Global Extremism Monitor

Violent Islamist Extremism in 2017

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FOR GLOBAL
CHANGE**

WITH A FOREWORD BY
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SEPTEMBER 2018

CO-EXISTENCE

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Costa Rica

Norway
Sweden
Ireland   UK   Denmark
Neth.
Bel.   Germany
Swz.   Aus.
France
Spain   Italy

Morocco
Algeria   Tunisia

Senegal
Mali   Niger
Burkina
Faso   Nigeria
Ivory
Coast   Cam.
Gabon

Foreword

Tony Blair

One of the core objectives of the Institute is the promotion of co-existence across the boundaries of religious faith and the combating of extremism based on an abuse of faith. Part of this work is research into the phenomenon of extremism derived particularly from the abuse of Islam.

This publication is the most comprehensive analysis of such extremism to date and utilises data on terrorism in a new way to show:

1. Violent extremism connected with the perversion of Islam today is global, affecting over 60 countries.

2. Now more than 120 different groups worldwide are actively engaged in this violence.

3. These groups are united by an ideology that shares certain traits and beliefs.

4. The ideology and the violence associated with it have been growing over a period of decades stretching back to the 1980s or further, closely correlated with the development of the Muslim Brotherhood into a global movement, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and—in the same year—the storming by extremist insurgents of Islam's holy city of Mecca.

5. Defeating this ideology and violence requires a strategy designed for the long term that understands that the violence will never be eliminated unless the ideology behind it is also broken.

Islamist extremism didn't begin with al-Qaeda, nor will it end with the defeat of ISIS. Guided by a transnational religious-political ideology going back

over half a century, the more than 120 groups my Institute has documented believe that anyone who doesn't adhere to their totalitarian thinking is a legitimate target.

From the Muslim Brotherhood, which armed its members in the 1940s on an anti-imperialist mission, to the band of international fighters who once fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, to the creation of Hizbullah in Lebanon following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, this ideology has festered and spread across borders.

Leading figures of the violent Islamist movement such as Osama bin Laden whipped up anger and resentment and created a sense of group victimhood. A perception of unparalleled Muslim suffering around the world became the jihadis' rallying cry. Yet far from being protectors of the ummah, the Islamists mete out most of their cruelty on other Muslims. As our research shows, Muslims are often the first victims, with two-thirds of all attacks aimed at civilians taking place in Muslim-majority countries. Those who live in peaceful co-existence—practising Islam peacefully, as most Muslims around the world do—and who fail to answer the call to arms are regarded as heretics, and targets just as much as non-Muslims.

Outside the Middle East, Islamists have found footholds in Southeast Asia and, increasingly, in sub-Saharan Africa. Mali is today one of the worst-affected countries, and the Sahel poses one of the world's most potent security challenges, as weak governance, poverty and extremism increasingly collide. And while each country faces a unique set of circumstances, as groups take different forms and exploit local grievances, all affected nations have a shared interest to uproot an ideology that killed more than 84,000 people in 66 countries last year.

Security measures will be vital. But security alone will never be enough. It will only slow the violence. Stopping it requires a comprehensive strategy, which encompasses state capacity, addresses poverty, improves education and ensures that people are not drawn to a pernicious ideology. But to deliver this, governments around the world must reorder resources towards long-term measures to combat the ideology as well as the violence it breeds.

Presently, the world collectively spends hundreds of billions of dollars every year on additional security in airports, protection and counter-terrorism. It spends a small fraction of that on soft-power measures that tackle the underlying ideology.
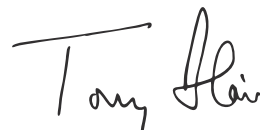
A security only approach is important to address public concerns, but ultimately it will never succeed. Security must be complemented by other measures, not just at a state level, but also multilaterally.

For example, we are proposing a Global Commitment on Education, whereby nations agree that as a matter of global responsibility, they will act to root out religious prejudice and promote religious tolerance in their public and private education systems.

Far more efforts must go to supporting Muslim leaders working to counter the hijacking of their religion. We also need to redefine development in countries at risk of extremism. Aid policy has already been shown to have severe limitations unless it also addresses state capacity. But where extremism flourishes, aid policy is essentially ineffective. Development agencies must therefore work in tandem with security ones in places such as Chad, Niger or Somalia.

Lastly, we need to remove the idea that extremism is essentially tied to conflict. Where a vacuum is created, such as in Syria, it has clearly created nationwide chaos. But it also simmers away outside conflict zones: 64 of the world's extremist groups operate outside them.

Unless there is a global will to meet the depth of the challenges, the ideology of Islamism will grow—and with it, the violence. It is time to act.

Tony Blair
Executive Chairman of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change
Former Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Unless decision makers fully engage in the battle of ideas and tackle extremists' totalitarian thinking, violence will continue to spread.

Despite major defeats against ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2018, at least 120 other violent Islamist groups are still inspiring and orchestrating attacks around the world. In response, security measures are vital. But the sheer volume of extremist incidents means that unless decision makers fully engage in the battle of ideas and tackle extremists' totalitarian thinking, recognising that these groups are bound together by a transnational religious-political ideology, the violence will continue to spread.

As many as 64 of the world's extremist groups are active outside the world's major conflict zones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Beyond the major conflicts, groups operating in Egypt, Mali, Nigeria and Pakistan make these countries

among the world's ten deadliest for violent Islamist extremism.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change is launching its annual Global Extremism Monitor (GEM). Each year, the monitor tracks violent Islamist extremism, and efforts to counter it, worldwide. Drawing on English-language open-source data, our analysis reveals the international spread and scale of Islamist extremist violence. In 2017, the GEM documented 27,092 incidents of violent Islamist extremism and state and nonstate efforts to combat it. At least 84,023 people in 66 countries died during the year because of this problem. Extremists accounted for 57 per cent (48,164) of those killed in 2017, while 26 per cent (21,923) were civilians, 12 per cent (10,337) were security personnel and 4 per cent (3,307) were nonstate actors. The identities of 292 of those killed could not be affirmed.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Violent Islamist extremism is a global problem.** There were 7,841 attacks in 48 countries in 2017, and related counter-measures in a total of 66 countries. Extremism affected 18 of the world's most developed countries. A total of 121 violent Islamist groups were active in 2017. Of these, 92 perpetrated violence in at least one country. Nigeria's Boko Haram and Mali's Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin demonstrated the fluidity of violence across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, instigating attacks in four countries each.

- **Intentional attacks on civilians killed at least 6,310 people in 2017.** At least 47 violent Islamist extremist groups deliberately orchestrated fatal campaigns against civilians, designed to instil fear and erode public morale. Seventy-one per cent of Boko Haram's violent actions targeted the public, affirming it as the group most engaged in a violent campaign against civilians. ISIS in Iraq and Syria's sectarian agenda and harsh interpretation of Islam led to the intentional killing of 2,080 civilians. An additional 15,613 civilians were killed by the actions of extremists and efforts to combat them.

