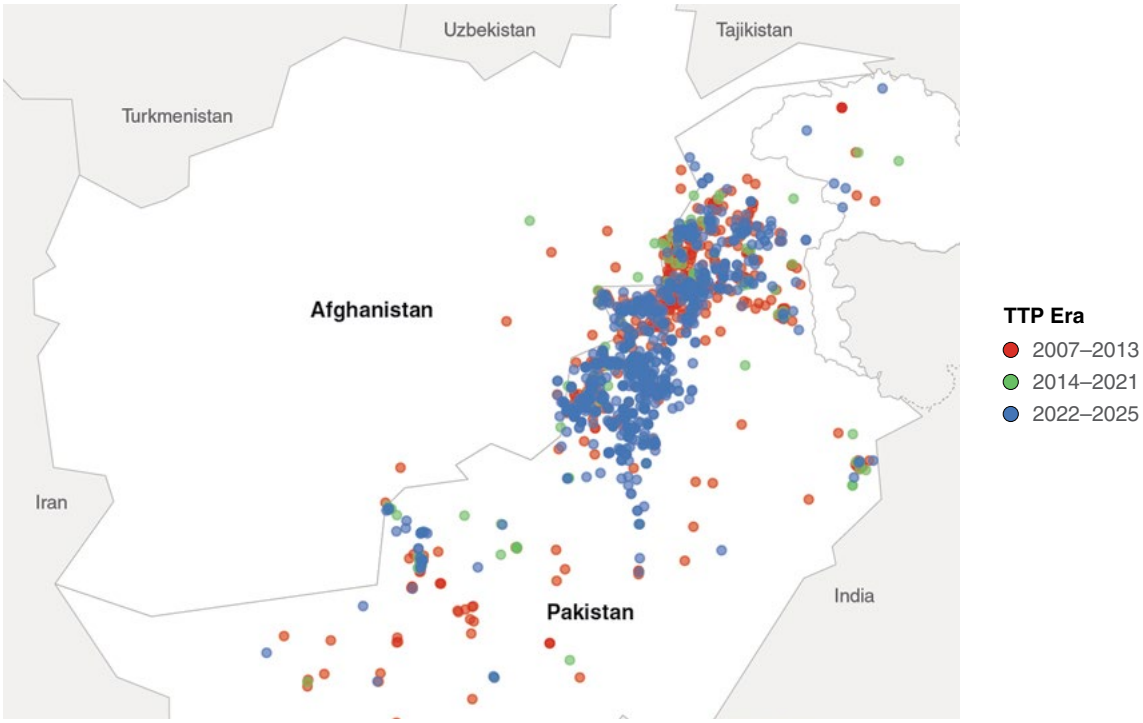


Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.9

TTP terrorist activity in Pakistan and Afghanistan, 2007–2025

TTP activity has surged since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan.



Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

trafficking and migrant flows across the Iranian border, driven by Afghans seeking work or asylum, were exploited by criminal networks that in some cases paid off local Taliban commanders for passage.

2021–2024: Post-Taliban Takeover and Contemporary Border Dynamics

The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 dramatically altered Afghanistan's political landscape, but the exploitation of porous borders by militant groups has persisted and, in some cases, intensified. Under the 2020 Doha Agreement, the Taliban promised to prevent terrorist groups from using Afghan soil. However, in practice, the country once again serves as a sanctuary and staging ground for a range of extremist groups, with consequences felt across all its borders. Since 2021, TTP violence in Pakistan has surged, ISKP has remained resilient and even expanded, narcotics and arms smuggling continue across multiple frontiers, and neighbouring states are increasingly seeking to seal off militant infiltration. This section examines how each border is being used in the post-2021 environment.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border remains the most active and strategically exploited frontier. After the Taliban's victory in 2021, the TTP found a friendly haven in Afghanistan, leading to a sharp escalation of attacks in Pakistan. Islamabad accuses the Taliban government of harbouring TTP militants who cross into Pakistan to strike military and civilian targets. An estimated 6,000 to 6,500 TTP fighters are now believed to be based in Afghanistan.[23] These TTP fighters enjoy greater freedom of movement in eastern Afghan provinces such as Kunar, Nangarhar, and Paktika, all of which border Pakistan. Between 2022 and 2024, TTP's use of Afghan territory for sanctuary and training drove a surge in cross-border attacks in Pakistan, reaching the highest levels in over a decade. Figure 3.9 shows where TTP has carried out attacks since 2007. The group relies on the rugged terrain of northern Pakistan to evade detection and capture.

Northern Borders with Central Asia: Jihadist Presence and Cross-Border Threats

Afghanistan's borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have taken on renewed strategic importance since 2021, as all three countries watch warily as militant groups entrench themselves just across the Amu Darya basin. The Taliban's victory emboldened regional jihadist groups that had long sheltered in Afghanistan, most notably Central Asian fighters allied with the Taliban and an expanding ISKP presence in the country's north.[24]

The Taliban's relationship with foreign fighters carried over from the insurgency era into government. Upon taking power, the Taliban integrated some foreign jihadists into their forces, assigning them responsibility for securing certain areas. In the north, they effectively delegated security in Badakhshan, which borders Tajikistan, to Jamaat Ansarullah, a Tajik Islamist group. By the time of the Taliban takeover, these Tajik fighters controlled stretches of the Tajikistan frontier. Tajikistan's government has refused to recognise the Taliban and has cited the presence of terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan as a key concern.[25]

There have been clashes along the border. In 2022, Tajik border guards exchanged fire with Taliban forces, reportedly including Tajik militants, who approached the frontier. Tajik authorities have also intercepted infiltrators: in May 2023, three Jamaat Ansarullah militants were killed attempting to cross from Afghanistan into Tajikistan. Tajikistan has fortified its border with Russian assistance, but the extremely rugged terrain makes it impossible to seal completely.[26]

ISKP has exploited northern Afghanistan's porous borders not only to intimidate neighbours with rockets, but also to facilitate recruitment and potential infiltration. The group has accelerated online recruiting in Central Asian languages, targeting disaffected youth in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. There is concern that ISKP could use Afghanistan as a training hub for operatives to infiltrate Central Asia posing as traders or refugees. In 2023, Russian officials warned of some 4,000 ISKP members present in northern Afghanistan aiming to destabilise Central Asia.[27] ISKP was implicated in a 2021 plot to bomb the Turkmenistan embassy in Kabul, and in late 2022 several Uzbeks in Kabul were arrested for planning attacks on Uzbekistan.

The Central Sahel: Weak State Capacity in the Borderlands

The central Sahel region has become the epicentre of terrorism in the last decade. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have collectively recorded almost 4,500 terrorist attacks in the past two decades, which resulted in almost 17,000 deaths. Many thousands more have been killed in the broader conflict. All three countries have been heavily affected by political instability, with each experiencing at least one military coup in the last decade. All three are also dealing with an insurgency that operates in border areas.

The jihadist insurgencies in the Central Sahel have been shaped from the outset by borderland dynamics. The 2012 Islamist rebellion in Mali grew out of the collapse of the Libyan state and an alliance between jihadist groups and returning Tuareg separatists, and borders were central to its evolution from the start. When France intervened through Operation Serval, militants fled Mali through porous borders with Algeria, Libya, and Niger, using those countries as bases from which to stage periodic attacks. The large-scale intervention, alongside the UN peacekeeping mission, pushed groups into neighbouring states or into border regions where they could move freely between Mali, Algeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, beyond the reach of French forces who lacked the jurisdiction to follow.[28] This cross-border movement also reshaped recruitment. Marginalised Fulani communities, whose lives and livelihoods already spanned national borders, were drawn into relationships with the various Islamist groups active during this early period, providing a new base of support and fighters.

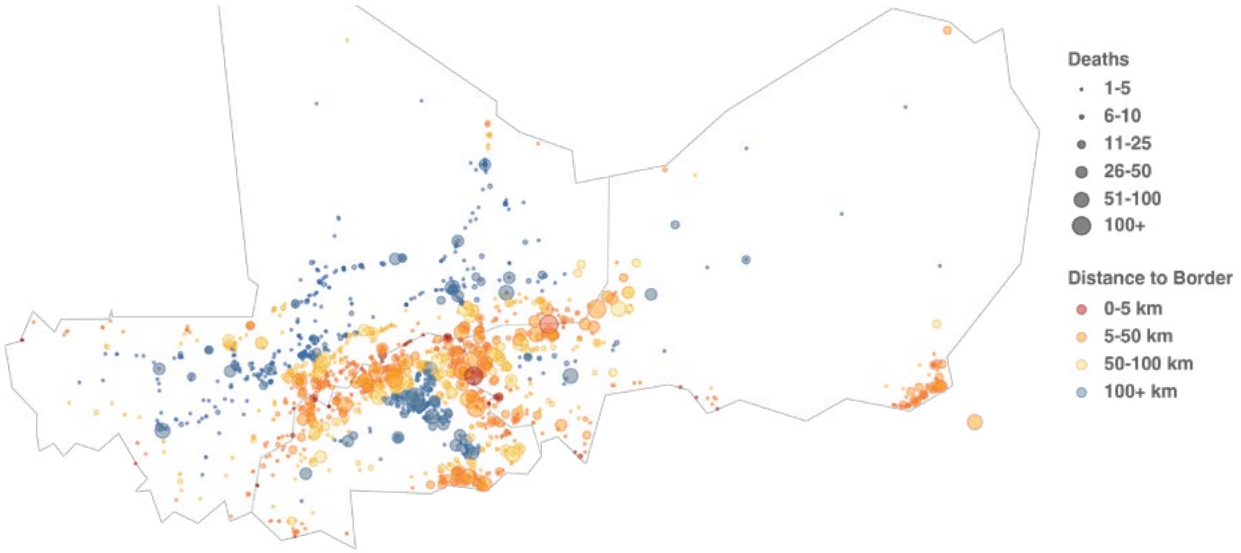
A key strategic advantage for jihadist groups has been the lack of effective cross-border security coordination among Sahelian states. Figure 3.10 shows the lethality of attacks in the border areas between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. As groups exploit these borders, their attacks near or along them tend to be more deadly, with the absence of coordinated security allowing them to mount larger operations. Algeria had led a regional counterterrorism framework (CEMOC) with Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, but it proved inadequate when the Mali crisis erupted in 2012. The January 2013 attack on the In Amenas gas plant in Algeria illustrates the point. Planned by Mokhtar Belmokhtar's unit of AQIM, it involved gunmen who likely crossed through the Mali-Algeria border region to assault the facility, using the international border as both their route in and their route out.[29]

Similarly, in 2014 and 2015, as French and UN forces tried to stabilise Mali, AQIM units evaded them by retreating into the unpoliced Mali-Mauritania frontier or crossing into Niger's sparsely populated west. By 2015, Mali's conflict was no longer contained within its borders. It had become a regional insurgency incubated in the borderlands.

FIGURE 3.10

Deaths from terrorism in the Central Sahel, 2017–2025

The tri-border region is the world's most active terrorism hotspot.

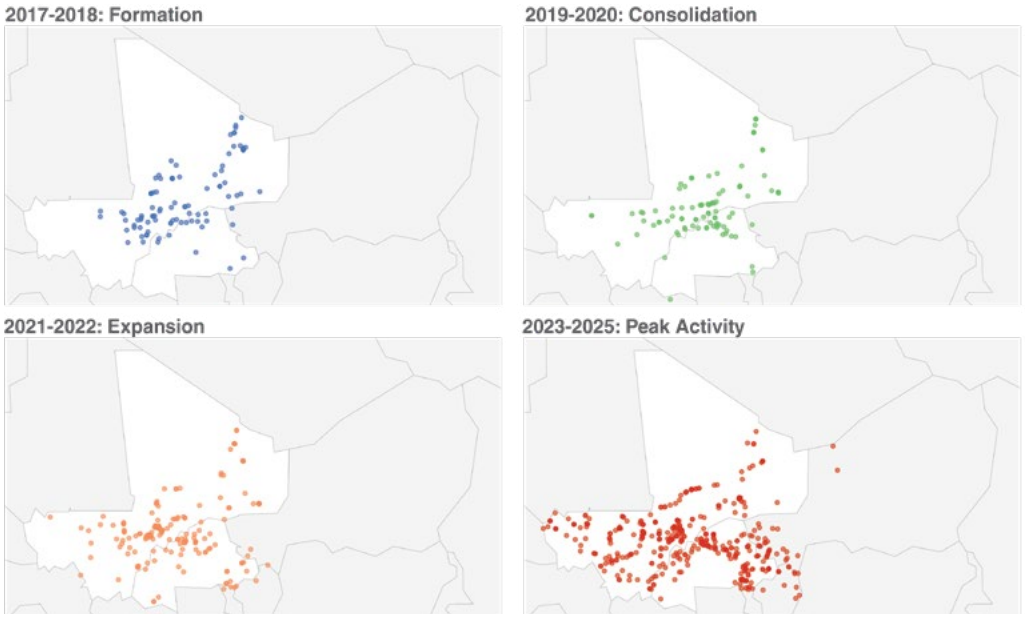


Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.11

JNIM terrorist activity in the Sahel by era, 2017–2025

By 2023, JNIM was heavily active in all three Central Sahel states.



Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

The pressure from French and UN operations likely drove Katiba Macina, one of the forerunners of JNIM, to expand into Burkina Faso, a country with no prior history of Islamic extremism. From 2015 onwards, jihadist groups extended their operations into Burkina Faso and Niger, concentrating in the tri-border area with Mali known as Liptako-Gourma. Challenging terrain and minimal state presence made it difficult for Malian forces, as well as French and UN interventions, to succeed even within Mali itself. Beyond its borders, the problem was starker: national boundaries constrained state and international forces, but not the armed groups they sought to contain.[30]

Northern and eastern Burkina Faso likely fell into insurgency after 2015 as a direct result of cross-border dynamics. In late 2016, a Burkinabè jihadist faction called Ansaroul Islam launched an uprising in Soum province, just across the border from Mali. The group's emergence was directly tied to Mali's conflict. Weapons flowed freely across the Mali-Burkina border, and captured militants later described arms deals between jihadists from both countries taking place at the frontier, with fighters on either side openly trading guns and supplies.[31] By 2018, large parts of eastern and northern Burkina Faso, particularly along the borders with Mali and Niger, were under militant control or influence. Government presence collapsed in border districts, and jihadists began using eastern Burkina Faso, especially Tapoa and Kompienga provinces, as a base for further expansion.

Niger experienced a similar pattern in its western regions bordering Mali and Burkina Faso. The Tillabéri and Tahoua regions became theatres of frequent attacks by ISGS and JNIM after 2016. The Mali-Niger frontier is largely open scrubland inhabited by interrelated Tuareg and Fulani communities, terrain well suited to militant infiltration. Jihadists established hideouts on both sides of the border, moving back and forth to evade airstrikes and raids, effectively traversing a circuit through multiple countries that allowed them to stay ahead of counterterrorism operations.

Within this zone, groups also exploited protected areas and forests that straddle national borders. The tri-border W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) parks complex, a wildlife park system along the Burkina-Niger-Benin border, gradually became a jihadist refuge by 2018. Burkina Faso's eastern forests in the Arli and W parks were largely beyond government control, and jihadists moved into these dense border forests to hide, rest, and train fighters. Security reports described eastern Burkina Faso as a safe haven outside state control, with fighters from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso all sheltering there. They also tapped into cross-border smuggling routes in the area for income. When international and regional forces stepped up sweep operations in the Sahel in 2020, temporarily slowing jihadist expansion, the militants responded by falling back into these cross-border hideouts to regroup.[32]

From 2022 onward, jihadist groups in the central Sahel increasingly leveraged borderlands to expand beyond Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, marking a qualitative shift in the conflict. Following the withdrawal of French forces from Mali, political instability following military coups, and overstretched national armies, jihadist actors - particularly JNIM and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP/ISGS) - have pursued geographic diversification by exploiting weakly governed peripheral regions along southern and eastern borders.

JNIM has been the principal driver of expansion toward coastal West Africa, using southern Burkina Faso as a staging ground as shown in Figure 3.11. From bases in Kompienga and Tapoa provinces, JNIM units infiltrated northern Benin, Togo, and intermittently Côte d'Ivoire. These incursions have been deliberately incremental, with JNIM initially deploying reconnaissance teams and religious intermediaries rather than large combat units. This mirrors earlier JNIM strategies in central Mali and northern Burkina Faso.

A critical enabler has been the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) protected area complex, which spans Burkina Faso, Niger, and Benin. This forested cross-border zone has served as a safe haven where militants can evade security forces, train fighters, and coordinate operations across all three countries.[33] By 2024, JNIM had established a sustained presence in Benin's Alibori region, and southern Niger's Dosso region, carrying out attacks on border security posts and along logistical routes.

