

TERRORIST THREAT ASSESSMENT

2019 - 2021

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and Hanna Rigault Arkhis

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Main Points

- Left-wing extremist terrorism is the most common, as well as the least lethal form of terrorism. Left-wing extremist terrorists are responsible for roughly half of the attacks, but for only a fraction of the victims. Jihadist and right-wing extremist terrorist attacks have occurred less often, but have much higher casualty rates.
- France and Germany suffered many terrorist attacks in absolute, as well as in relative, numbers. Among the countries we examined, France and Germany are among the larger countries going by population size, so one would expect more terrorist attacks there than in smaller countries. However, attacks in France and Germany were overrepresented in our database, meaning that more attacks occurred in France and Germany than one would expect on the basis of the sizes of their populations.
- There is a relation between the ideology of the perpetrators and the weapons they use in their attacks. Not all these patterns are as salient, but most left-wing extremist terrorists commit arson or use fire bombs, most jihadists use melee weapons (mostly knives), and most right-wing extremists use firearms.
- The number of terrorism-related arrests has decreased between 2018 and 2020. In eight countries with comparable data, the overall number of arrests has dropped by half between 2018 and 2020. According to Europol data, in the EU, the number of jihadism-related arrest decreased by more than fifty percent compared to previous years. The same trend can be observed amongst left-wing extremism-related arrests, largely due to a decrease in Italy.
- Arrests for terrorism-related charges are spread out across various countries, but there are nevertheless geographical patterns. Most arrests of suspected left-wing extremist terrorists have taken place in Southern Europe, with Italy and Greece together accounting for seventy-three percent of those arrests. Most arrests on suspicion of ethno-nationalist terrorism (eighty-four percent) occurred in Northern Ireland. Right-wing extremism-related arrests are mostly located in the US and Germany, which together account for sixty percent of the arrests in this category. Jihadism-related arrests are carried throughout the EU, but 38 percent took place in France.
- Numbers of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) remain low relative to the amount that remain abroad. 4,020 FTFs from the countries assessed remain unreturned (including those killed, captured, and remaining at large) after just seventy-nine returned in the period assessed. This does not differ greatly from the trend seen in recent years, nor from the overwhelming thrust of state policies on the issue.
- Female FTFs are significantly more likely to return or be repatriated to their home countries than male FTFs. In all countries we have examined, the returning foreign fighters have been mostly women. Some state policies favour the repatriation of children and as a result, females are being returned in their capacity as mothers as part of these arrangements due to states opting not to separate child from mother.
- FTFs are far more likely to return as part of formal repatriation/extradition arrangements than through informal/illicit cross-border travel: ninety-one percent of FTFs known to have returned home between September 2019-August 2021 did so through formal repatriation and extradition agreements. Only nine percent returned on their own initiative.

1. Introduction

By now it is something of a truism to say that the terrorist threat is constantly changing and is always adapting to whatever changes it sees itself confronted with.¹ But merely acknowledging the fluid nature of the terrorist threat is not enough. We should, of course, try to understand what those changes entail, if they occur at all, and what they mean for our efforts to fight terrorism. The current ICCT Threat Assessment means to serve as a basis for such discussions. Using data about the numbers, geographical distribution, and modus operandi of terrorist attacks, about returning foreign terrorist fighters and about arrests related to terrorism, we identify the most relevant trends and patterns in these areas and give our estimates about what we can read into them. That way, we provide an empirical overview about the current state of the terrorist threat.

This Threat Assessment is a follow-up to the Threat Assessment that ICCT published in 2019 and covers the two-year period between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2021, unless stated otherwise. In terms of geographical scope, the research here covers the same countries as the previous Threat Assessment, with data on Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the US. The previous Threat Assessment was intended as a basis for meetings of the Madrid Group, “a forum under which representatives from various national fusion centres informally convene bi-annually, to share insights and experiences on threat assessments and counter-terrorism coordination.”² With this purpose in mind, all of the members of the Madrid Group were included in the previous Threat Assessment. In order to enable ourselves to make comparisons between the current situation and the one in the period covered by the previous Threat Assessment, we chose to focus the current assessment on the same countries.

For each of these countries we collected the same (or at least similar) data. The first aspect of terrorism examined is the attacks, including what country they occurred in, what weapons were used, how many people were killed and wounded, and what ideology the perpetrators adhered to. The results have been outlined in chapter 2. Then we focused on the jihadist foreign fighter phenomenon. While the numbers of foreign terrorist fighters plateaued several years ago and have remained much the same since, there remain questions regarding the returning foreign terrorist fighters: are they coming back at all, and if so, how? Are they making their way to their home countries on their own initiative, or are they being sent back by countries where they were imprisoned? These, among others, are questions we answer in chapter 3. The next chapter is about arrests on charges related to terrorism (including terrorist financing, recruitment, spreading (online) propaganda etc.). We looked at where they occurred and what the ideology of the perpetrators was. Finally, we compared the official threat levels of the various countries in 2021 to the threat levels that were recorded in the previous threat assessment. This allowed us to see whether the terrorist threat has changed in the perception of the governments of the countries in our threat assessment.

No data-driven research project is perfect, and the current one is no exception. We will, however, be clear about the methodological choices we made and about the advantages and disadvantages of the ways we collected our data. Each chapter starts with a brief outline of the methodology for the data that are being discussed in that chapter. Those who want to find out in more detail what we did, can consult the more elaborate descriptions in the methodological annex, which has a separate section that corresponds with each one of the chapters.

1 For just two examples of assertions to this effect, see A. Koshkin and A. Novikov, "Economic Risks of Terrorist Attacks and Specific Features of Their Assessment", *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 331 (2019): 371, <https://doi.org/doi:10.2991/ismge-19.2019.70>; J. Coles and J. Zhuang, "Introducing Terrorist Archetypes: Using Terrorist Objectives and Behavior to Predict New, Complex, and Changing Threats", *Military Operations Research* 21, No. 4 (2016): 47, <https://doi.org/doi.10.5711/1082598321447>.

2 R. van der Veer, W. Bos, and L. van der Heide, *Fusion Centres in Six European Countries: Emergence, Roles and Challenges* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), 2.

2. Terrorist Attacks

2.1 Methodology

In collecting data regarding terrorist attacks in the selected countries, we made full use of available overviews of attacks.³ We used the country timelines of the Counter Extremism Project as a starting point and used some other overviews to find attacks that were not mentioned by the Counter Extremism Project. As a third step, we carried out several online searches per country (with ‘terrorist’, ‘attack, the name of the country and a year as search terms) to be sure that we are not missing out on any attacks.

In deciding which attacks to include in our database, we used Schmid’s revised academic consensus definition of terrorism: “a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties.” As terrorism is widely considered to be a form of political violence, the current analysis of terrorist attacks only focuses on acts by non-state actors for which there is at least some evidence that the perpetrator was acting on a political or ideological agenda. For a more elaborate explanation on the choices we made during the collection of the data, we refer the reader to paragraph 8.1.

2.2 Attacks per country

The total number of attacks we found for the entire period and all countries combined is ninety-nine, but the geographical distribution of these attacks is very uneven. The four countries where attack numbers run into the double digits account for sixty-four percent of the attacks, and roughly half of the countries (sixteen out of thirty-one) have had no terrorist attacks at all (see figure 1; the countries with no attacks have been left out).⁴

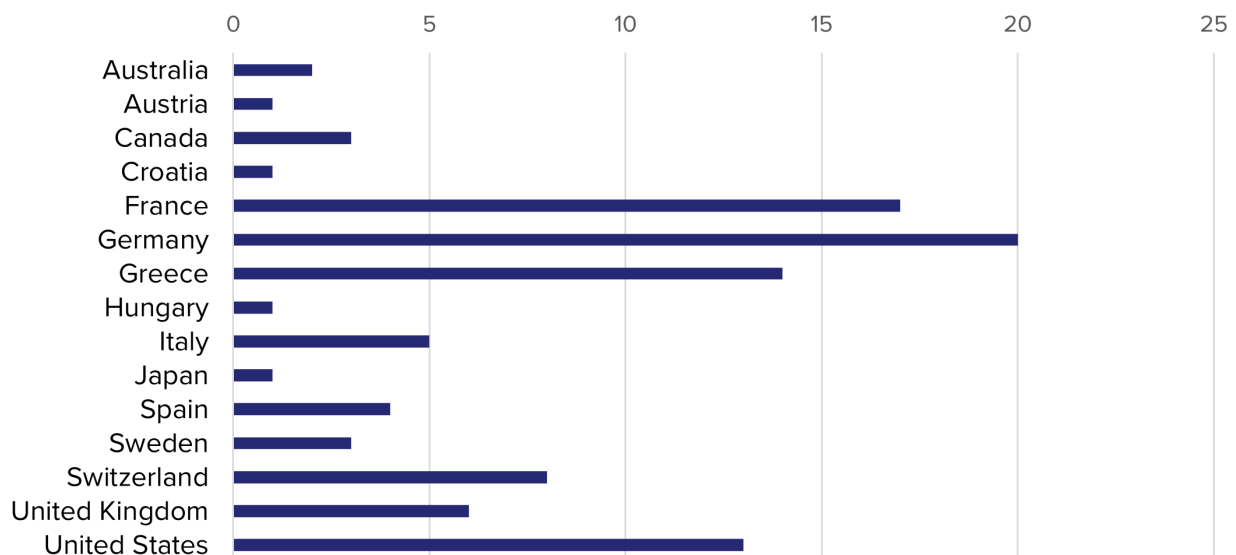


Figure 1. Number of Terrorist Attacks per Country, 2019-2021

³ See paragraph 8.1.2 for the full list of overviews we used.

⁴ One country score that may require some explaining is that of the UK, which one might expect to have a higher score because of the ongoing tensions in Northern Ireland. By the standards of the region the violence is currently low, but there is nevertheless a constant stream of paramilitary style shootings and other similar types of violent incidents. The problem, however, is that on the basis of the most reliable data that are available to us, i.e. the statistics of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) regarding the security situation in the region, we cannot tell which one of these incidents are actually terrorist attacks. This being the case, we treated Northern Ireland in the same way we treated the other countries, which led us to a number of terrorist attacks which is much lower than the overall number of violent incidents in Northern Ireland. We concur that some of the incidents that have been recorded in the PSNI data may be terrorist attacks, but as we cannot be sure, we did not include them in our count for the UK. For a more elaborate explanation of our reservations regarding the PSNI-data, see par. 8.1.5.

Germany is the country with the highest number of terrorist attacks, followed by France, Greece and the US. Many countries have few terrorist attacks; nine of them have fewer than five. Part of the explanation for the uneven distribution between the various countries could be differences in population size. Not all selected countries, of course, have similar population sizes, so it stands to reason that countries with more people also have more terrorist attacks. In order to see whether the terrorist attacks are distributed equally by population size, we generated two data points for each country. First, we added up the population sizes of all the countries in our threat assessment and for each of the countries we calculated what percentage of that overall population size they represent. Second, for each country we calculated what percentage of the ninety-nine attacks occurred within their borders.

If the distribution would be perfectly equal according to population size, a country that accounts for, say, twenty percent of the overall population will account for twenty percent of the terrorist attacks. If that same country accounts for, say, forty percent of all terrorist attacks, it is overrepresented in the list of attacks, as there will have been more attacks than one would expect on the basis of its population size. If, on the other hand, this country accounts for only five percent of all attacks, it is underrepresented. The stronger the overrepresentation, the more justified one would be to say that a given country has a ‘terrorism problem’, with the caveat that not all terrorist attacks are equally lethal (see paragraph 3.4).

As a visual aid, we created figure 2. The green line from the bottom left to the upper right represents a perfectly equal population size / terrorist attack ratio and helps us see whether a country is over- or underrepresented in the set of ninety-nine terrorist attacks. Countries that are above the green line are overrepresented, countries that are below the green line are underrepresented. The first thing that stands out from the chart is how strong the relation between the shares in the population size and the attacks actually is. Of the thirty-one countries, only six (the labelled ones in the chart) fall clearly above or below the green line, meaning they have significantly more or fewer attacks than one would expect on the basis of their population sizes. It is beyond the scope of this paper to find explanations for over- or underrepresentation, but what it does show, is that population size alone does account for some, albeit not all, of the differences in the numbers of terrorist attacks in various countries.

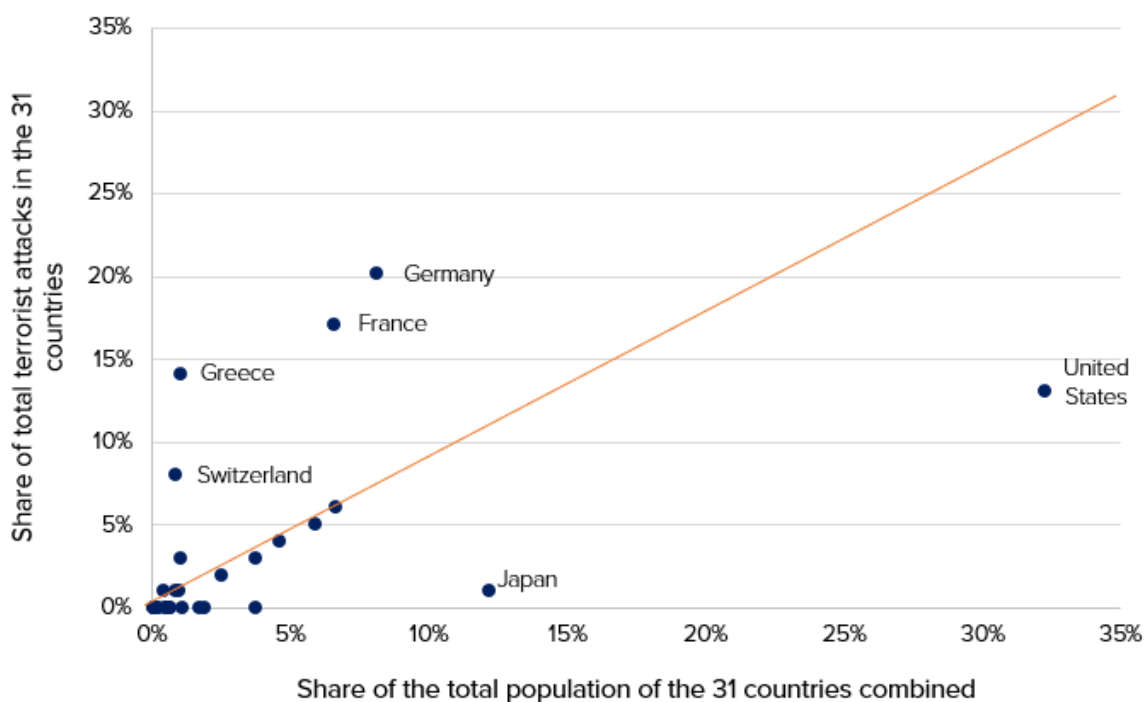


Figure 2. Population size and terrorist attacks, 2019-2021

At the same time, there are also countries that have witnessed numbers of attacks that are out of proportion to their population size. France and Germany are large European countries in terms of population size, but would have seen fewer attacks if the distribution of attacks were equal according to population size. Interestingly, in three of the four countries that are furthest above the green line, it is left-wing extremist attacks that account for the difference; Greece, Germany and Switzerland all have relatively high numbers of left-wing extremist attacks. As attacks in that category are almost always invariably small and easy to execute, it stands to reason that the presence of a movement willing to commit that type of terrorist attack drives up the attack numbers to the point where a country becomes overrepresented in datasets on terrorist attacks. France is different in this regard; a sizeable majority of the attacks on French soil were jihadist in nature.

The two countries where one would, on the basis of population size alone, expect more attacks than there have been, are Japan and, perhaps more surprisingly, the US. Given the strong presence of violent right-wing extremism in the US, the country's underrepresentation might seem odd, but perhaps this presence leads to other forms of political violence. The US may not have seen an inordinate number of terrorist attacks, it has dealt with large numbers of hate crimes, shootings and the like, so the fact that the US is underrepresented in the set of ninety-nine attacks does not necessarily suggest that American right-wing extremists are not violent. At most, it means they also engage in other forms of political violence.

2.3 Attacks per ideological strand

Of the ninety-nine total attacks we discussed in the previous section, slightly more than half (fifty) have been committed by left-wing extremists, which have been by far the most prolific terrorists in the time period in question, at least in terms of the number of attacks (see figure 3). There have been twenty-seven jihadist attacks, fourteen right-wing extremist attacks and three ethno-nationalist attacks. Five attacks fall into the 'single-issue' category, meaning that they were meant to further causes that are not tied to a more all-encompassing ideology.

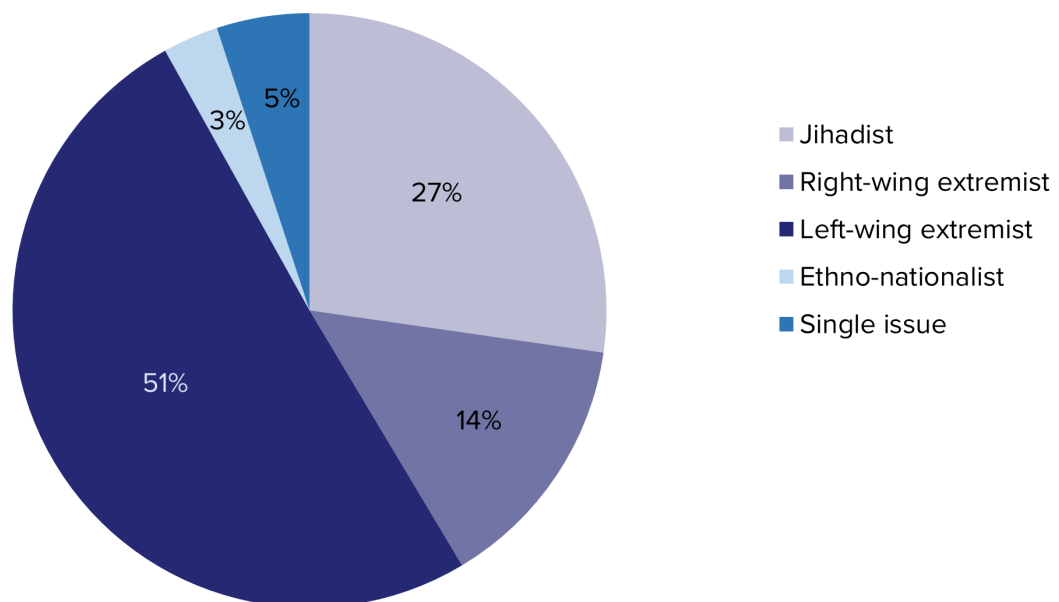


Figure 3. Terrorist Attacks per Ideology, 2019-2021

Before the fall of the Caliphate, a relatively large number of attacks, some of which very deadly, were committed in France. What we are seeing now (see figure 4) is a continuation of that pattern, except on a much more modest scale. In France, jihadism is still the most prolific ideology. Countries other than France have seen only a handful of jihadist attacks, if there have been any at all. There have been no jihadist terrorist attacks in twenty-two of the thirty-one countries in our threat assessment (they have been left out of figure 4).