- **Five of the ten deadliest countries are very fragile states, and four are outside major conflict zones.**

Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq not only suffered high numbers of fatalities in 2017 but were also ranked among the world's ten most fragile states. Beyond major conflict areas, Mali, Egypt, Nigeria and Pakistan were also on the list of countries most affected by violent Islamist extremism.

- **Muslims, more than anyone else, are the most frequent victims of violent Islamist extremist groups.** Nearly two-thirds of all attacks aimed at the public space in 2017 occurred in Sunni Muslim–majority states. An ideology that systematically legitimises the targeting of two broad groups—Muslims deemed to be heretics for failing to answer the call to jihad and non-Muslims of a faith or of no faith at all—is simultaneously exploiting and exacerbating community tensions around the world.

- **Sectarianism mobilises the deadliest and most active groups.** Over 95 per cent of sectarian attacks targeted Muslim Shia–minority populations, and a sizeable number of operations focused on the religious persecution of Christians. Tracking data of Islamist violence in 2017 reveals the capacity and intentions of groups to target individuals and symbols of the Christian faith and its denominations. Sixty-nine people were killed in just three assaults aimed at Egypt's Coptic community in 2017.

- **Executions and suicide attacks are tactics shared by Islamist extremist groups.** Thirty-seven groups exploited the Islamic concept of *istishhad* (martyrdom) to conduct suicide attacks. Twenty-one groups executed 1,976 people on charges including fleeing, spying and disobedience.

- **Many women plot and orchestrate deadly attacks targeting civilians.** The deployment of women on the battlefield shows violent Islamist groups adapting and strategically shifting their principles in favour of operational gains. Operational pressures have encouraged the most expansionist groups to adopt more flexible rulings on women and their place in the global violent jihadi movement. Boko Haram used women more than any other group in 2017. Of all suicide

attacks conducted for Boko Haram last year, attacks by women had a 6 percentage point lower interception rate than those by men.

- **Syria remains the epicentre for violent extremism.** At least 34,853 people were killed in Syria in 2017 due to violent Islamist extremism, making it the country most affected by this problem. This puts the total death count as a result of violent Islamist extremism outside Syria at 49,170. Over half of the world's civilian fatalities from Islamist extremism occurred in Syria.

The GEM makes plain the limits of military containment strategies in countering terrorist groups like ISIS. In Iraq, after the liberation of Mosul from ISIS in mid-2017, a reduction in ISIS attacks there was accompanied by an increase in attacks in neighbouring Baghdad and Anbar. Throughout the year, ISIS defeats in the Middle East coincided with attacks in support of the group across the West.

Geolocated tracking of violent Islamist attacks across the globe in 2017 reveals the extent of activity on state borders, where violence spills into new territories. At least 16 of the groups operating in 2017 have an expansionist agenda, conducting operations across frontiers. From local insurgencies to coordinated terrorist missions, the extremist ideology of these groups has found receptive audiences around the world.

Since 2017, ISIS has faced major defeats in Iraq and Syria. But it has gained strength in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Niger, Somalia and Yemen, where it continues to recruit and capture pockets of territory. Around the world, both ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to inspire attacks.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL EXTREMISM MONITOR

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change aims to help make globalisation work for the many, not the few. We do this by helping countries, their people and their governments address some of the most difficult challenges in the world today. Violent extremism—both the violence and the underlying ideology that drives it—is an urgent and pressing challenge that holds back development, stability and opportunity for many around the world.

The GEM builds on previous work by the Institute that has highlighted the shared ideologies and international networks of the global violent jihadi movement.[1] The Institute presents and designs evidence-based solutions to help defeat extremist ideologies. We lead research that harnesses innovative techniques to support decision makers and bolster programmatic interventions. The GEM provides data to explore and understand the process and conditions through which extremist groups spawn, thrive and mature.

The methodology for sourcing, recording and categorising each incident of violent Islamist extremism was designed and developed over two years. Every incident recorded in the GEM has been thematised and geocoded with coordinates of where the incident is reported to have taken place. Tracking and monitoring groups has allowed the GEM to attribute an instigator to an event when news reports are unclear. The GEM draws conclusions on the basis of location analysis and records the parties only if there is a high probability of Islamist extremist group involvement.

For Syria, a specific data set was designed to track and monitor the activities of groups in that country. The monitor captured data on all actors involved in the Syrian conflict, including rebel groups, nonstate militias and proxy actors.

THE WAY FORWARD

Violent Islamist extremism is not a new problem. Many of the groups monitored by the GEM can trace their origins back 30 to 40 years, and their genesis is intertwined through a convergence of networks and ideological agendas. Over that time, despite counter-terrorism efforts from local counter-insurgencies to international military coalitions, the challenge has proliferated.

Security measures can only hope to contain the problem. Solving it requires preparing for a generational struggle against the ideas that underpin extremist violence. Ideology is the greatest tool for the global jihadi movement. The long-term fight against it

will need a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy.

Education is one of the most effective instruments to counter extremist ideologies. National education systems that legitimise the stereotypes and prejudices that bolster extremist narratives are a major block to countering the spread of extremism. A global commitment to educating against extremism can build a road map for improving the capacity of education systems to prevent extremism, for the benefit of future generations.

Violent Islamist groups thrive on simplicity. The more they are forced to defend their interpretations of Islamic values, the harder it will be to maintain that simplicity. A critical response to counter the appeal of the ideology is to expose the contradictions and false readings groups use to justify their acts. Religious leaders and local imams are valuable partners for

forming effective policy. They have the knowledge and interests to undermine the perverse interpretations of Islamic doctrine.

Groups gain local support by filling governance vacuums and undermining local leadership. The threat of Islamist violence cannot be solved from the outside. Empowering community leaders and government institutions is paramount. Community leaders are key to spotting signs of radicalisation, while government institutions can provide the resources and scalable support needed to widen the impact of counter-extremism efforts.

For policy initiatives to work, evidence-based research is critical. Big databases, such as the GEM, can help draw out salient trends over time, informing the design of policy and directing priorities that match the scale and nature of the threat.

The landscape of violent Islamist extremism and terrorism in 2017 was crowded and complex, and the threat was constant on many fronts.

In the early hours of New Year's Day 2017, Uzbekistan-born Abdulkadir Masharipov walked into an Istanbul nightclub and fired his AK-47 rifle at the crowd of 600 revellers. Masked amid the chaos and bloodshed, the 28-year-old then walked straight out. Masharipov, later identified and arrested by Turkish police, killed 39 and injured 70 others.[2] The nightclub massacre was only the first in a year of similarly motivated violent incidents across eight regions and 66 countries (see figure 1.1).