JNIM's strategy in coastal West Africa has focused on embedding within communities rather than seizing territory. The group targets marginalised border populations, exploiting local grievances over land access, park restrictions, and pastoralist tensions, and uses border regions as transit corridors and fallback zones. Coastal states are treated less as primary theatres of operation and more as strategic rear areas for regrouping and expansion. In 2025, the group was reported to be increasing its activity around southwestern Mali, with encroachments into Côte d'Ivoire and attacks near the borders with Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania.[34]

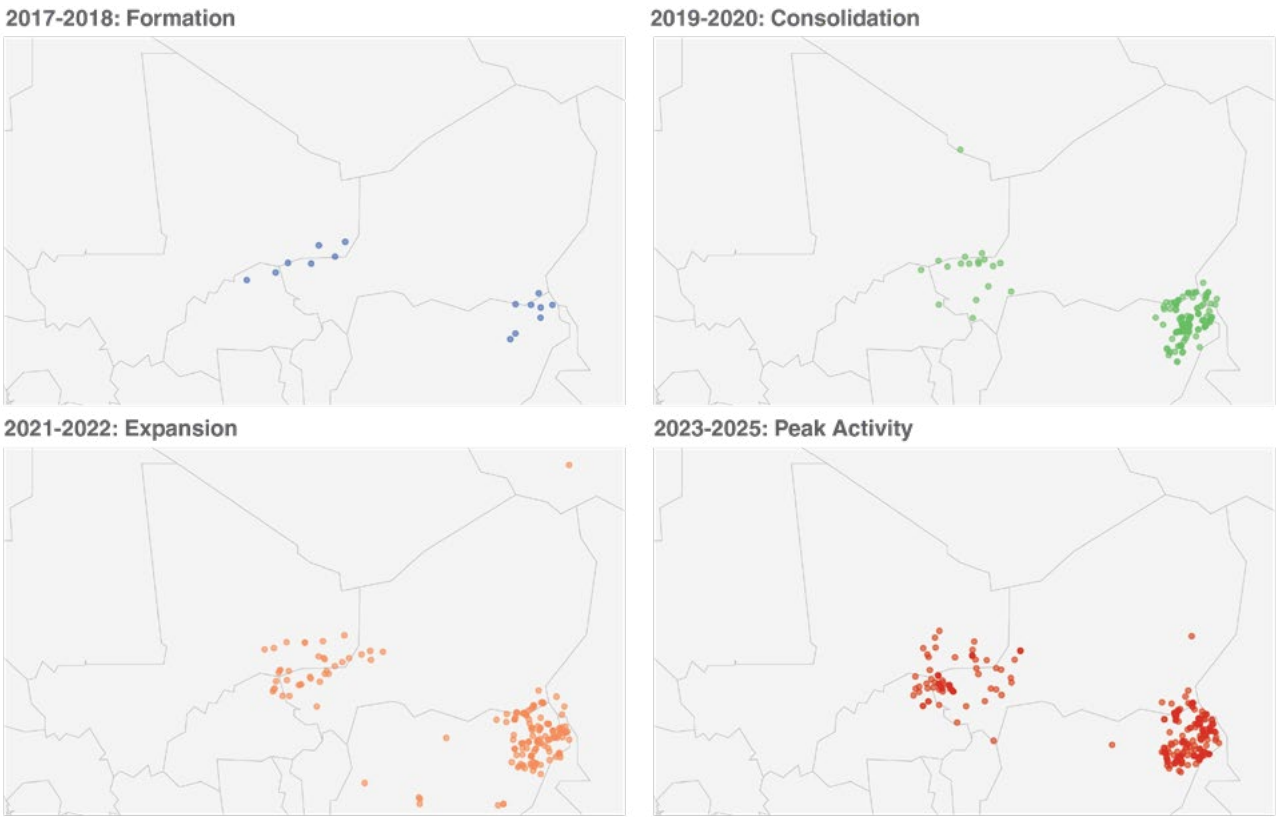
The attacks near these borders are linked to JNIM's strategy of blockading fuel and trade flowing from coastal West Africa to Bamako, effectively placing the capital under economic siege in an attempt to force the collapse of the military junta or ultimately capture the city. This tactic relies on the group's ability to operate in the peripheral border zones of neighbouring West African states, where it can avoid detection and exploit the gaps created by political disagreements and uneven military capabilities between countries.[35]

Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) has pursued a parallel but distinct borderland strategy, consolidating control in northeastern Mali and western Niger while expanding eastward toward northwestern Nigeria, as shown in Figure 3.12. From 2022 onwards, ISSP developed logistical and recruitment networks along the Niger-Nigeria border, particularly in Niger's Dosso region and Nigeria's Sokoto and Kebbi states. By late 2023, these had become active operational zones, with attacks on security forces and infrastructure including repeated sabotage of the Benin-Niger oil pipeline. This expansion reflects ISSP's effort to connect the Sahelian jihadist theatre with jihadist networks in Nigeria, building a broader Islamic State-aligned operational corridor across the region. As in earlier phases of the insurgency, ISSP has relied on porous borders to move fighters, evade pressure, and exploit the jurisdictional gaps between national security forces.[36]

FIGURE 3.12

IS terrorist activity in the Sahel by era, 2017–2025

Although not as prominent as JNIM, IS activity in the Sahel has followed the same pattern of escalation.

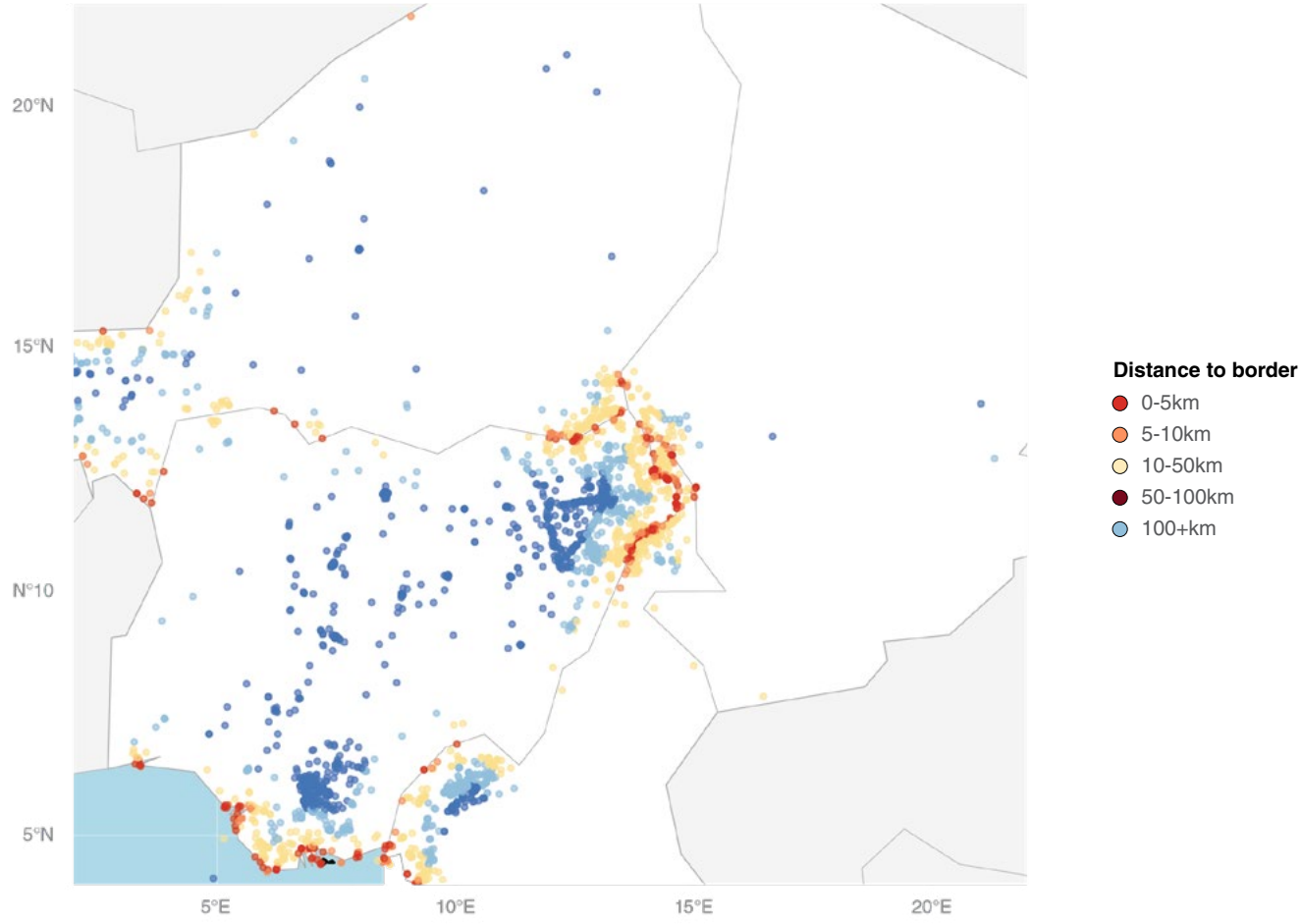


Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.13

Terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin region, 2007–2025

The tri-border region between Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad has become a terrorist hotspot.



Source: TerrorismTracker, IEP Calculations

The Lake Chad Basin

The Lake Chad Basin, encompassing northeastern Nigeria, southeastern Niger, western Chad, and northern Cameroon, has been the centre of a prolonged jihadist insurgency. Boko Haram, its splinter group the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and the al-Qaeda-linked Ansaru, have all used the region's porous borders to sustain and expand their operations. Colonial-era boundaries cut through ethnic communities and remote terrain, leaving poorly monitored frontiers that militants exploit for sanctuary, movement, and supply.

Extremist groups routinely evade counterterrorism pressure by crossing into neighbouring countries when pursued, and launch raids against both civilian and military targets on either side of the border. The fragmented security response among the Lake Chad Basin countries, combined with the region's difficult geography of marshes, wetlands, islands, dense bush, and mountains, has allowed a de facto cross-border insurgency to take hold - one that no single country can effectively address alone.

Figure 3.13 shows terrorist incidents along borders in the region, illustrating how the combination of tough terrain, shifting jurisdictions, and established trade routes makes the area persistently vulnerable to terrorist activity. Since 2007, over 15,000 people have been killed in terrorist attacks in Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon, with over 4,000 terrorist incidents recorded.

Boko Haram, officially Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunnah lid-Da'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), was founded in the early 2000s in Maiduguri, Nigeria by cleric Mohammed Yusuf. It remained relatively low-profile until an armed uprising in July 2009 against the Nigerian government, which led to Yusuf's death in police custody and the killing of some 800 followers.[37] Surviving militants, led by Yusuf's deputy Abubakar Shekau, went underground and reorganised. By 2010–2011, Boko Haram re-emerged with a violent campaign of bombings and shootings in northeastern Nigeria. As the group became more aggressive, it also began to test international boundaries. Nigeria's far northeast borders Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. These borders are largely remote, thinly policed, and cut across villages of shared ethnicity. Taking advantage of this, Boko Haram militants could strike in Nigeria and then slip into border communities across the boundary to avoid pursuit.

By late 2013, Boko Haram conducted its first known attacks in Cameroon's Far North region. The group established hideouts in the Mandara Mountains and forests along the Nigeria–Cameroon frontier. Nigerian forces, restricted from entering Cameroonian territory without permission, often saw militants flee across the line to safety.[38] Cameroon's military presence in the Far North was limited at this time, allowing Boko Haram to use border villages as rear bases and to procure arms via smuggling routes through Cameroon.

INSURGENCY BECOMES REGIONAL (2014–2015)

Boko Haram's activities dramatically escalated in 2014, as shown in Figure 3.14. In April of that year, the group kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno State, sparking international outrage and the #BringBackOurGirls campaign.[39] The Chibok kidnapping, along with a sustained campaign of bombings and massacres, established Boko Haram as one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups. Building on this momentum, the group escalated its cross-border operations. In 2014, militants attacked villages and military posts in northern Cameroon, drawing Cameroon fully into the conflict. By late 2014, Boko Haram controlled an estimated 20,000 square kilometres of territory in Nigeria near the Cameroon border. In January 2015, the group attacked the multinational military base at Baga on Nigeria's border with Chad, killing large numbers of civilians and displacing thousands into Chad.

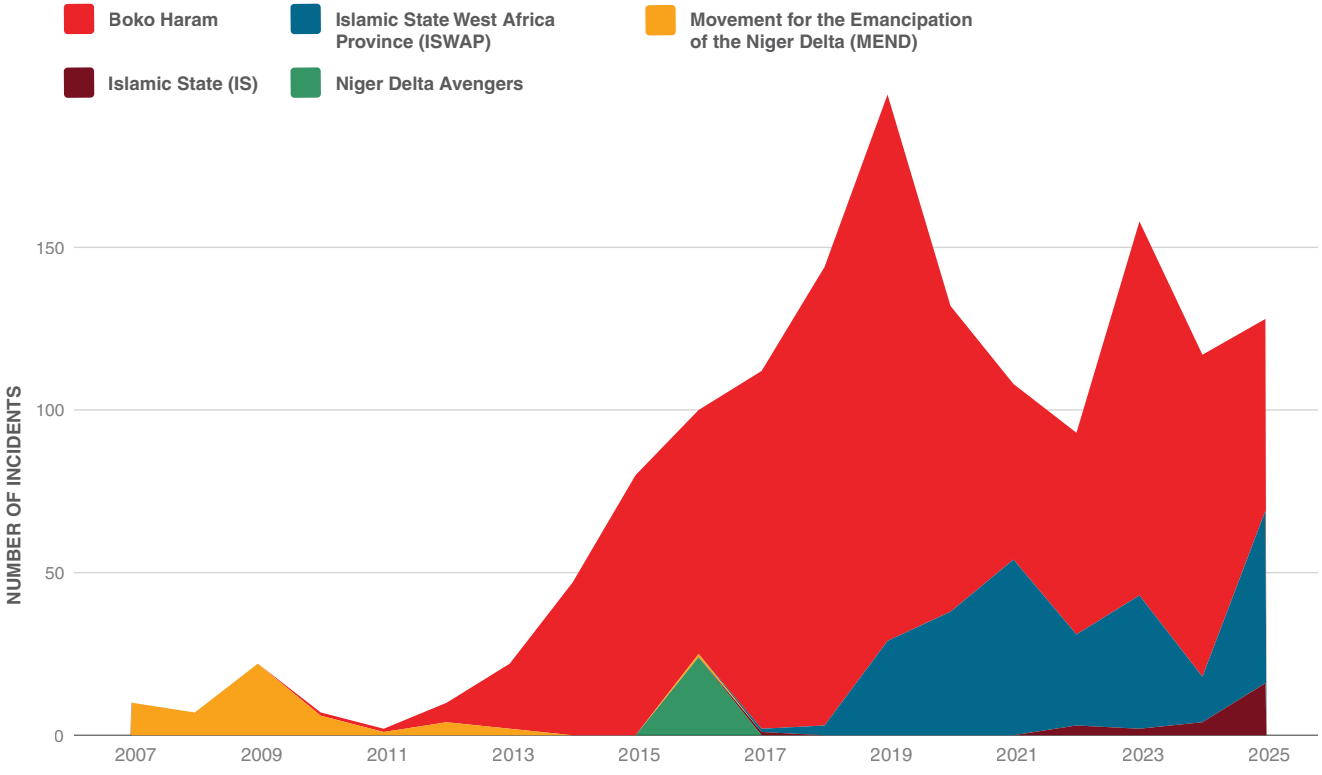
In March 2015, Abubakar Shekau pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS), and Boko Haram was formally recognised by IS as its 'West Africa Province' (ISWAP). This development signalled the group's intent to place its jihad in a transnational context. Even before the IS affiliation, the insurgency had clearly overflowed Nigeria's borders. By early 2015, Niger's Diffa region, directly across the border from Boko Haram strongholds in Borno, was under frequent attack. Over 70 attacks occurred in Niger's Diffa region during 2015 alone. Likewise, Cameroon's Far North saw many incursions with over 30 cross-border raids in Cameroon in the first half of 2016.[40] In June 2015, Boko Haram carried out its first known attack inside Chad, using suicide bombers in N'Djamena and attacks on villages around Lake Chad.

Faced with this regional threat, the Lake Chad Basin countries increased cooperation. In early 2015, a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was reactivated under the auspices of the African Union, comprising troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Benin. The 10,000-strong MNJTF coordinated a regional offensive that succeeded in flushing Boko Haram out of many Nigerian towns in 2015.[41] Boko Haram fighters were often forced to retreat into hard-to-reach border zones, such as the marshes and islands of Lake Chad, the Mandara hills along Cameroon, and the dense Sambisa Forest on the Nigeria–Cameroon border. While the group was driven from its peak territorial holdings by late 2015, it adapted by turning to guerilla tactics and cross-border terrorism.

FIGURE 3.14

Terrorist attacks by group in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad, 2007–2025

Both Boko Haram and Islamic State have increased their activity in the Lake Chad Basin region.

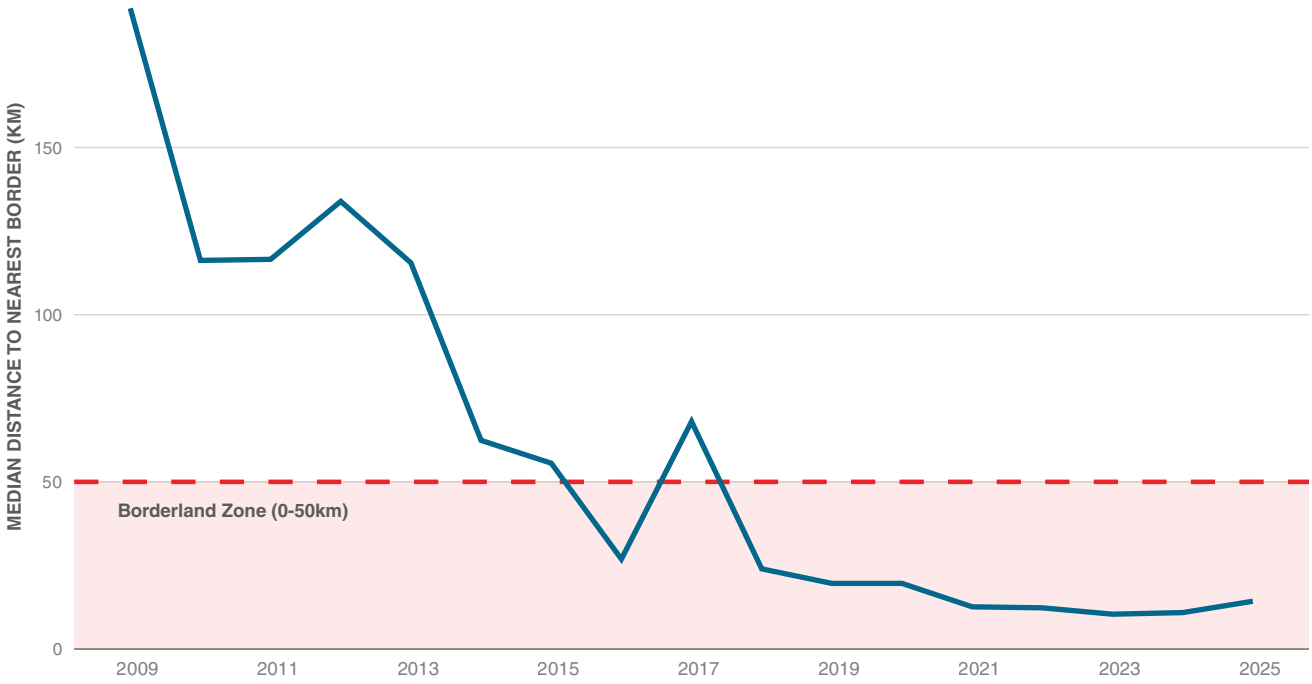


Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

FIGURE 3.15

Median distance to nearest border, Boko Haram terrorist attacks, 2009–2025

Since 2018, the median distance of Boko Haram attacks has been in the borderland zone.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

Factors Enabling Cross-Border Insurgency

By 2020, Boko Haram and ISWAP had shown remarkable resilience, in large part because of the Lake Chad Basin's geography and security gaps. Porous borders are a fundamental factor: the region's boundaries often run through remote areas, from the densely vegetated shores of Lake Chad to savannah and mountain terrain. Security forces are stretched thin, and Nigeria alone has hundreds of known illegal border crossing points. Militants easily bypass official checkpoints, moving along footpaths and waterways familiar to local populations. Communities that straddle borders, such as the Kanuri, Hausa, and Shuwa Arab, sometimes provide kinship networks that insurgents draw on for shelter and recruits, blurring the line between internal and cross-border conflict. As shown in Figure 3.15, Boko Haram has increasingly operated closer to borders over time, with the group's median attack distance falling to under 50km from a border since 2016.