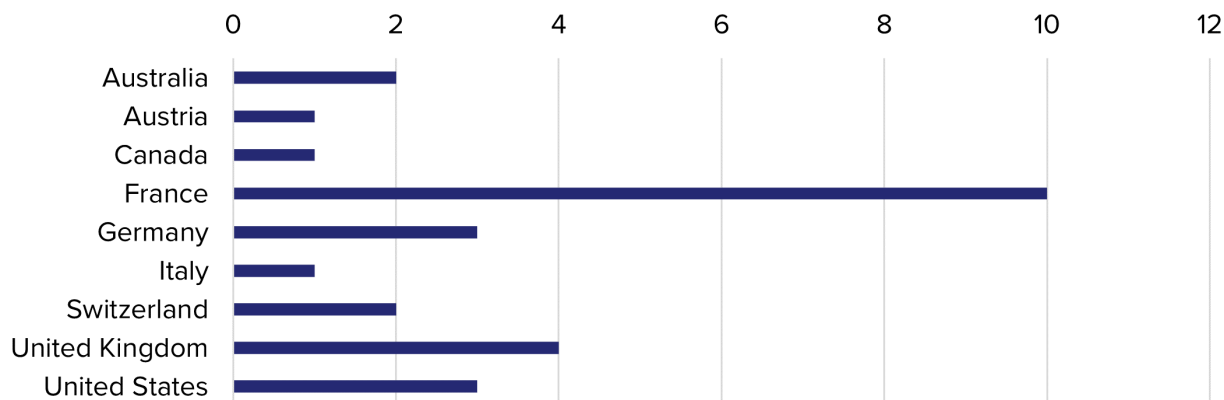


Figure 4: Numbers of Jihadist Terrorist Attacks, 2019-2021

There have been fourteen right-wing extremist terrorist attacks, half of which took place in the US (see figure 5). Several policy makers and police agencies have sounded the alarm about the threat from right-wing extremist terrorism. So far, however, such fears have yet to materialise into a tangible threat. Purely in numerical terms, one would be hard-pressed to speak of a wave of right-wing extremist terrorist attacks in the time period September 2019 – August 2021. Five countries suffered only one right-wing extremist attack, twenty-four countries suffered none. To be sure, this does not mean that we should conclude that there is no right-wing extremist terrorist threat, but it is also fair to say that it has not yet reached a level that is much more serious than what we have seen in previous years.

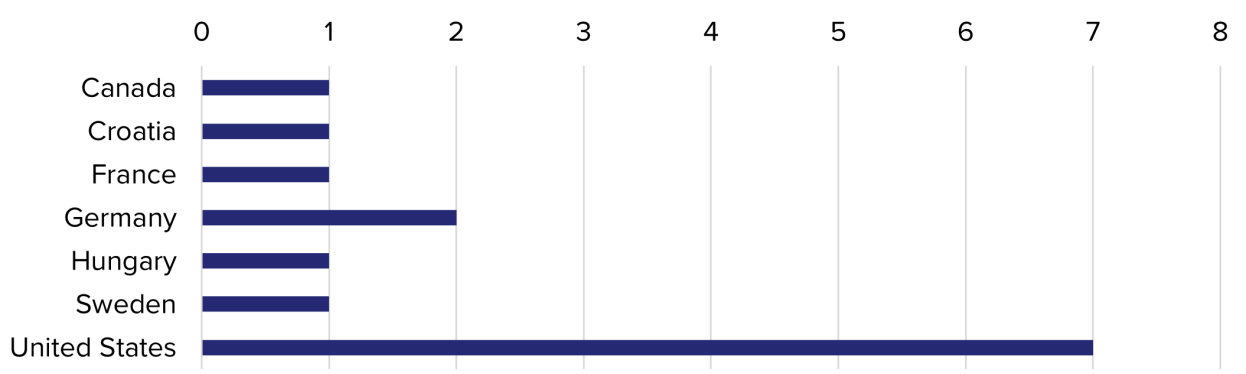


Figure 5: Numbers of Right-Wing Extremist Terrorist Attacks, 2019-2021

It does not generally draw a lot of attention from governments or the media, but, as has been mentioned above, purely in numerical terms left-wing extremist terrorism has been the most frequent form of terrorism in the countries we examined. Two countries that stand out in figure 6 are Germany (fifteen attacks) and Greece (fourteen attacks), which together account for fifty-eight percent of all left-wing extremist attacks. The distribution of the left-wing extremist terrorist attacks is comparable to that of the attacks in the other ideological strands. One or two countries stand out, followed by five or six countries with a handful of attacks and a sizeable majority (twenty-three in the case of left-wing extremism) that have not suffered any attacks at all.

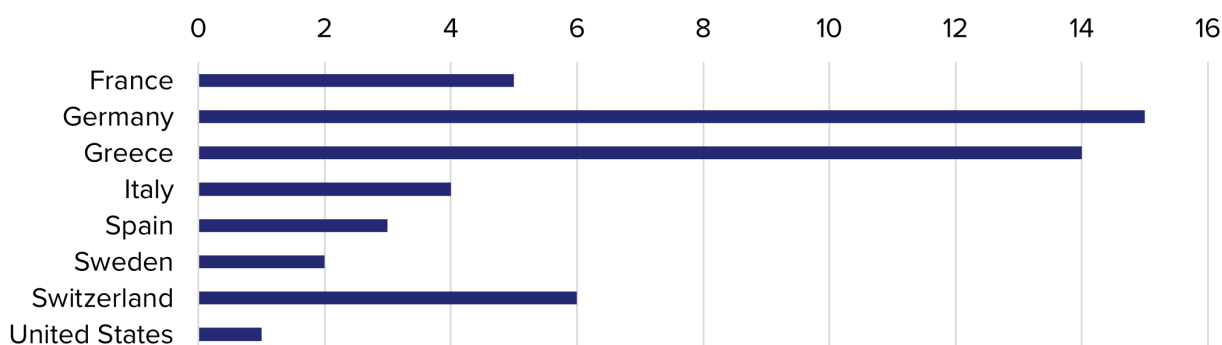


Figure 6: Numbers of Left-Wing Extremist Terrorist Attacks, 2019-2021

2.4 Victims

The number of attacks can tell us something about the nature and size of a terrorist threat, but it is by no means a perfect indicator. Probably the most obvious flaw is that the numbers of attacks do not say anything about the numbers of victims. The 9/11 attacks would count as one attack in most databases, but even if every plane would be counted as an individual attack, the victim count of each of these would dwarf that of the vast majority of the jihadist terrorist attacks that have been committed in the post-9/11 era. This is also clear from the government response to and the social impact of 9/11. The meaning and significance of the 9/11 attacks have been hotly debated, but the fact that there were only four jihadist terrorist attacks recorded in 2001 in the US does not do justice to the problem the US was dealing with at the time.

In order to add some more nuance to our threat assessment we also looked at the numbers of victims in the ninety-nine terrorist attacks that have been committed in the two-year period we are covering in this threat assessment. In the time period and the countries we looked into, ninety-three people have been killed in terrorist attacks; 149 have been wounded.⁵

Figure 7 shows the numbers of deadly and wounded victim per country. The geographical distribution of the victims closely matches the distribution of the terrorist attacks. In paragraph 3.2, we stated that four countries (the US, Greece, France and Germany) accounted for sixty-four percent of the terrorist attacks. Three of those countries (the US, France and Germany) also account for seventy-eight percent of the deadly victims and sixty percent of the wounded.

The fourth country in the group of four countries we just mentioned, is Greece, which is a particular case. It has suffered a fairly high number of attacks, but these attacks combined killed no one and wounded only three people. A likely explanation is the modus operandi of left-wing extremist terrorism, which accounts for all fourteen terrorist attacks in Greece.

One of the most salient aspects of the left-wing extremist modus operandi is that left-wing extremist terrorist attacks claim few victims, at least in the last ten years or so. As the 2013 TE-SAT report notes, “[i]n most cases, left-wing and anarchist groups aim to damage property rather than to injure or kill people.”⁶ This possibly has to do with the strategy that left-wing terrorists deploy, which is to win over (rather than victimise or antagonise) the population; killing large numbers of people would only undermine such a strategy.⁷ But either way, as a result of their way of operating, left-wing extremists have not killed anyone in the fifty total attacks they have committed during the assessed time period. They wounded three people, which amounts to an average of 0.06 wounded victims per attack. While left-wing extremist terrorism is the most frequent type of terrorism by a significant margin, it also has the lowest lethality rate, meaning the average number of deaths per attack. The difference between the lethality rates of ethno-nationalist and left-wing extremist terrorism are negligible, but the low lethality rate of ethno-nationalist terrorism is not the result of a principled unwillingness to kill or wound people; it is rather the result of an inability to do so.

⁵ In collecting the data we made a call that other researchers may have made differently and that therefore requires some explanation: we did not count the Capitol Riots of January 2021 as a terrorist attack and did therefore not include the deaths and wounded from that attack in our count. Our position is that the perpetrators in the Capitol Riots were trying to make it physically impossible for the two chambers of Congress to establish that Joe Biden won the US Presidential election. Terrorism has a communicative aspect to it, which means that it works indirectly. The perpetrators use violence to send a message to their target audience; the target audience then changes their calculations and makes decisions that are in accordance with the political agenda of the terrorists. As a result of the violence, they will make a decision than they would have made in the absence of the terrorist attacks. The Capitol Riots lacked this intermediate step. They did not try to make the members of Congress change their mind; they simply wanted to incapacitate them and keep them from acting against the interests of Donald Trump. Because of this absence of the communicative element, we decided to consider the Capitol Riots a coup attempt rather than a terrorist attack.

⁶ European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2013 (The Hague: Europol, 2013), 33.

⁷ B.S. Frey and S. Luechinger, *Measuring Terrorism*, Working Paper Series (Zürich: University of Zurich, Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, 2003), 5.

The numerical differences with right-wing extremist and jihadist terrorism, on the other hand, are quite dramatic. As can be seen in figure 8, in the time period of this threat assessment jihadist attacks on average killed 1.44 people and wounded 3.19 people. But perhaps surprisingly given their reputation for committing mass casualty attacks, jihadist terrorists do not have the highest casualty rates. Right-wing extremist terrorists killed 3.57 people per attack on average; the average number of people wounded was 3.29, slightly higher than for jihadist terrorist attacks (see figure 8).

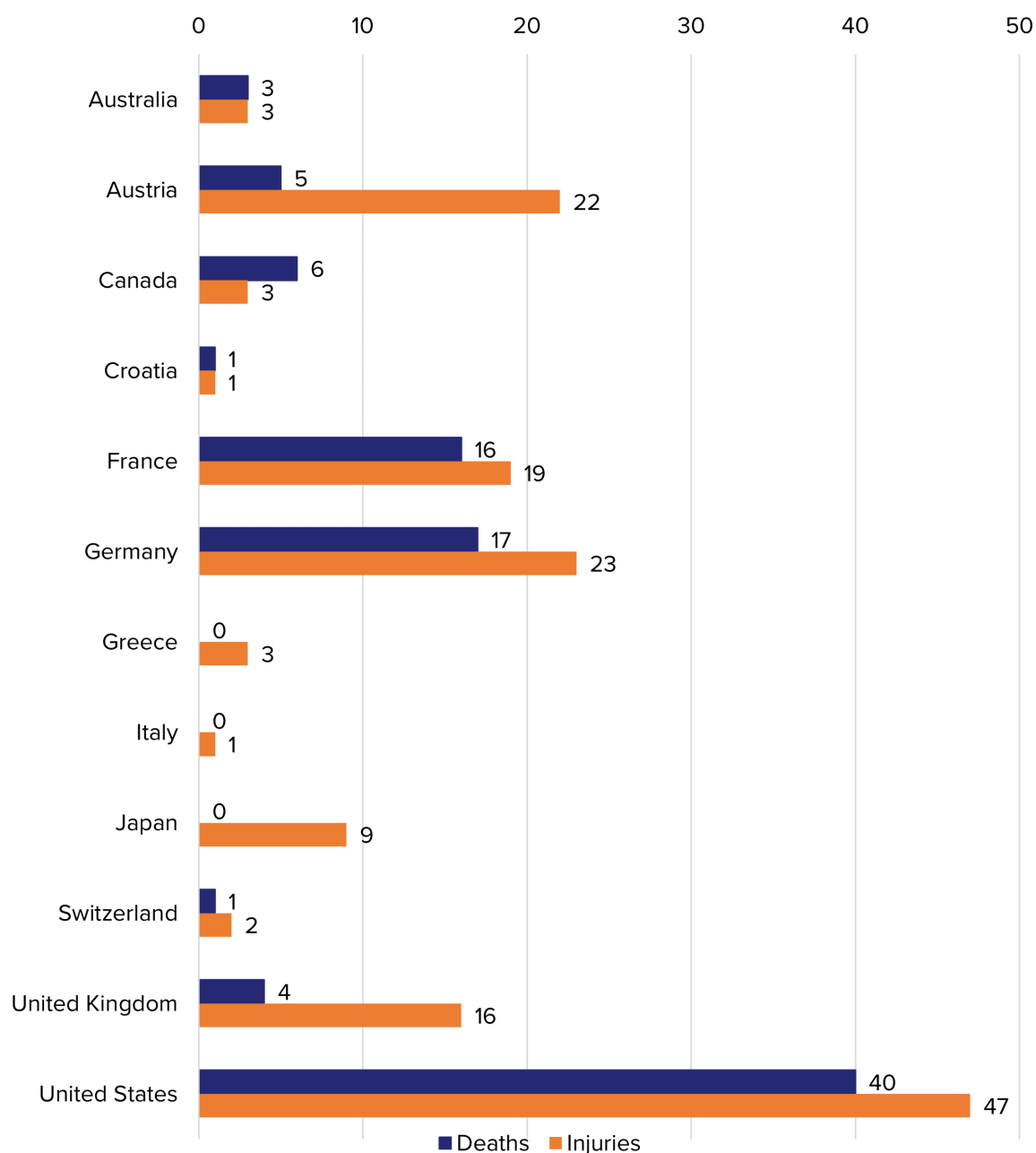


Figure 7: Deaths and Injuries per Country, 2019-2021

It should be noted that the high lethality rate of the right-wing extremist attacks is largely caused by two attacks that are outliers. The shootings in El Paso, US (August 2019) and Hanau, Germany (February 2020) killed twenty-three and eleven people, respectively, which means that these two attacks account for sixty-eight percent of the deadly victims of right-wing extremist terrorist attacks. Had it not been for these two attacks, the difference in the lethality rates of jihadist and right-wing extremist terrorist attacks would have been much smaller. This is not to downplay the threat from right-wing extremist terrorism, but rather to stress that the lethality rates we found are not stable numbers. They may fluctuate from year to year depending on the activities of only a handful of people, i.e. those who manage to commit highly deadly attacks. If jihadist terrorists manage to commit two large attacks in the coming two years and right-wing extremists do not, the lethality rates will be reversed in the next ICCT threat assessment.

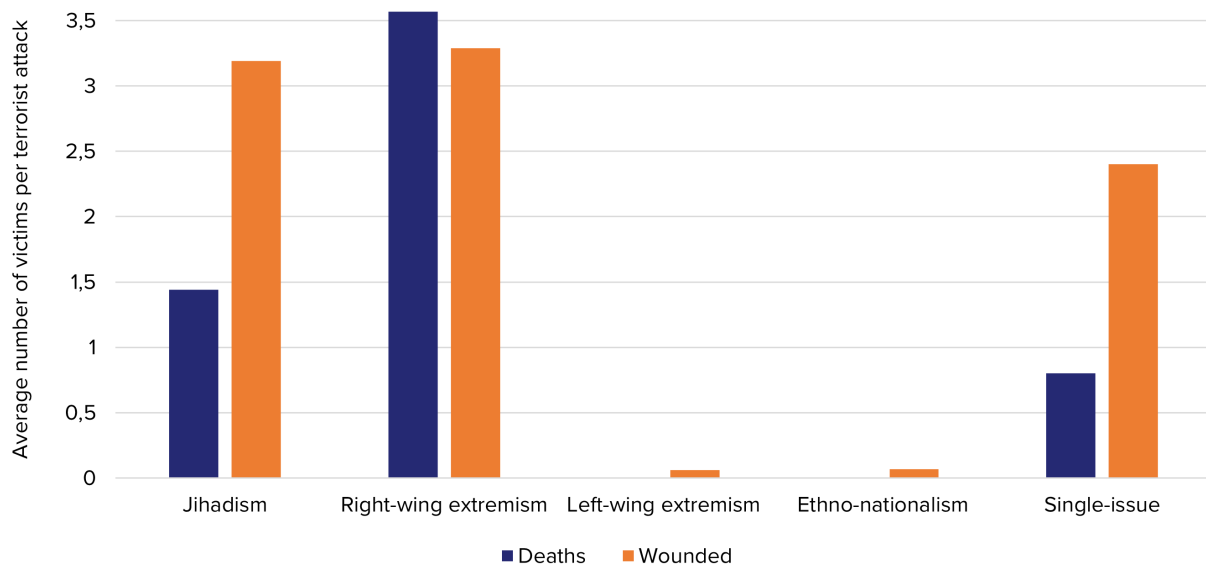


Figure 8: Lethality rates of various ideological strands, 2019- 2021

2.5 Weapons

We also examined what weapons were used for each of the ninety-nine attacks (see figure 9). There have been instances in which the perpetrators used more than one type of weapon; in such instances we counted each weapon separately. As a result, the numbers from the chart do not add up to ninety-nine. By melee weapons we mean knives, bats and other handheld objects that perpetrators use to strike their victims with. Attacks in which the perpetrators used nothing but their bare hands have been counted as attacks with no weapon (see the score on the right).