The landscape for violent Islamist extremism and terrorism in 2017 was crowded and complex, and the threat constant on multiple fronts. Using publicly available information, the Global Extremism Monitor (GEM) captured events of violent Islamist extremism

FIG. 1.1 Countries Affected by Violent Islamist Extremism, 2017

VIOLENT ISLAMIST
INCIDENTS AND
COUNTER-MEASURES

0	21-50	176-300
1-6	51-100	301-600
7-20	101-175	601-2,000

2,570
17,422

over the year, and efforts to combat it. In 2017, an average of approximately 21 violent Islamist attacks occurred per day. Of all those killed during the year, 57 per cent (48,164) were extremists, 26 per cent (21,923) were civilians, 12 per cent (10,337) were security personnel and 4 per cent (3,307) were nonstate actors. The identities of 292 of those who died could not be confirmed.

Capturing and analysing all violent Islamist activity in 2017, the GEM highlights distinct commonalities in the way groups operate. This first annual report draws on the most salient of these trends. The monitor has uncovered how violent Islamists intentionally target the public and how their violence affects all segments of society. Although the targeting of civilians has created a contentious debate across ideologues in the global violent jihadi movement, attacks on non-combatants are common across the 121 groups in the monitor, and not limited to al-Qaeda or ISIS. To coerce a state into a group's demands, divert resources away from conflict zones or damage public morale, extremists increasingly

see civilians as legitimate and strategically valuable targets.

Of the attacks in 2017, the GEM data show that Sunni Muslim–majority countries continue to be the most affected by violent Islamist extremism. It is essential to acknowledge this reality to dispel the myth that non-Muslims are the prime targets. The extent of attacks that were justified by sectarian hatred and suspicion shows that despite the rhetoric of violent Islamist groups, attacks have sought to divide the global Muslim community, not unite or protect it.

The changing role of gender in extremist activities offers insights into what groups are doing to ensure their survival and expansion, and maximise damage. The 181 female suicide bombers identified by the GEM in 2017 expose the realities of extremism today. Recognising a strategic value in female recruits, groups are showing signs of a concerted effort to employ women for their ability to evade security and arouse less suspicion than men. This link between women and

terrorism, borne out by the data, reflects a real shift in Islamist extremism. To the extent possible, all data in the GEM have been disaggregated when gender nuances are necessary. The value of women for suicide missions is a trend to watch, with serious implications for security measures.

Superficial definitions of terrorism fail to capture the daily activities of groups in their acquired territories. The GEM has sought to record all activities of violent Islamist groups, whether offensive, defensive or ritualistic. Consequently, the monitor recorded data on executions and punishments at the hands of extremist groups. The application of extreme punitive measures in 2017 was not unique to ISIS and its affiliates. The GEM captured data on all groups that meted out punishments on civilians and their own ranks. This trend has been relatively consistent across groups that espouse a Salafi-jihadi ideology, regardless of their affiliations. Groups that apply punishments have appropriated convenient aspects of Islamic legal jurisprudence to force discipline on their subjects and spread fear among people under their rule.[3] This trend reveals how efforts to hold onto territory are common across groups, signifying a long-term mission beyond insurgent activities.

The monitor analysed over 700 open-source documents and papers, and more than 400 news sources, to contextualise and corroborate all recorded incidents. Every incident was individually coded and analysed for its stated motives and target, its known or suspected perpetrators, its geolocation, its impact and the demographic make-up of its victims. In addition to tracking attacks and attempted attacks by violent Islamist groups, the GEM recorded counter-terrorism responses and offensives by states, coalitions and nonstate actors. For 2017, state-led coalitions included the US-led anti-ISIS coalition and French-led counter-offensives in the Sahel. Nonstate actors included Kurdish peshmerga in Iraq and Syria and vigilante groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria. The GEM also tracked tribal and clan factions working with or alongside multi-state coalitions.

Capturing trends simultaneously on both violent Islamist activity and efforts to counter it enables a better assessment of the efficacy of military responses to violent extremism. Understanding how violent Islamism responds and adapts to military measures is critical to developing sustainable, proportionate and effective policy that mitigates against displacement of violence across borders. While a military response to this global violence is vital, the cost of security measures internationally requires a sustained analysis. This cannot be done adequately without comparing data over time on violent Islamist activity and state and nonstate responses.
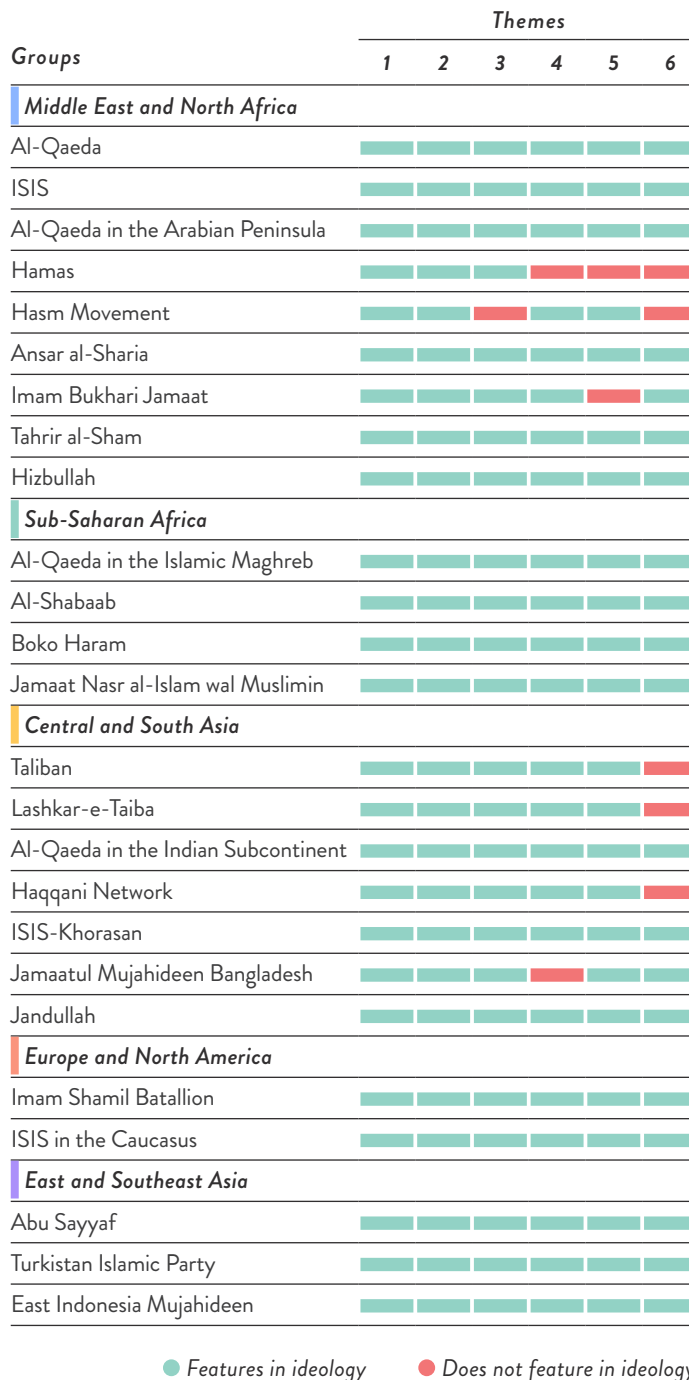
A UNIFYING IDEOLOGY