The fragmented security response before 2015 was another key factor. Each country initially confronted Boko Haram on its own, and the militants exploited this. In 2013 and 2014, Nigeria was reluctant to allow pursuit across borders, and Cameroon was hesitant to provoke Boko Haram, meaning insurgents could attack in one country and find refuge in the next. This began to change with the formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and improved cooperation from the middle of the decade, but differences in capabilities and priorities among the member states have persisted.

The case of Lake Chad's islands is illustrative: Over half of Lake Chad's area is dotted with small islands and swampland.[42] These fall at the intersection of all four countries, yet for years none of the national militaries maintained a strong, permanent presence on the remote islands. Boko Haram (especially ISWAP) capitalised on this void, establishing camps and arms caches on islands just inside Niger's or Chad's territory to avoid Nigerian troops.[43] When pressured in Nigeria, they would relocate via boats through the lake's maze of channels into Cameroon or Chad. The multinational force has mounted island-clearing operations, but sustaining control is difficult without constant joint patrols.

Logistically, cross-border smuggling has been vital to the jihadists. Arms flow into northeast Nigeria through the Sahel. Following the Libyan civil war, weapons proliferated southward. Boko Haram has obtained assault rifles, machine guns, and even rocket launchers via traffickers moving through Niger's borders.[44] Porous frontiers also enable illicit trade in fuel, fish, and cattle, which Boko Haram and ISWAP tax to fund their insurgency. The fish trade on Lake Chad is one example. Dried fish shipped from insurgent-controlled areas into Niger or Nigeria became a source of revenue until authorities cracked down on it around 2015. Military efforts up to 2020, while reducing Boko Haram's ability to hold cities, did not eliminate this ecosystem but rather forced it to adapt across borders.[45]

By 2020, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) had grown in strength and focused on the Lake Chad region, while the original Boko Haram faction led by Abubakar Shekau (often called JAS) was somewhat diminished and isolated in the Sambisa Forest. A defining moment came in May 2021, when Abubakar Shekau was killed. ISWAP quickly moved to capitalise on the vacuum left by Shekau. ISWAP deepened its ties with Islamic State central, receiving strategic guidance and possibly financial support.[46]

Almost immediately, shifts in insurgent behaviour were observed. ISWAP has generally pursued a 'hearts and minds' approach toward local Muslim populations, de-emphasising the kind of mass-casualty attacks on Muslim civilians that were the hallmark of Shekau's leadership. After Shekau's elimination, attacks on civilians in the region fell. In Borno State, Nigeria JAS (Shekau's faction) had been responsible for roughly 43 per cent of attacks and dozens of civilian deaths in the three months before Shekau's death; in the three months after, JAS's share of attacks dropped to four per cent, with almost no civilian fatalities attributed to the group.[47] The Boko Haram insurgency continued, but now under ISWAP's banner for the most part.

Strategically, ISWAP in the post-Shekau era has reinforced its cross-border capabilities. The group operates in an area that spans national boundaries in the Lake Chad Basin. After 2021, ISWAP created additional semi-autonomous operational units (provinces or *wilayat*) within the Lake Chad region to manage its expanding territory. ISWAP has continued to launch raids into Niger's Diffa region and Cameroon's Far North, though it often attempts to win over local Muslim communities by avoiding indiscriminate violence. Its governance approach includes providing limited services, protection, and Islamic justice in areas where state presence is weak.[48] In contrast, the remnant JAS faction under Bakura reverted to more bandit-like behaviour, allegedly plundering villages and kidnapping for ransom, which earned them less local support.

Evolving Counterterrorism Responses (2021–2023)

Counterinsurgency operations since 2020 have had to adjust to the new realities. Infighting among extremists created a window of opportunity for stabilisation in late 2021. The Nigerian military, alongside regional partners, sought to encourage defections and surrenders. By 2022, Nigerian authorities claimed that over 100,000 Boko Haram/ISWAP fighters and family members had surrendered since the previous year, a figure that likely includes many non-combatants but is still illustrative of significant militant demobilisation.[49] This mass surrender phenomenon is unprecedented in the conflict and has posed challenges in terms of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programs and managing ex-fighters.

Regionally, the MNJTF has remained a key framework for cooperation. In 2022, the MNJTF launched Operation Lake Sanity, a joint offensive to clear Boko Haram/ISWAP from the Lake Chad fringes and islands. While initially successful in striking insurgent camps, the operation exposed coordination issues: Chad's forces, for instance, participated only briefly before withdrawing due to other internal security priorities. Chad had been without its long-time leader Idriss Déby since April 2021, and the new government in N'Djamena was less eager to sustain large deployments against Boko Haram outside Chadian territory.[50] Consequently, by 2022–2023, Chad reduced its proactive operations against Lake Chad insurgents, focusing on guarding its own side of the lake. This left Nigeria and Cameroon carrying much of the combat burden in joint operations, with Niger's involvement fluctuating due to its own internal issues.

A major disruption to regional cooperation came in 2023. In July 2023, a military coup in Niger ousted the elected government. The coup strained Nigeria–Niger relations severely. Nigeria condemned the coup and backed ECOWAS sanctions on Niger. In retaliation, the ruling junta in Niger suspended security cooperation with Nigeria. For a time, the Niger–Nigeria border was closed, and Niger even accused Nigeria of conspiring with foreign powers to undermine the new regime. As a result, Niger withdrew from MNJTF operations and curtailed joint missions with Nigeria in late 2023.[51]

This was a setback for counterinsurgency, as Niger's forces had been instrumental in securing the western shores of Lake Chad and preventing Boko Haram infiltration among the 300,000+ Nigerian refugees in Diffa region. Local commanders on both sides reportedly kept up informal cooperation. The security fragmentation in the region thus worsened: with Chad less engaged since Déby's death, and Niger partially stepping back post-coup, only Cameroon remained consistently cooperative with Nigeria by 2024. Cameroonian forces continued to secure their Far North and often acted in concert with Nigerian units along the border, sharing intelligence and conducting concurrent operations to trap insurgents.[52] This uneven regional commitment has given jihadists openings to exploit one country's relative inaction against the others.

Despite these issues, there have been some improvements in counterterrorism tactics. Nigeria, for instance, acquired Super Tucano light attack aircraft from the US in 2021, and has increasingly used airstrikes to target insurgent camps, especially when ground troops are thinly stretched. In May 2025, swift air support helped Nigerian forces defend the garrison town of Damboa from an ISWAP onslaught, breaking up the attack and inflicting heavy militant casualties. Notably, ISWAP fighters began using more sophisticated weaponry, including drones for surveillance and even dropping explosives. Some evidence suggested foreign trainers (possibly Arab IS veterans) arrived in Lake Chad to teach ISWAP new techniques.[53]

The MNJTF has tried to integrate non-military measures to stabilise the region. Since 2019, a Regional Stabilisation Strategy has guided efforts to rebuild communities and provide services in liberated areas. The MNJTF established a Civil-Military Cooperation cell in 2020 to improve relations with civilians and coordinate humanitarian operations. This had positive effects: the joint force has largely avoided the abuses that plagued individual national armies in the past, with very few reports of MNJTF troops harming civilians. Projects like rebuilding clinics, drilling boreholes, and airing peace

messaging on local radio have been implemented to win hearts and minds. Such efforts are crucial because Boko Haram originally capitalised on local grievances and mistrust of the state.[54]

The jihadist threat in the Lake Chad Basin persisted throughout 2023 and 2025. ISWAP remained the most potent force, launching periodic large-scale attacks on military targets in Nigeria and Cameroon. In late 2024 and early 2025, ISWAP units mounted a wave of bold assaults against army bases and convoys in Borno and Far North Cameroon, temporarily overrunning outposts and ambushing troops.[55] These offensives prompted concerns that the insurgents were surging after a perceived lull.

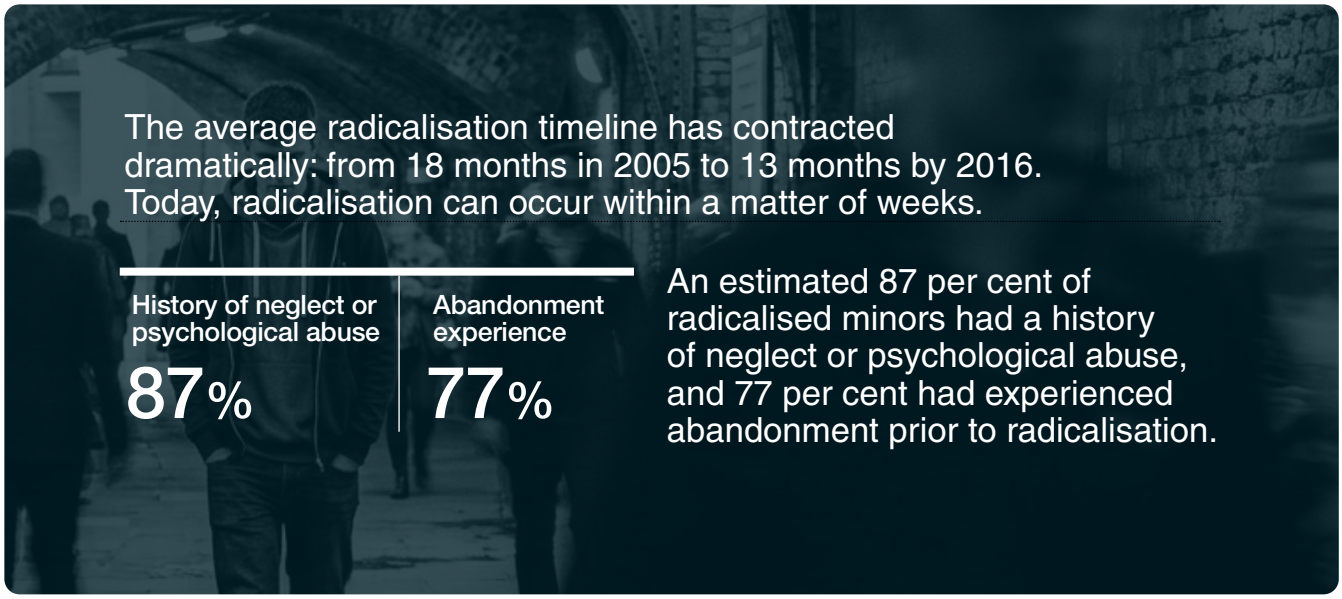
Cross-border mobility remains central to these militant operations. ISWAP and the remnants of JAS continue to pose a transnational threat, requiring sustained regional collaboration. Military pressure has kept them from holding major towns, unlike in 2014–2015, but large swathes of rural border territory remain danger zones where jihadists roam freely and even extract resources from locals.

42%

Youth radicalisation has been increasing rapidly in the past three years. Children and adolescents accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025, a threefold increase since 2021.

2/3

In 2024, teenagers were involved in nearly two-thirds of IS-linked arrests in Europe, and the total number of terrorist incidents in the West rose to 52, up from 32 the previous year.



The average radicalisation timeline has contracted dramatically: from 18 months in 2005 to 13 months by 2016. Today, radicalisation can occur within a matter of weeks.

History of neglect or psychological abuse

87%

Abandonment experience

77%

An estimated 87 per cent of radicalised minors had a history of neglect or psychological abuse, and 77 per cent had experienced abandonment prior to radicalisation.

Properties of Youth Radicalisation

Although youth radicalisation is becoming more common, plots involving youth are planned less well and more likely to be caught by security services. Between 2022 and 2025, 97 per cent of terrorist plots involving a minor were foiled, compared to a 68 per cent foil rate for adult-only plots.

93%

Lone-wolf actors carried out 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West over the last five years and were three times more likely to successfully execute an attack than groups of two or more plotters.

Motivations for youth radicalisation vary by region. In the West, alienation and social isolation are the key factors. In sub-Saharan Africa, 71 per cent of recruits cited human rights abuse by state security forces as the tipping point for joining a violent extremist group, while a quarter cited a total lack of job opportunities.

4 Trends in Youth Radicalisation

Introduction

The involvement of young people in terrorism and violent extremism has become one of the most pressing security concerns of the past decade. Across multiple regions and ideological contexts, minors and young adults have been recruited, radicalised, and in some cases deployed as operatives in terrorist plots. The rapid mobilisation of minors has become a critical vector of instability, with geopolitical disruptions such as the conflict in Gaza and the war in Ukraine amplifying extremist narratives and driving unprecedented levels of youth radicalisation.[1]

A radicalisation process that historically took months or even years can now take place within weeks or even days, driven by short-form online propaganda, algorithmic amplification, and the exploitation of developmental vulnerabilities.[2] While the primary target demographic for terrorist networks spans youths aged 15 to 25, active recruitment and ideological indoctrination have been documented in children as young as eight years old. This creates what counter-terrorism practitioners term an 'acceleration gap': the growing disparity between the speed of radicalisation and the capacity of states to detect and respond to it.[3]

Trends in youth radicalisation

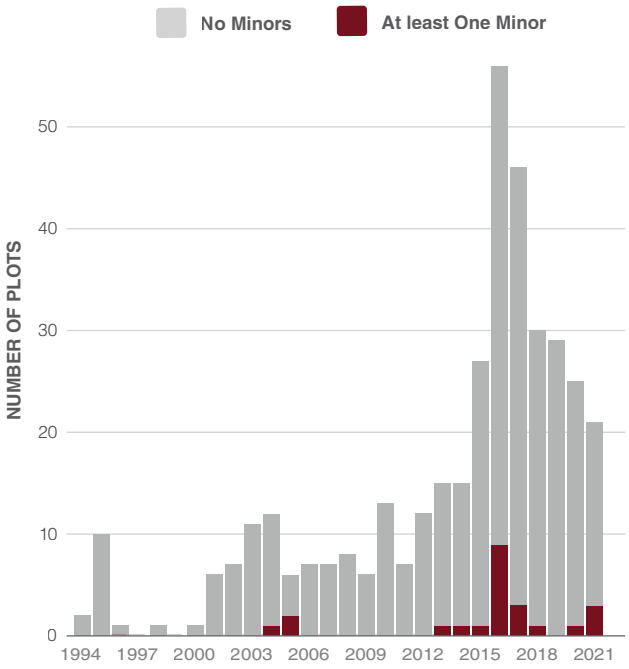
There has been a clear trend of increasing youth radicalisation. Although no single harmonised data source exists, reports from multiple regions and countries indicate that there has been a surge in young people and minors being investigated for terrorism offences since 2022. Children and adolescents accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025, representing a threefold increase since 2021.[4] In France, 18 minors were prosecuted for terrorism offences in 2024, comprising 20 per cent of all terrorist cases, a sharp rise from 15 cases in 2023 and merely two in 2022.[5] The Belgian intelligence service (VSSE) reported that one-third of its terrorist investigations between 2022 and 2024 concerned minors.[6]

In the United Kingdom, 82 minors were arrested for terrorism-related offences between April 2023 and March 2024, an exponential increase compared to 12 in 2019.[7] Data from the UK's Prevent programme for the year ending March 2025 recorded 8,778 total referrals, a 27 per cent rise from the previous year and the highest annual total since the programme's records began in 2015.[8] Within the Five-Eyes intelligence sharing alliance, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) reported that approximately 20 per cent of its priority counter-terrorism cases involved young people, with the Australian Federal Police investigating 35 minors for terrorism offences since 2020.[9]

FIGURE 4.1

Jihadist plots in Europe involving a minor, 1994–2021

Minor involvement in European jihadist plots was virtually non-existent before 2015.



Source: JPED

Data on minor involvement in terrorist attacks and plots is not available at the global level or for all ideologies, but is available for Europe from 1994 to 2021, as shown in Figure 4.1 Europe has experienced multiple waves of jihadist activity since the mid-1990s, progressing from the operations of networks linked to the Algerian GIA and al-Qaeda, through to the Islamic State-inspired plots that surged after 2014. A striking feature of the most recent wave has been the increasing involvement of minors in planned or successful attacks.

Between 1994 and 2012, the involvement of minors in jihadist plots in Europe was virtually non-existent. The handful of plots recorded during this period were overwhelmingly carried out by adults operating within established networks, often with direct ties to organisations such as al-Qaeda or the GIA. The operational model was cell-based, requiring logistics, travel, and coordination that typically excluded younger individuals.

This changed dramatically from 2015 onwards. The rise of the Islamic State and its use of social media for propaganda and recruitment created new pathways to radicalisation that were particularly effective in reaching younger demographics. The IS model of encouraging low-sophistication 'inspired' attacks, often using vehicles or knives rather than explosives, lowered the barrier to entry for would-be attackers, including teenagers. Online radicalisation accelerated this trend, with minors consuming extremist content through encrypted messaging platforms and social media, without the need for in-person contact with established networks.

Several factors helped explain the growing vulnerability of minors to jihadist radicalisation. Adolescence is a developmental period characterised by identity formation, susceptibility to peer influence, and a search for meaning and belonging. The Islamic State's media apparatus was specifically designed to exploit these vulnerabilities, producing content that glorified violence and framed participation as a heroic obligation.