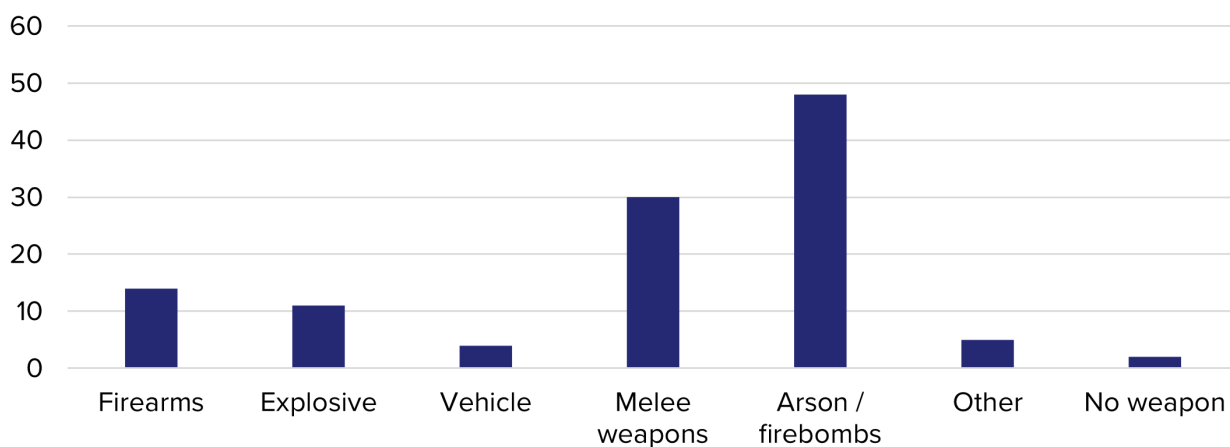


Figure 9: Weapon use in terrorist attacks, 2019-2021

One of the most striking finding is that close to half (forty-eight out of ninety-nine) of the terrorist attacks in our database have been committed through arson or with firebombs. This is a reflection of the predominance of left-wing extremist attacks in our database. As is clear from the table 1, arson and the use of firebombs clearly constitute the modus operandi of choice of left-wing extremist terrorists. Of the fifty left-wing extremist terrorist attacks, forty-one (or eighty-two percent) involved arson or fire bombs. Also, the penchant for arson and firebomb attacks is much stronger among left-wing extremists than among perpetrators with other ideological motivations: of the 48 instances of arson and/or fire bombings, forty-one (or eight-five percent) concerned attacks by left-wing extremists. Table 1 contains the full breakdown of weapons used by various ideological strands of terrorism.

Interestingly, attackers in the other ideological strands also have a weapon choice that is fairly unique to them.

Jihadist terrorists display a distinct proclivity towards the use of melee weapons, which they used in twenty-three (or eight-five percent) of the twenty-seven attacks committed in the assessed time period. This is a remarkable finding, as one would be misguided in considering melee weapons the jihadist weapon of choice. Judging by their post-9/11 record, the ideal jihadist terrorist attack involves the use of explosives. It is also salient that terrorists from other ideological strands are largely staying away from using melee weapons. Of the thirty instances of melee weapons use, only seven (or twenty-three percent) concerned attacks that were not jihadist.

The patterns are less salient for right-wing extremist terrorists, but they too, have a weapon they use often, and also more often than terrorists from the other ideological strands. There have been nine instances of firearms use by right-wing extremist terrorists, which is as many as all of the other weapon types combined. Additionally, of the fourteen instances of terrorist use of firearms, nine (or sixty-four percent) concerned a right-wing extremist attack.

Table 1. Weapon Use per Ideology

	Firearms	Explosives	Vehicle	Melee weapons	Arson	Other	No weapons
Jihadist	4	3	3	23			
Right-wing extremism	9	3	1	1	4		
Left-wing extremism		2		3	41	5	1
Ethno-nationalist		2		1			1
Single-issue	1	1		2	3		
Total	14	11	4	30	48	5	2

2.6 Interpretation

To make sense of the above, it is perhaps instructive to look at what the data do not show. First and foremost, they do not show increased threat levels. This does not necessarily mean that there are no reasons to believe the threat from one or more kinds of terrorism is increasing, but it does mean that, if the threat levels are increasing, that has yet to translate into terrorist attacks becoming more numerous and/or lethal.

With regard to jihadist terrorism, what we are seeing in the current Threat Assessment is a lethality rate that is probably lower than the jihadists themselves would want. As Thomas Hegghammer noted in an instructive article for Foreign Affairs: “every jihadi assault in Europe since 2017 has been carried out by a lone individual, suggesting that it has become very difficult to plan group attacks. Similarly, no terrorist strike since 2017 has involved explosives: instead, the attackers have used simpler weapons, such as guns, knives and vehicles”⁸.

The data explored show three jihadist attacks with explosives, but they were fake explosives, so our data do bear out Hegghammer’s assessment in the factual as well as in the analytical sense: jihadist attacks have become simpler, and that has led to a decreased lethality rate compared to the peak of jihadist attacks in 2015-2017. Given what we know about the jihadists’ preferred modus operandi and operational ambitions, this can be considered a significant loss for the jihadist movement in the countries in our Threat Assessment.

Hegghammer is probably right that the explanation for this trend lies in the Western response to jihadist terrorism. It has weakened the jihadist movement, making it less organised, less able to plan major attacks, and therefore more reliant on self-initiated attacks by untrained individuals with weaker ties to the jihadist movement.

⁸ T. Hegghammer, "Resistance Is Futile: The War on Terror Supercharged State Power", Foreign Affairs, October 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2021-08-24/resistance-futile>.

Combined with the resources and capabilities that Western countries have brought to bear in the fight against terrorism, this has made Europe and North America a more difficult place to commit a large-scale terrorist attack of the type that jihadists have committed in, for instance, Madrid (2004), London (2005) and Paris (November 2015).

As for right-wing extremist terrorism, it has never reached the threat levels jihadist terrorism has, but for some years now, police and intelligence agencies have been warning about an increased threat from right-wing extremist violence.⁹ As demonstrated above, two attacks together account for the relatively high lethality rate of right-wing extremist attacks. In most cases, right-wing extremist terrorist attacks, like the jihadist ones that occurred within our timespan, are small and claim few victims. This means that, based on the data analysed here, it is fair to say that the increased right-wing extremist terrorist threat has yet to become visible in the attack numbers or the lethality rate.¹⁰

Over the last two decades left-wing extremism been the least pressing concern of the three types of extremism, but lately some observers have expressed their concerns about it. In a discussion paper from June 2021, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator alluded to two EU threat assessments to make the case that “[t]he threat stemming from violent left-wing and anarchist extremism (VLWAE) is still considered low but increasing, due to the fact that more Member States have been affected in 2020.”¹¹ During a discussion of the Working Party for Terrorism in July 2021, a Europol representative commented that “[t]he threat deriving from Violent Left Wing & Anarchist Extremism at EU level can be described as increasing and evolving.”¹² Perhaps these assessments are accurate, but if they are, they are not yet borne out by the data. We see no trend in the direction of left-wing extremist terrorist attacks against people, let alone towards deadly attacks. Left-wing extremist terrorist attacks today are what they have been over the last years: arson attacks against symbols of capitalism or state repression. It is not inconceivable that their actions may become more explicitly targeted against people, but in the time period covered in this Threat Assessment we have not seen any signs of such hardening.

Two observers have recently highlighted the ability of terrorists to adopt new ways to carry out their attacks.¹³ While some terrorists and terrorist organisations have certainly displayed the ability to innovate, we have seen little of this in our attack data. The weapons that have been used have all been part of the terrorist modus operandi for some time. There are, for example, no instances of the use of drones or CBRN-weapons in our dataset. This may be the result of the weakness of terrorist organisations. With few larger networks to tap into for expertise or resources, terrorists in the countries we examined continued with simple attack modes. There is even little innovation in the sense that we have seen terrorists from one ideological strand adopt other weapons that are more common in other ideological strands. Throughout the two-year period, terrorists from each strand predominantly stuck to one type of weapon. In this sense too, there is more continuity than discontinuity in the data.

9 See e.g. V. Dodd and J. Grierson, "Fastest-Growing UK Terrorist Threat Is from Far Right, Say Police", *The Guardian*, 19 September 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/19/fastest-growing-uk-terrorist-threat-is-from-far-right-say-police>; European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019 (The Hague: Europol, 2019); *De Golfbewegingen van Rechts-Extremistisch Geweld in West-Europa: Aard, Ernst En Omvang van de Rechts-Extremistische Geweldsdreiging in West-Europa, Inclusief Nederland* (The Hague: NCTV, 2018).

10 We should also entertain the possibility that this is the result of a reporting issue, whereby some countries consider certain crimes to be, for instance, hate crimes rather than terrorism. Against that, one could argue that all EU Member States agreed to adopt certain minimum elements in their legal definition of terrorism (see European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021 (The Hague: Europol, 2021), 108. While this does not eliminate each and every concern one could have about the way prosecutors and police forces treat right-wing extremist violence, they are obligated to report all incidents that meet the minimum definition of terrorism as cases of terrorism. This suggests that there are at least some limits to the freedom countries have to decide what is terrorism and what is not.

11 "EU Action to Counter Left-Wing and Anarchist Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Discussion Paper" (EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, 28 June 2021).

12 Europol, ECTC, Expertise & Stakeholder Management Unit, "The Threat of Violent Left Wing & Anarchist Extremism in the EU".

13 Y. Veilleux-Lepage, *How Terror Evolves: The Emergence and Spread of Terrorist Techniques* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); A. Kurth Cronin, *Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation Is Arming Tomorrow's Terrorists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

The interpretation of the geographical spread of the attacks will be combined in section 4.4 with the interpretation of the arrest data.

3. Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters

With the largescale territorial demise of the Islamic State (ISIS) caliphate in 2019, many foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from the Islamic State have attempted to flee territory previously controlled by the group. Most reliable estimates state that amongst those who travelled to the conflict zones, mostly between 2014-2017, were around 6,000 individuals from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.¹⁴ The UN Security Council¹⁵ states that since ISIS lost ninety-eight percent of their territory, there has been only limited relocation of these FTFs from Syria to other conflict zones in the region, or to engage in and support terrorist or insurgent operations in Africa or Central and Southeast Asia. In other words, many attempted escapes failed, which means that foreign fighters were killed, captured, or remain at large in the region. Nevertheless, many governments are concerned about the possibility of the return of their FTFs.

Of the FTFs who have not moved to other countries and were not killed in the conflict, a small number is believed to be living in the few remaining Islamic State enclaves in Iraq and Syria.¹⁶ Some others continue to attempt to make their way back to their home countries, and hundreds more are now inmates and residents of prisons and displaced persons facilities in Syria. Most male detainees are held in prisons at Hasakah and Dashisha, whereas women and children are detained at the al-Hol and Roj camps.¹⁷ Security officials have long warned of the threat posed by FTFs who return to their home countries, stating that they are likely to have acquired both the skills and connections to be potentially very dangerous and also to have experienced extreme radicalisation.¹⁸ Whilst some may return disillusioned by fighting or the dissonance between the ISIS propaganda and reality, some of these FTFs pose a threat of returning trained, battle-hardened, internationally connected, and capable of unprecedented lethality with the capacity to cause mass destruction.¹⁹ This is an important factor in the reluctance on the part of many governments to take back their FTFs. Broadly, Western states have been somewhat amenable to repatriating children and some mothers but both men and women continue to be typically viewed as significant security threats.

Given this background, it should not come as a surprise that we found few cases of FTFs returning to the countries in our Threat Assessment. In a logistical sense, the journey can be a difficult one to successfully make and most governments have done little to actively repatriate their citizens; this state of affairs is clearly reflected in the numbers presented below.

3.1 Methodology

There was no one collective source which could be relied upon for accurate and up to date numbers for all countries in order to determine the number of FTFs that have returned from conflict zones over the period of time covered in this assessment. This meant that the data collection, as with our approach to the attack data, had to be conducted on a country-by-country basis. This involved, chiefly,

14 "Beyond Iraq and Syria: ISIS' Global Reach", Pub. L. No. S. Hrg. 115-752, § Committee on Foreign Relations (2017). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg39765/html/CHRG-115shrg39765.htm>.

15 Twenty-Eighth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities (New York: United Nations Security Council, 21 July 2021).

16 R.J. Bunker and A. Keshavarz, A Policy Response to Islamic State Extremist Fighter Battlefield Migration (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2020).

17 I. Acheson and A. Paul, 'Marching Home? Why Repatriating Foreign Terrorist Fighters Is a Pan-European Priority' (Brussels: European Policy Centre, 2020).

18 D. McElroy, "MI6 Warns of "Very Dangerous" Shamima Begum-Style Returnees", The National, 16 February 2019. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/mi6-warns-of-very-dangerous-shamima-begum-style-returnees-1.826247>.

19 A. Hoffman and M. Furlan, Challenges Posed by Returning Foreign Fighters (Washington, DC: GW Program on Extremism, 2020).

gathering data from official government statements announcing the repatriation, extradition, or arrest of individuals affiliated with ISIS, or media reporting on the same themes. In addition, we approached experts and practitioners from all the countries with larger FTF numbers, and a range of the countries assessed with smaller numbers, to confirm the returnee figures we found in our own research. These individuals ranged from academic experts in the field to government officials working in the areas of national security and foreign affairs. When necessary, we adjusted the numbers in accordance with the suggestions of the experts and practitioners.

In definitional terms, we use the term ‘foreign terrorist fighter’ to cover those who travelled to Syria or Iraq to join a jihadist group.²⁰ We do not include those who only attempted to travel to a conflict zone but either failed or were impeded by authorities in the commission of their travel. For the purposes of this assessment, an individual is also considered an FTF regardless of what their role in their respective jihadist groups might have been. It is not necessary that they were proven combatants in the conflicts or were actively engaged in the carrying out or planning of terrorist attacks. This means that any capacity in which an individual, male or female, served or supported a jihadist group in a conflict zone is included under the term FTF. We have not, however, included children in these figures given their victim status and lack of agency.

Given that our data collection methods were based largely on open-source media reporting and released official statements, it is possible that the data is incomplete. It is likely some FTFs will return without being noticed by national or regional media outlets. There may be some cases in which the authorities have a legitimate reason to withhold the information on specific returnees from the public, and there may be some instances in which individuals have made their way back to their home nations but avoided detection and/or arrest by posing as refugees, or using illicit routes of travel. As such, the numbers presented can confidently be taken as a minimum number of those that are known to have returned and can be officially verified.

A more in depth account of the methodology used for this analysis can be found in section 8.2 of this report.

3.2 Departing foreign terrorist fighters

As there have been few reports over in the time period covered in this Threat Assessment from any state included in this assessment of individuals continuing to travel to Iraq or Syria to join ISIS in the conflict zones, the total numbers of FTFs for each country have not significantly increased. The failure of ISIS to maintain its controlled territory under military pressure from the international coalition in Iraq and Syria will be the driving force behind this halt in international recruitment to the region. This, coupled with a tightening of security measures addressing FTF travel by home states and, crucially, Turkey, has resulted in the halting of Western FTFs departing for conflict zones.

For these reasons, and as there is no evidence to suggest that additional FTFs have departed from the countries assessed here, we have determined that the total number of 6,020 individuals who travelled to the conflict zone since 2011 remains unchanged. The breakdown of FTF numbers per country was included in the previous ICCT Threat Assessment, these figures remain accurate and are therefore presented in the graphs below. There have, however, been some changes in the numbers of FTFs who are back in their home countries.

²⁰ For elaboration on the narrow definitional terms used and the focus on solely jihadist FTFs, see section 8.2.1 of this report.

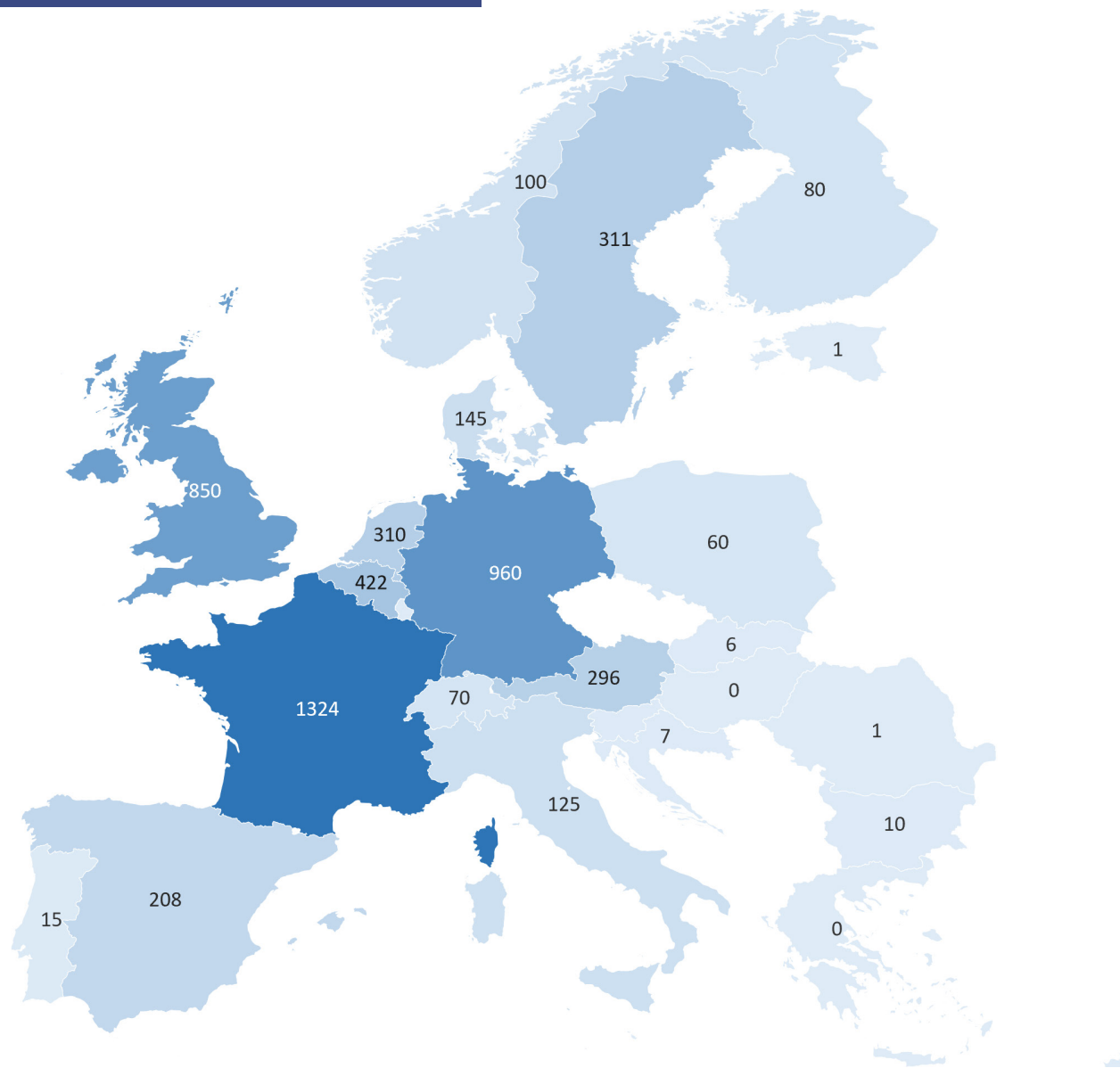


Figure 10. Foreign Terrorist Fighters per Country



Figure 11. Foreign Terrorist Fighters - Country Breakdown

3.3 Returning FTFs September 2019 – August 2021

Since September 2019 there have been reports of a total of seventy-nine FTFs that have returned to their home nations (see figure 12). To put this into context, this is seventy-nine out of the 4,020 FTFs that remained unreturned, which will include all individuals killed, captured, and who remain at large. Germany has seen twenty individuals return to their territory over the two year period. Belgium (twelve), France (eight), and Finland and the United States (seven), are the closest to Germany’s numbers. Reports regarding child repatriation numbers claim that there was a decrease in both 2020 and 2021 when compared to 2019 figures and that this can be partially attributed to travel restrictions introduced to curb the spread of COVID-19. It is reasonable to infer that a similar impact also occurred regarding repatriation of adult FTFs. Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, and Malta have no FTFs to return and are therefore not included in the graphs below.