This report looks at violent Islamist extremist groups from the Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf to Salafi-jihadi al-Qaeda franchises all over the world. Violent Islamist extremism comes in many varieties, but what drives all violent Islamists is a belief in the obligation, on theological and political lines, to establish and enforce an absolute reading of sharia law as the underlying principle of public and state life. Violent Islamists all seek a restoration of Muslim dignity through a return to the caliphate, and they believe that violence and intimidation are legitimate methods to overcome perceived enemies of Islam that restrict the success of this project.

For many violent Islamist groups, enemies include Muslims who are seen to benefit from or facilitate non-Muslim rule over Muslim lands, and those who emulate the lifestyles of 'disbelievers'. While some of these groups focus on struggles at the national level, many have an expansionist vision, crossing borders to secure territory and obtain recruits. Taken as a whole, violent Islamists make up a global movement of self-avowed outsiders who exploit political events and religious doctrine to further a socio-religious project of their making.

To explore the measure of ideological overlap across the groups active in 2017, we referenced official statements from, and literature on, a representative sample of 25 violent Islamist groups operating today in five regions across the world—from inaugural speeches to more recent propaganda. It is clear there are common ideological features that bind the movement. While many groups in the GEM started as insurgents against local governments, with national or separatist objectives, their ideologies have converged and developed in support of a broader global Islamist cause. Both al-Qaeda and ISIS have catalysed the convergence of these objectives, as groups pledged allegiance in accordance with their shared vision.

FIG. 1.2 Selected Violent Islamist Groups and Key Themes in Their Ideology

THEME 1

Restoration of Islamic governance as a religious obligation

THEME 2

Violent opposition to perceived enemies of Islam

THEME 3

Violent jihad as every Muslim's duty

THEME 4

Identification with a global struggle

THEME 5

Narrow interpretation of who is a 'Muslim'

THEME 6

Support for expansion of Muslim lands

Groups	Themes					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Middle East and North Africa						
Al-Qaeda	●	●	●	●	●	●
ISIS	●	●	●	●	●	●
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hamas	●	●	●	✕	✕	✕
Hasm Movement	●	●	✕	●	●	✕
Ansar al-Sharia	●	●	●	●	●	●
Imam Bukhari Jamaat	●	●	●	●	✕	●
Tahrir al-Sham	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hizbullah	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sub-Saharan Africa						
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	●	●	●	●	●	●
Al-Shabaab	●	●	●	●	●	●
Boko Haram	●	●	●	●	●	●
Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin	●	●	●	●	●	●
Central and South Asia						
Taliban	●	●	●	●	●	✕
Lashkar-e-Taiba	●	●	●	●	●	✕
Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	●	●	●	●	●	●
Haqqani Network	●	●	●	●	●	✕
ISIS-Khorasan	●	●	●	●	●	●
Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh	●	●	●	✕	●	●
Jandullah	●	●	●	●	●	●
Europe and North America						
Imam Shamil Batallion	●	●	●	●	●	●
ISIS in the Caucasus	●	●	●	●	●	●
East and Southeast Asia						
Abu Sayyaf	●	●	●	●	●	●
Turkistan Islamic Party	●	●	●	●	●	●
East Indonesia Mujahideen	●	●	●	●	●	●

● Features in ideology   ● Does not feature in ideology

However, within the sample, even groups that have remained decidedly independent from ISIS or al-Qaeda have subscribed to similar ideas propagated by the largest groups.

Each group in the sample was assessed to reveal to what extent its leadership subscribes to six key themes that form Salafi-jihadi ideology (see figure 1.2). The most divergence in the sample was over whether a group identified with a global struggle (theme 4), whether it supported an expansion of Muslim lands (theme 6), and whether it practised a narrow interpretation of who is a 'good Muslim' (theme 5). Despite this, 72 per cent of groups subscribed to all six ideological themes, and 100 per cent were committed to restoring Islamic governance (theme 1) and to waging war against perceived enemies of Islam (theme 2). When explicit references were not available to confirm a group's subscription to a theme, that theme was not attributed.

EXAMPLE STATEMENTS FROM VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS ON THESE KEY THEMES

Theme 1: **Restoration of Islamic governance as a religious obligation**

"The strategic position of Katibat Imam al Bukhari is to establish the Islamic state in Syria and in the homeland of Turkestan [Central Asia], where people would live and obey the laws of Allah. And only when the group achieves its goals, Allah would be pleased with the determination and faithfulness of his servants."
— Imam Bukhari Jamaat, 2018

Theme 2: **Violent opposition to perceived enemies of Islam**

"The first priority and the main focus should be on America, then the United Kingdom, then France. . . . The Lions of Allah who are

all over the globe—some call them lone wolves—should know that they are the West's worst nightmare."
— Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, 2014

"We must give sacrifices in the fight against the crusaders. In this fight, whether we are killed, martyred or thrown in jail we are proud of it."
— Haqqani Network, 2010

Theme 3: Violent jihad as every Muslim's duty

"The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim."
— Al-Qaeda, 1998

"We have made sure the floor of this hall is turned red with blood, and this is how it is going to be in all future attacks and arrests of infidels. . . . From now, killing, slaughtering, destructions and bombing will be our religious duty anywhere we invade."
— Boko Haram, 2014

Theme 4: Identification with a global struggle

"At the hands of the savage Buddhists, thousands of Muslims, including many women and children, have fled their homes . . . their only crime being their adherence to Islam. . . . Take matters into your own hands, help your Muslim brothers and know that this is a religious obligation upon you for which you will be held fully accountable in front of Allah on the day of judgement."
— Al-Shabaab, 2015

Theme 5: Narrow interpretation of who is a 'Muslim'

"We don't kill Muslims but rather we kill people who claimed themselves to be Muslims. They are called MURTADIN. This kind of people—we see them praying five times a day, performing all Islamic rites, but working with the enemy and with the Shaytan Forces against the Muslims, especially fighting Mujahideen."
— Abu Sayyaf (no date)

"O Sunnis of Iraq, the time has come for you to learn the lesson of the past . . . that nothing will work with the

rafidah [pejorative for Shia] except slicing their throats."
— ISIS in Iraq and Syria, 2014

Theme 6: Support for expansion of Muslim lands

"We are working to ensure that Hindustan, too, turns into a centre for Hijrat [migration for religious battle] and Jihad, so that we, as the people of India, can play a major role in the foundation of the next caliphate. . . . We started from Bangladesh but have now spread. Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen India is an example. Work is progressing elsewhere as well."
— Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh, 2018

GLOBAL EXTREMISM TODAY

The data captured by the GEM and analysed in this first report present a bleak overall picture for international security and the spread of violent Islamist extremism. However, at the time of writing, 2018 has already seen noteworthy gains. Terrorist safe havens are being disrupted across the world, from Iraq to Syria to Afghanistan.

