Terrorist Attacks in the U.S Between 1970 and 2013: Data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD)

Background
START’s Global Terrorism Database (GTD) contains information on more than 125,000 domestic and international terrorist attacks* that occurred between 1970 and 2013. Collectively, these attacks have resulted in more than 266,000 deaths and more than 354,000 injuries. This research highlight focuses on the terrorist attacks that occurred in the United States between 1970 and 2013.

Overall Attack Trends
From 1970 through 2013, more than 2,600 terrorist attacks took place in the United States, resulting in more than 3,500 fatalities.

Approximately 85% of all deaths from terrorist attacks during this period occurred in the coordinated attacks on September 11, 2001.
Nearly 80% of all terrorist attacks involved no casualties (fatalities or injuries).
More than half of terrorist attacks took place during the 1970s. Between 2000 and 2013, there were fewer than 20 attacks per year on average.

Attack Targets
The most frequently attacked type of target in the United States between 1970 and 2013 was business targets. Nearly one-third of all attacks on business targets were on banks/commerce, and an additional 23% were on retail entities.

* Terrorism is defined as the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation. More information available at www.start.umd.edu/

START Research Highlight © START, November 2014
Perpetrators, 2000-2013

- Between 2000 and 2013, the vast majority of attacks in which named organizations were identified were carried out by environmental and animal rights violent extremist groups.
- However, attacks were most frequently carried out by individuals not known to be affiliated with a perpetrator group. These include Wade Michael Page’s assault at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012, as well as Nidal Hasan’s attack at Ft. Hood in 2009.
- Twelve of the 28 attacks in 2012 and 2013 were attributed to unaffiliated individuals.

Locations

- **1970-2013:** Terrorist attacks occurred in all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, however 50% of all attacks took place in California, New York, and Puerto Rico.
- **2000-2013:** Although fewer attacks occurred compared to earlier periods, terrorist attacks still occurred in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Three states — California, New York, and Washington State — accounted for 35% of all attacks.

UNSUCCESSFUL ATTACKS, 1970–2013

- 82% of all attempted attacks, i.e., those in which perpetrators were “out the door” intending to imminently attack their targets, were successful.
- The percentage of attempted attacks that were unsuccessful (e.g., the bomb failed to detonate or was defused) has varied considerably over time, particularly as terrorism in the country has declined.
- It peaked in 2011 when 44% of attempted attacks were unsuccessful, and was at its lowest in 1990 and 2012, when all attempted attacks were successful.

This research was supported by the Resilient Systems Division of the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through Award Number 2009-ST-108-LR0003 made to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.