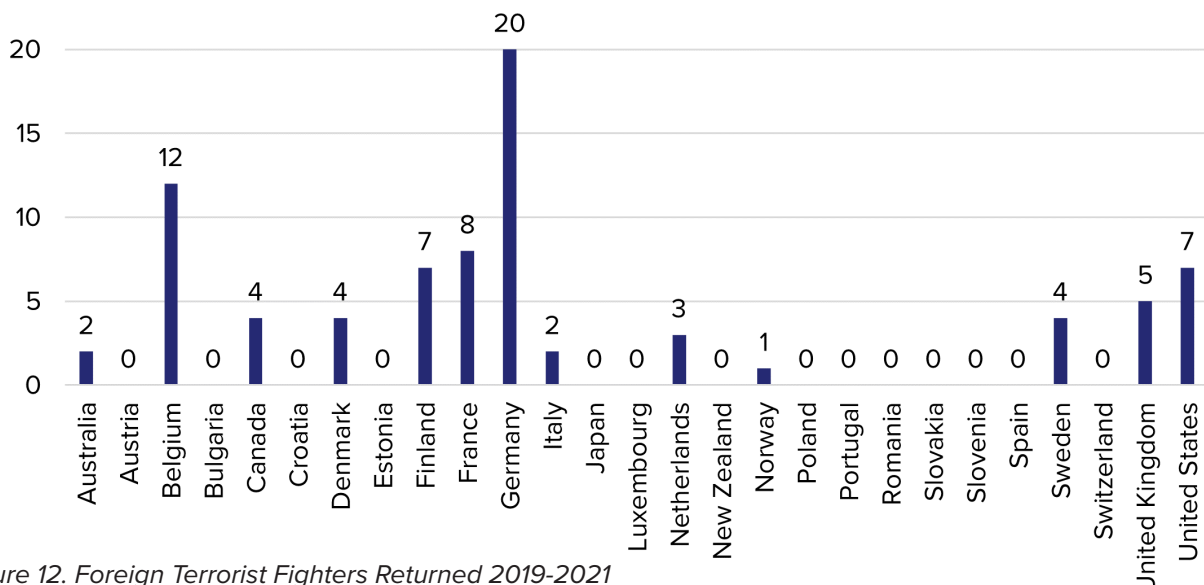


Figure 12. Foreign Terrorist Fighters Returned 2019-2021

Given the small numbers of returnees in the timeframe we are covering in this Threat Assessment, the percentages of FTFs that have returned have not changed dramatically. The percentages in figure 13 are based on the numbers of total foreign fighters and returnees of each country from the previous Threat Assessment to which we included the numbers of ‘new’ returnees from the period since the previous threat assessment. We then calculated what percentage of their FTFs had returned as of thirty-one August 2021 for each country.

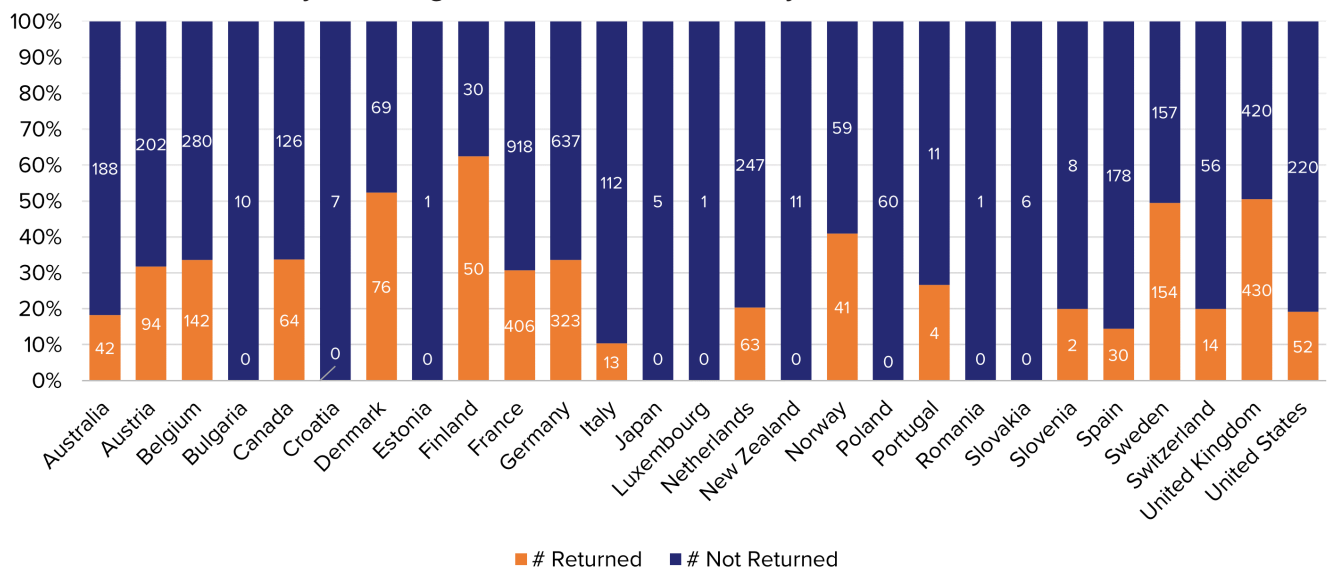


Figure 13. Number of Returnees per Country, 2019-2021

The overwhelming majority of those who did return, did so through repatriation arrangements conducted by their home nation (see figure 14, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland are not included in this figure since they have not had any FTFs return to their territory after August 2019). Seventy-two of the total seventy-nine returnees in the 2019-2021 time period were facilitated through these formal arrangements, leaving only seven who made their way back to their home country via travel organised through informal channels, what we are terming their 'on own initiative'. This might suggest an evident difficulty for an FTF to make their way from Iraq or Syria back to their home country. If an individual is to successfully return home, it will have to be on agreement with their government. There is the possibility that a number of cases of those who have travelled on their own initiative successfully evaded detection. The size of this contingent is not possible to quantify, however, and will therefore not be represented in the figures.

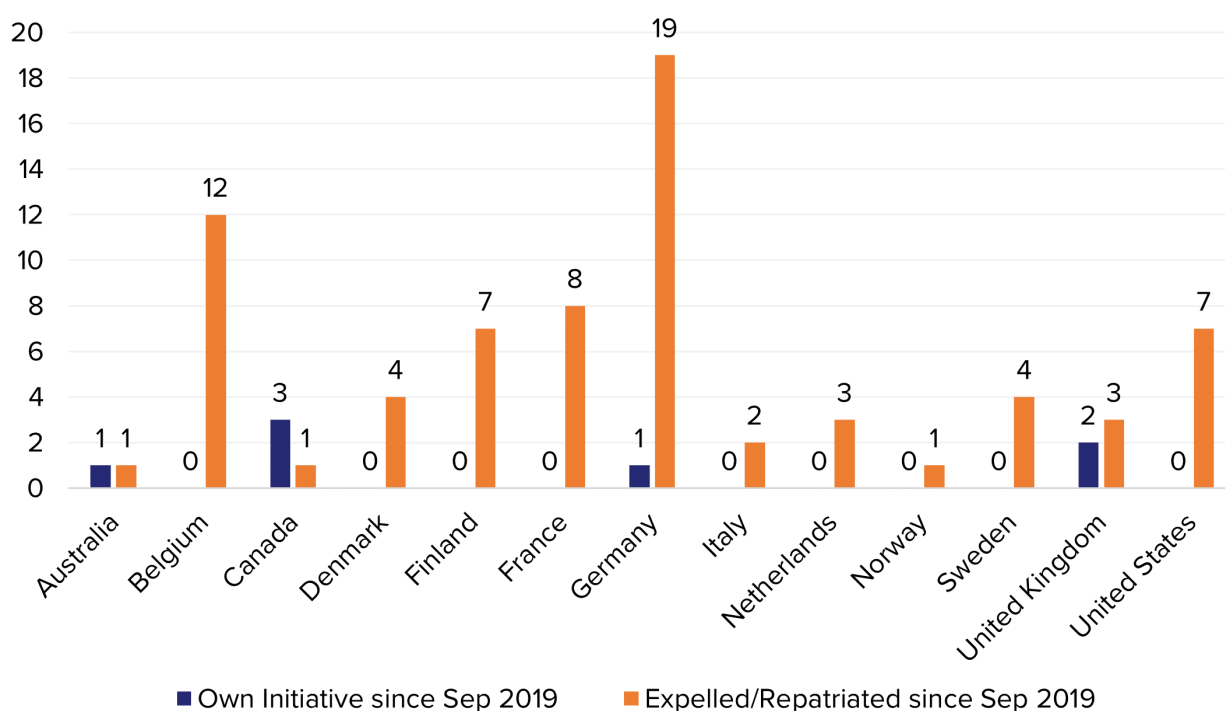


Figure 14. Modes of Repatriation, 2019-2021

Based on the available data, it is estimated that approximately nineteen percent of the total number of FTFs who travelled to Iraq and Syria since 2011 were female (1,166 out of 6,020). Countries that exceed this proportion include France (thirty-three percent; or 440 females), the Netherlands (twenty-six percent; or eighty females), Finland (twenty-five percent; or twenty females), and Sweden (twenty-four percent; or seventy-five females). In comparison, the known gender proportions of those who have returned after August 2019 do not follow the totals. Of the total seventy-nine returnees listed, we are aware of the gender of sixty-three of them (see figure 15). For the remaining cases, the gender of individuals is either not reported or numbers are given as groups without any breakdown of gender. However, of the returnees whose gender we know, seventy-one percent were female and twenty-nine percent were male. This is an enormous overrepresentation of female returnees. Whilst it is accepted that this is a somewhat incomplete picture considering that we know the genders of only eight percent of the cohort, this overrepresentation is stark. The explanation for this can, at least in part, be in three factors: first, the relative willingness of home countries to repatriate women/mothers (as part of child repatriation initiatives) and not men/fathers; second, the higher mortality rate of male FTFs due to their roles as soldiers; and third, the higher likelihood that male FTFs will be imprisoned upon capture as opposed to being transferred to refugee camps, as has happened to many female FTFs.

Even if we take the unlikely scenario that the twenty percent of unknown cases are all male, this would still leave females representing fifty-seven percent of the returnee cohort, much more than the nineteen percent they account for in the entire population of FTFs.

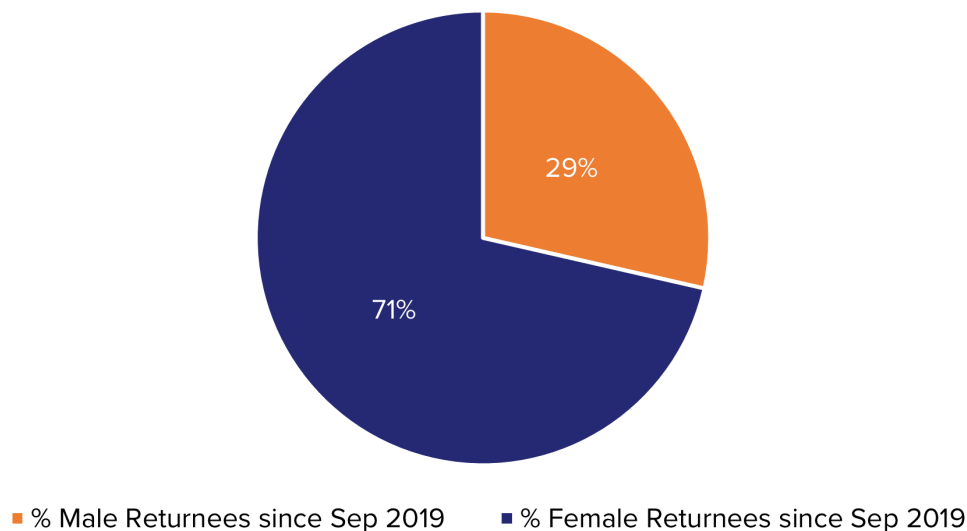


Figure 15. Gender Breakdown of Returnees, 2019-2021

Another noteworthy finding is that the numbers of repatriations, although small for all countries, in one respect match the public positions countries have taken on the issue of the repatriation of FTFs: countries that are claiming to be willing to take back their FTFs appear to be doing so. Finland, for example, has a relatively high number of repatriated FTFs in the timeframe we covered, and also has a policy of active repatriation of women, despite the Finnish intelligence services publicly warning that the repatriated women would likely increase the terrorism threat in Finland.²¹ Similarly, Germany's policy is that those who can prove citizenship have an undeniable right of return, and the German courts have found that mothers must be repatriated with children where there is no indication that the mother poses a concrete security threat.²² This explains their above average repatriation figures. The US put public pressure on other countries to take back their FTFs, but also showed itself willing to take back twelve fighters, a relatively high number.²³

What these numbers make clear is that in the timeframe we examined, the return of FTFs largely occurred as a result of decisions made by states. This may change depending on, for instance, the willingness and ability of Kurdish forces to guard prisons where FTFs are being detained. For those FTFs that remain either in refugee camps or prisons in Iraq and Syria and wish to return home, it is likely that the trends regarding female repatriation and expulsion represented by this data will continue considering that both country policies and court decisions on child repatriation are increasingly in favour of simultaneous repatriation of mothers. This means that in the coming years we should expect to see only returnees whose states assess they have a strong chance of prosecuting, or mothers who are accompanying their children home. There may be incidental cases of FTFs returning on their own initiative, but as we explained above, a returning FTF's chances are slim given the current security measures.

21 A. Paananen, "Supon Päällikkö: Isis-Äidit Olisivat Suomessa Suurempi Uhka Kuin Syyrian Leirillä", *Iltä-Sanomat*, 17 December 2019. <https://www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000006346018.html>.

22 OVG Bestätigt: Bundesrepublik Deutschland Muss Minderjährige Kinder Aus Dem Lager Al-Hol Im Nordosten Syriens Zusammen Mit Ihrer Mutter Nach Deutschland Zurückholen - 34/19 (Oberverwaltungsgericht Berlin-Brandenburg, 7 November 2019). <https://www.berlin.de/gerichte/oberverwaltungsgericht/presse/pressemitteilungen/2019/pressemitteilung.863104.php>.

23 A.J. Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken Opening Remarks at D-ISIS Meeting Opening Session" (US Department of State, 28 June 2021). <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-opening-remarks-at-d-isis-meeting-opening-session/>.

3.4 Interpretation

The halted departure of FTFs from home nations to conflict zones that is demonstrated in the figures above is likely to endure in the coming years. This is due not only to the fact that ISIS suffered significant territorial losses making it increasingly difficult to take on and provide for new recruits and FTFs, but with these losses came also a shift in strategy by ISIS. The repeated calls for foreign fighters, particularly from the West, and support for active fighter migration - which was provided during the rise and expansion of the Caliphate - were abandoned when faced with ISIS' territorial losses, particularly those seen in Raqqa and Mosul.

Equally important has been the tightening of the security measures addressing FTF travel by home nations, and access points on the Turkish border becoming less permeable, which has resulted in the halting of Western FTFs departing for conflict zones. Shortly after Turkey tightened its border security in dealing with traffic to and from Syria, the numbers of FTFs decreased dramatically. Given the added complexity of the current pandemic restrictions affecting global travel generally, the decrease in the number of returning FTFs is not to be reversed in the near future.

However, ISIS may have drawn some encouragement from the August 2020 prison break by its branch in Afghanistan (Islamic State – Khorasan Province, or ISKP), which could replenish its ranks with possibly hundreds of fighters they sprang from prison.²⁴ Given the success such actions have brought the movement in the past, it is conceivable that ISIS is refocusing on increasing its capability to orchestrate jailbreaks and assist escapees. Any such jailbreak operations are very likely to include FTF inmates, though ISIS would be indiscriminate regarding the jihadists it aims to liberate. In this respect, a great deal hinges on the ability and willingness of Kurdish security forces to guard the prisons holding the FTFs. The jailbreaks from January 2022 make clear that there is by no means a guarantee that imprisoned FTFs will remain behind bars until they served their terms.²⁵

What the figures above do not show is the location of the remaining unreturned FTFs. It is apparent from camp and prison figures that a significant number of them are detained in Iraq and Syria, though exact numbers are unclear. The number of dead is even more difficult to quantify. Some states give estimates of their own citizens that have been killed in the conflict zones but these estimates are not available for every country assessed. Rough estimates put the number of dead FTFs at 1,200 out of the 4,020 that remain unreturned, though these figures include those believed to have been killed as well as those confirmed dead. It is unlikely that the nearly 3,000 unreturned FTFs that are believed to be alive will be able to migrate to other conflict zones, due to their detention, logistical difficulties, and possibly a lack of will to do so due to them becoming disillusioned by fighting or by the dissonance between the religious ideals promised in ISIS' propaganda and the reality of life in Syria, or due to battle fatigue.²⁶

The upheaval in Afghanistan, and the potential for the Taliban to revert to their policy of harbouring international terrorists, has some expressing concern that the country will become a new hub for FTFs.²⁷ Whether this will happen, however, is doubtful. Afghanistan is hard to reach, has less appeal in the jihadist narrative than Muslim heartlands like Syria and Iraq, and al-Qaeda will need time to rebuild its capabilities to attract and train recruits, if the Taliban will allow them to do that at all.

24 T. Joscelyn, "Islamic State Claims Prison Raid in Eastern Afghanistan", FDD's Long War Journal (blog), 3 August 2020. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/08/islamic-state-claims-prison-raid-in-eastern-afghanistan.php>.

25 M. Tawfeeq and J. Berlinger, "Deadly ISIS Prison Break Attempt Fuels Fears of the Group's Resurgence", CNN, 21 January 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/21/middleeast/isis-attack-prison-iraq-intl/index.html>.