The trend of increasing youth involvement in terrorist attacks has accelerated sharply from 2022 onwards, as shown in Figure 4.2. The data for 2022 onwards, as well as 2013 and 2021, does not come from the same sources, so some caution should be taken when comparing the periods. However, there does appear to have been a very large increase in youth involvement in IS plots in Europe over the past three years.

Properties of Youth Radicalisation

Understanding the profiles of radicalised minors requires untangling the interplay of developmental biology, environmental stressors, and identity formation. There is no single profile that adequately covers all at-risk youth. Vulnerability typically stems from overlapping and compounding pressures such as deep social isolation, family dysfunction, neurodevelopmental factors, and socio-economic marginalisation.[10]

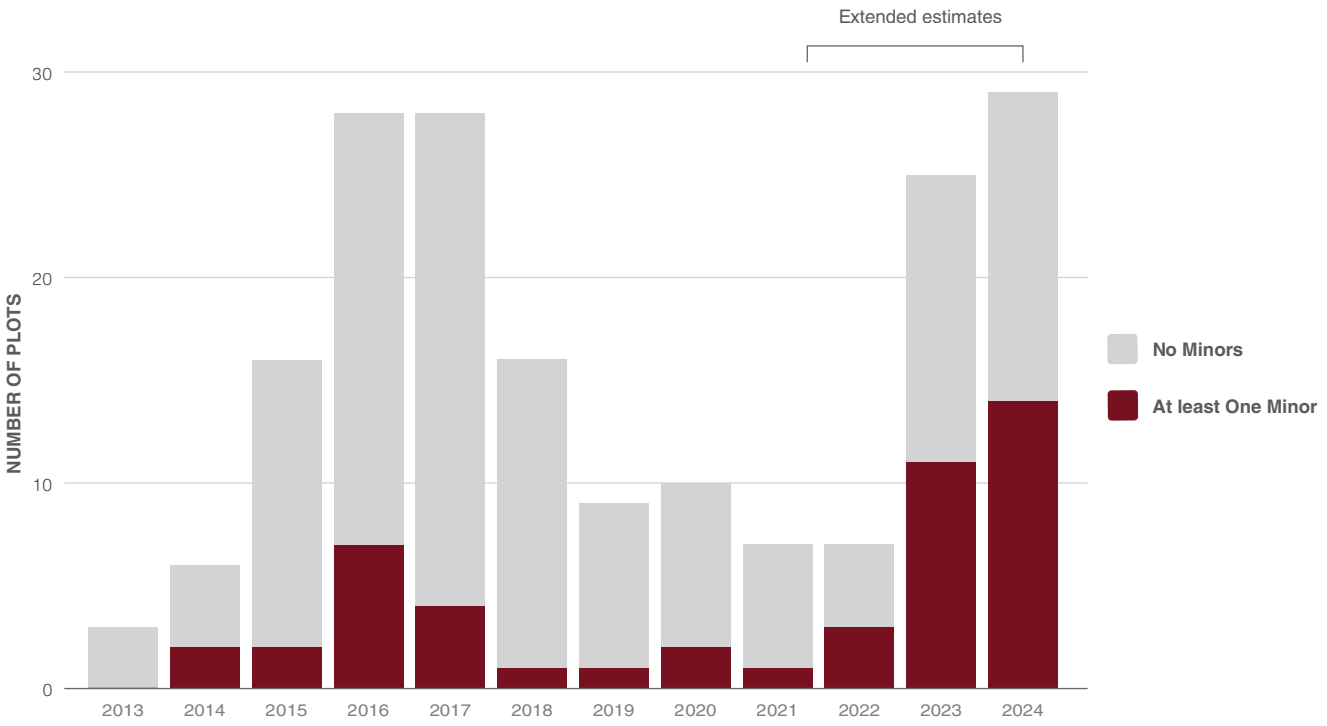
Radicalised minors are significantly more likely to have suffered from severe domestic instability, neglect, and psychological abuse, compared to adults involved in terrorism. Over 87 per cent of radicalised minors have a history of neglect or psychological abuse, and 77 per cent have experienced abandonment prior to their radicalisation.[11] Conversely, radicalised minors often exhibit lower rates of prior criminality and substance addiction compared to adults, suggesting that their pathway to extremism is driven less by established criminal socialisation and more by acute developmental crises and a desperate search for belonging.[12]

Some studies have found that over a third of radicalised youths in Western cohorts possessed formal mental health diagnoses, including bipolar disorder, severe anxiety, conduct disorder, or clinical depression, alongside high rates of familial bereavement,

FIGURE 4.2

IS plots in Europe involving a minor, 2013–2024

The proportion of IS plots involving minors increased significantly in 2023 and 2024.



Source: JPED; DIIS; IEP Calculations

separation, and socio-economic marginalisation.[13] The late teenage years seem to be the highest risk cohort, with youth extremists having an average age of 17. Youth extremism is also often correlated with poor educational engagement and a high prevalence of self-harm or suicidal ideation years before formal referral to counter-terrorism prevention programmes.[14] While intelligence and empathy scores among these cohorts often rank as average, their offline environments were frequently characterised by instability, pushing them toward online networks as alternative support structures.[15]

Identity Diffusion and Significance Quests

Adolescence is characterised by a search for identity, peer validation, sensation-seeking, and a sense of purpose. In the context of extremism, Significance Quest Theory provides vital insights into the mechanics of youth radicalisation. This theory suggests that the desire to maintain a meaningful identity and achieve personal significance is the dominant psychological driver underlying violent extremism.[16]

For adolescents experiencing 'identity diffusion', a psychological state of uncertainty regarding one's values, beliefs, and societal role, extremist groups offered an alluringly simple, absolutist worldview. Radical narratives capitalised on this uncertainty by providing a rigid 'us versus them' dichotomy, supplying vulnerable youth with an immediate sense of belonging, elevated status, and moral clarity.[17] The adoption of a group-centred extremist identity resolves the significance quest, replacing feelings of marginalisation with the empowering illusion of being a vanguard in a civilisational struggle.[18]

The Modern Radicalisation Pathway

The internet, social media algorithms, and immersive gaming environments have fundamentally reshaped how radicalisation occurs, enabling extremist recruiters to bypass traditional community gatekeepers such as parents, educators, and religious leaders.[19] The contemporary radicalisation pathway is characterised by its unprecedented speed, its reliance on algorithmic curation, and its exploitation of interactive, gamified digital ecosystems.

Extremist networks employ a multi-tiered 'funnel strategy' to identify, groom, and radicalise minors. This process typically originates on algorithm-driven mainstream platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube Shorts.[20] Algorithms designed to maximise user engagement and retention often inadvertently channel impressionable youths toward increasingly extreme, emotionally charged content. Youth engaging with edgy or controversial content are rapidly fed videos glorifying serial killers, school shooters, and terrorist operatives, normalising extremist aesthetics through short-form video.[21]

Once a minor demonstrates affinity or ideological vulnerability on mainstream platforms, recruiters migrate the interaction to encrypted messaging applications such as Telegram, Signal, or Wire.[22] Within these unmoderated, encrypted environments, youths are inducted into highly insulated echo chambers. Dissenting opinions are aggressively suppressed, and the minor is subjected to intensive indoctrination, tactical discussions, operational planning, and the normalisation of extreme violence. This transition from algorithmic exposure to peer-reinforced echo chambers represents the critical nexus where cognitive radicalisation morphs into behavioural radicalisation and physical threat mobilisation.[23]

One of the most alarming developments in youth radicalisation is the weaponisation of online gaming and gaming-adjacent communication platforms, including Discord, Twitch, Steam, and Roblox. Multiplayer gaming environments provide ideal digital infrastructure for isolation, alternative community building, and the normalisation of violence. Recruiters leverage popular multiplayer games such as Minecraft, Fortnite, and Call of Duty, to establish social bonds with isolated adolescents under the guise of shared recreational interests.[24]

This gamification extended to the creation of bespoke extremist modifications and custom servers where users actively role-play violent fantasies. Minors have been documented using simulation games to digitally rehearse real-world violence, such as simulated attacks on mosques, synagogues, or schools, blurring the boundary between digital recreation and physical terrorism.[25]

The gamification of extremism also extended to the creation of 'scoreboards' and competitive dynamics within extremist communities. Online forums track and celebrate the 'kill counts' of mass attackers, creating perverse incentive structures that encourage escalation. For adolescents already immersed in competitive gaming cultures, these dynamics exploit familiar psychological reward mechanisms such as achievement, ranking, and peer recognition, to normalise and incentivise real-world violence.

Digital recruitment pathways are also defined by a strategic shift away from adult-led, top-down recruitment towards a decentralised peer-to-peer, youth-on-youth model. Digitally native youths independently generate, remix, and consume jihadist or accelerationist propaganda.[26] These adolescents utilise internet-native communication styles, such as memes, dark humour, and contemporary aesthetic framing, to package extremist ideology in a format that is highly digestible and appealing to their peers.

Characteristics of Youth Terrorist Plots

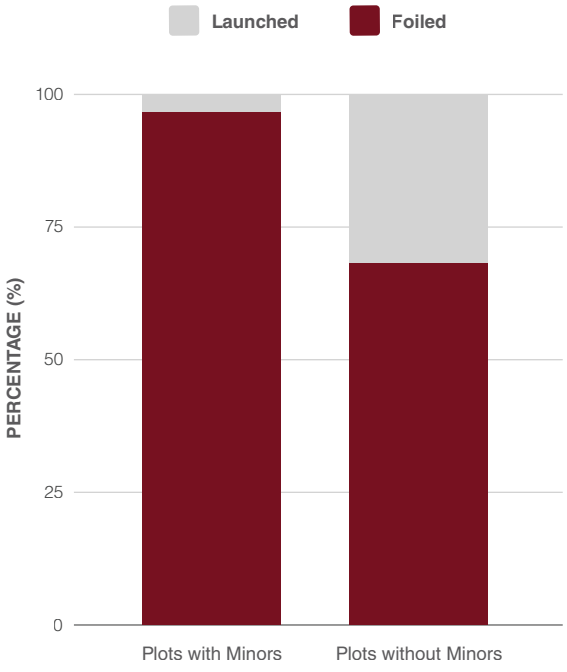
Although at-risk youth are increasingly involved in terrorist activity, plots involving minors are less likely to be carried out successfully than plots involving adults. Figure 4.3 shows IS terrorist plots from 2022 to 2025. Of the 31 plots that involved at least one minor, 30 were foiled by security services before they could be carried out at a foil rate of approximately 97 per cent. By contrast, plots without minors had a foil rate of around 68 per cent.

This disparity suggested that plots involving young people tend to be less operationally secure. Minors were more likely to reveal their intentions through careless communication, online activity that attracted the attention of authorities, or behaviour changes noticed by family members, teachers, or peers.

FIGURE 4.3

Plot outcomes, 2022–2025

Plots involving minors were foiled at a rate of 97 per cent, compared to 68 per cent for adult-only plots.

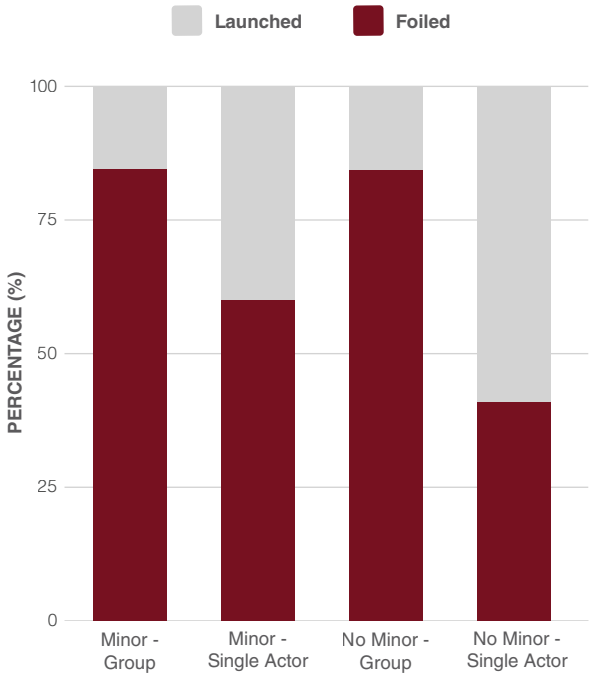


Source: CTC Sentinel

FIGURE 4.4

Plot outcomes by group size and minor involvement, 1994–2021

Single-actor plots were more likely to be successfully executed than group plots across both categories.



Source: JPED; IEP Calculations

The data on jihadist plots in Europe from 1994 to 2021 can be further broken down to look at both lone wolf and group plots involving minors, as shown in Figure 4.4. Single-actor plots, whether involving minors or adults, had different detection profiles than group-based plots. Single actors were harder to detect through network-based intelligence but were also less capable of carrying out sophisticated operations. Group plots involving minors, while still overwhelmingly foiled, presented a different dynamic: the presence of a minor in a group cell may indicate a recruitment relationship in which an older individual groomed or directed a younger person to participate.

The involvement of a minor, in either a group or single actor plot, meant that it was more likely to be foiled than a group or single actor plot not involving a minor, although the difference for groups was very small. The increase in the number of foiled plots between, 1994 and 2021, as shown in Figure 4.4, and 2022 to 2025, as shown in Figure 4.3, suggest that youth plots are happening in a shorter timeframe in a less organised way, reflecting a spontaneous decision to become involved in violent extremism.

THE INTERSECTION OF LONE-WOLF TERRORISM AND YOUTH RADICALISATION

The rise in youth radicalisation has occurred alongside a broader shift in Western terrorism toward lone-wolf attacks. Over the last 15 years, fatal incidents have increasingly come from individuals acting alone, rather than from coordinated operations by recognised organisations. These attackers may subscribe to a particular ideology or interact with extremist communities online, but they do not receive formal training or direct organisational support. Lone-wolf actors carried out 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West over the last five years and are three times more likely to carry out a successful attack than groups of two or more plotters.

During 2024, the total number of terrorist incidents in the West rose to 52, up from 32 the previous year. In the vast majority of these, investigators did not link the attacks to any terrorist group. When examining jihadist plots in Europe from 1994 to 2021, the number of plots by lone-wolf terrorists overtook those planned by groups of two or more in 2015 and remained the dominant form through 2021. The rise in lone-wolf terrorism has also coincided with an increase in mass casualty shooting events, and the line between mass shootings and terrorist attacks has become increasingly blurred over the last decade.

The Accelerating Radicalisation Timeline

Two trends are particularly concerning at the intersection of lone-wolf terrorism and youth: attackers are becoming progressively younger, and the time between initial exposure to extremist material and the execution of an attack has shortened considerably. In 2005, it took an average of 18 months from first exposure to radical material to the carrying out of an attack. By 2016, this interval had decreased by over 25 per cent, driven primarily by the spread of online extremist content. Today, radicalisation can occur so rapidly that only a few weeks separate first exposure from attack.

This compression of the radicalisation timeline is particularly dangerous when applied to adolescents. Research in developmental psychology shows that the adolescent brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex responsible for impulse control and long-term planning, is not fully developed until the mid-twenties. Combined with the rapid pace of online radicalisation, this creates a situation in which young people can move from initial exposure to violent action before the slower-moving mechanisms of detection, intervention, and support have any opportunity to engage.

The 'Bathtub Model' and Youth Vulnerability

The process by which disaffected young people became radicalised and moved toward lone-wolf violence can be conceptualised using the 'bathtub model'.[27] This framework compares the accumulation of motivations to a bathtub being filled with water, where three taps represent distinct categories of motivation: ideological, psychological, and personal. These taps pour into the tub at varying rates, reflecting how different factors influence the individual over time. When the water level reaches the tub's capacity and overflows, it represents the moment an individual decides to commit an attack.

For adolescents, the threshold for action is often lower due to developmental factors including impulsivity, limited life experience, and a heightened need for identity and belonging. Triggers such as traumatic personal experiences, mental health issues, exposure to propaganda, or the desire to emulate other attackers act as catalysts that accelerate the process. When a young person's threshold is lowered by mental instability, external pressures, or heightened exposure to these triggers, the likelihood of action increases significantly.

Detection Challenges

Lone-wolf attacks pose particular detection challenges because perpetrators seldom leave a clear intelligence footprint. Operating in isolation, they do not usually communicate with large networks or rely on significant financial backing, limiting opportunities for detection. The involvement of minors amplifies this problem: youth suspects often do not match the typical profile of a terrorism threat, and in many jurisdictions, minors trigger fewer warnings within security frameworks and enjoy certain privacy protections. Security agencies are forced to distinguish adolescent isolation or rebellion from violent extremist intent; a task made more urgent when online propaganda can transform alienation into lethal action within weeks.

A central feature of lone-wolf terrorism is ideological flexibility. Even when attackers declare allegiance to a specific group, they frequently draw on grievances and narratives from multiple sources, blending religious, political, and conspiratorial ideas in ways that defy easy categorisation. For young people already navigating identity formation, this fluid approach is particularly accessible, allowing them to build personalised belief systems from the wide range of radical content available online. Combined with geopolitical trigger events, such as the conflict in Gaza or heightened racial tensions, these factors produce a threat landscape in which lone-wolf attacks by minors represent one of the most difficult challenges facing Western security agencies.

Comparative Regional Analysis

While the psychological vulnerabilities of young people and their susceptibility to online manipulation were broadly similar worldwide, the factors that turned these vulnerabilities into violent extremism varied significantly by region. A comparison of the West, sub-Saharan Africa, and South-East Asia revealed clear differences in the structural, economic, and socio-political drivers of youth radicalisation. The major drivers and trends across these three regions are outlined in Table 4.1.

The West: Ideological Convergence and Digital Alienation

In Western democracies, youth radicalisation was predominantly a product of alienation, ideological convergence, and the exploitation of socio-political polarisation. The threat matrix was dominated by the lone-actor terrorist: over the past five years, lone-actor attacks have accounted for 93 per cent of fatal terrorist attacks in the West.[28]

TABLE 4.1

Trends in youth radicalisation by region

Region	Drivers	Operations	Ideological Focus
The West (Europe, US, Australia)	Digital alienation, social isolation, perceived loss of status, psychological vulnerability, algorithmic amplification.	Lone-actor attacks, gamification of violence, deepfakes, peer-to-peer online grooming.	Political extremism, Islamist, Nihilistic/Incel, Composite ideologies
Sub-Saharan Africa (Sahel, Somalia)	Extreme multidimensional poverty, youth unemployment, state fragility, climate-induced resource scarcity.	Proto-state recruitment, forced conscription, retaliation against state security abuses.	Localised ethno-political control, declining reliance on pure religious ideology.
South-East Asia (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia)	Familial indoctrination, historical regional grievances, rapid digital penetration.	Kinship networks, radical study circles, digital True Crime Communities (TCC).	Inherited jihadism, IS-inspired online radicalisation, Nihilistic violence.