Yet despite symbolic military progress against ISIS in Iraq since mid-2017, signs in 2018 suggest the group is far from finished. In its former strongholds of Iraq and Syria, where many of the victories against ISIS have taken place, the group still held an estimated 2,600 square kilometres of land as of July 2018.[4] What is more, progress in defeating the group raises the risk of the violence dispersing farther afield. The displacement of ISIS members from Iraq and Syria and emergency relocations appear to be causing more trouble in Afghanistan, where the group's local affiliate, ISIS-Khorasan, is ramping up its activities in the east and north of the country to undermine renewed efforts to bring peace to the Afghan people.

US President Donald Trump's deployment in April 2017 of a "mother of all bombs" in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, killing 36 ISIS militants and costing $16 million, highlights the gap between the cost and long-term gains of a military-heavy response to terrorism.[5] GEM data show that since the massive ordnance air blast (MOAB) was deployed on ISIS hideouts, ISIS activity in the country has not slowed. On the contrary, the United Nations has estimated that a surge in ISIS suicide attacks in Afghanistan

resulted in a 1 per cent increase in fatalities in the first half of 2018, reaching a record high of almost 1,700.[6]

The coming years will bring growing challenges, with the war in Syria persisting and sustained insurgencies intensifying in the Sahel, sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, combined with pressures of foreign fighters returning to Europe. Since its losses in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has been strengthening its grip and recruiting fighters in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Niger, Somalia and Yemen. The GEM data from 2017 and the analysis that follows will help those on the front line—in both decision-making and implementation—to design evidence-based responses and protection against future threats, and monitor the impact of counter-measures year on year. This analysis will also enable early capture of trends that will help discern the long-term strategies of terrorist groups.

THE LONG WAR AGAINST EXTREMISM

Most of the groups recorded in 2017 are not new. Over decades, groups have rooted themselves deep in the fabrics of societies and traversed borders in search of new conflicts and havens. The establishment of groups being fought today can be traced to networks and conflicts as far back as 30 to 40 years ago, with once-disparate localised insurgencies now stitched together through a grand mission and political-religious affinity. Despite semantic disputes and strategic rivalries within this broader movement, the groups that form this body of militants are more ideologically aligned than not.

The same Salafi-jihadi violence the world battles today began to take shape and affect world politics through Islamist movements established as early as the 1920s. These groups, and the thinkers who formed them, earned unprecedented social capital and leverage by reinterpreting Islam's sacred texts in a way that was both fringe and violently politicised.

As loose reinterpretations were gradually refined into a cohesive ideology through the 1980s and 1990s, Islamist violence came to dominate the dynamics in conflicts that marked the period, including the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the Algerian Civil War (1991–2002)

and the Egyptian insurgency (1990–1998), as well as al-Qaeda's established global leadership. Al-Qaeda's shift from guerrilla insurgency to transnational terrorist movement in the 1990s led to the development of an ideology that legitimised killing Muslims and non-Muslims, soldiers and civilians.

A PLETHORA OF INSURGENCIES BEFORE 9/11

The period of Islamist violence before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States is markedly different from the period since (see figure 1.3). Before 2001, governments—predominantly in the Middle East and North Africa—were engaged in local counter-insurgencies, fighting groups that were indigenously formed and committed to uprooting national political systems through the conflicts that marked the period. Following then al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's 1996 and 1998 declarations of war against Americans, Jews and Crusaders—with leading signatories from violent Islamist groups in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia—the message was clear: "Fight the pagans all together . . . until there is no more tumult or oppression."[7]

Six months after Bin Laden's call for a united Islamic front, al-Qaeda suicide bombers drove truck bombs into US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people and wounding 2,500.[8] Far from its bases in Afghanistan and Sudan, al-Qaeda showed the world its commitment to its declaration and its resolve to inflict mass-casualty attacks abroad. Another attack followed on US assets in Yemen in 2000, as al-Qaeda entered a period of formal and informal organisational merges with smaller, local insurgent groups across the Muslim-majority world.

Throughout the 1990s, Bin Laden forged links with violent Islamist groups from Morocco to Iraq, Mali to Somalia and Myanmar to Indonesia, while providing resources and assistance for insurgencies in Pakistan, the Philippines and Tajikistan.[9] From 1998, the al-Qaeda network set about organising the 9/11 attacks.

A PROLIFERATION OF TERRORISM SINCE 9/11

The coordinated attacks in September 2001 on the World Trade Center that killed 2,996 propelled

al-Qaeda and Islamist terrorism to the forefront of the international security agenda.[10] At the same time, the structures of al-Qaeda changed critically, as did the landscape of global violent Islamism. The franchising of the al-Qaeda brand after 2001 leveraged the connections forged in the 1990s, creating an ideologically aligned but decentralised terrorist movement committed to targeting the West and its allies.

A year after the 9/11 attacks, several groups worldwide emerged or reconstituted themselves in line with Bin Laden's call to global jihad. Official al-Qaeda franchises emerged in Yemen, Iraq and northwest Africa. Insurgent leaders in almost every continent, historically focused on local issues, began to shift their worldview to incorporate Bin Laden's globalist jihadi ideology, while continuing to carry out local attacks on Western interests. With this growing network, al-Qaeda inspired and facilitated a wave of attacks worldwide throughout the early 2000s, on targets from Bali nightclubs to London buses.