26 Hoffman and Furlan, Challenges Posed by Returning Foreign Fighters.

27 J. Seldin, "Would-Be Foreign Fighters Dreaming of Afghanistan", VOA, 10 September 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/a/6222427.html>.

Moreover, given their deep-seated rivalry, it is unlikely that ISIS FTFs from Syria and Iraq will join forces with the Taliban, but they might join ISKP in its fight for a caliphate in Afghanistan.

It is clear from public policy, and evident in the low numbers of FTFs they have been willing to take back, that many of the state governments assessed here remain concerned about the threat that returning FTFs pose. This threat will undoubtedly vary on a case by case basis but the difficulty in accurately quantifying it is based on the lack of available intelligence and evidence. States face the complicating factors of restricted access and a lack of local contacts in war-torn and conflict-ridden areas to collect information for intelligence or evidentiary purposes and legitimate governments may not have any effective control over the area where the evidence is located. The fact that, for the most part, FTFs are only returning when facilitated by their government, means it is unlikely that the range of annual returnees seen in this Threat Assessment will vary too much in coming years unless a significant overall policy shift takes place. However, the evidence and intelligence issues highlighted above will likely contribute to the endurance of the assessment by governments that the return of FTFs generally poses a significant risk to national security. Both the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria²⁸ and the UN²⁹ have repeatedly urged home nations to repatriate their nationals still held in Syria but despite this many states included in this assessment, such as Belgium³⁰, France³¹, the Netherlands³², Germany³³, and the United Kingdom³⁴ have introduced targeted legislation preventing some FTFs from returning by revoking their citizenship.

In a practical sense, the gender demographics of the returnees revealed by the data above present a possibility that the services dealing with the most returnees per country will be invariably women's prisons, social services dedicated to women and children's welfare, and criminal justice/security services which otherwise typically dedicate a majority of resources to the threat posed by adult male individuals. This being the case, it would perhaps be wise to anticipate the return of more female FTFs by equipping prison management and rehabilitation arrangements to deal with women. Male and female FTFs require different approaches when in prison, so developing a more tailored approach in dealing with them is probably advisable.

4. Arrests

In chapter 2, we examined terrorist attacks in an attempt to establish what kind of terrorist activity was occurring where and how often. Terrorism, however, involves more than simply the commission of attacks. Terrorist groups recruit people into their collectives, finance their operations, spread propaganda, purchase illegal weapons, etc. These are all crimes in the countries in our Threat Assessment and can be considered forms of terrorist activity, but they are not attacks. In order to account for these kinds of activities in a topical manner, we decided to also analyse the numbers of people that have been arrested on terrorism-related charges.

28 "Press Release", Tweet, Rojava Information Center (blog), 18 March 2021. <https://twitter.com/RojavaIC/status/1372518844720353282>.

29 "Syria: UN Experts Urge 57 States to Repatriate Women and Children from Squalid Camps", OHCHR, 8 February 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26730&LangID=E>.

30 Article 23 § 1 Code de La Nationalité Belge. Deprivation of nationality is permitted only for citizens who have not obtained nationality through birth or parents as long as it does not lead to statelessness.

31 Article 25 Code Civil, Section 3: De La Déchéance de La Nationalité Française. Deprivation of nationality is permitted only against naturalised citizens after conviction of terrorist-related offences as long as it does not lead to statelessness.

32 Chapter 5, Article 14 Rijkswet Op Het Nederlanderschap. Deprivation of nationality is permitted with or without a criminal conviction, as long as it does not lead to statelessness.

33 Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz (StAG) § 28. Deprivation of nationality is permitted if an individual participated in combat operations of a terrorist organisation abroad as long as it does not lead to statelessness.

34 Article 40(A) and (B) British Nationality Act 1981.

This will include people who have been arrested for terrorist attacks, but also people who have been arrested for related crimes, like financing terrorism or recruitment.

The numbers of arrests are a very rough indicator of terrorist activity, as sizeable numbers of arrestees will be acquitted later on,³⁵ and there are surely individuals or groups who commit crimes but are not found out and are not arrested. But while it is true that not all arrests reflect actual terrorist activity, some of them certainly do, especially since these arrests do not include cases in which the suspects have been released without charges.³⁶ Also, assuming the ratios of people who will be acquitted do not differ greatly per country,³⁷ we can consider them very rough indicators of terrorist activity and use them as a basis for country comparisons in the sections below. In other words, the point is not so much whether there have been two or three arrests in a given country, but whether there have been significantly more arrests in one country compared to another.

4.1 Methodology

In order to find an accurate number of arrests for the countries in the Threat Assessment we again consulted several sources. The most important one was Europol's TE-SAT report for 2020. This is a helpful source, as it breaks down the numbers of arrests per ideology. Unfortunately, we only have data for the year 2020. Arrest reports and crime statistics, from Europol as well as from other government sources, are usually published on a yearly basis, which is why we chose to focus on 2020 as the only complete year in our timeframe. The drawback of this is that this section covers a shorter time period than the chapters 2 and 3. We could, of course, look for terrorism-related arrests in the same way we looked for terrorist attacks, but given the high numbers of arrests, this would simply take too much time. For that reason, we are taking the TE-SAT report for 2020 as a starting point. The drawback of this is that we have to limit the analysis to 2020.

Also, not all countries in our Threat Assessment are members of Europol, which means we had to find solutions for the non-Europol countries in our set. For the US, we could get an idea of the number of terrorism-related arrests by going over the press releases the FBI issued in 2020.³⁸ For Norway and Canada, we could not get numbers of arrests, only numbers of terrorist crimes reported by the police.

35 Another issue with Europol's TE-SAT data is that crimes in some ideological strands are more likely to be prosecuted under terrorism legislation, whereas similar crimes in other ideological strands are being prosecuted as non-terrorist legislation. This is, in fact, a key reason that scholars invoke to explain differences between Europol data on right-wing extremist terrorism and other forms of terrorism. While this is a relevant objection, it does not apply to the current Threat Assessment, as here we will draw conclusions mostly by comparing countries within ideologies rather than make claims about which ideology poses the greatest threat.

36 The analysis below is largely based on data from Europol's TE-SAT reports, and the latest of those, in describing the findings, speaks of numbers of people that have been arrested on terrorism-related charges. This suggests that arrests that did not lead to any charges being pressed have not been included in the arrest numbers.

37 Europol's TE-SAT report for 2021 states that "conviction rates in the EU are generally high" See 'European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021', 108. It also cites an average acquittal rate of twelve percent (p. 102). This is in the same area as the acquittal rate reported in older studies about the US. Two studies, one from 2010 and one from 2011, put the conviction rate for terrorism court cases on around ninety-one percent (and the acquittal rate at nine percent). See *In Pursuit of Justice: Prosecuting Terrorism Cases in the Federal Courts* (New York: Human Rights First, 2010), <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/pursuit-justice>; A. Welsh-Huggins, 'Terror Conviction Rate High in US, with Questions', NBC News, 4 September 2011. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna44389361>. The conviction rate for Canada is a lot lower, though. A recent analysis shows that forty-five out of the sixty-two people (or some sixty-four percent) charged with terrorism offences in Canada in the period 2001-2021 were eventually found guilty. See M. Nesbitt and H. Nijjar, 'Counting Terrorism Charges and Prosecutions in Canada Part 2: Trends in Terrorism Charges', Intrepid (blog), 24 June 2021. <https://www.intrepidpodcast.com/blog/2021/6/24/counting-terrorism-charges-and-prosecutions-in-canada-part-2>.

38 The FBI's press releases can be found here: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel>.

Also, these numbers are not broken down in ideological categories, which is why we could only tangentially include Norway and Canada in the analysis below (see paragraph 8.3.3 for links and explanations regarding the statistics for Norway and Canada).

Given its exit from the EU, the UK is a special case as well. The TE-SAT report for 2020 mentions a total number of terrorism-related arrests for the UK, but does not break it down in various ideological categories. Using data from the Home Office (see paragraph 8.3.3 for links and further explanation), we were able to establish the number of arrests related to ethno-nationalist terrorism, but we could not find similar numbers for left-wing extremism, right-wing extremism and jihadism. We, therefore, included it in our analysis of the overall numbers and the numbers for ethno-nationalist terrorism, but not for the other two ideological categories. The only terrorism-related official data that are available about Australia concern the number of defendants in terrorism-related cases. However, considering the length of terrorism-related judicial procedure, it is reasonable to assume some of these defendants have been arrested months if not years prior to the most recent reference period (the financial year 2019-20). New Zealand's and Japan's crime statistics do not include categories related to terrorism at all. The Swiss crime statistics only include offences related to the financing of terrorism (see paragraph 8.3.3 for links and explanations regarding statistics for Switzerland). Additional searches have been conducted which highlighted a few arrests. Thus, we suspect that there is probably some jihadist activity in Switzerland, but it is not clear how comprehensive the results of our searches for Switzerland are, so we are hesitant to use them in the same way we used the TE-SAT data for the other countries. Given these limitations, these four countries (Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Switzerland) have been left out of the paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 altogether.

For a more elaborate discussion of the methodology behind the numbers in the following paragraphs, we refer the reader to paragraph 8.3. Table 2 summarises for each of the countries what sources we used. A 0 in the column 'Overall' means that that particular country reported no arrests for the TE-SAT report for 2020. We have not included these countries in the bar chart in paragraph 4.2.

Table 2. Available data per Country

Country	Crimes reported			No relevant data
	TE-SAT	by police	FBI press releases	
Australia				X
Austria	X			
Belgium	X			
Bulgaria	X			
Canada		X		
Croatia	X			
Cyprus	X			
Denmark	X			
Estonia	X			
Finland	X			
France	X			
Germany	X			
Greece	X			
Hungary	X			
Italy	X			

The Netherlands	X			
New Zealand				X
Norway		X		
Poland	X			
Portugal	X			
Romania	X			
Slovakia	X			
Slovenia	X			
Spain	X			
Sweden	X			
Switzerland				X
United Kingdom	X			
United States			X	

4.2 Total numbers

The data we collected in accordance with the methodology outlined above suggest that 644 individuals have been arrested on terrorism-related charges in the Europol countries, the US and the UK combined (see figure 16, which covers the Europol countries and the US). What is striking about these data is that the arrests are spread quite unevenly. The UK (185 arrests, or twenty-nine percent) and France (127 arrests, or twenty percent) together account for forty-nine percent of all terrorism-related arrests. This means that the other twenty-three countries for which we have comparable data account for fifty-one percent of all arrests. Also, of these twenty-five countries, only seven have reported ten or more terrorism-related arrests.

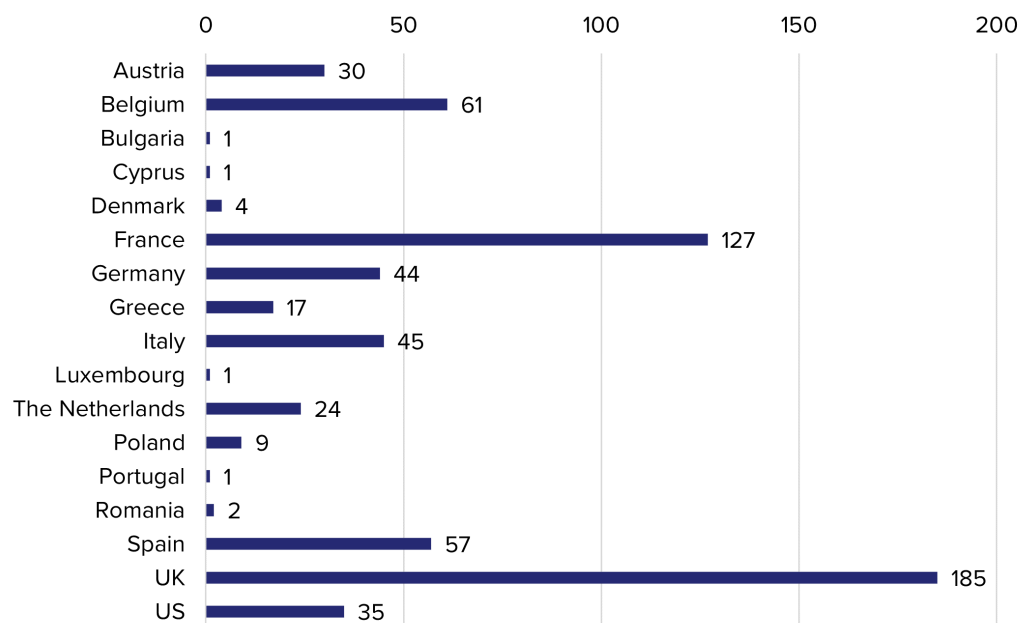


Figure 16. Arrests per Country in 2020

As has been mentioned above, we do not have arrest data for Canada and Norway, but we do know that the Canadian police reported seventy terrorism-related crimes for 2020, and the Norwegian police reported nineteen.

While it is not possible to tell how many people have been arrested for these crimes, it appears safe to assume that there have been some terrorism-related arrests in those countries as well. The Swiss police arrested seven people on charges related to the financing of terrorism.

Interestingly, the data we collected show a strong decrease in the number of arrests compared to the previous ICCT Threat Assessment. There, we presented the numbers of arrests for ten countries: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the US. We can compare those numbers with the ones we collected for 2020 for the same countries, except for Australia and the US.

According to the previous Threat Assessment, there were 986 terrorism-related arrests in the eight countries for which we have data for both January 2018 – August 2019 and the year 2020. The number for 2020 is 496 arrests for that same group of countries. However, the period of the previous Threat Assessment was longer than a year, so we need to calculate a monthly average in order to make a meaningful comparison. For the period of the previous Threat Assessment, this monthly average is 49.3; for 2020, it is 41.3, somewhat lower than for the period of the previous Threat Assessment.

4.3 Arrests per ideology

For 462 arrests we know the ideological background of the arrestee(s). Jihadism is still by quite a margin the most common ideological strand in the arrest data; it accounts for 248 arrests (thirty-eight percent of the total number of 644 arrests). This is more than twice the number of arrests for the second most common ideological category, which is ethno-nationalist terrorism. Also, there are sixty-nine arrests for which the ideology of the arrestees is not specified. Of those sixty-nine, however, fifty-eight occurred in Belgium, and the TE-SAT report mentions that most of these fifty-eight arrests concerned jihadist terrorism. This means that 248 jihadist arrests is in all likelihood an undercount. At the same time, however, in the Europol countries the number of terrorism-related arrests in the jihadism category decreased by more than half compared to 2019.³⁹

With regard to the geographical spread, it is noteworthy that France, with ninety-nine arrests, accounts for the highest number and percentage (thirty-nine percent) of jihadist terrorism-related arrests, followed by Spain (thirty-seven arrests, or fifteen percent) and Austria (thirty arrests, or twelve percent). Of the four main ideological strands, jihadism appears to be the one with the widest geographical spread. Of the fifteen countries for which we know the ideology of the arrestees, eight have made more than ten arrests (see figure 17, which covers the Europol countries and the US).

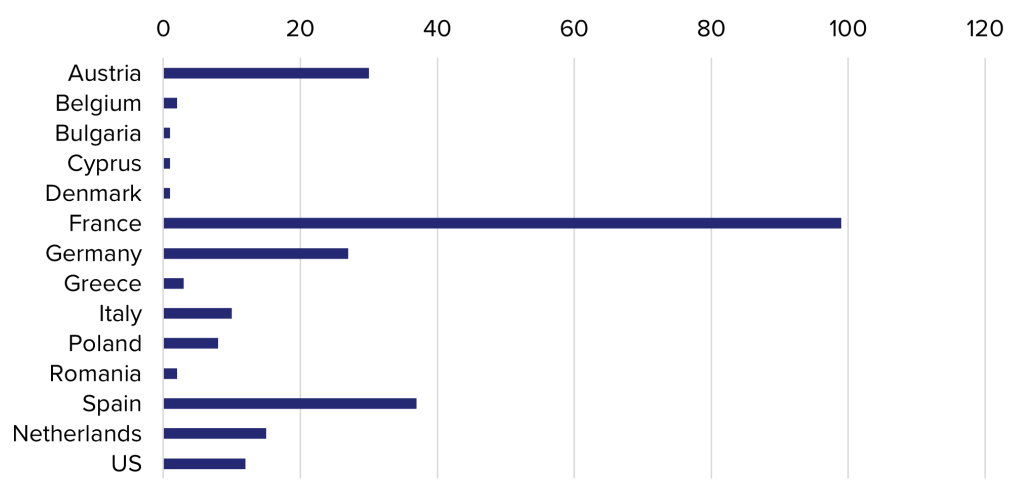


Figure 17. Jihadism-related arrests per country in 2020

³⁹ European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021, 99.

The second most common ideological category is ethno-nationalism with 112 arrests out of the total number of 644, or seventeen percent. Unsurprisingly, the lion's share of those arrests (seventy-nine arrests, or seventy percent) occurred in Northern Ireland (see figure 18, which covers all Europol countries and Northern Ireland). But arrests related to ethno-nationalist terrorism are not unique to Northern Ireland. France (Corsica) and Spain (Basque Country) have witnessed longstanding violent separatist campaigns as well, and in 2020 they each made twelve arrests (eleven percent) related to these conflicts. There were also a handful of arrests in Germany (three), Denmark (three), The Netherlands (two) and Italy (one); the other countries had no arrests in this category.

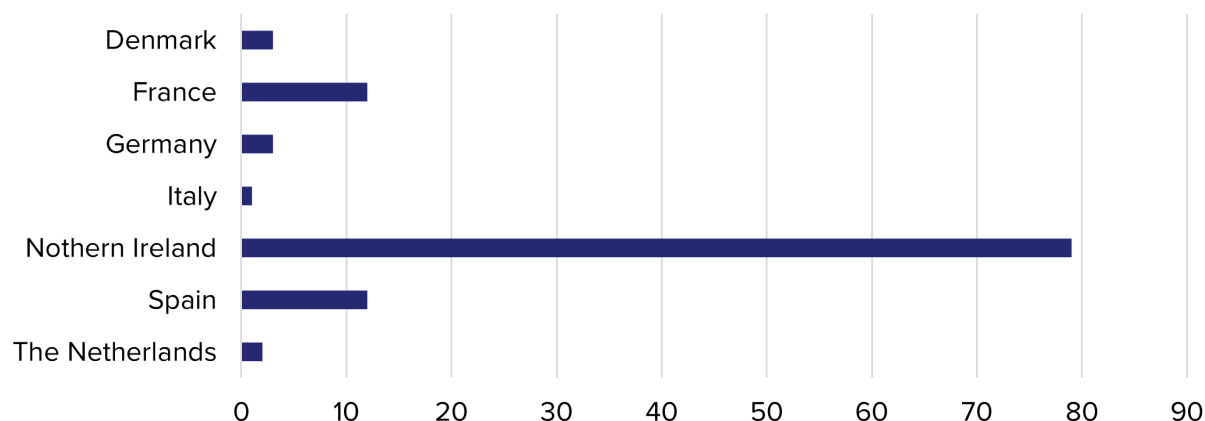


Figure 18. Ethno-nationalism-related arrests per country in 2020

What is most striking about the arrests for left-wing extremist terrorism is they are exclusive to Mediterranean countries (see figure 19, which covers all Europol countries and the US). There have been no terrorism-related arrests of left-wing extremists outside of Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece. Italy has seen the highest number in this category with twenty-four arrests, followed by Greece with fourteen arrests. These two countries together account for seventy-three percent of all terrorism-related arrests of left-wing extremists.