The ideological landscape is highly fragmented and dynamic. While Islamist radicalisation remained a persistent and lethal threat, often surging in response to geopolitical trigger events such as the October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel,[29] extreme right-wing activity has also risen sharply, increasing by 250 per cent in the West over the last five years.[30] Data from the UK's Prevent programme illustrated this ideological complexity: 21 per cent of all referrals in 2024–2025 were related to extreme right-wing radicalisation, 10 per cent to Islamist extremism, and a 34 per cent concerned individuals with a 'mixed, unstable, or unclear' (MUU) ideology.[31]

A defining feature of Western youth radicalisation was 'salad bar' or 'composite' extremism.[32] Young individuals curate bespoke belief systems blending political accelerationism, antisemitic conspiracies, pro-IS aesthetics, incel (involuntary celibate) culture, and anti-government sentiment.[33] This ideological fluidity posed challenges for predictive threat modelling, as the motivation for violence was often divorced from a coherent political end-state, driven instead by a nihilistic desire for destruction and digital infamy.

In the West, the drivers of radicalisation are rarely extreme economic deprivation or direct state violence. Rather, they are rooted in a perceived loss of social status, online connection but physical isolation, and the gamification of violence as a mechanism for achieving fame and overcoming identity diffusion.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Socio-Economic Deprivation and State Fragility

In contrast to the digitally-mediated grievances of the West, youth radicalisation in sub-Saharan Africa is driven largely by acute socio-economic deprivation, multidimensional poverty, and weak state capacity. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for over half of all terrorism-related deaths globally in 2025. The Sahel has suffered a tenfold increase in terrorism fatalities since 2007, with violence spreading into coastal West African nations such as Benin and Togo.[34]

A 2023 study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which interviewed nearly 2,200 individuals, including over 1,000 former violent extremists across eight African countries, challenged traditional assumptions regarding radicalisation on the continent.[35] Religious ideology has declined as a primary driver of recruitment. It was cited by only 17 per cent of voluntary recruits, a 57 per cent decrease from 2017, with many recruits displaying limited knowledge of religious texts. A quarter of all voluntary recruits cited a total lack of job opportunities as their primary motivation, representing a 92 per cent increase in economic motivations since 2017.[36]

The UNDP report identified that for 71 per cent of recruits, the ultimate tipping point was an experience of human rights abuse or violence perpetrated by state security forces.[37] Additionally, severe ecological stressors acted as threat multipliers. In Niger, 51 per cent of recruits cited climate change-related difficulties as a primary reason for joining militant factions.[38]

The scale of youth vulnerability in sub-Saharan Africa is compounded by demographic pressures. The Sahel has one of the world's youngest and fastest-growing populations, with a median age of roughly 15 in countries such as Niger and Mali. In these contexts, the majority of the population has grown up in conditions of active conflict, with limited access to education, healthcare, or formal employment. The UNDP's research found that 83 per cent of voluntary recruits to violent extremist groups had either no formal education, or had not progressed beyond primary school, and that the average recruit had been unemployed for extended periods prior to joining.

Violent extremist groups in these fragile regions effectively operate as proto-state competitors, exploiting the vacuum left by weak governance, endemic corruption, and a lack of basic service delivery to position themselves as alternative providers of justice, security, and employment. In regions where the state had lost its monopoly on the legitimate use of force, armed groups offered immediate, tangible benefits such as a salary, and a sense of purpose. This has proven to be extremely appealing for young people with no prospect of legitimate employment, and no trust in state institutions.

Where states are unable to provide basic services or economic opportunity, armed groups fill the gap with structured roles, regular income, and a sense of belonging. In the Lake Chad Basin, for example, Boko Haram has historically offered signing bonuses and monthly stipends to young recruits, while in the central Sahel, JNIM has embedded itself in local dispute resolution and resource management, providing governance functions that the state has abandoned. The result is a recruitment dynamic driven less by ideological conviction than by the material realities of poverty and exclusion.

The role of state security forces in driving youth radicalisation in sub-Saharan Africa also warrants particular attention. Heavy-handed counterterrorism operations, including extrajudicial killings, mass detentions, and the destruction of property, have been widely documented across the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, and parts of East Africa. In Burkina Faso and Mali, where military juntas have relied on poorly trained auxiliary forces and foreign military contractors, reports of civilian abuses have coincided with spikes in militant recruitment in affected communities.

Addressing youth radicalisation in sub-Saharan Africa therefore requires not only security responses but also fundamental reforms in governance, accountability, and economic inclusion, without which the structural conditions that feed recruitment will persist regardless of military gains.

South-East Asia and the ASEAN Region

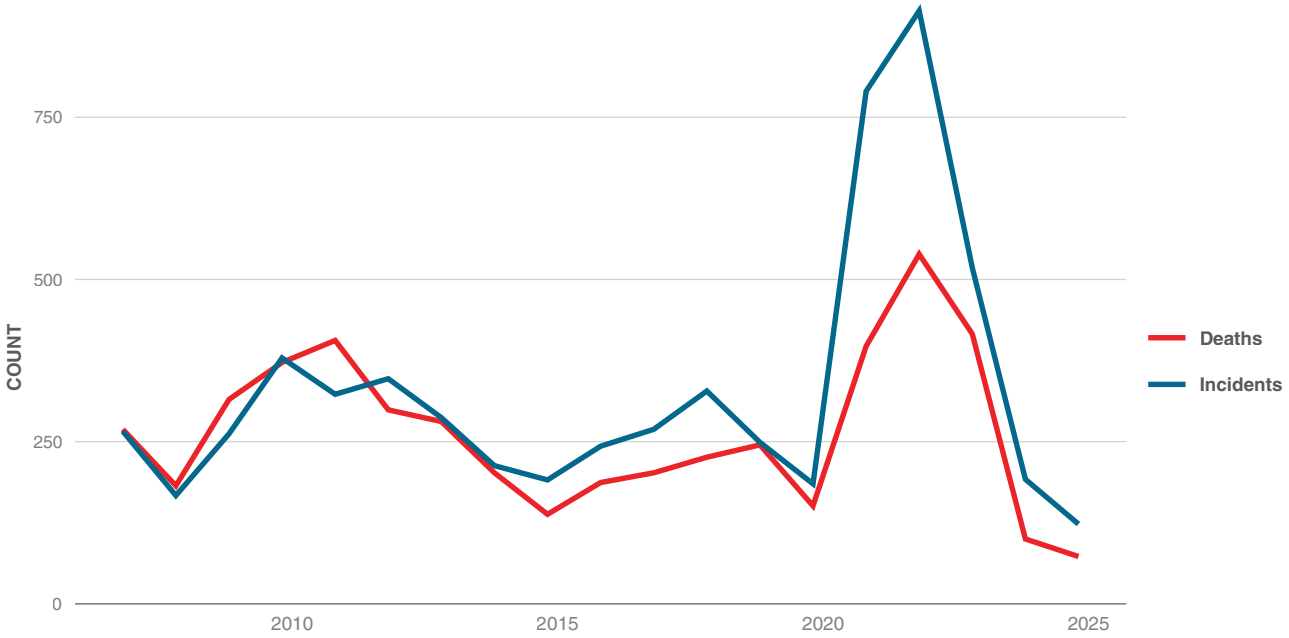
The Australian experience provided a complementary perspective on youth radicalisation. Data from Australia shows a pattern broadly consistent with the European trend: a notable increase in the involvement of young people, particularly from the mid-2010s onward.

There have been several different radicalisation pathways among young Australians. While some minors were embedded in broader networks or influenced by family members, others appeared to radicalise largely in isolation, consuming extremist

FIGURE 4.5

Terrorism incidents and deaths in the ASEAN region, 2007–2025

While overall fatalities have declined from historical peaks, terrorism remains a persistent regional threat.



Source: TerrorismTracker; IEP Calculations

content online with minimal interpersonal contact with established extremists. This diversity of pathways complicates prevention efforts, as no single profile could adequately capture the range of circumstances that led young people towards violent extremism.

The role of social media platforms, encrypted messaging services, and peer-to-peer sharing of extremist content was a consistent theme across Australian cases. The ASIO Director-General noted that the agency's caseload was increasingly dominated by younger individuals, with approximately 20 per cent of priority counter-terrorism investigations involving young people. The Australian Federal Police has investigated 35 minors for terrorism offences since 2020, underscoring the scale of the challenge even in a geographically isolated country with historically low levels of terrorism impact.

The broader South-East Asian region faces multiple challenges, blending deep-rooted historical grievances and localised familial networks with modern digital vulnerabilities. Historically, radicalisation in South-East Asia relied on offline, kinship-based networks. In Indonesia, the phenomenon of 'inherited jihadism' is common, with youth following the extremist trajectories of parents or relatives, creating intergenerational cycles of violence.[39] In the Philippines, violent Islamist extremism remained rooted in the protracted Mindanao conflict, driven by intergenerational Muslim grievances and conflict with the central government.[40]

As shown in Figure 4.5, the ASEAN region experienced a peak in terrorism-related fatalities in the early 2000s, driven by attacks such as the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed over 200 people. This was followed by a sustained decline as regional security forces dismantled key networks, most notably Jemaah Islamiyah. However, the rise of the Islamic State created new dynamics, with the Philippines experiencing a resurgence of violence linked to IS-affiliated groups, culminating in the 2017 siege of Marawi.

The regional dynamic is evolving rapidly, driven by widespread digital access. The May 2024 Ulu Tiram attack in Malaysia illustrated this shift: a 20-year-old man attacked a police station, killing two officers. Investigations revealed the attacker had been heavily influenced by the ideology of Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), and that his radicalisation was driven by his father, who had isolated the family off-the-grid and systematically groomed his children through a distorted religious narrative.[41] Simultaneously, authorities in Singapore repeatedly disrupted plots by self-radicalised teenagers inspired by foreign political extremism and IS manifestos accessed via TikTok, Roblox, and encrypted apps.[42] A particularly concerning trend was the rise of Nihilistic Violent Extremism (NVE) through the True Crime Community (TCC), an online subculture obsessed with perpetrators of mass violence, allowing South-East Asian youths to sample foreign extremist content and adapt it to local contexts.[43]

The countries most affected in the ASEAN region, such as the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, and Indonesia, each faced distinct security challenges rooted in long-standing insurgencies, separatist movements, and communal tensions. The involvement of young people varied significantly by context: in the southern Philippines, youth recruitment by armed groups had a long history tied to poverty, marginalisation, and clan dynamics, while in Indonesia and Malaysia, online radicalisation by transnational jihadist organisations remains the primary concern.

Expert Contributions

EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

Jihadists in the Sahel: What is Behind Expansion and What is the Threat to Coastal West Africa?

Jessica Moody, PhD in post-conflict peacebuilding in Côte d'Ivoire, freelance research consultant on political risk and peacebuilding in West and Central Africa. Author of upcoming book Life After War: Lessons in Human-Centred Peacebuilding from Côte d'Ivoire.

Between 2020 and 2023, a series of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger prompted a worsening of an already poor security situation across the Sahel. New military leaders took office, determined to reassert sovereignty, kick out foreign interference – particularly the former colonial power France, and improve the security situation. This enticing vision of strong and nationalist leadership was hugely popular with civilians across all three countries, though the impact of these grand plans on the security situation has been rather less appealing.

To date, the violence in the Sahel is responsible for the deaths of 76,900 people according to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), with 10,000 deaths recorded in 2025 alone.[1] It is largely attributed to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is a coalition of jihadist groups formed in 2017, affiliated with al-Qaeda. The group is comprised of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front and Al Mouribatoun.

The other group which has contributed to the violence is Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP). ISSP is slightly less prolific in its areas of operations but generally more violent than JNIM and it was formed from a splinter of AQIM when it pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2015. ISSP is more prominent in the border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, while JNIM has tended to operate more in central and southern Mali and Burkina Faso, with a much greater footprint in coastal West Africa.

The bid to reassert sovereignty and defeat jihadists in the Sahel saw all three countries demand the drawdown of French troops and military assistance in the years following their respective coups. The French military had been present in Mali since 2013 following an attempt by jihadists to seize control over the country – a movement which had piggybacked on a separatist uprising and was the precursor to much of the vast jihadist violence that we see now across the Sahel. As jihadism spread, so too did French operations, which subsequently expanded to Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania as well.

With French troops ousted, Mali also forced the UN mission in that country, which was tasked with upholding security in the north of the country and maintaining a fragile peace agreement with Tuareg separatists in the north, to leave. For good measure, the Sahel countries also decided to withdraw from the regional economic bloc ECOWAS, citing its manipulation by France and its failure to protect Sahel states from jihadist violence.

The impact of the French missions in the Sahel, under Operation Serval and later Operation Barkhane, is debatable. There was little evidence that the French presence was improving the situation and jihadist violence certainly worsened over time, with France unable to prevent the insurgents from spreading into Burkina Faso from Mali and from there into Niger too. Equally, the UN mission was doing little to halt jihadist violence, indeed that was not its mandate. And ECOWAS was, as the Sahel states lamented, not particularly helpful in dealing with the threat.

Still, the presence of UN and French troops did act as something of a buffer to the exponential growth of jihadist violence and it ensured that major cities were relatively secure. The removal of this security guarantee, albeit a weak one, has played a role in allowing jihadists to spread from enclaves in the north of Mali and in certain provinces of Burkina Faso to a position where they now control considerable territory in both Mali and Burkina Faso and are gaining ground in Niger.

The arrival of Russian Wagner troops and influence in the region has also played a role in this deterioration in security. No sooner had the governments in the Sahel thrown off the shackles of the former colonial power France had they sought solace in the arms of Moscow. Russia, in stark contrast to France, was hugely popular in the Sahel, in part due to some extremely sophisticated and effective online propaganda campaigns across West Africa.

Wagner troops were rapid to arrive in Mali, while Burkina Faso and Niger relied more on military assistance than troop presence per se. Russian troops have been even less effective than France at curbing the spread of jihadist violence. While the French strategic plan in the Sahel was always somewhat unclear, the tactics of the Russian mercenaries have been still more haphazard. Wagner, and later Africa Corps, has appeared to target towns and villages with little concern for whether there is a jihadist presence there or not. Human rights abuses skyrocketed and death tolls soared. Indeed, in 2024,

2,430 civilian deaths in the Sahel were attributed to national security forces and their Russian partners.[2]

While Russian troops were not present, human rights abuses were also pervasive in Burkina Faso, where the government sought the assistance of a volunteer defence force, known as the VDP. This force has been in existence since 2020 but was amplified under the new leadership of President Traore. Traore decided to boost its membership – recruiting 50,000 additional VDPs after he came to power, sometimes by conscription of dissidents.[3] The catch is that you can only join the VDP if you do not belong to the Peuhl community, who are believed to be significantly involved with jihadists.[4] State security forces have not been any less brutal or misled in their tactics and state-led human rights abuses in Burkina Faso have also risen considerably. In February 2024, Human Rights Watch reported that the state military had executed at least 223 civilians in two villages on the same day.[5]

In both Burkina Faso and Mali, these strategies and tactics, which rely largely on massacring populations in the hope that jihadists will be among the dead, have proved fruitless in tackling jihadist violence. In both cases, the stigmatisation of the Peuhl community, who are always disproportionately targeted because of their perceived association with the armed groups, leads them to join the jihadists in droves to ensure their protection against the state. This is not just true of Peuhls though. Other civilians who are targeted or who lose loved ones at the hands of the government are also easy recruitment targets for jihadists.

Meanwhile, the new nationalist governments have done little to provide for populations, create jobs or build infrastructure. Life, especially outside of major cities in the Sahel, remains extremely difficult. The vast majority of those joining jihadist groups are doing so because it pays and it means they have some protection against the rogue and unruly government and its Russian operatives. There is little evidence of a strong ideological conviction behind jihadist group membership in the region.

The results of these poorly thought-out counter terrorism efforts in the post-coup era in the Sahel are startling. According to ACLED, deaths in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, reached 7,620 in the first half of 2024, an increase of 9% since 2023, 37% compared to 2022 and 190% relative to 2021.[6] Jihadist groups have also expanded their areas of influence considerably since the coups took place. For instance, ISSP has doubled the amount of territory it controls in Mali since the 2020/2021 coups, while it also doubled its area of operations in Niger between 2022 and the first half of 2023, spreading towards the northeastern Nigerien region of Tillabéri, while also moving towards Niamey itself.[7] Meanwhile, in September 2024, JNIM launched an attack in Bamako itself, targeting the military airport and a gendarmerie school, killing over 70 Malian security forces and destroying the presidential plane.[8] The brazen assault, which was the first time that jihadists had attacked Bamako since 2015, was an indicator of the strength of the group which targeted multiple, military protected sites simultaneously.

Not only does Russian assistance not help to win the hearts and minds of the people in the Sahel, but it also undermines strong military action. In Mali there are rumours that troops are widely disgruntled at working with Russian personnel who are often racist and demeaning towards them. The chain of command is confused and morale is low. This raises the risk of military destabilisation and governments across the Sahel report recurrent coup attempts. While rarely verified, accusations of coup attempts prompt significant military reshuffles that keep the military weak and prevent effective colonels or generals from adopting more effective strategies to deal with the jihadists.

What next?

As jihadist violence expands in the Sahel, it looks to gain greater control over governance in the region. Notably, JNIM has doubled its attacks in the western region of Kayes annually since 2022.[9] By operating in this part of the country, JNIM is able to target the mining sector, which is responsible for around 80% of foreign export earnings and is crucial to the government's retention of power. Equally, the group has used its attacks in western Mali to target Kayes and Nioro du Sahel, two key transport and import/export hubs in the region. From September 2025 it began a blockade of Kayes, blocking all petrol tankers from entering the country and suffocating the economy. For weeks, Malians lost access to transport and electricity, and public services collapsed.