Bin Laden's death in 2011 came amid a wave of Arab-majority protests for political reform across North Africa and the Middle East. Under the administration of former US President Barack Obama and after the assassination of Bin Laden, a campaign of drone strikes on al-Qaeda killed at least 34 of the group's leaders in Pakistan and 230 of its fighters.[11] Yet, the culmination of civil war following the Syrian uprisings in 2012 gradually provided an opportunity for a revival of al-Qaeda networks in Syria and Iraq. From mergers to splits, within two years al-Qaeda faced a new rival heavyweight in the global jihadi movement. Still aligned on a fundamental ideology to fight the West and all its allies—from fellow Muslims to the "Crusader-Zionist alliance"—al-Qaeda lost its monopoly, as its former Iraqi franchise split off, rebranded as ISIS, announced the establishment of a so-called Islamic state and drew pledges of allegiance from all over the world, including from some groups formerly allied to al-Qaeda.[12]

The rivalry between ISIS and al-Qaeda continues to shape the structure of terrorism networks today, as groups splinter over which brand to pledge allegiance to. Despite the fault lines in the movement, the ideas and objectives across the groups have never been clearer an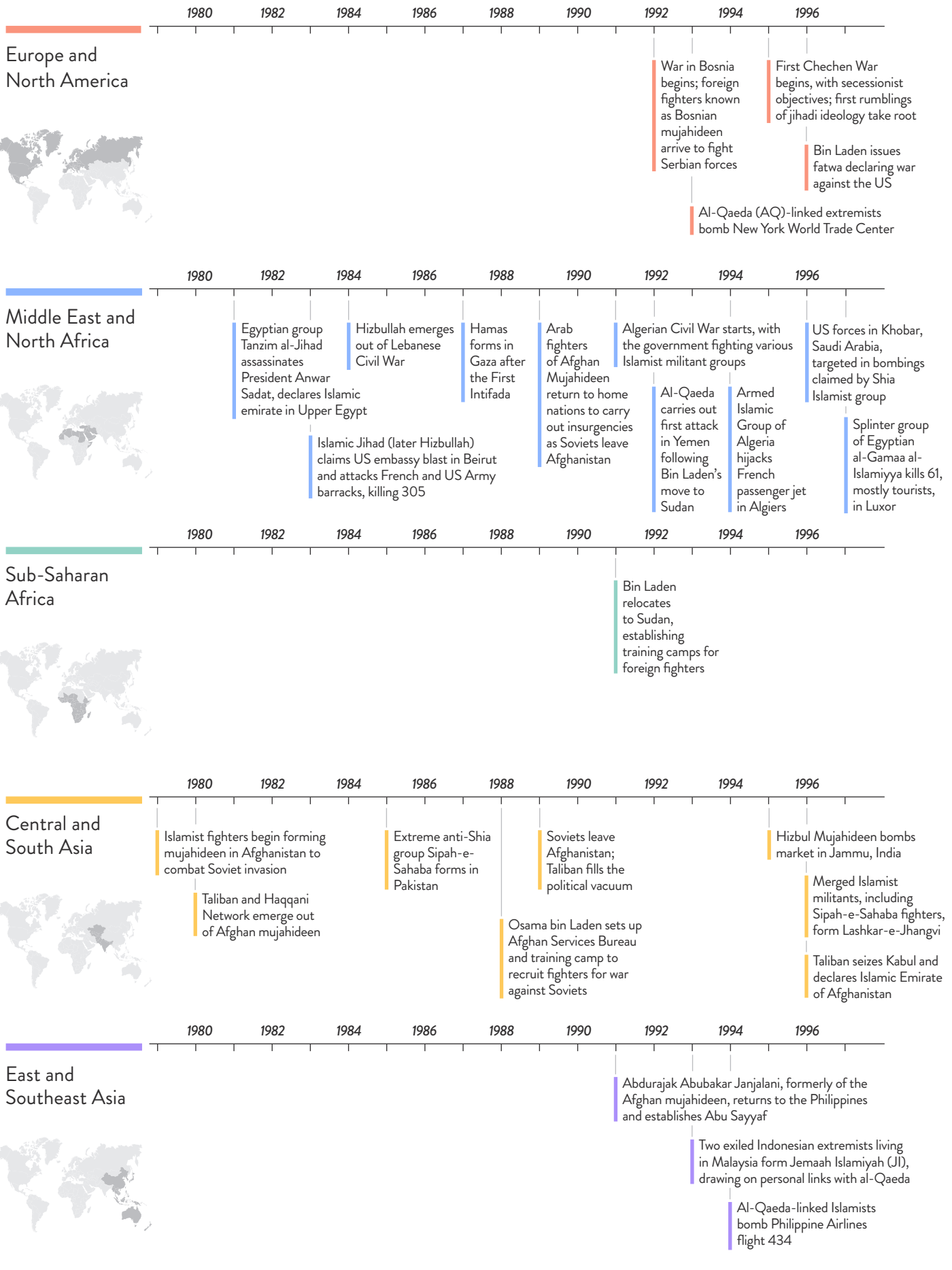d more unified. Previous research by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change on the ideologies of ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates shows the deep ideological alignment and cohesion between them.[13] The GEM data from 2017 reveal how alike they are operationally and strategically, despite the factionalism that has marked the period since 2011. The tactics and priorities, shaped by their common ideology, are plain to see in the data captured in one year, from the targeting of civilians to the enactment of punishments.
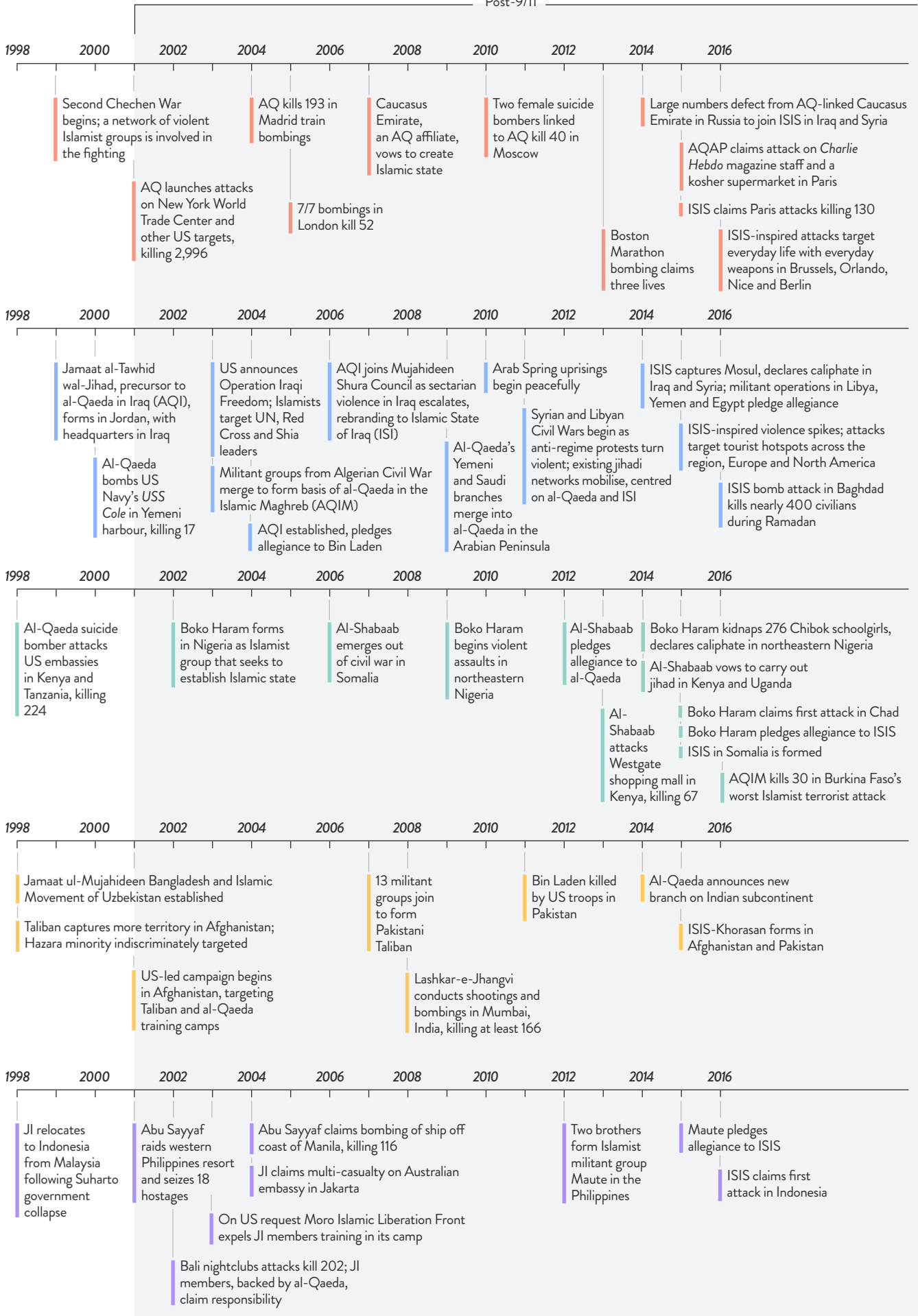
THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Throughout the 30- to 40-year history of global terrorism, counter-terrorism efforts have adopted varied strategies, from amnesties and sustained local counter-insurgencies throughout the 1990s to international coordinated military coalitions and targeted drone strikes on training camps and strongholds throughout the 2000s. Yet despite a variety of approaches to tackle Islamist violence in an array of local contexts, the challenge is growing. In devising sustainable strategies to fight the terrorists, it is critical to understand the forces that ideologically drive and unite them.