It is perhaps remarkable that Germany has seen a considerable number of left-wing extremist attacks, but appears to have made no arrests in this category. A possible explanation is that the types of crimes German left-wing extremists⁴⁰ are engaging in, are not (or are not considered) terrorist in nature. In its most recent annual report, the BfV, the German security service, noted an numerical increase and a hardening in the actions coming from left-wing extremists, though it seems the German authorities consider much left-wing extremist activity as related to other forms of political violence than terrorism.

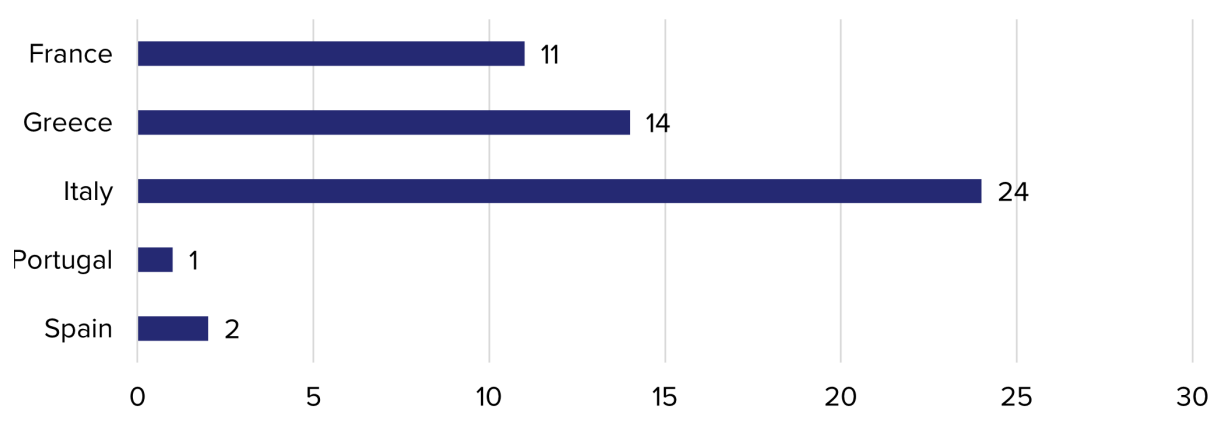


Figure 19. Left-wing extremism-related arrests per country in 2020

40 Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020 (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, 2021), 122–23.

The arrests for right-wing extremism appear to have occurred largely in the US and Germany (see figure 18). These two countries together account for sixty percent (sixteen and fourteen arrests, respectively) of the total number of fifty arrests in 2020. This should not come as a surprise, given the long and violent history of right-wing extremism in these two countries, as well as the assertiveness of German and American right-wing extremist groups in their opposition to the Covid-19 restrictions in their respective countries.⁴¹ Another notable finding is that, the US aside, all arrests have taken place in Western Europe; the Scandinavian and Eastern European countries have made no arrests in this category.

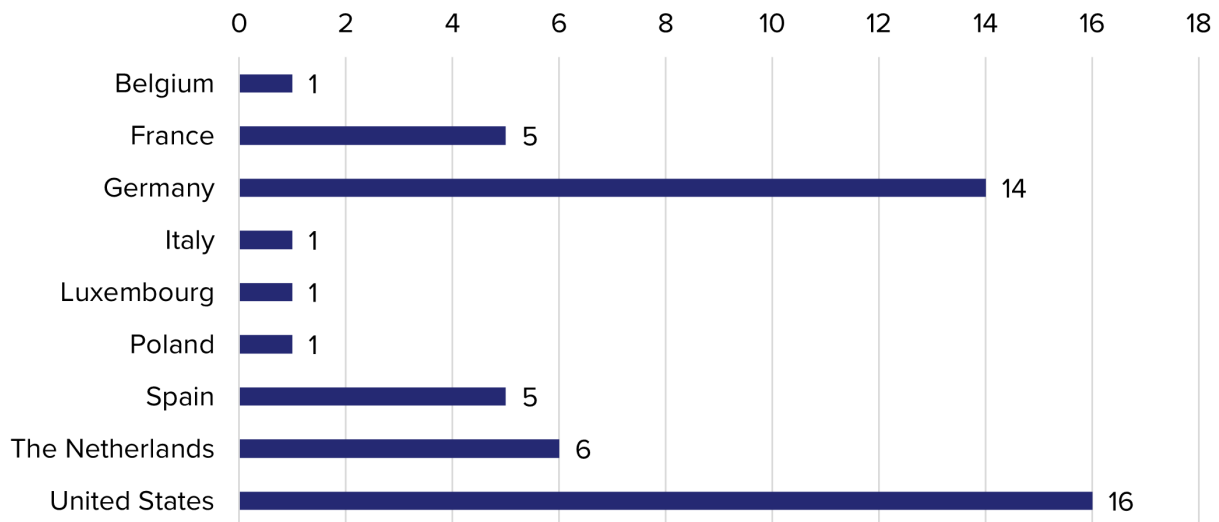


Figure 20. Right-wing extremism-related arrests per country in 2020

4.4 Interpretation

For the interpretation of the arrest data, we will also draw on the data about the geographical spread of the terrorist attacks we identified (see paragraph 2.2). Since we are using the numbers of arrests per country as an indicator of terrorist activity, we can combine them with the attack data to get an idea of what types of terrorism occur where. With some exceptions, the arrest data match up with the attack data in the sense that countries that have seen a large number of attacks from a certain ideological strand are likely to also have arrested a higher number of suspects from that same ideological strand.

A clear example concerns jihadist terrorism. Many of the attacks have taken place in France, as have many of the arrests. Similarly, Greece has seen a high number of left-wing extremist attack, as well as a high number of terrorism-related arrests of left-wing extremists. As for right-wing extremism, the attacks, as well as the arrests, are to a considerable extent concentrated in the US (although German authorities have also arrested many right-wing extremists).

What does this tell us? There are several possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive. First, it could be that in the timespan that is covered in this Threat Assessment, terrorist activity within each of the ideological strands has remained limited to a relatively small number of countries and has not spilled over to other countries. This could lead one to suspect that, however globalised terrorist networks may be in all sorts of respects (spreading narratives, sharing expertise and resources, etc.), whether or not terrorism occurs depends on the social and political context on the national or local level.

41 T. van Dongen and E. Leidig, "Whose Side Are They on? The Diversity of Far-Right Responses to Covid-19", ICCT Perspective (blog), 18 August 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/whose-side-are-they-on-the-diversity-of-far-right-responses-to-covid-19/>.

With regard to the latter, one could think, for example, of characteristics and social environment of the movement members, the perceived effectiveness of violent actions, etc.⁴² Addressing the terrorist threat in the countries where it does occur, will also require an assessment of the context-specific factors that account for that occurrence.

A second possibility is that terrorist activity has spread, but it has not been detected yet. In cases with few arrests and attacks terrorist activity is going through an early stage in which it goes below the radar and has not translated into terrorist attacks yet.

But there are also some countries (Italy for left-wing extremism, Spain and Austria for jihadism) that have large numbers of arrests in an ideological strand and few or no terrorist attacks. Such cases are hard to interpret without inside knowledge regarding the exact nature of the crimes, but one potential explanation is that the movements are gravitating towards other types of political violence than terrorism. In May 2020, the Italian police arrested twelve anarchists in suspicion of involvement in “acts of terror”. One such act was an arson attack in Bologna, but the other acts pertained to violence during demonstrations, which is something different than terrorism.⁴³ It is speculative, but if movement members are arrested under anti-terrorist legislation, but actually have a preference for other forms of political violence, their arrests may show up in the Europol data, but their attacks may not.

For Spain, this mismatch between the numbers of arrests for crimes related to jihadist terrorism on the one hand and the absence of jihadist terrorist attacks on the other could mean, first, that jihadists in Spain are simply focusing more on terrorism-related crimes (like spreading propaganda⁴⁴ or terrorist financing) than on actual terrorist attacks and, second, that the ones who still focus on committing attacks are no longer able to remain undetected.⁴⁵ Austria’s high number of arrests is, at least for a considerable part, accounted for by a manhunt for accomplices of the jihadist shooter who killed four people in Vienna in November 2020.⁴⁶

5. Threat Levels

In this Threat Assessment, we have so far been using data to develop our own understanding of the current terrorist threat. Now we will turn to the impressions of the governments of the countries we have presented data about. This extra step in the Threat Assessment will serve as a check on our findings.

In the 2019 Terrorism Threat Assessment, it was first established which countries have a threat level system in place to keep the public informed about the severity of the terrorist threat. There were fourteen such countries; as they still had them when we carried out the current Threat Assessment, they are the same countries as the ones in figure 21.

42 This observation matches Schuurman’s analysis of factors that push people towards or keep them away from terrorism. See B. Schuurman, “Non-Involvement in Terrorist Violence: Understanding the Most Common Outcome of Radicalization Processes”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, No. 6 (2020): 17–18.

43 “12 Anarchists Arrested for “Terror Acts” (4) in Bologna, Florence and Milan”, ANSA, 13 May 2020. https://www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2020/05/13/12-anarchists-arrested-for-terror-acts-4_9cccca98-8fe9-4e68-a9b9-34dab92f8f65.html.

44 “Jihadist Radicalisation: An Individual Arrested in Spain for Spreading Terrorist Propaganda Online” (Europol, 23 October 2020). <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/jihadist-radicalisation-individual-arrested-in-spain-for-spreading-terrorist-propaganda-online>; “Arrest in Spain for Dissemination of Jihadist Terrorist Propaganda” (Europol, 5 June 2020). <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/arrest-in-spain-for-dissemination-of-jihadist-terrorist-propaganda>.

45 “Morocco and Spain Arrest 4 Suspected ISIS Supporters in Joint Raids”, *The Defense Post*, 4 December 2019. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/12/04/morocco-spain-isis-arrests/>.

46 F. Murphy, “Austrian Police Arrest 14 in Manhunt after Gunman’s Deadly Rampage”, *Reuters*, 2 November 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/austria-attack-int-idUSKBN2712P7>.

Such systems consist of a series of ordinal level scores, typically ranging from something like ‘low’ to something like ‘critical’.⁴⁷ For the countries that have such a system in place, we also established at what level the terrorist threat was. For the current Threat Assessment, we went back to the same countries to see where their threat levels are standing now.

In the previous Threat Assessment, we normalised the scores to account for differences in the number of levels, which ranges from three (France) to six (New Zealand). We calculated the 2019 threat levels as a percentage of the maximum threat level. For example, supposing that a country has five threat levels and was at level 4 in 2019; that country would then have gotten a score of eight percent. We made the same calculations for the current threat levels (which were established on 30 July 2021). Then we calculated an average percentage for 2019 and one for 2021. Any meaningful shifts in the average threat level would require an explanation, as would a shift that would clearly contradict the trends and patterns we highlighted in the previous section.

Figure 21 shows the normalised scores for the threat levels that were established on 30 July 2021. Poland is something of a special case; its threat level system is only activated in the event of a specific threat of a terrorist attack. This is why Poland’s threat level is at 0, which is also what it stood at in the previous Threat Assessment.⁴⁸

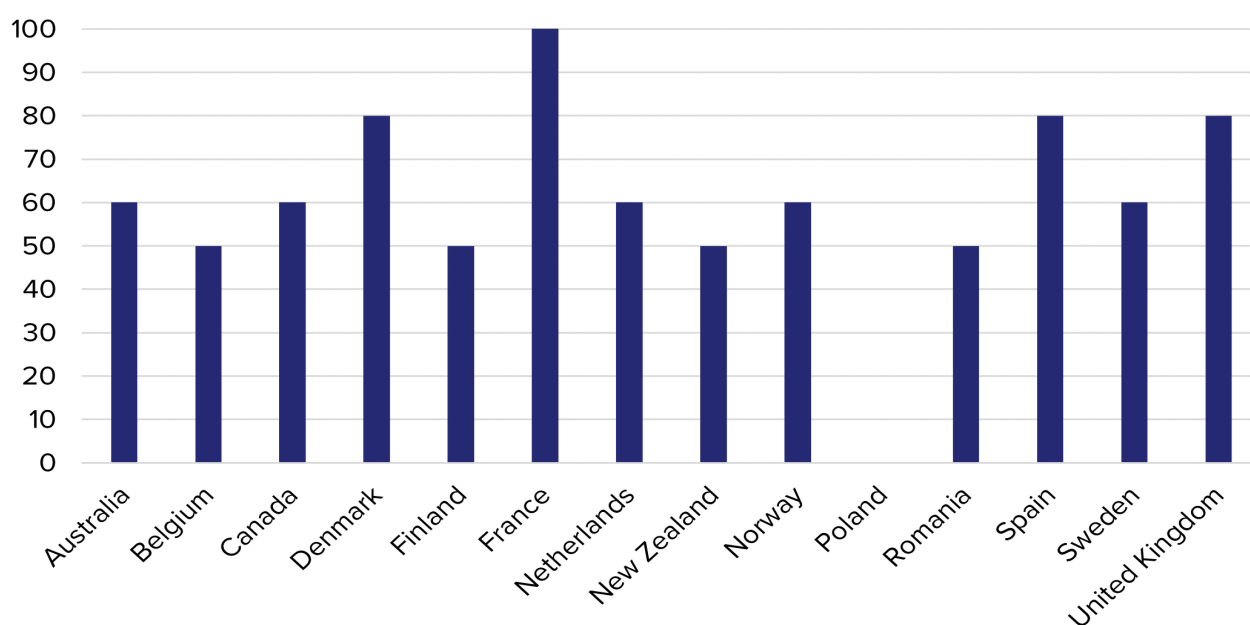


Figure 19: Normalised threat levels, July 2021

There are only two countries, France and the Netherlands, that are now on a different threat level than in 2019. France increased its threat level to ‘attack emergency’, the highest level, after a knife attack in Nice in October 2020. The Netherlands lowered its threat level in December 2019, primarily because it saw a decrease in the threat from jihadist terrorism. Romania’s 2021 score differs from the score in the 2019 Threat Assessment as well, but that is because it went from a system with five levels to a system with four. With such a low number of changes in the various threat levels, the average threat level from 2021 does not differ much from the average threat level in 2019; in fact, the difference is only one tenth of a percentage point. This is in line with our assessment that the terrorist threat to the countries we examined, has remained largely stable.

47 For some examples of threat levels, see "Canada's National Terrorism Threat Levels", Government of Canada, accessed 27 January 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/nationalsecurity/terrorism-threat-level.html>; "Threat Levels", MI5, accessed 27 January 2022, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>.

48 L. van der Heide and R. Bergema, *Terrorism Threat Assessment 2018 – 2019* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), 14.

6. Conclusion

The terrorist threat in the countries we examined is currently limited in several respects. First, the data we collected for this Threat Assessment do not show shifts in weapon use; left-wing extremist, right-wing extremist and jihadist terrorists have one weapon type they use in most of their attacks and that they use more than terrorists in the other ideological strands. We have not seen shifts within ideological strands to other weapons, nor have we seen the introduction of weapons that are new for all ideological strands. Related to that, there also appears to be no escalation. The lethality rates are fairly low; there is no trend towards more deadly attacks.

Second, within the territorial boundaries of the group of countries we examined, the various terrorist threats are geographically confined. They certainly differ in this respect, with jihadist terrorism having a wider geographical reach than the other ideological strands, but for each of the strands there is a small number of countries that accounts for a large share of the attacks and the arrests. The spill-over towards other countries has been limited.

Finally, we have not seen a large-scale relocation of foreign terrorist fighters from Syria and Iraq to their home countries, or the other way around. The numbers of FTFs who returned between September 2019 and August 2021 is not more than a sliver of the overall numbers of FTFs who went to Syria and Iraq after 2011. As we have seen in chapter 3, it is unlikely that these numbers are going to change dramatically in the near future, barring a major policy development. But as long as, for instance, local Kurdish officials are willing and able to detain FTFs and Western governments remain reluctant to repatriate their citizens, large-scale relocations remain unlikely.

Our impression of terrorism being in a status quo finds confirmation in the official terrorist threat levels. Very few countries have reason to believe that they are now under a greater or lesser threat than two years ago.

But we also know that terrorist threats can flare up quickly. Around 2009 and 2010, the jihadist movement seemed a spent force. Some intelligence agencies claimed that they had defeated the jihadists. During the Arab Spring, several observers rejoiced that the protests demonstrated the irrelevance of organisations like al-Qaeda. Little did they know that it would not be long before the region and the world had to deal with the Islamic State, an al-Qaeda offshoot.

In order not to be caught by surprise again, we need to take note of the status quo outlined in this Threat Assessment and ask ourselves what could happen that would change it. Identifying the factors that the current status quo hinges on is crucial, as it can help us prevent, or at least anticipate sudden escalations of the terrorist threat.

For jihadism, it could be the release from prison of those that have been jailed in the early stages of the Syrian Civil War. With the expertise they gained on the battlefield and with the networks they built there (and which they could to expand while in prison), they are in a position to reinvigorate the jihadist movement in their respective countries.⁴⁹ A recent study, although drawing on small numbers of jihadists, shows that the recidivism rates among terrorist prisoners with previous convictions for terrorist or extremist activity are higher than those for other terrorist prisoners.⁵⁰ This means that the jihadist veterans who fought in Syria and Iraq continue to pose a risk.

49 K. Willsher, "Returning Jihadists 'Threaten New Wave of Terror in Europe'", *The Guardian*, 19 December 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/19/returning-jihadists-threaten-new-wave-of-terror-in-europe>.

50 R. Simcox and H. Stuart, 'The Threat from Europe's Jihadi Prisoners and Prison Leavers', *CTC Sentinel* 13, No. 7 (2020): 22–36.