JNIM's plan was likely to force the Malian government's destabilisation from within. JNIM recognised its inability to take on the Malian government where it is strongest in the capital, while it also knows that intervening in a capital city is more likely to draw the attention of international powers. This would be counterproductive and thus it seeks instead to destabilise the Malian government through economic suffocation. It is likely assuming that by bringing the government to its knees, there will be another coup or a popular uprising. If a new government were to come to power with its support, JNIM could manipulate new authorities to implement sharia law, effectively holding the new government to ransom without having to maintain control itself.

So far, the Malian government has held firm. It has been able to use its allies in the region to deliver some fuel to the capital and although supplies are still insufficient it is enough to allow the government to function. Meanwhile, the effect of the blockade has been to reinforce rather than undermine the support for the junta, which is now regarded as the protector of the country against the jihadists, rather than a government which is failing to meet the population's basic needs.

Even so, the strategy is clear, and JNIM is unlikely to stop there. These kinds of blockades have been crucial parts of its strategy across the Sahel for years, with some blockades lasting months at a time and forcing civilian populations to comply with their demands. It is likely to continue to use these kinds of methods to force governments in the region to break down and to allow it to take greater control across the Sahel. Importantly, as discussed above, the military in all three of these countries remains incredibly weak and is likely to be

susceptible to sustained pressure from jihadists.

What does this mean for coastal West Africa?

As the jihadists spread further south in the Sahel, the threat to coastal West Africa is also growing. The group intends to expand towards the coast to gain access to ports and control more territory for its caliphate. Last year saw JNIM in particular gain greater prominence in coastal West Africa, underscoring this threat. JNIM's blockade of Kayes was linked to a series of assaults on the border with Senegal, which is unprecedented in the history of the group. Its continued operations along the Senegalese border suggest that it is likely to be expanding recruitment, posing an elevated threat to Senegal itself. This is particularly so given the prominence of Senegal's mining sector along the border with Mali – mining has often been a key source of revenue for JNIM – as well as Senegal's ongoing political demise, amid a severe debt crisis which saw it become the most indebted country in Africa last year.

Nigeria also saw an uptick in jihadist violence emanating from the Sahel in 2025. Indeed, JNIM launched its first attack in Nigeria in October this year, in Kwara State. Although the death toll from the attack was low, the incident underscored the growing propensity of jihadist groups in the Sahel to operate in coastal states. Benin too witnessed a considerable rise in assaults by JNIM in 2025, with 70 percent more deaths between January and December 2025 than in the first 11 months of 2024.[10] It has deployed 3,000 soldiers along its border with Burkina Faso and Niger to try to reduce the scope of incursions, but it is unlikely this alone will halt the jihadists who are extremely adept at exploiting porous border areas.[11] If the state weakens further in Cotonou – following a coup attempt in late 2025 - it is likely that the group will push further south and start to establish an even greater foothold in that country.

Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana for their parts have been spared some of this expansion of jihadist violence. Côte d'Ivoire witnessed a series of assaults in 2020 – 2021 but has since brought the violence under control, with no confirmed attacks since then. Meanwhile despite considerable communal tensions in the border areas, Ghana has also largely managed to keep jihadist assaults at bay.

Both Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are renowned for being two of the most stable and strong countries in the region, which likely makes them harder for jihadists to penetrate. Part of their success has also been to approach the challenge not just through a security lens. Ghana has adopted a comprehensive decentralisation programme that allows northern regions to take more control over their own security.[12] Equally, in Côte d'Ivoire, the government has expended considerable resources in development programmes, job creation and infrastructure projects in the border areas. This has been crucial to preventing significant jihadist recruitment.

Even so, the threat is mounting. This year has seen a series of assaults on Mali's southern border near Côte d'Ivoire. While jihadists are not specifically targeting Côte d'Ivoire, it is now suffering the indirect impact of a mass refugee influx. Around 90,000 refugees are now being hosted by Côte d'Ivoire, and with communal tensions already significant, the country is exposed to insecurity in the northern region, particularly if the jihadists continue to spread further south.

What can be done?

Crucially, coastal countries can learn much from what has not worked in the Sahel. Jihadist groups have always capitalised on local grievances and communal tensions to recruit and to carve a space for themselves in the local and political discourse. Typically, local conflicts or tensions between herder and farmer communities, often involving the Peuhl, who have historically been herders, are exploited. Jihadists befriend the marginalised community – mostly the Peuhl – and provide succour to them, boosting their recruitment. They then target farming communities, prompting further outcry from farmers who vilify the Peuhl once more, resulting in still more recruitment to the jihadist group. This is a cycle that has played out across the Sahel and is almost certain to be useful to jihadists in coastal states as well, where this tension is also prominent. Governments in coastal countries can do more to try to resolve these communal divisions and bring communities closer together to reduce the potential for jihadist exploitation.

Additionally, the security response to violence is vital. Blanket targeting of the Peuhl community clearly amplifies the dynamic described above and should be avoided at all costs. The use of poorly trained militias and vast human rights abuses again only worsen community dynamics and assist in jihadist recruitment. Targeted military action that actually hits the intended target is far more useful than excessive and widely used force that has no clear objective.

Security is also not the only answer. As countries like Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have shown, there is real value in development, infrastructure, and job creation programmes. Awareness raising initiatives in areas affected by jihadist violence are also useful. If people have jobs and are able to feed their families, they are far less likely to be easy targets for jihadist groups. Understanding that this is not solely a security problem would go a long way to resolving the crisis that has spread so exponentially in recent years across the Sahel and is now edging its way closer to the ports of coastal West Africa.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

The Nihilistic Violent Extremist Ecosystem: A Global Threat

Julie Chernov Hwang, PhD, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Goucher CollegeSenior Research Fellow, The Soufan Center.

Youth radicalization is fast becoming a worldwide epidemic. While right wing extremism is spiking worldwide and IS is recruiting teenagers to carry out attacks in Europe, one of the less covered threats is from a series of highly networked milieu of online subcultures and digital communities that fall under the banner of nihilistic violent extremism. Members of NVE groups tend to be young, often male, and terminally online. This new threat comes with an expedited timeline for radicalization. According to Cecelia Polizzi, in 2002, radicalization to extremism took 16 months on average; now, youth are being radicalized in a matter of weeks.[13] This article unpacks nihilistic violent extremism as a concept; examines the manner of recruitment; assesses its risk; and then explores four such groups, three of which are inter-connected.

Marc-Andre Argentino defines nihilistic violent extremism as "those on the fringe actively encouraging, promoting, glorifying or engaging in serious acts of violence for the sake of violence and chaos in and of itself."[14] While there is no unifying ideology, all NVE networks share a misanthropic worldview that normalizes, celebrates, commodifies, encourages or coerces acts of extreme violence, fuelled by a hatred of humanity and a desire to bring about societal collapse.[15]

Nihilistic violent extremist networks use social media and online gaming platforms, including Tik Tok, X, Instagram, Reddit, TamTam, 4Chan, Telegram, Discord and Roblox to target socially isolated youth[16]. While the typical NVE recruit tends to be under 25, with many under 18, some NVE groups specifically target children as young as six as well as tweens and teens[17]. They identify youth who may be dealing with one or more vulnerabilities: neurodiversity, eating disorders, social isolation, mental illness, family problems, etc; love bomb them; and pull them into private chats. Once bonds of trust and loyalty are built, which can happen in a matter of days or even hours, perpetrators socialize, cajole, extort and/or exploit the youth to commit acts of self-harm and extreme violence.[18]

The greatest threat from nihilistic violent extremists comes from a decentralized but highly connected set of individuals and groups working through a collection of websites, social media applications, servers, chats, forums, encrypted platforms, and gaming platforms known as the COM or Community network[19]. The activities of COM network groups tend to fall into one of three categories: sexual extortion, cybercrime and offline violence, with some groups favouring one over another[20]. The most prominent COM affiliates are as follows: 764, which has tended to favour sextortion and No Lives Matter (NLM) and Maniac Murder Cult (MKY), which eschew sextortion in favour of outright violence. To become a member of 764, NLM or MKY, one must commit the type of crime favoured by that group. Members create multimedia around their crime to gain the attention of their in-group peers. The more violent or obscene the crime, the more status they accrue, the more popular they become. Then, there is the True Crime Community (TCC), which has both violent and non-violent components but has elements within it that glorify mass violence and others that carry out school shootings and mass attacks in a memetic fashion. While they are not COM, the violent stream within TCC overlaps with NVE and thus is worthy of analysis here.

764

The most infamous COM affiliate is 764. 764 perpetrators tend to target vulnerable youth age 8-17, whom they befriend or initiate romances with online, often via mainstream social media or gaming platforms. They groom the particular youth until loyalty and trust are established, often requesting nudes or sexually suggestive pictures. They then use that content and the threat of exposure to cajole or coerce vulnerable youth to livestream acts of self-harm, animal torture, sibling abuse, sexually explicit behaviour, rape, incest, violence, suicide, or the production of child sexual exploitation content, ever escalating in the severity of their demands[21]. They may insist a child who livestreamed self-harm to send new videos with deeper cuts or they cut a sibling or harm a pet or livestream their own suicide. The content victims produce is put into "lorebooks" and disseminated across the network in order to exert control over the victims and raise the status and clout of the perpetrators.[22] Should the victims resist, perpetrators threaten to share the content with their loved ones, their school, and their community; they threaten to dox them; they call in bomb threats; they swat them; and threaten to harm family members. The ever escalating threats have led some youths to commit suicide rather than face exposure.

According to FBI Assistant Director David Scott, Head of the FBI's Counter-Terrorism Division, the FBI has investigations ongoing against 764 in every state, in

total estimated at 250 nationwide[23]. However, the international reach of 764 makes it particularly insidious. Not only is 764 in every state, but its members are in dozens of countries. Thus, the perpetrator may be in one country and their victims may be in multiple states or countries. Since most of the perpetrators and victims are minors and the crimes can be transnational, law enforcement agencies are often ill equipped to handle these cases.

Maniac Murder Cult (MKY)

MKY is another outgrowth of the COM network—part of the offline violence track. It was founded in Ukraine, later spread into Russia and Western Europe, and has been linked to attacks in Canada, Sweden, Romania, the United States, Ukraine and Russia.[24] Of the COM-affiliated or linked organizations, Maniac Murder Cult comes the closest to having a discernible ideology, fusing militant accelerationism, violent nihilism, neo-fascism and ethno-supremacy.[25] Their raison d'être to spread chaos and violence for the sake of notoriety, violence and chaos.[26] MKY activities are built around committing acts of extreme violence and terror and the glorification of those acts.

To join MKY, one must commit a series of crimes across four categories: direct actions (assault, murder, arson, terrorism); IT (hacking, swatting, doxxing, developing computer viruses); recruitment/campaigning (vandalism, propaganda generation); and "microbiology," (chemicals, poisons, bioweapons)[27]. Candidate members are required to document these actions with videos and photos.[28] "Manhunts" are a core practice of MKY: members identify, stalk, hunt and kill a target, recording it for posterity, status, clout, and proof of activity.[29] They advertise their crimes on Telegram, and Vkontakte because status and clout are currency.

MKY's commitment to extreme violence can be seen in the actions of their leaders. For example, Mikhail Chkhikvishvili recently pled guilty in US federal court to soliciting bombings, school shootings, hate crimes, and sending instructions for how to make bombs and the poison, ricin[30]. At the time of his arrest, he was plotting a mass attack against racial minority and Jewish children, where members would dress up as Santa Claus and hand out poison-laced candies.[31]

No Lives Matter

Another COM affiliate, No Lives Matter (NLM) is the English language ehub of Maniac Murder Cult.[32] NLM states that "societal standards should not exist. They are to be crushed by any means possible."[33] The group labels those who follow societal norms and laws as "mundane" and they encourage their members to terrorize "all who are mundane."[34] Members connect via anonymous chatrooms on Telegram, Wire, Signal, Matrix, Potato Chat and SimpleX.[35]

Like most COM groups and like MKY, prospective members must commit a crime to join NLM and the more violent the crime, the greater the status and clout one gains within the organization. This could be vandalism, arson, animal abuse, beatings, stabbing, murder, mass murder, "manhunts" and terrorism.[36] They publish guides for members to "sharpen their skills," where members can learn to make poisons, make IEDs, and learn how to do a proper "manhunt".[37]

NLM members' misanthropy and accelerationism can be seen in how they conduct attacks. For example, NLM claimed responsibility for a series of stabbings in Sweden in October 2024; the alleged perpetrator was only 14. Even though the boy admitted to stabbing an 80-year-old man, livestreamed his attacks, and Swedish police suspected the teen in four other attacks, he was below the age of criminal responsibility and could not be charged.[38]

True Crime Community

The True Crime Community is a broad term used to refer to an online community of superfans of true crime, mass shooters, serial killers and school shooters. It is an online ecosystem spanning documentaries, podcasts, Reddits and subreddits, Discord servers, Telegram, Tumblr, TikTok, Youtube, X feeds and Wikis[39]. On the one side are the true crime fans that analyse cases. Some members obsess over particular mass shooters or school shooters affecting their aesthetics and authoring mass shooter fan fiction or online content.

At their most extreme, TCC members carry out attacks modelled on the mass shooters they idolize in a memetic fashion. For example, Buffalo shooter, Hayden Espinosa, and Nick Lee, who plotted a mass shooting at 5 mosques in Singapore, took inspiration from Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant.[40] Arda Küçükyetim, who stabbed five people in Eskişehir, Türkiye expressed admiration for the Oklahoma City bombers, the Columbine High School shooters, Anders Brevik, and the German synagogue shooter Stephan Balliet.[41] The youth who bombed a mosque at SMA 72, a high school in Jakarta, Indonesia had inscribed the names of Brenton Tarrant; Quebec mosque attacker, Alexandre Bissonnette; and Luca Traini, who shot and wounded six African migrants on a toy gun he brought to the crime[42].

This variation in lethality makes the TCC decidedly different from MKY, NLM or 764, but their extreme end is no less threatening. Moreover, not only do TCC members take inspiration from previous school shooters, they embolden one another to carry out attacks through shared chats. For example, Arda Küçükyetim was in a Telegram chat with 9 other TCC members. Of those nine, in the year that followed Küçükyetim attack, four went on to mount attacks of their own, including Natalie Rupnow (Abundant Life Christian School, Madison, WI), Solomon Hnderson (Antioch High School, Nashville, TN) and Desmond Holly (Evergreen High School, Evergreen, Colorado).[43]

Linkages

It's important to note these groups are not rigidly separate; the borders between them are porous. 764, MKY and NLM are part of the COM network. Members, messaging, and tactics overlap among these groups. All target children—youths, tweens, and teens--often male, vulnerable, socially isolated and terminally online. All use online mechanisms for recruitment. COM network affiliates share members and cross-recruitment

is becoming more frequent. Marc-Andre Argentino highlights MKY's increasing recruitment from 764[44], presumably targeting those more interested in carrying out acts of extreme violence than CSAM.

There is also a considerable ideological convergence. NLM, 764 and MKY share misanthropy and militant accelerationism that aims to bring about a collapse of society. All three as well as certain elements of TCC normalize, celebrate, and encourage acts of extreme violence, be it the self-harm, the CSAM and the suicidology of 764, the beatings, stabbings, mass murder and manhunts of NLM and MKY or the school shootings and random stabbings of TCC. Each group has constructed a system where clout and popularity are achieved through committing and livestreaming or creating content around acts of extreme violence. Even their online spaces are porous. There are Telegram channels dedicated to 764 and NLM members who carry out IRL extreme violence. [45] Therefore, stakeholders should consider these groups as nodes that share a common ecosystem of extreme violence and online harms.

Conclusion

In sum, NVE networks represent a threat that cannot be ignored and must be taken seriously. Addressing the problem will require a whole of government and a whole of society approach that bring together government stakeholders, law enforcement, the courts, practitioners, psychologists, social workers, formers, social media and gaming companies, and youths themselves to design and implement effective interventions at all levels and in all vulnerable spaces. One challenge to address is that many of the perpetrators of crimes, be it by TCC, 764, MKY or NLM are minors; this creates a problem for law enforcement—how do you address highly networked minors committing acts of extreme violence. How do you address cases where a minor can be both perpetrator and victim?

Some governments have begun to take swift action against the threat of NVE networks. The United States, New Zealand and Canada have listed 764 as a terrorist entity. Canada and the UK have proscribed the Maniac Murder Cult. This, however, is just a start. Combatting this threat is going to require thorough, expeditious cross-national cooperation at all levels. We must share best practices and see what can be adopted from one context to be adapted to another. Social media platforms must both be partner and held accountable for failures to act. The youth themselves must be part of the conversation—as part of multisectoral teams-- because they are not only a prime target but they may also have innovative solutions.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

European Terrorism Trend Assessment 2026

A Comprehensive Strategic Foresight Trend Analysis of Contemporary Extremism Dynamics

Nicolas Stockhammer & Gustav E. Gustenau[46]

Introduction & Method

Recent empirical evidence on terrorist incidents in Europe indicates in several aspects shifting dynamics rather than a simple linear trend. Instead of merely extending past data along a straight trajectory assuming persistence, scholars in the field must account for patterns suggesting potential disruptions and evolving extremist trends. Against this backdrop, what prospects can be identified for the evolving terrorist threat landscape in Europe in 2026 and over the following two to three years? Guiding research questions include: What potential trends can be observed? Which of these trends are likely to develop further, and what factors may influence the overall trajectory of Europe's terrorist landscape?

The consolidated trend analysis presented hereunder extends the strategic foresight research of the European Institute for Counter Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP), which examines the evolution of extremist and terrorist phenomena across Europe. Applying a software-based trend management approach, this analysis identifies and evaluates developments likely to shape the European terrorism landscape in the coming years. In this context, trends are defined as discernible directions of development or qualitative expectations of change. Unlike forecasts, trends remain open to future transformations, emphasizing the ongoing dynamics of the present rather than distant speculation. The initial findings of this analysis, first published in 2025[47], have been refined and expanded for the present report.