The scale of the challenge is clear from the data in 2017. Now, it is vital to acknowledge the depth and origins of the problem, to prepare for what has been—and will continue to be—a long-term struggle against not only the violence but also the ideas and beliefs that have come to justify this mass call to arms.

19

FIG. 1.3 Timeline of Selected Violent Islamist Incidents, 1979–2016

Europe and North America

1980 1982 1984 1986 1988 1990 1992 1994 1996

War in Bosnia begins; foreign fighters known as Bosnian mujahideen arrive to fight Serbian forces

First Chechen War begins, with secessionist objectives; first rumblings of jihadi ideology take root

Bin Laden issues fatwa declaring war against the US

Al-Qaeda (AQ)-linked extremists bomb New York World Trade Center

Middle East and North Africa

1980 1982 1984 1986 1988 1990 1992 1994 1996

Egyptian group Tanzim al-Jihad assassinates President Anwar Sadat, declares Islamic emirate in Upper Egypt

Hizbullah emerges out of Lebanese Civil War

Hamas forms in Gaza after the First Intifada

Arab fighters of Afghan Mujahideen return to home nations to carry out insurgencies as Soviets leave Afghanistan

Algerian Civil War starts, with the government fighting various Islamist militant groups

US forces in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, targeted in bombings claimed by Shia Islamist group

Islamic Jihad (later Hizbullah) claims US embassy blast in Beirut and attacks French and US Army barracks, killing 305

Al-Qaeda carries out first attack in Yemen following Bin Laden's move to Sudan

Armed Islamic Group of Algeria hijacks French passenger jet in Algiers

Splinter group of Egyptian al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya kills 61, mostly tourists, in Luxor

Sub-Saharan Africa

1980 1982 1984 1986 1988 1990 1992 1994 1996

Bin Laden relocates to Sudan, establishing training camps for foreign fighters

Central and South Asia

1980 1982 1984 1986 1988 1990 1992 1994 1996

Islamist fighters begin forming mujahideen in Afghanistan to combat Soviet invasion

Extreme anti-Shia group Sipah-e-Sahaba forms in Pakistan

Soviets leave Afghanistan; Taliban fills the political vacuum

Hizbul Mujahideen bombs market in Jammu, India

Taliban and Haqqani Network emerge out of Afghan mujahideen

Osama bin Laden sets up Afghan Services Bureau and training camp to recruit fighters for war against Soviets

Merged Islamist militants, including Sipah-e-Sahaba fighters, form Lashkar-e-Jhangvi

Taliban seizes Kabul and declares Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

East and Southeast Asia

1980 1982 1984 1986 1988 1990 1992 1994 1996

Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, formerly of the Afghan mujahideen, returns to the Philippines and establishes Abu Sayyaf

Two exiled Indonesian extremists living in Malaysia form Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), drawing on personal links with al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda-linked Islamists bomb Philippine Airlines flight 434

Post-9/11

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016

Second Chechen War begins; a network of violent Islamist groups is involved in the fighting

AQ launches attacks on New York World Trade Center and other US targets, killing 2,996

AQ kills 193 in Madrid train bombings

7/7 bombings in London kill 52

Caucasus Emirate, an AQ affiliate, vows to create Islamic state

Two female suicide bombers linked to AQ kill 40 in Moscow

Boston Marathon bombing claims three lives

Large numbers defect from AQ-linked Caucasus Emirate in Russia to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria

AQAP claims attack on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine staff and a kosher supermarket in Paris

ISIS claims Paris attacks killing 130

ISIS-inspired attacks target everyday life with everyday weapons in Brussels, Orlando, Nice and Berlin

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016

Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, precursor to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), forms in Jordan, with headquarters in Iraq

Al-Qaeda bombs US Navy's *USS Cole* in Yemeni harbour, killing 17

US announces Operation Iraqi Freedom; Islamists target UN, Red Cross and Shia leaders

Militant groups from Algerian Civil War merge to form basis of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

AQI established, pledges allegiance to Bin Laden

AQI joins Mujahideen Shura Council as sectarian violence in Iraq escalates, rebranding to Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)

Al-Qaeda's Yemeni and Saudi branches merge into al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Arab Spring uprisings begin peacefully

Syrian and Libyan Civil Wars begin as anti-regime protests turn violent; existing jihadi networks mobilise, centred on al-Qaeda and ISI

ISIS captures Mosul, declares caliphate in Iraq and Syria; militant operations in Libya, Yemen and Egypt pledge allegiance