Another risk factor is Afghanistan. Colin Kahl, the US Under Secretary for Defense for Policy stated that it would take ISKP about half a year to build the capacity to strike in the US. Al-Qaeda, according to Kahl, would need “a year or two”.⁵¹ Admittedly, there are valid reasons to question this assessment. First, it will take some time for al-Qaeda and ISKP to build training camps, establish contacts with jihadists on other continents and find travel routes for new recruits. In doing so, they will possibly have to reckon with the Taliban, which is hostile to ISKP and which may try to restrain al-Qaeda to avoid a backlash from the countries al-Qaeda wants to attack. And that is all on the questionable assumption that al-Qaeda and ISKP are going to operate far outside of Central Asia. Both organisations seem to be focused on Afghanistan for the time being, although especially ISKP’s ambitions go further.⁵² On the other hand, the Taliban is going to have its hands full now that it has to govern Afghanistan, so it is uncertain whether they will be fully willing and able to keep al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a basis for attacks elsewhere.⁵³

The threat of right-wing extremist terrorism could also escalate as a result of external developments. If the Covid-19 protest movement hardens its actions and if the right-wing extremist movement manages to claim the leadership of this movement, it may inspire more people to commit terrorist attacks. Right-wing extremist terrorists may also feel emboldened by the further electoral rise of far-right political leaders. In this respect, it is important to note that there are elections coming up in some countries with strong far-right political parties. Also, right-wing extremist terrorism is a self-reinforcing phenomenon: one attack may inspire other right-wing extremists to commit similar attacks.⁵⁴

Left-wing extremist terrorism may become more frequent once the movement perceives a growing far-right threat. When far-right candidates win elections, or perform well, left-wing extremists may begin to feel that other means have failed and violence is necessary. Indeed, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue recently noted “an emerging firearms community in the US consisting of armed left-wing activists and antifascists” who want to develop the capabilities to defend themselves from attacks by right-wing extremists.⁵⁵

These are just some examples of factors that could help terrorist movements to break out the status quo they are in right now. Constant monitoring and more thinking about what external factors could provide a boost to the various terrorist movements is necessary to understand what it would take to bring about an increase in the threat level. Right now, the various terrorist threats are not so high as to warrant serious concern, but that may change, and it may change quickly.

51 "Islamic State in Afghanistan Could Have Capacity to Strike US Next Year", The Guardian, 26 October 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/26/islamic-state-afghanistan-capacity-strike-us-next-year-al-qaida>.

52 C. Clarke, "Al-Qaeda Is Thrilled That the Taliban Control Afghanistan — But Not for the Reason You Think", Politico, 7 September 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/09/07/al-qaeda-taliban-complex-relationship-509519>; A. Jadoon and A. Mines, "The Taliban Can't Take on the Islamic State Alone", War on the Rocks, 14 October 2021. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/the-taliban-cant-take-on-the-islamic-state-alone/>.

53 Jadoon and Mines, 'The Taliban Can't Take on the Islamic State Alone'.

54 Such copycat effects, however, are not always as straightforward as they seem. Macklin and Bjørgo point out that there is little real evidence that Breivik's attacks had a copycat effect. That said, they do acknowledge a copycat effect of the Christchurch shootings in 2019. See G. Macklin and T. Bjørgo, "Breivik's Long Shadow? The Impact of the July 22, 2011 Attacks on the Modus Operandi of Extreme-Right Lone Actor Terrorists", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, No. 3 (2021): 27.

55 J. Farrell-Molloy, "The Growth of the Left-Wing 'Gunstagram'", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2 December 2021. https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-growth-of-the-left-wing-gunstagram/.

7. ICCT Products

For those who want to learn more, the lists below contains reading suggestions for some of the topics we touched on in the Threat Assessment. All publications have recently been published on the ICCT website.

7.1 Jihadist terrorism

Davis, J. The Future of the Islamic State's Women: Assessing Their Potential Threat. ICCT Policy Brief. 8 June 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-future-of-the-islamic-states-women-assessing-their-potential-threat/>.

Gartenstein-Ross, D., E. Chace-Donahue and C. Clarke. "The Threat of Jihadist Terrorism in Germany." ICCT Perspective (blog). <https://icct.nl/publication/the-threat-of-jihadist-terrorism-in-germany/>.

Hamming, T. Al-Hazimiyya: the Ideological Conflict Destroying the Islamic State from Within. ICCT Research Paper. 4 May 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/al-hazimiyya-islamic-state-ideological-conflict/>.

Ingram, Haroro J., Craig Whiteside and Charlie Winter. "The Islamic State's Global Insurgency and its Counterstrategy Implications". The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) Evolutions in Counter-Terrorism, Vol. 2 (November 2020): 21-46. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/11/Special-Edition-2-2.pdf>.

Malkki, L., and J. Saarinen. Evolution of Jihadism in Finland. ICCT Research Paper. 19 May 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/evolution-of-jihadism-in-finland/>.

Renard, T. "The Caliphate's Legacy and Fringe Extremists". ICCT Perspective (blog). <https://icct.nl/publication/the-caliphates-legacy-and-fringe-extremists/>.

Vale, G. Women in Islamic State: from Caliphate to Camps. ICCT Policy Brief. 17 October 2019. <https://icct.nl/publication/women-in-islamic-state-from-caliphate-to-camps/>.

7.2 Right-wing extremism

Dongen, T. van. "Normalisation, Party Politics and Vigilantism: Why the Next Terrorist Wave will not be Right-Wing Extremist". The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) Evolutions in Counter-Terrorism, Vol. 2 (November 2020): 101-120. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/11/Special-Edition-2-5.pdf>.

Gartenstein-Ross, D., C. Clarke and S. Hodgson. "Bordering on Hate: The Strategic Implications of White Supremacist Extremist Travel between the United States and Canada". ICCT Perspective (blog). 13 April 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/white-supremacist-extremist-travel-the-united-states-canada/>.

Johnson, B., and M. Feldman. Siege Culture After Siege: Anatomy of a Neo-Nazi Terrorist Doctrine. ICCT Research Paper. 21 July 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/siege-culture-anatomy-of-a-neo-nazi-terrorist-doctrine/>.

Leidig, E. "‘We are worth fighting for’: Women in Far Right Extremism". ICCT Perspective (blog). 26 October 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/women-far-right-extremism/>.

Veilleux-Lepage, Y., C. Daymon and A. Amarasingam. "The Christchurch Attack Report: Key Takeaways on Tarrant's Radicalization and Attack Planning". ICCT Perspective (blog). 18 December 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-christchurch-attack-report-key-takeaways-on-tarrants-radicalization-and-attack-planning/>.

7.3 Left-wing extremism

Dongen, T. van. “We Need to Talk About Left-Wing Extremism. Or Do We?” ICCT Perspective (blog). 24 November 2021. <https://icct.nl/publication/we-need-to-talk-about-left-wing-extremism-or-do-we/>.

7.4 Arrest / imprisonment

Silke, A., and J. Morrison. Re-Offending by Released Terrorist Prisoners: Separating Hype from Reality. ICCT Policy Brief. 2 September 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/re-offending-by-released-terrorist-prisoners-separating-hype-from-reality/>.

7.5 Terrorist weapon use

Anfinson, A., and N. Al-Dayel. “The Threat of the Islamic State’s Extensive Use of Improvised Explosives”. ICCT Perspective (blog). 12 July 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-threat-of-the-islamic-states-extensive-use-of-improvised-explosives/>.

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7.6 Foreign fighters

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8. Methodological Annex

8.1 Terrorist attacks

8.1.1 Definitions and demarcations

Any effort to collect data about terrorist attacks is bound to raise methodological and definitional issues, the most notorious of which undoubtedly concerns the definition of terrorism. This is not to redo the never-ending debate on the definition of terrorism, but for the purposes of this Threat Assessment we do need to identify a phenomenon that is distinguishable from other phenomena, and that is recognisable as a security threat. To that end, we adopted Alex P. Schmid's revised academic consensus definition of terrorism: "a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties."⁵⁶ In addition, it should be noted that the current analysis of terrorist attacks only focuses on acts by non-state actors, for which there is at least some evidence that the perpetrator was acting on a political or ideological agenda.⁵⁷

From this definition, it follows that the intention of the perpetrator determines whether a certain act constitutes an act of terrorism. Cases in which the intention of the perpetrator is unknown, either because the perpetrator is unknown or because they or their movement or organisation has said nothing about why they committed the attack, are therefore left out of the database. After all, if it is not possible to establish the intention behind an attack, it is also not possible to establish whether it is a terrorist attack.

We could have tried to gauge the intention of the perpetrator from the nature of the attack or the target, but we have been reluctant to do so. For instance, it is tempting to believe that an attack in or against a mosque or a church has some religious background, but in such cases there are many other possible scenarios that are equally as plausible. Making up a lack of evidence by speculatively assigning motivations to perpetrators is likely to lead to a misreading of some incidents and would lead to pollution in our dataset and an inflation of the terrorist threat.

This does mean that there is a chance that we will have to reconsider some incidents at a later stage. It is possible that the true nature of an attack becomes clear only later on, for instance during a court case. Perhaps it will turn out that some recent attacks that we left out of the database are indeed terrorist attacks. However, the number of attacks for which this will be the case is likely to be small. As terrorist attacks are supposed to send a message of some variety, we can be reasonably sure that most terrorists will make clear what they hope to achieve by committing their attacks.

Given the nature of especially some left-wing extremist actions, we are also faced with the question what actually constitutes a physical attack or an act of violence. In order to draw this line, we only included two types of acts in our database. First, we included acts in which the perpetrators exerted considerable physical force on people or objects to which they were hostile or ill-disposed with the clear intention of damaging or harming these same objects or people. Second, we included acts in which the perpetrators exerted considerable physical force in ways that could reasonably lead to such harm or damage.

Many left-wing extremist groups spray-paint slogans on the buildings of their enemies. While we

⁵⁶ A.P. Schmid, "The Revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, No. 2 (2012): 158–59.

⁵⁷ Schmid also stresses the importance of the political motivation as a defining element of terrorism. See Schmid, "The Revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism".

acknowledge that, depending on the circumstances, this may be intimidating, we do not consider this an act of violence, and therefore not a terrorist attack. But what about throwing paint against a building? Is that an act of violence? We decided against including such acts in our database because it does not by definition take real physical force to apply paint to a wall. Any force that is used in such instances is not intended to do harm, but to cover the distance between building and perpetrator, who is for example kept away from the building by a gate.

On all these points, we tried to make our decisions jointly as a research team and in accordance with the principles outlined in the previous paragraphs, but we acknowledge that other researchers may have made different choices.

Finally, we examined only attacks that reached the execution stage. We did not look at foiled attacks, primarily because it is hard to establish how far advanced a foiled attack plan needs to be in order to deserve the label ‘foiled attack’. Moreover, the modus operandi of an attack is not written in stone once a plan is conceived, nor is it sure that foiled attack plans would have reached the execution stage if the police or the security services had not stepped in. Terrorists adopt, change and abandon plans, so what they have in mind at one particular point is not necessarily an accurate predictor of what they are going to do at a later stage. For these reasons, we chose to focus only on the most straightforward and unequivocal manifestation of the terrorist threat, the actual terrorist attacks.

8.1.2 The data collection procedure

We looked for data that covered the period immediately after the latest ICCT Threat Assessment, covering the period from 1 September 2019 until 31 August 2021. We specifically focused on the following thirty-one countries that are in the Madrid group: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States.

For all countries where there was one available, we used the timelines on the website of the Counter Extremism Project, as those contain at least the most prominent attacks. We then supplemented the data we collected that way, with additional data sources. Some of these cover all countries, some just a specific one on our list of thirty-one. The additional sources are the following:

- The Global Terrorism Database (for September – December 2019);⁵⁸
- A list of jihadist attacks published by the Dutch AIVD;⁵⁹
- Johnston’s Archive’s list of jihadist attacks in the US;⁶⁰
- The lists of Islam-inspired violent incidents compiled by the website Religion of Peace for 2019,⁶¹ 2020⁶² and 2021⁶³;

58 “Global Terrorism Database”, n.d. <https://start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

59 “Tijdlijn Van Aanslagen in het Westen”, Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, n.d. <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/terrorisme/tijdlijn-van-aanslagen-in-het-westen>.

60 R. Johnston, “Terrorist Attacks and Related Incidents in the United States”, Johnston Archive, 24 August 2021. <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/wrjp255a.html>.

61 “List of Islamic Terror Attacks”, The Religion of Peace, n.d. <https://www.thereligionofpeace.com/attacks/attacks.aspx?Yr=2019>.

62 “List of Islamic Terror Attacks”, The Religion of Peace, n.d. <https://www.thereligionofpeace.com/attacks/attacks.aspx?Yr=2020>.

63 “List of Islamic Terror Attacks”, The Religion of Peace, n.d. <https://www.thereligionofpeace.com/attacks/attacks.aspx?Yr=2021>.

- The Anti-Defamation League’s HEAT Map of terrorist attacks in the US;⁶⁴
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland’s statistics on the security situation in Northern Ireland.⁶⁵

Finally, we did individual country searches through Google and Bing search engines, using the name of the country, “terrorist attack” (so as a Boolean search) and 2019, 2020 or 2021 as search terms. We also ran searches using the following combinations of search terms:

- “Jihadist attack” (NAME COUNTRY) (YEAR)
- “Right-wing extremist attack” (NAME COUNTRY) (YEAR)
- Anarchist attack (NAME COUNTRY) (YEAR)

Our impression is that Google is reluctant, at least more so than Bing, to include links to anarchist websites in the search results. As such sites are important sources of information about left-wing attacks, we used Bing, which does not eliminate the search results as thoroughly as Google Chrome, to find left-wing extremist (anarchist) terrorist attacks.

For each attack in our dataset we collected the following information:

- The country where it took place
- The numbers of deadly victims (incl., if applicable, the perpetrator(s))
- The number of wounded victims (incl., if applicable, the perpetrator(s))
- The ideology of the perpetrator
- The weapons used by the perpetrator

8.1.3 Limitations

We did our best to come up with meaningful data, but there are nevertheless some limitations that we need to mention.

- Our dataset is probably biased against smaller attacks. Those attract less media attention and are therefore less likely to be picked up by the sources we used to compile our database. Also, since they are less well-documented, there may be less information regarding the exact objectives of the perpetrator, which will make it more difficult to identify them as a terrorist attack in a data collection process that relies largely on media reports.
- Related to a point we already touched on above, the incidents in this database are very recent in some cases, which can lead to a misreading of the nature of violent incidents. First, not all of them have been cleared up to the point where one knows enough about the perpetrators’ intention to definitively say that these incidents were indeed terrorist attacks, or what the perpetrator’s ideology was. Also, in some cases, the criminal investigations are still ongoing, so some attacks have been included in the database only on the basis of suspicions on the part of the police. The subsequent court cases may generate information that sheds a different light on the initial assessment of an incident as a terrorist attack.
- Regarding the attacks by anarchist groups, we took much of the information about those from anarchist websites that translate communiqués (some of which are about attacks) from

⁶⁴ “ADL HEAT Map”, Anti-Defamation League, n.d. <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map>.

⁶⁵ “Security Situation Statistics”, Police Service of Northern Ireland, n.d. <https://www.psnl.police.uk/inside-psnl/Statistics/security-situation-statistics/>.

websites in other languages. This is likely not a highly structured process, so there may be an element in randomness regarding which attacks will get mentioned on the English-language websites and which ones will not. This being the case, it is probable that there are smaller left-wing extremist terrorist attacks that we missed, so our number of left-wing extremist attacks is likely to be an undercount. In their *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020* the German federal security service claims that left-wing extremists are setting fire to commercial company assets almost every day.⁶⁶ We cannot be sure how many of these attacks would satisfy our criteria for a terrorist attacks (as opposed to intimidation or sabotage), but some may, which would suggest there have been more terrorist attacks than we found through our searches. At the same time, such English-language websites do not apply much of a threshold in deciding which attacks are worth mentioning. Even the most innocuous of so-called ‘direct actions’, like spray painting a slogan on the gate of the Italian consulate in Basel, Switzerland,⁶⁷ are hailed as major acts of resistance on websites like *anarchistsworldwide.noblogs.org*. At the very least, this makes it less likely that we will have missed out on major left-wing extremist attacks.

8.1.4 Europol data

Finally, we should briefly explain why we chose not to base the chapter on terrorist attacks on a freely available and widely used source of data, namely Europol’s annual TE-SAT reports, which give an overview of the terrorist threat in the countries that are signatories to the Europol Convention. Aside from the practical matter that there are no Europol data specifically for the periods September-December 2019 and January-August 2021, Europol includes foiled attacks in the attack numbers it lists in its reports. As the TE-SAT reports do not contain specific references to attacks that have been counted as foiled, we have no way to verify whether the foiled attacks indeed posed specific, serious threats.

Moreover, there is the issue of the cross-country comparability of the Europol data. Europol collects “qualitative and quantitative data on terrorist offences in the EU and data on arrests [...] provided or confirmed by EU Member States”.⁶⁸ Since every country has its own definition of terrorism, strictly speaking each country has supplied data to Europol on a slightly different phenomenon. Considering how thorny the definitional issues regarding terrorism still are, we felt that the current Threat Assessment is better served by data collection on the basis of a definition of terrorism that is the same for all countries we are examining. The numbers in the TE-SAT reports are generally higher than the ones we found through the procedure outlined in section 2.1.2. The foiled attacks may account for this, but it is also possible that the police agencies that are represented in Europol have more information at their disposal than we do. That said, many terrorist attack do attract media attention, so if there are actual attacks that we missed out on and that are included in the Europol data, they will be smaller attacks with less dramatic results than the ones that we did include. In other words, if our way of working is biased, it will, as we explained above, be a bias against smaller attacks.

8.1.5 Police Service of Northern Ireland Statistics

With regard to the UK, we made the decision to omit attack data derived from statistics published by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The reason for this is that we found these statistics to be problematic for our purposes in numerous ways.

⁶⁶ *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020*, 141.

⁶⁷ "Basel, Switzerland: Italian Consulate Attacked in Solidarity with the Genoa Dockers Strike", *Anarchists Worldwide* (blog), 1 March 2020. <https://anarchistsworldwide.noblogs.org/post/2020/03/01/basel-switzerland-italian-consulate-attacked-in-solidarity-with-the-geoa-dockers-strike-video/>.

⁶⁸ *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020* (The Hague: Europol, 2020), 7.