Phase 1: Trend Identification

The analysis began with a systematic identification of trends within a defined observation field focused on the future evolution of terrorism in Europe. Two main analytical dimensions guided this process. The ***etiological dimension*** examined the underlying causes and drivers of terrorism, including global developments, political and strategic contexts, the EU's counter-terrorism framework, and ideologically or religiously motivated radicalization processes. Whereas the ***morphological dimension*** focused on how terrorism manifests in practice, analyzing technological and digital dynamics, tactical innovations, attack methods, perpetrator profiles, and strategic objectives. Nineteen areas of influence structured the analysis, through which EICTP experts identified and described over one hundred emerging trends.

Phase 2: Trend Selection

A cross-impact analysis was subsequently conducted to determine which of the identified trends exerted the greatest influence on the overall interconnected trend system. Thirty-four trends were designated as particularly significant, ensuring balanced representation across all areas of influence.

Phase 3: Expert Evaluation

These thirty-four key trends were then assessed through an expert survey that applied three evaluative criteria: their relevance to terrorism in Europe; their impact and systemic stability, which captured their influence on and interdependence with other trends; and their durability and controllability, which addressed the persistence and manageability of each trend. This expert evaluation served as the first step toward establishing a recurring, participatory assessment framework for future analyses.

Phase 4: Trend Analysis and Monitoring

During the next phase, the trend evaluation process was operationalized, integrating software-assisted methods to facilitate continuous monitoring through the "SPHERE" analytical framework. The focus shifted to trend dynamics, examining expected evolutions, possible tipping points, and underlying uncertainties. A trend portfolio was developed as a strategic reference tool—distinguishing trends with high predictive certainty from those characterized by volatility and uncertainty. The latter were prioritized in subsequent monitoring efforts. As a result, the database was refined to twenty-nine key trends, incorporating revisions, merges, and newly emerging phenomena.

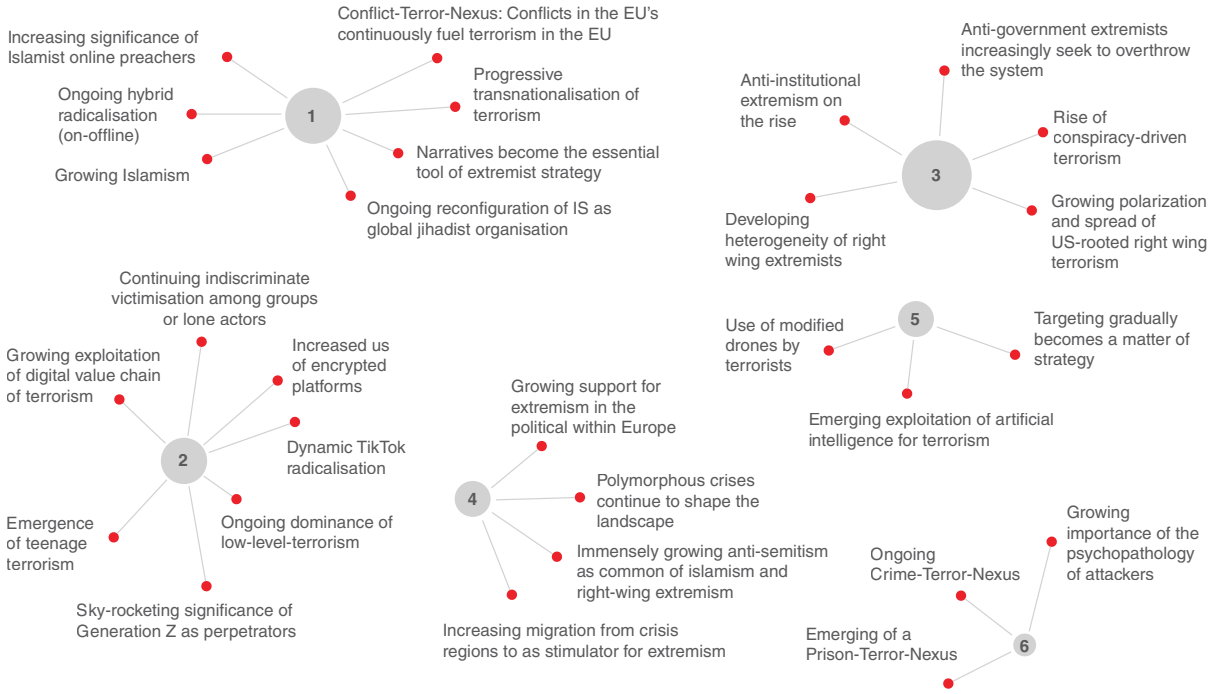
Phase 5: Cluster Formation and Synthesis

The refined set of 29 trends, evaluated across 729 individual assessments, was subjected to cluster analysis to uncover thematic coherence and interrelations. This process identified six clusters of mutually reinforcing trends, each with strong internal thematic linkages that pointed to overarching meta-trends.

Meta-trends aggregate multiple interdependent trends into simplified, long-term developmental trajectories. They reduce complexity, boost analytical clarity, and support strategic foresight and policy-making — while still reflecting the uncertainties of underlying trends.

FIGURE 1

Trend clusters with the 29 key trends



The figure illustrates these six clusters, where grey circle sizes denote internal coherence levels (strongest in Clusters 1 and 3).

The trend clusters do not exist independently of one another; rather, they collectively form a coherent picture — capturing the central complexes of anticipated terrorist developments in Europe. Although not visibly represented here, the trends remain interconnected in numerous ways, as originally observed in the network analysis. In order to elaborate on these trend clusters, the emphasis lies on the development and refinement of the overarching meta-themes, subsequently leading to six meta-trends that will likely shape the European terrorist threat landscape.

The European Terrorist Threatscape

Undoubtedly, the contemporary European security environment faces an unprecedented transformation in the nature, organization, and operational capacity of terrorist threats.[48] Rather than representing discrete ideological factions, violent extremism has morphed into a fluid, interconnected ecosystem characterized by narrative-driven mobilization, rapid technological adoption, and institutional erosion.[49] This assessment synthesizes structural trend cluster analysis across six interconnected domains to illuminate the strategic terrorist threat landscape for 2026 and beyond.

The transformation is not primarily ideological in nature, but rather reflects a profound shift in how violent extremism operates. Whereas historically, terrorism relied upon hierarchical organizations with coherent ideologies, contemporary manifestations increasingly operate through narratively fluid, hybrid online-offline structures, virtualized value chains, and decentralized franchise networks.[50] This evolution enhances adaptability, resilience, and psychological impact while simultaneously complicating traditional counter-terrorism approaches.

Meta-Trend 1: Polycrisis – Amplification and Radicalization

Polycrisis Context

Contemporary violent extremism unfolds within overlapping global crises — geopolitical (Ukraine, Gaza, Iran), economic (EU debt, trade tensions), technological (AI disruption, cyber insecurity), migratory, institutional, and climatic – and an increasingly polarizing US role under the Trump administration, whose confrontational nationalism and support for European radical-right narratives further strain transatlantic cohesion.[51] These crises no longer act independently but amplify each other, producing cumulative uncertainty. Such fragile environment increases receptivity to extremist explanations that promise clarity and certainty facing a growing complexity.

Conflict-Terror-Nexus

Islamist terrorism is currently regarded as the most relevant terrorist threat to Europe, also for the foreseeable future.[52] It is profoundly shaped by conflict dynamics. External armed conflicts act as accelerators of radicalization and mobilization, as geopolitical events

are swiftly integrated into jihadist narratives.[53] Diaspora contexts in Europe serve as resonance chambers that amplify these narratives, while protest movements can evolve into legitimizations of violence. This conflict–terror nexus ensures that external crises exert direct security implications within European societies.[54] In parallel, jihadist actors — most notably the Islamic State (IS) — have since more than a decade undergone organizational transformation from centralized terrorist networks to decentralized, transnational ecosystems of violence. These consist of regional affiliates with operational autonomy, online-based ideological centers acting as a "virtual caliphate"[55] and loosely coupled networks of formal, semi-formal, and informal supporters, thereby enhancing their resilience against repressive measures[56]. The strategic essence of this meta trend lies in the transition of jihadist movements into narrative-driven, hybrid, and transnational ecosystems of violence, purposefully designed to delegitimize democratic statehood, erode social cohesion, and challenge the state's monopoly on the use of force. Whether they achieve this strategic objective with smaller scale local "pinprick" attacks remains questionable.

Radicalization Through Crisis Overload

Multiple overlapping crises create a sense of lost control, rapid change, and existential uncertainty. In this climate, extremist ideologies thrive by simplifying complexity into moral binaries, naming scapegoats, and promising restored order and belonging. These narratives turn diffuse anxiety into directed hostility, lowering resistance to radicalization across ideologies. As radical ideas seep into mainstream politics and culture, extremism becomes normalized — fueled by polarization, weakened centrism, identity conflicts, eroding taboos, and digital echo chambers that amplify extreme views.

Institutional Erosion and Security Implications

Eroding institutional capacity — through fiscal strain, political fragmentation, and digital vulnerability — hampers governments' and international organization's ability to respond effectively. The decline in institutional trust fuels anti-government extremism and conspiracist subcultures, further accelerating democratic weakening.

Meta-Trend 2: The Narrative-Driven Architecture of Contemporary Extremism

Narrative Power and Emotional Legitimacy

Central to understanding 2026's European terrorist threat landscape is recognizing that narratives or narrative fragments have replaced formal ideology as the main mobilizing force — at least partially.[57] Extremist ideology — be it jihadist, far-right, far-left, or anti-government — essentially relies on emotionally charged storytelling that allows fluid ideological mixings. This shift toward eclectic blends of ideological components often referred to as "hybrid extremism", "salad-bar extremism," marks a transformation in how radicalization and cohesion occur without centralized structures.[58]

Mainstream Islamism in Europe is rising particularly through non-violent channels like political advocacy, cultural normalization, and demographic shifts, often leveraging Gaza sympathy to mainstream stances like anti-Zionism and sharia-influenced norms.[59] Across movements, potent narrative cores emphasize victimhood and oppression, whether framed through global Islamic struggle, Western persecution, or institutional corruption. The evolving forms of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, intensified by the Gaza–Israel conflict, act as unifying "bridge"-narrative threads linking diverse extremist actors.[60] Hamas, jihadist groups, and far-right as well as far-left movements exploit real and fabricated imagery to radicalize audiences, particularly youth.[61] In this context, segments of the far left increasingly align with Islamist organizations (Taguieff: "***Islamo-leftism"***) around anti-Israel and anti-Zionist causes, creating tactical alliances that blur ideological boundaries.[62] Shared slogans such as "***from the river to the sea***" further amplify polarization across Europe, rendering extremist narratives and acts of violence increasingly plausible as expressions of political legitimacy.

Counter-Narratives and Reflexive Extremism

Anti-Islamic narratives also thrive, particularly within far-right ecosystems, where they expand into broader conspiracy frameworks like the "remigration" discourse.[63] These portray Muslim communities as existential cultural and demographic threats, framing the mass repatriation of asylum seekers and migrants as an urgent necessity for national survival and defensive reaction aimed at preserving national identity and social order.[64] At the same time, a unifying conspiracist, anti-elitist storyline — blaming corrupt political, financial, and media powers — links extremist communities across ideological lines, providing common ground between far-right, far-left, and Islamist actors despite their differing worldviews.[65] This storytelling proves highly effective because it is emotionally gripping, widely accessible, and readily adaptable to local grievances around migration, discrimination, or injustice. Most critically, it frames violence as morally justified retaliation against perceived victimization.

Hybrid Radicalization and Influencer Ecosystems

Digital environments rapidly magnify this effect, as radicalization today unfolds in hybrid online–offline ecosystems that continually reinforce one another.[66] Online, social media platforms, encrypted messaging apps, and video channels act as powerful multipliers, spreading grievance narratives quickly and visually. Offline, mosques, protest spaces, youth and sports contexts, as well as informal networks, validate these narratives through shared identity experiences. The feedback loops between both domains generate rapid social confirmation, drawing individuals ever deeper into narrative-defined identities.[67] Within this dynamic, Islamist online influencers play a crucial role as "pre-radicalizers," guiding followers from legalistic religiosity toward violent activism without the need for formal recruitment.[68]

Meta-Trend 3: Radicalization Acceleration, Generational Transformation and Low-Level TTPs

Trend Cluster 3 describes a structural condensation

of several mutually reinforcing developments that collectively accelerate terrorist violence — particularly within the jihadist spectrum. At its core lies a shortened and accelerated chain of radicalization → mobilization → violence, enabled by digitalization, changing perpetrator profiles, and simplified modes of violence. This marks a critical structural shift from earlier terrorism, which required extended periods of organizational participation, ideological indoctrination, and operational planning.

Indiscriminate Mass Victimization as Dominant Violence Modality

Jihadist actors—both organized groups and lone offenders — are increasingly resorting to indiscriminate violence against random civilian "soft" targets.[69] This strategy lowers both operational and psychological entry barriers, maximizes psychological impact with minimal planning effort, and fosters a narrative of omnipresence and unpredictability.[70] Low-threshold opportunistic attacks (i.e., those preferably using knives, vehicles, or improvised explosive devices) are now deliberately combined with mass-casualty effects.[71] Terrorism is thus continuously shifting from complex operational planning toward scalable everyday violence, characterized by higher frequency, spontaneity, and social visibility.

Virtualization of the Terrorist Value Chain

Terrorism is increasingly organized end-to-end in the digital sphere.[72] Initial contact, ideological exposure, social embedding, operational instruction, and propaganda dissemination occur almost entirely online. Encrypted platforms and artificial intelligence enable forms of remote-controlled terrorism, where transnational guidance and motivation occur without physical networks.[73] As a result, perpetrators develop both ideological conviction and operational capability simultaneously through virtual interaction. This virtualization increases the adaptability, resilience, and unpredictability of terrorist operations—particularly among lone actors and micro-cells.

The Youth Factor – Teenage Terrorism and Generation Z

The growing involvement of younger perpetrators represents a key acceleration factor.[74] Members of Generation Z — and increasingly Generation Alpha — show lower psychological inhibitions toward violence, a strong affinity for gamification, meme culture, and heroization, and heightened susceptibility to rapid radicalization within algorithmically curated echo chambers.[75] Platforms such as TikTok have become primary vectors of radicalization for adolescents aged 13–17.[76]

Jihadist networks, far-right movements, and anti-government extremists deliberately target this demographic through online preachers, influencer figures, and closed messaging groups. From a developmental perspective, adolescence—marked by identity formation, risk-seeking, and social validation—creates psychological vulnerabilities that extremists exploit through emotionally charged and aesthetically appealing narratives.

Low-Level Terrorism as the New Normal

Low-level terrorism functions as the operational intersection of all sub-trends.[77] It is compatible with youthful offender profiles, ideally suited for digital instruction, and highly effective when paired with indiscriminate target selection. Complex large-scale attacks are declining[78], but mass-impact violence persists in simpler, more reproducible forms. This reflects a new operational logic: psychologically potent yet materially minimalist violence. Simple tactics — stabbings, vehicular assaults, improvised explosives — deliver mass psychological effects disproportionate to their resource requirements.[79] At the same time, drone use and autonomous systems technologies emerge as new complexity multipliers within this fundamentally simplified framework.[80] Emerging TTPs (***tactics, techniques, and procedures***) increasingly emphasize speed, adaptability, and deniability — favoring low-cost, high-impact operations that can be executed autonomously and replicated virally across decentralized networks.[81]

Despite the broader trend toward decentralized, low-cost extremist operations / terrorist attacks, coordinated high-impact attacks persist as a serious threat. Recent examples, like the Vulkangruppe's January 2026 arson sabotage of Berlin's power grid — causing a five-day blackout for about 45,000 households and 2,200 businesses amid freezing weather[82] — or the ISKP's March 2024 assault on Moscow's Crocus City Hall, which killed over 140 people and injured hundreds, highlight this risk.[83] The 2022 Nord Stream pipeline sabotage attack exemplifies another maximum-impact scenario.[84] These incidents collectively underscore how complex planning and coordination can still produce profound disruptive effects amid an era dominated by fragmented extremism.

Meta-Trend 4: The Tech-Terror- Nexus and Tactical Innovation

The convergence of artificial intelligence, encryption, and emerging automation has fundamentally altered the terrorism threat landscape.[85] Barriers to entry for sophisticated operational capabilities have dramatically collapsed. What historically required organizational apparatus, technical expertise, and resource networks now becomes accessible to small groups and individuals through commodified technology platforms.

Artificial intelligence as Key Driver

Artificial intelligence functions as a force multiplier across the entire terrorism value chain. AI-generated propaganda systems produce news bulletins, memes, and tailored content at scale.[86] Recruitment automation employs personalized chatbots engaging potential recruits continuously, with metaverse environments enabling immersive training simulations. Financing facilitation through cryptocurrency mixing and automated money laundering reduces traceability. Operational planning becomes enhanced through targeting analysis, logistics optimization, and project management.[87] Surveillance evasion advances through encryption algorithms and steganographic techniques. Weapon integration — via autonomous drone systems and AI-guided targeting — shifts the cost-benefit calculation decisively toward non-state actors.

The encrypted dark space represents perhaps the most consequential operational environment. Encrypted platforms—Telegram, Signal, ProtonMail — enable coordination beyond law enforcement surveillance reach.[88] Dark web marketplaces mature into integrated ecosystems for weapons procurement, financing, haven networking, and knowledge exchange. These spaces provide not merely operational security, but cultural reinforcement within extremist subcultures. Blockchain-based decentralized platforms are emerging as additional coordination infrastructure, further complicating detection, and disruption.

Emerging technologies and drones

Emerging technologies amplify these capabilities. Drone integration in attack scenarios — for surveillance, delivery, and autonomous assault — lowers entry barriers for lethal operations while providing precision and force multiplication.[89] Three-dimensional printed weapons manufacturing reduces supply chain dependency.[90] Biometric spoofing and deepfake technology complicate identity verification and enable sophisticated propaganda. Cryptocurrency enables terrorist financing while evading sanctions.[91] Metaverse environments provide training, radicalization, and community reinforcement outside physical surveillance. The asymmetric advantage accrues to non-state actors.

