

# TERRORIST THREAT ASSESSMENT

2019 - 2021

## *Executive Summary*

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## About ICCT

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The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism.

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# Executive Summary

The current ICCT Threat Assessment provides a data-driven overview about the state of the terrorist threat in the countries that are members of the Madrid Group (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).

We present 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, the Threat Assessment can serve as a basis for discussions about what should be done in the fight against terrorism.

In order to get the data that underlie the Threat Assessment, we used timelines, overviews and other datasets where it was possible. For the arrests, for instance, we relied heavily on Europol's TE-SAT data. For the attacks we used timelines and overviews published by i.a. the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service and the Counter Extremism Project. In addition, we did extensive searches for news reports about terrorist attacks.

To establish the numbers of returning foreign fighters we could not rely on readily available overviews. We pieced together the numbers on the basis of news reports and consultations with country experts.

In the attack data, which cover the period September 2019 – August 2020, the following points stand out:

- Left-wing extremist terrorism is the most common, as well as the least lethal form of terrorism.
- France and Germany suffered the most terrorist attacks, in absolute as well as in relative (per capita) numbers.
- There appears to be a relation between ideology and weapon use in terrorist attacks: most left-wing extremist perpetrators committed attacks through arson, jihadists displayed a strong preference for melee weapons, and most right-wing extremists used firearms.

The data on returning foreign terrorist fighters brought out some salient patterns as well:

- Numbers of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) remain low relative to the amount that remain abroad.
- Female foreign terrorist fighters are significantly more likely to return or be repatriated to their home countries than their male counterparts.
- Foreign terrorist fighters are far more likely to return as part of formal repatriation/extradition arrangements than through informal/illicit cross-border travel.

What is most noteworthy about the data on arrests on terrorism-related charges is the geographic distribution.

- Most arrests of suspected left-wing extremist terrorists have taken place in Italy and Greece.
- Most arrests on suspicion of ethno-nationalist terrorism occurred in Northern Ireland.
- Right-wing extremism-related arrests are mostly located in the US and Germany.
- Jihadism-related arrests have been carried out throughout the EU, but thirty-eight percent took place in France.

Overall, the impression one could take away from the data is that terrorism in the countries has been going through a status quo. The various ideologies are sticking to a particular weapon type, the numbers of victims per attack have remained low throughout the period we examined, and the threats from terrorists of different ideological stripes remain geographically confined. Against this background, it would be prudent to be on the lookout for events or developments that might change that.

Examples of such events and developments include the release from prison of convicted jihadists, the ability of right-wing extremist groups to benefit from the discontent over the Covid-19 restrictions, and a perceived need among left-wing extremist to fight back against right-wing extremism. The various forms of terrorism we examined are not at peak levels in terms of the numbers of attacks and victims, but that may change, and it may change quickly.

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