The statistics are set out according to five categories: “shooting incidents”, “bombing incidents”, “paramilitary-style shootings”, “security-related deaths”, and “casualties of paramilitary-style attacks”. Taking each category individually, the issues with the data are as follows:

- **Shooting incidents:** This data does not discriminate regarding the source of the shot. It includes any shooting incident relating to the security situation in Northern Ireland including shots fired by terrorists, shots fired by the security forces, paramilitary style attacks involving shootings, and shots heard (and later confirmed by other sources). It is not possible to distinguish what the source of the shot was, nor the motivation behind it. We considered therefore that the figures presented in this category were unusable for our purposes.
- **Bombing incidents:** This category records (and does not distinguish between) incidents in which the explosive was detonated and incidents in which the device was defused. For every other country in the assessment we had discounted foiled attacks. The inability to separate those incidents in the PSNI statistics which were foiled from those which had succeeded rendered these numbers unusable.
- **Paramilitary-style shootings and assaults:** We carefully considered the communicative aspect of these attacks but it was ultimately decided that they did not fit our definition of terrorism. The specific purpose as assessed by the PSNI is to “punish the victim for anti-social activities”. This retributive factor set it apart from the type of attacks we are recording in this assessment. Further, these paramilitary style shootings are generally conducted by Loyalist or Republican paramilitary groups on members of their own community. We considered this to be an additional significant differentiating factor. We determined that these incidents blur the line between vigilantism, terrorism, and mob rule and are more akin to organised violent crime, albeit conducted for the most part by terrorist organisations. We therefore did not include these incidents in the numbers listed for the UK.
- **Security-related deaths:** The problem with these figures is that they include not just incidents of murder but also deaths resulting from the use of force by the security forces or persons being killed while planting a bomb which detonated prematurely. They also include deaths as a result of paramilitary style shootings we had already made the decision to discount.
- **Casualties of paramilitary-style assaults:** This category details the number of victims as opposed to incidents so it is not possible to extract from the figures presented how many incidents occurred. Further, “casualties” as recorded include those sustained as a result of gunshot, explosion, assault, armed robbery, rioting or plastic baton rounds and other forms of incident that does not fit our definition of terrorism.

Inclusion of any of the categories above would inaccurately inflate the number of terrorist attacks that took place in the UK. We conducted a separate, additional search for incidents in Northern Ireland (the same way we did for the other countries) and ultimately included two incidents in the UK attack data since we were able to confirm, independently of the PSNI statistics, that they satisfy our definition of a terrorist attack. Those two incidents included in the assessment are two of many more reported security-related incidents which occurred in Northern Ireland between 01 September 2019 and 31 August 2021 according to PSNI data. These include a total of three security-related deaths, eighty shooting incidents, thirty-one bombing incidents, eighty-two casualties of paramilitary-style assaults (excluding fatalities), and thirty-five casualties of paramilitary-style shootings (excluding fatalities). Some of these incidents may indeed meet our criteria for what constitutes a terrorist attack, but as there is no way for us to assess whether that is the case, we could not include them in our database and had to concede that our number for Northern Ireland (or rather the UK) may be an undercount.

8.2. Returning foreign fighters

8.2.1. Definitions

There is no internationally agreed legal definition of foreign terrorist fighters, nor a specific regime governing them, there is similarly no operational definition of foreign fighter applied by the EU or other groups. For the purposes of this assessment we use an adapted version of the definition which can be found in UN Security Resolution 2178.⁶⁹ We therefore consider foreign terrorist fighters to be *individuals who travel to Iraq or Syria for the purpose of the support, perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, jihadist terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of jihadist terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.*

We do not include those who only attempted to travel to a conflict zone but either failed or were impeded by authorities in the commission of their travel. As is highlighted in the definition, we consider an individual to be an FTF regardless of what their role in their respective jihadist groups might have been, it is not necessary that they were proven combatants in the conflicts or had actively engaged in the carrying out or planning of terrorist attacks. This means that any capacity in which an individual, male or female, served or supported a jihadist group in a conflict zone is included under the term FTF. We have not, however, included children in these figures. Their victim status and lack of agency make it unlikely that they engaged on a large scale in the activities that are mentioned in the definition we provided above.

Also set out in the definition above is the fact that the FTF section of this assessment focuses exclusively on jihadist foreign fighters. Governments are of course also faced with nationals joining other, non-jihadist, conflicts. The conflict in Ukraine attracted large numbers of right-wing fighters, with estimates indicating a total amount exceeding 17,000 from fifty-five countries, joining both the Ukrainian (approximately 3,900) and the Russian/separatist side (approximately 13,400). The majority of these fighters came from Russia (15,000).⁷⁰ The decision was taken not to include these figures in this assessment since the policies and measures of most of the countries included in this report with regard to the issue of FTFs are focused solely on ISIS-affiliated FTFs. Further, the numbers of FTFs with regard to the Ukraine conflict are high, but concentrated to just a handful of countries, lacking broader applicability.

8.2.2 The data collection procedure

Figures for the total numbers of FTFs that had departed each country were retrieved from the previous ICCT Threat Assessment of 2018-2019. Each of the figures listed in that report had a minimum of two independent sources confirming the figures cited, most had three sources, which were comprised of numbers reported in the TE-SAT reports, media reports, and official government statistics. Where competing estimates were found, the more conservative and specific figures (as opposed to broader estimates) were used, or the lower end of the range reported was used to avoid overstating the reality of the figures.

As with the preceding section, the data regarding returning FTFs begins on 01 September 2019, and ends on 31 August 2021. We searched for returnee data on most of the same countries that were covered in the attack section, with the exception of Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, and Malta. Though these countries appear in the data displaying total numbers of departed FTFs (all representing zero), the fact that they have no reported FTFs to potentially return meant that we

69 Resolution 2178 (2014) (United Nations Security Council, 24 September 2014), <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/s/res/2178-%282014%29>.

70 White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement (New York: The Soufan Center, 2019).

excluded them from our country-specific searches for returned FTFs. This meant that the countries included in those searches for returned FTFs were: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Again, similar to the section on attack data, we utilised the country profiles and timelines on the website of the Counter Extremism Project where they were available. These country reports include a dedicated section on FTFs which sometimes includes the most notable cases of deaths, capture, or repatriation of those individuals, as does the country timelines on the website. We supplemented the information found in these sources with individual country searches through Google and Bing, using the name of the country “foreign fighter”/s (Boolean) and 2019, 2020 or 2021 as search terms. We also ran searches using the following combinations of search terms:

- arrest + “foreign fighter”/s + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- repatriated + “foreign fighter”/s + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- extradited + “foreign fighter”/s + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- repatriated + “terrorist” + Syria/Iraq + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- extradited + “terrorist” + Syria/Iraq + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- returnees + Syria/Iraq + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- “ISIS bride” + extradited + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- “ISIS bride” + repatriated + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)
- “ISIS bride” + returned + (NAME COUNTRY) + (YEAR)

We used the search term ‘extradited’ because it is often used in media reports, also for cases in which there is technically speaking no extradition. Extradition is a legal arrangement between two countries; in many cases, notably those involving Turkey, it is probably more accurate, as we do in this report, to speak of expulsion rather than of extradition. We do of course, speak of extradition in cases where we now a legal arrangement existed.

We did not find the same issues regarding Google Chrome not including links of a certain type as we had in the previous section since most of the sources were legitimate government, academic, or media organisations. The searches were conducted in English, French, Dutch, and German, and we looked at reports in numerous other languages which were translated using online translation tools. Whilst this runs the slight risk of mistranslation, key data such as numbers of those returned are usually relatively straightforward to translate from any language considering Arabic numerals are so widely used.

For each case we found in the research, we only recorded them as returned if there was confirmation that the FTF(s) was back in the territory of their home nation or confirmation of their officially organized departure (repatriation arrangements or expulsion) from the country where they had been located previously.

For each country in our dataset we collected the following information:

- The number of FTFs that have been returned and the date of their return
- Whether each case returned on their own initiative or were expelled/repatriated by the state.
- The gender of the returnee(s) or whether this was unknown.

Recording the date of return for each reported case allowed us to eliminate the possibility of counting the same case(s) more than once should they be reported again on a later date.

As an extra step of verification, we consulted with experts and practitioners from all the countries with larger FTF numbers, and a range of the countries assessed with smaller numbers, to confirm the returnee figures we found in our own research. We provided these experts with an explanation of the project, a list of the cases found for their respective countries, and the accompanying source for each case. We requested that they cross-reference the data presented to them with either their collected data or their own general knowledge of returnees in the time relevant time period. Where additional cases were highlighted that had been missed in our initial data collection, these were incorporated into the final numbers. Similarly where it was pointed out that cases had been erroneously included (through misattribution of nationality of the individual) these were removed from the tally. The experts approached ranged from academic experts in the field to government officials working in the areas of national security and foreign affairs, all of whom have had extensive policy, practice, and academic experience in international counter-terrorism.

Two cases were included in the UK figures which required consideration. They were the cases of Alexandra Kotev and El Shafee Elsheikh, two British FTFs and members of the infamous 'Beatles' group. They were extradited from US custody in Iraq to face trial in federal court in Virginia, US after previously having their British citizenship revoked. It was considered that it would be inaccurate to record them as returnees under the US' figures since the pair were not US citizens, had not departed from that country, and were therefore not counted amongst the 272 that had. Based on the fact that the pair were extradited to the US on the express approval of the UK government and that prior withholding of such approval meant that the extradition was not possible, it was decided that the UK government had effectively repatriated the pair albeit to a territory other than its own. As a result they were both recorded against the expulsion/repatriation figures of the UK.

8.2.3 Cases not included

There were two reports found of individuals for which repatriation has been officially agreed with their home nation, but confirmation could not be obtained that this had yet taken place. The first case involved a female from New Zealand and her two young children. The repatriation agreement was made in late July 2021 but due to legal and security concerns, state authorities refused to reveal when the family would be repatriated from immigration detention in Turkey where they were being held having left Syria earlier in the year. Due to this lack of confirmation, the amount of time that these arrangements can take to complete, and the possibility that the agreement might fall through, it was considered likely that the woman in question has been returned to New Zealand between the date the repatriation agreement was made (26 July 2021) and the end of the period this assessment is concerned with (31 August 2021). The case was therefore not included in the figures for this assessment.

Another case involved a female from Canada who was released from a Syrian camp after co-operating with the police. Her release was secured in June 2021 by a former US Ambassador and it was reported that the 'stage was set' for her return back to Canada. However, due to the fact that the Canadian government released a statement explaining that they were not involved in the woman's release, there were no official commitments from the Canadian government to facilitate repatriation, and her last reported whereabouts were Erbil, Iraq, this case was not included in the assessment figures. There was an additional case of a British/Irish dual national, Lisa Smith, who was returned to Dublin from Syria, having been repatriated by the Irish Army. Smith subsequently won an immigration appeal against her imposed ban from the United Kingdom, having expressed her intention to return to Northern Ireland. This may result in the United Kingdom having an

additional returned FTF in its territory but for the purposes of quantifying these figures, she remains an Irish FTF despite her part-British nationality.

Finally, there were two cases in Spain totalling four individuals which we ultimately discounted from the figures altogether. The first case was that of Abdel-Majed Abdel Bary who was found in a flat with two other men in Spain after having arrived by boat through his own initiative. Abdel Bary himself was a British/Egyptian dual national who had his British citizenship revoked so cannot be considered to be a Spanish returnee. Since he has not returned, and likely will not return, to Britain and since his transition to Spain was not facilitated by Britain, he cannot be considered to be a British returnee either. Further, it was never publicly disclosed whether the two additional men discovered with Abdel Bary had in fact arrived on the boat with him or were simply supporting him once he arrived. For these reasons, the three men were not counted against Spain's figures. An additional case concerned an Algerian FTF who was arrested in Barcelona having recently arrived from North Africa. In this case it was not clear whether Spain was his final destination, but considering his nationality he was not considered a Spanish returnee. As with the United Kingdom above, this may result in Spain having an additional two to four returned FTFs in its territory but for the purposes of quantifying these figures they are not considered Spanish returned FTFs.

8.2.4 Limitations

As with each other section in this report, the figures included in this section are based on information available to ICCT through a variety of sources, including correspondence with national experts in the field and media monitoring. The figures listed are possibly not an exhaustive list of those FTFs who have in reality returned to their home nations. There may be some gaps in the open-source information available on the number of returnees between September 2019 and August 2021. Some governments do not publicly disclose numbers, there may be some cases in which the authorities have a legitimate reason to withhold the information on specific returnees from the public, and there may be some instances in which individuals have made their way back to their home nations but avoided detection and/or arrest by posing as refugees or using illicit routes of travel. As such, the figures presented should be taken as indicative of a minimum that it is possible to confirm rather than exhaustive.

8.3 Arrests

Given the lack of useful data on very recent terrorism-related arrests, our arrest data will, unlike the other ones, pertain only to the year 2020. Arrest reports and crime statistics are usually published on a yearly basis, which is why we chose to focus on 2020 as the only complete year in our timeframe. Regarding the data, we could not use one data source or data collection method for all countries in our analysis. We applied several ways of working, and while this is not ideal, we do believe that we have data this allows us to make the analyses in the paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3.

8.3.1 TE-SAT data

The majority of the countries in this Threat Assessment are signatories to the Europol Convention. Consequently, data concerning terrorism-related arrests in these countries in 2020 can be found in Europol's Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) report on 2020. The content of this report is based on information supplied by EU member states, some non-EU countries and Eurojust as well as open source information.⁷¹

⁷¹ European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021, 107.

As we have noted previously, counter-terrorism policies vary from one country to another, leading to different thresholds to launch investigations and carry out arrests. However, counter-terrorism legislation has been harmonised amongst members of the EU, which suggests that there will be at least some similarities across countries in what constitutes a 'terrorism-related arrests'. This being the case, the TE-SAT report appears to be the most comprehensive and easily available resource to compare trends in terrorism-related arrests in the countries in the current Threat Assessment.

The chapter in the TE-SAT report that covers arrests has separate sections for each of the major ideologies (jihadist, ethno-nationalist, right-wing and left-wing / anarchist) and includes the overall number of arrests within the EU as well as the numbers per country.⁷² In addition, the most common causes for arrest per ideology are mentioned, but are not specified in numbers per country.

One country that slightly complicates matters, is the UK. As a result of Brexit, the UK has received only partial coverage in the TE-SAT report. Numbers of arrests for the various ideologies are not available for the UK; the TE-SAT report only provides the overall number of terrorism-related arrests for the UK and the number of terrorism-related arrests in the ethno-nationalist category in Northern Ireland. We used this latter number as applying to the UK as a whole, but there may have been some arrests related to ethno-nationalist terrorism that took place in England, Scotland and Wales. Thus, it is possible that the number of ethno-nationalist arrests in the UK may be slightly higher than we reported in par. 4.3.

8.3.2 FBI press releases

There is no straightforward way to get a number of terrorism-related arrests in the US for 2020, so we had to turn to an alternative source, namely the press releases of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI has been chosen as the source of data collection in the US as it is the lead agency in investigating and preventing domestic and international terrorism and is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of terrorism-related offences.⁷³

The FBI has a Crime Data Explorer, but its most recent data concern 2019, which is why we had to use the agency's press releases. We went over the press releases to find the ones that reported on arrests and from those filtered out the ones that were related to terrorism (as defined in paragraph 2.1.1). This was not as straightforward as it may seem. Remarkably, due to the American legislation and the lack of a federal domestic terrorism statute, it is harder in the US to arrest individuals specifically on terrorism-related charges than in other countries. For example, what in many European countries would count as a terrorism-related arrest, could be an arrest for the possession of illegal arms and explosives with the potential to harm a large number of civilians. In order to address this issue and to enhance the comparability of the data, we also included FBI-arrests that were not strictly and legally speaking not terrorism-related arrests. The criterion we applied to include a case in our database is a clear reference in a press release to an ideology or political motivation on the part of the arrestee. If an individual has been arrested with illegal explosives but has also been recognized as adhering to a violent extremist ideology, her/his arrest has been counted as terrorism-related.

⁷² European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021, 14–22.

⁷³ "What Is the FBI's Role in Combating Terrorism?", Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d. <https://www.fbi.gov/about/faqs/what-is-the-fbis-role-in-combating-terrorism>.

8.3.3 Official crime statistics

Finally, there is a small group of countries for which there simply are no data about terrorism-related arrests. For three countries that are not in Europol, an alternative to the TE-SAT data are the crime statistics published by the national office/bureau/agency of statistics of each country. The data for one such country, Canada, have been retrieved from Statistics Canada, the country's national statistics office. Information on criminal offences is reported to Statistics Canada on a yearly basis by the police services via the Uniform Reporting Survey.⁷⁴ Table 1 of the 2020 report displays the number of police-reported crimes for the selected offence 'terrorism'. These are the data we used in our analysis.

Similarly, Statistics Norway (Statistik sentralbyrå) Norway's central statistics bureau, publishes data regarding the offences and victims reported to the police. The data is retrieved from the police's central registration system, which includes all offences registered by the police, and then sent to Statistics Norway by the police's analysis and leadership system. The crime categories include terrorism and terrorism-related offences, but does not register the ideology of the suspects. Therefore, Norway is left out the analysis in paragraph 4.3.⁷⁵

Another non-Europol country in our set is Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes information about offenders and victims of crimes, but, unlike Norway and Canada, does not include terrorism-related offences. A better option was to use the number of federal defendants during the 2019-20 financial year, which does break down the overall number in several categories, including a category for terrorism-related cases.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, considering the length of terrorism-related judicial procedure, it is reasonable to assume the defendants have been arrested months if not years prior to the reference period. Thus, the Australian data is not comparable to the numbers of arrests in other countries, but can provide an overview of the outcome of such cases. Also, defendants and arrestees are not the same thing, as a number of arrestees will be released without charges or will end up being prosecuted for offences that are not related to terrorism. We therefore had to leave Australia out of our analysis.

In the paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 we will talk primarily about the countries that are signatories to the Europol Convention, and the US. We have numbers of reported terrorist crimes for Norway and Canada and the number of defendants for Australia, but we have just established that defendants and arrestees are different things, and so are crimes and arrests. There are likely to be crimes for which there is no arrests and crimes for which there will be more than one arrest. We will therefore not analyse these numbers as one category, but we will mention the data for Canada, Norway and Australia (i.e. the countries we have different types of data for) in the paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 when we consider it analytically useful or interesting.

For Switzerland, there are only data about the financing of terrorism, and not for other terrorism-related offences, whereas New Zealand's and Japan's crime statistics do not include categories related to terrorism at all. Therefore, these three countries are left out of the analysis in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 altogether.

74 G. Moreau, "Police-Reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2020", Statistics Canada, 27 July 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00013-eng.htm#mi-rs>.

75 "Offences and Victims Reported to the Police", Statistik sentralbyrå, n.d. <https://www.ssb.no/en/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/kriminalitet-og-rechtsvesen/statistikk/anmeldte-lovbrudd-og-ofre>.

76 "Federal Defendants, Australia", Australian Bureau of Statistics, 23 June 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/federal-defendants-australia/latest-release>.

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