Meta-Trend 5: Institutional Delegitimization and Anti-Government Extremism

This meta-trend captures the structural erosion of political-institutional legitimacy, manifesting in hybrid, fragmented, ideologically fluid extremism rather than coherent alternatives to democracy. Anti-government extremism (AGE), conspiracy-driven violence, stochastic terrorism and diverse right-wing forms converge into an anti-institutional space detached from traditional ideologies.[92]

AGE Characteristics AGE targets institutions like governments, parliaments, courts, media, science, and security forces, delegitimizing their carriers and processes without directly attacking democratic architecture. It lacks consistent counter-models, enabling narrative flexibility via “corrupt elites,” “deep state,” or “illegitimate government” myths that bridge ideological gaps and normalize violence.93 AGE blurs with populism, conspiracy theories, and issue-specific opposition, potentially diluting its utility for P/CVE efforts.94 Hybridization blurs lines between radical opposition, parliamentary integration, and extra-institutional mobilization, embedding extremist stances culturally.

Current Manifestations

AGE is characterized by erosion of trust in political institutions rather than explicit rejection of democratic governance structures. Conspiracy narratives provide organizing frameworks and legitimizing explanations for perceived institutional failure. The „crooked elite“ narrative specifically undermines rule of law through factually incorrect claims while maintaining rhetorical flexibility.

AGE manifestations increasingly evidence coordination among previously isolated actors. Vigilante movements rise throughout Europe.[95] Threats and intimidation against politicians, journalists, and judges intensify. Online networks facilitate coordination while decentralized organizational structures prevent traditional disruption strategies. Critically, extremist forces no longer operate external to democratic systems; they increasingly participate within electoral politics while simultaneously maintaining delegitimizing narratives.

The current US-polarization dynamic proves significant and spills over to Europe.[96] Nationalist movements gain emboldened participation globally, with political center perceived as vulnerable to asymmetric pressure. Electoral success of radical and even explicitly extremist parties across the EU political spectrum reflects mainstreaming of anti-institutional rhetoric.[97] Political establishment radicalization — characterized by uninhibited verbal violence, ***ad hominem*** attacks, and delegitimizing language — accelerates the erosion of institutional norms. Particularly, economic grievances have catalyzed unprecedented AGE mobilization constellations.

Meta-Trend 6: Institutionalized Radicalization Ecosystems and Hybrid Threat Profiles

Extremism and terrorism are increasingly emerging within institutionalized and marginalized environments, where detention systems, criminal milieus, and individual psychological vulnerabilities intersect and mutually reinforce one another. In certain contexts, prisons have transformed from points of disruption in extremist trajectories into strategic spaces for radicalization and recruitment. Alongside the crime-terror nexus and the rising prevalence of psychopathology among perpetrators, these dynamics contribute to a self-sustaining ecosystem that challenges conventional counter-terrorism strategies.

Prisons as Strategic Radicalization and Recruitment Spaces

Correctional facilities now serve as key arenas of extremist radicalization particularly for jihadist and far right actors.[98] Rather than disrupting extremist activity, detention often facilitates systematic recruitment and ideological indoctrination. These processes commonly involve the targeting of ordinary criminal offenders, the exploitation of vulnerability factors such as isolation, identity crises, and personal grievances, and the formation of durable networks that frequently reactivate after release. As a result, many individuals who later engage in terrorism complete significant stages of their radicalization while incarcerated, effectively turning prison systems into concealed pipelines for future violent extremists.

Consolidation of the Crime Terror Nexus

The prison–terror nexus increasingly overlaps with the broader crime–terror nexus[99], creating a landscape where criminal and terrorist worlds are no longer distinct but mutually reinforcing ecosystems. Terrorist groups depend on criminal networks for financing, logistics,

and operational expertise, while organized crime benefits from ideological legitimacy and protection. Prisons function as critical contact and fusion zones where these two spheres converge. A recurring biographical pattern often emerges: delinquency leads to incarceration, which can foster radicalization and ultimately result in terrorist mobilization. This cycle reinforces the adaptability and resilience of extremist structures.

Growing Relevance of Psychopathology in Terrorist Profiles

Modern terrorism reveals a growing share of perpetrators with psychological or psychiatric disorders often identified before attacks.[100] Yet persistent misconceptions suggest that mental illness negates ideological responsibility or that lone-actor radicalization happens suddenly. In reality, most cases evolve through extended social processes that intertwine personal crises, ideological exposure, and the communication of violent intent. Offenders frequently draw inspiration from previous attackers and extremist subcultures until a triggering event catalyzes violence. Many so-called hybrid attackers emerge at the intersections of prison settings, criminal milieus, and online extremist spaces. Adolescent vulnerability is particularly pronounced: low inhibition thresholds and unstable identity formation combine with extremist narratives, martyrdom framings, and gamified online aesthetics to heighten the risk of stochastic terrorism.

Conclusion: Cross-Domain Synergies and Fifth Wave Emergence

The trend cluster analysis consolidates a spectrum of heterogeneous developments into six overarching meta-trends, collectively outlining a transformed European security landscape shaped by terrorism and extremism well beyond 2026. Rather than signaling a linear escalation of specific threats, these trends portray a structural evolution: extremist phenomena are becoming more hybrid, narratively orchestrated, socially embedded, and strategically adaptive.

Persistent structural constants — such as jihadism, the narrative framing of extremism, the digitalization of terrorist ecosystems, and the Crime–Prison–Terror nexus — remain central pillars of terrorist strategy. Simultaneously, the erosion of institutional legitimacy and resilience within European societies underscores systemic vulnerability: extremism thrives not only on external conflicts but also on internal fractures, polarization, and crisis fatigue. The increasingly blurred boundaries between political dissent, ideological radicalization, and conspiracist anti-institutionalism epitomize a deeper process of societal destabilization.

Against this volatile backdrop, ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza — coupled with instability in Iran, the Sahel, and Central Asia, plus seemingly erratic and power-driven US geopolitics under the Trump administration — could intensify the global threat environment. These dynamics amplify transnational radicalization and generate cascading effects across digital, psychological, and sociopolitical domains.

Together, these interactions mark the onset of a "fifth wave of extremism": a multidimensional, cross-domain ecosystem driven less by cohesive ideologies than by loosely networked belief systems and algorithmically personalized narratives. Artificial intelligence, encrypted communication, and social media architectures are enabling individualized radicalization at scale, particularly among younger and cognitively vulnerable groups. This fluid configuration intertwines criminal and extremist spheres, accelerates tactical virtualization, and normalizes low-threshold violence.

Empirical data confirm these structural transformations. According to Europol in 2024, Europe recorded 58 terrorist attacks (24 of them jihadist, mostly by lone actors) and 449 terrorism-related arrests, 289 of which were linked to jihadism.[101] Jihadist terrorism remains the primary concern, even as right-wing extremism continues to rise, marked by simplified tactics, online mobilization, and "salad-bar" hybrid ideologies, which will gain significance. Youth radicalization via platforms such as TikTok and encrypted apps exemplifies this fusion, while technological exploitation — including AI-generated propaganda, deepfakes, and integration with criminal networks — further decentralizes the landscape.

Over the 2026–2029 horizon, terrorism in Europe is expected to persist as a low-level but continuous threat, characterized by intermittent lone-actor attacks and steady online-driven radicalization. Likely developments include an intensification of low-tech attacks (knives, vehicles) and recruitment of adolescents into loosely connected extremist networks. Both jihadist and far-right threats will persist in "mutant" forms, though most plots will likely be disrupted through enhanced EU intelligence cooperation. Geopolitical volatility — from the Middle East to Eastern Europe and beyond — will continue to fuel propaganda surges, arms trafficking, and foreign influence operations.

External instability, particularly in MENA jihadist hotspots and potential policy shifts under the current US administration, could boost recruitment and propaganda across EU-affiliated networks. While stronger frameworks of AI regulation, and digital moderation may reduce some risks, persistent societal polarization and marginalization — especially in susceptible migrant communities — could sustain intermittent attacks. AI advancements, deepfakes, and online vulnerabilities among youth will challenge prevention strategies.

In essence, terrorism in Europe is evolving from episodic attacks into a continuous structural challenge. Effective strategic foresight must therefore move beyond reactive counterterrorism to emphasize resilience-building and proactive prevention. Flexible, scenario-based planning—anticipating both escalation and de-escalation pathways — will be crucial to safeguarding democratic stability in an age of hybrid threats and algorithmically driven extremism.

A

GTI Ranks & Scores, 2025

GTI Rank	Country	2025 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2024–2025)
1	Pakistan	8.574	0.201
2	Burkina Faso	8.324	-0.257
3	Niger	7.816	0.029
4	Nigeria	7.792	0.159
5	Mali	7.586	-0.31
6	Syria	7.545	-0.461
7	Somalia	7.391	-0.235
8	Democratic Republic of the Congo	7.171	0.285
9	Colombia	7.116	0.528
10	Israel	6.79	-0.674
11	Afghanistan	6.678	-0.61
12	Cameroon	6.593	-0.39
13	India	6.428	-0.136
14	Myanmar	6.245	-0.696
15	Mozambique	6.022	-0.229
16	Iraq	5.822	-0.77
17	Russia	5.593	-0.574
18	Iran	5.477	-0.605
19	Benin	5.434	0.632
20	Thailand	5.275	0.446
21	Kenya	5.088	-0.278
22	Palestine	4.8	-0.223
23	Philippines	4.719	-0.521
24	Indonesia	4.714	0.338
25	Yemen	4.653	-0.427
26	Chad	4.625	-0.777
27	Chile	4.553	-0.615
28	United States of America	4.521	0.98
29	Germany	4.447	-0.311
30	Togo	4.305	-0.699
31	Australia	3.732	1.62
32	Egypt	3.465	-0.951
33	Burundi	3.361	-0.682
34	Uganda	3.25	-0.452
35	France	3.224	0.477
36	Turkiye	3.212	-0.756

GTI Rank	Country	2025 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2024–2025)
37	Ecuador	3.063	1.513
38	United Kingdom	2.936	0.154
39	Ukraine	2.927	0.924
40	Greece	2.788	-0.196
41	Tajikistan	2.602	0.781
42	Bangladesh	2.286	-0.677
43	Oman	2.282	-0.645
44	Jordan	2.268	-0.645
45	Czechia	2.261	-0.645
46	Sweden	1.839	-0.003
47	Algeria	1.766	-0.649
48	Poland	1.682	-0.353
49	Peru	1.572	-0.588
50	Tunisia	1.522	-0.662
51	Austria	1.498	0.916
52	Netherlands	1.475	0.073
53	Canada	1.333	-0.617
54	China	1.311	-0.552
55	Belgium	1.198	-0.337
56	Angola	1.136	-0.521
57	Malaysia	1.092	-0.534
58	Senegal	1.07	-0.508
59	Libya	1.007	-0.605
60	Italy	0.999	-0.28
61	Djibouti	0.925	-0.536
62	Brazil	0.909	-0.521
63	Tanzania	0.888	-0.913
64	Spain	0.794	-0.462
65	Serbia	0.782	0.2
66	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.782	-0.436
67	United Arab Emirates	0.749	-0.429
68	Switzerland	0.749	-0.516
69	Norway	0.725	-0.473
70	Denmark	0.72	0
71	Cote d'Ivoire	0.702	-0.752
72	Lebanon	0.648	-0.589

GTI Rank	Country	2025 GTI Score (out of 10)	Change in Score (2024–2025)
73	Slovakia	0.616	-0.407
74	Finland	0.582	-0.367
75	Japan	0.571	-0.378
76	Central African Republic	0.556	-0.401
77	Georgia	0.506	-0.335
78	Kosovo	0.465	-0.317
79	Argentina	0.455	-0.346
80	Saudi Arabia	0.443	-0.402
81	Portugal	0.423	0.423
82	Armenia	0.423	-0.297
83	Ireland	0.423	-0.297
84	Lithuania	0.423	-0.297
85	Venezuela	0.396	-0.314
86	South Korea	0.333	-0.249
87	Mexico	0.325	-0.257
88	Ethiopia	0.288	-0.499
89	Nepal	0.288	-0.825
90	Cambodia	0.233	-0.19
91	Latvia	0.233	-0.19
92	Cyprus	0.176	-0.171
93	Azerbaijan	0.123	-0.11
94	Belarus	0.123	-0.11
95	New Zealand	0.114	-0.103
96	Uzbekistan	0.114	-0.119
97	Iceland	0.059	-0.064
98	Eswatini	0.044	-0.043
99	Bahrain	0.03	-0.029
100	Albania	0	0
100	Bhutan	0	0
100	Bolivia	0	0
100	Botswana	0	0
100	Bulgaria	0	0
100	Costa Rica	0	0
100	Croatia	0	0
100	Cuba	0	0
100	Dominican Republic	0	0
100	El Salvador	0	0
100	Equatorial Guinea	0	0
100	Eritrea	0	0
100	Estonia	0	0
100	Gabon	0	0
100	Ghana	0	0
100	Guatemala	0	0
100	Guinea	0	0
100	Guinea-Bissau	0	0
100	Guyana	0	0
100	Haiti	0	0
100	Honduras	0	0
100	Hungary	0	0
100	Jamaica	0	0
100	Kazakhstan	0	0
100	Kuwait	0	0
100	Kyrgyz Republic	0	0
100	Laos	0	0
100	Lesotho	0	0
100	Liberia	0	0
100	Madagascar	0	0
100	Malawi	0	0
100	Mauritania	0	0
100	Mauritius	0	0
100	Moldova	0	0
100	Mongolia	0	0
100	Montenegro	0	0
100	Morocco	0	0
100	Namibia	0	0
100	Nicaragua	0	0
100	North Korea	0	0
100	North Macedonia	0	0
100	Panama	0	0
100	Papua New Guinea	0	0
100	Qatar	0	0
100	Republic of the Congo	0	0
100	Romania	0	0
100	Rwanda	0	0
100	Sierra Leone	0	0
100	Singapore	0	0
100	Slovenia	0	0
100	South Africa	0	0
100	South Sudan	0	0
100	Sri Lanka	0	0
100	Sudan	0	0
100	Taiwan	0	0
100	The Gambia	0	0
100	Timor-Leste	0	0
100	Trinidad and Tobago	0	0
100	Turkmenistan	0	0
100	Vietnam	0	0
100	Zambia	0	0
100	Zimbabwe	0	0
100	Uruguay	0	-0.059
100	Paraguay	0	-0.073

B

GTI Methodology

The GTI ranks 163 countries based on four indicators weighted over five years. A country's annual GTI score is based on a unique scoring system to account for the relative impact of incidents in the year. The four factors counted in each country's yearly score are:

- total number of terrorist incidents in a given year
- total number of fatalities caused by terrorists in a given year
- total number of injuries caused by terrorists in a given year
- total number of hostages caused by terrorists in a given year

Each of the factors is weighted between zero and three, and a five-year weighted average is applied in a bid to reflect the latent psychological effect of terrorist acts over time. The weightings shown in Table C.1 were determined by consultation with the GPI Expert Panel.

The greatest weighting is attributed to a fatality.

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE OF A COUNTRY'S GTI SCORE

To assign a score to a country, each incident is rated according to the four measures. The measures are then multiplied by their weighting factor and aggregated. This is done for all incidents and then all incidents for each country are aggregated to give the country score. To illustrate, Table C.2 depicts a hypothetical country's record for a given year.

TABLE C.1

Indicator weights used in the Global Terrorism Index

Dimension	Weight
Total number of incidents	1
Total number of fatalities	3
Total number of injuries	0.5
Total number of hostages	0.5

TABLE C.2

Hypothetical country terrorist attacks in a given year

Dimension	Weight	Number of incidents for the given year	Calculated raw score
Total number of incidents	1	21	21
Total number of fatalities	3	36	108
Total number of injuries	0.5	53	26.5
Total number of injuries	0.5	20	10
Total raw score			166.5

Given these indicator values, this hypothetical country for that year would be assessed as having an impact of terrorism of

(1×21) + (3×36) + (0.5×53) + (0.5×20) = 166.5.

FIVE-YEAR WEIGHTED AVERAGE

To account for the aftereffects of trauma that terrorist attacks have on a society, the GTI takes into consideration the events of previous years as having a bearing on a country's current score. For instance, the scale of the 2011 terrorist attacks in Norway continued to have a psychological impact on the population for many years after the event. To account for the lingering effects of terrorism, the prior four years are also included in the scoring with a decreasing weight each year. Table C.3 highlights the weights used for each year.

TABLE C.3

Time weighting of historical scores

Year	Weight	% of Score
Current year	16	52
Previous year	8	26
Two years ago	4	13
Three years ago	2	6
Four years ago	1	3

LOGARITHMIC BANDING SCORES ON A SCALE OF 1-10

The impact of terrorism is not evenly distributed throughout the world. There are a handful of countries with very high levels of terrorism compared to most countries which experience only very small amounts of terrorism, if any. Hence, the GTI uses a base 10 logarithmic banding system between 0 and 10 at 0.5 intervals.

As shown in Table C.4, this mapping method yields a total number of 21 bands. This maps all values to a band of size 0.5 within the scale of 0-10. To band these scores, the following method is used:

1. Define the Minimum GTI Score across all countries as having a banded score of 0.
2. Define the Maximum GTI Score across all countries as having a banded score 10.
3. Subtract the Minimum from the Maximum GTI scores and calculate 'r' by:
4. a. root = 2 X (Highest GTI Banded Score – Lowest GTI Banded Score) = 2 X (10–0) =20
5. b. Range = 2 X (Highest Recorded GTI Raw Score – Lowest Recorded GTI Raw Score)
6. c. r = root range -1 for all values of root between 1 to 21

This method produces the set of bands used in the GTI listed in Table C.4.

TABLE C.4

Bands used in the GTI

Band number	Bands	Band cut off values	Band number	Bands	Band cut off values
1	0	0	12	5.5	578.19
2	0.5	1.78	13	6	1030.79
3	1	3.18	14	6.5	1837.66
4	1.5	5.67	15	7	3276.14
5	2	10.1	16	7.5	5840.64
6	2.5	18.01	17	8	10412.57
7	3	32.11	18	8.5	18563.3
8	3.5	57.24	19	9	33094.25
9	4	102.04	20	9.5	58999.71
10	4.5	181.92	21	10	105183.4
11	5	324.32			

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