ISIS-inspired violence spikes; attacks target tourist hotspots across the region, Europe and North America

ISIS bomb attack in Baghdad kills nearly 400 civilians during Ramadan

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016

Al-Qaeda suicide bomber attacks US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224

Boko Haram forms in Nigeria as Islamist group that seeks to establish Islamic state

Al-Shabaab emerges out of civil war in Somalia

Boko Haram begins violent assaults in northeastern Nigeria

Al-Shabaab pledges allegiance to al-Qaeda

Al-Shabaab attacks Westgate shopping mall in Kenya, killing 67

Boko Haram kidnaps 276 Chibok schoolgirls, declares caliphate in northeastern Nigeria

Al-Shabaab vows to carry out jihad in Kenya and Uganda

Boko Haram claims first attack in Chad

Boko Haram pledges allegiance to ISIS

ISIS in Somalia is formed

AQIM kills 30 in Burkina Faso's worst Islamist terrorist attack

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016

Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan established

Taliban captures more territory in Afghanistan; Hazara minority indiscriminately targeted

US-led campaign begins in Afghanistan, targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda training camps

13 militant groups join to form Pakistani Taliban

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi conducts shootings and bombings in Mumbai, India, killing at least 166

Bin Laden killed by US troops in Pakistan

Al-Qaeda announces new branch on Indian subcontinent

ISIS-Khorasan forms in Afghanistan and Pakistan

1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016

JI relocates to Indonesia from Malaysia following Suharto government collapse

Abu Sayyaf raids western Philippines resort and seizes 18 hostages

On US request Moro Islamic Liberation Front expels JI members training in its camp

Bali nightclubs attacks kill 202; JI members, backed by al-Qaeda, claim responsibility

Abu Sayyaf claims bombing of ship off coast of Manila, killing 116

JI claims multi-casualty on Australian embassy in Jakarta

Two brothers form Islamist militant group Maute in the Philippines

Maute pledges allegiance to ISIS

ISIS claims first attack in Indonesia

The Ten Deadliest Countries

1	Syria
2	Iraq
3	Afghanistan
4	Somalia
5	Nigeria
6	Yemen
7	Egypt
8	Pakistan
9	Libya
10	Mali

Violent Islamist extremism struck 66 countries in eight regions in 2017. It claimed the lives of at least 84,023 people. Its grip reached every corner of the world. Islamist violence inspired people in countries from Russia and the United States to Mozambique, Austria and Gabon. Because this extremist violence did not affect all geographies equally, it is necessary to explore the distinct ways in which extremism manifested itself in different environments. Extremist ideology is the key driver of this violence, but unique social, political and economic contexts also affect the directions extremists take.[14]

Factoring in all these elements, the GEM has built individual country profiles that provide insights into the violence. Ten states together experienced 97 per cent of all fatalities globally: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, Egypt, Pakistan, Libya and Mali. Of these, five—Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq—were among the ten most fragile nations in the Fund for Peace's 2017 Fragile States Index.[15]

By counting each person killed, the GEM measures the activity and deadliness of a country's violent Islamist problem. The monitor contextualises the violence by disaggregating groups' motivations, intended targets and modes of attack, and the gender of the perpetrators. In doing so, the GEM shows each state's distinct experience of violent extremism in 2017. The monitor also explores the counter-terrorism actions of state and nonstate actors, from operations on the ground to airstrikes and militia activity.

In embattled areas, accurately detailing Islamist activity reflects the complex relationship between violent militants, those attempting to combat them and the geographies in which they operate. By mapping conflict at the neighbourhood level, the GEM tracks this violence geographically to illustrate deeply complex local characteristics, including sectarianism and large-scale civilian displacement.

Syria

Syria's civil war entered its seventh year in 2017, and the GEM documented the deaths of 34,853 people, including 15,992 extremists, as a result of Islamist violence and counter-measures. Syria is the country most affected by violent Islamist extremism. Its situation is unlike that of any other state monitored by the GEM.[16] Twenty-nine violent Islamist groups were actively engaged in conflict in 2017, considerably more than in any other country. The groups' affiliations and allegiances are very interchangeable, and their presence in every province of the country highlights the devastating realities of one of the world's most complex conflicts (see figures 2.1–2.3).

The GEM recorded 17,422 incidents involving violent Islamists in 2017. ISIS was the deadliest group in the country, launching 44 per cent of all extremist attacks. The group targeted 44 different actors, from other extremist groups to militaries to civilians.

Efforts in 2017 to combat ISIS, whose so-called caliphate stretched across parts of northern Syria and Iraq, culminated in October, when the Syrian Democratic Forces led an offensive that liberated Raqqa.

As a result of these efforts to strike at the ideological heart of ISIS, the group's social media output, which it had used to attract thousands of recruits and consolidate morale among militant members, declined by 66 per cent.[17] ISIS suffered considerable losses throughout the year, with counter-extremism actions killing 7,891 ISIS militants, according to the GEM. Of these, 56 per cent occurred in Deir ez-Zor and Homs, where the group proved difficult to purge. Despite increased efforts to eradicate ISIS, the group launched attacks in all 14 Syrian provinces, deploying 326 suicide bombers as well as 365 landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Offensives against ISIS's key strongholds only marginally affected ISIS's operational capacity in Syria.

Twenty-eight other Sunni Islamist extremist groups were active in the country, with 18 of them launching attacks. In January, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, the Ansar al-Din Front, Jaysh al-Sunna, Liwa al-Haqq, the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement and disaffected members of Ahrar al-Sham merged into Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). HTS launched 41 per cent of the violent Islamist attacks in Syria recorded by the GEM in 2017 and killed 1,540 people including security personnel, nonstate actors and civilians. The group's activities exemplify the convoluted conflict playing out in Syria: HTS was engaged in violence against 14 other violent Islamist actors.

Using a distorted version of Islam to justify the use of violence, Syria's extremist groups are engaged in both urban and rural warfare. The GEM monitored extremist activity in hundreds of Syrian towns besieged by violent Islamists as well as the targets of counter-extremism operations. Civilians bore the brunt of the violence throughout 2017, accounting for 11,741 deaths. Half of all civilian fatalities recorded globally were documented in Syria.

Airstrikes and ground offensives supported by airstrikes resulted in the deaths of 5,199 extremists. Many of these militants had planted themselves in Syria's towns and villages. The GEM also documented 97 incidents at refugee camps, including clashes with security personnel and extremist attacks aimed at inhabitants. Eight targeted attacks on these camps resulted in 214 civilian deaths.

In early 2018, reports put the number of ISIS fighters remaining in Iraq and Syria at between 1,000 and 2,000, but the group may still have up to 10,000 loyalists.[18] It has also been reported that many loyalists in and around Abu Kamal and Deir ez-Zor are Iraqis who fled across the border to support ISIS after the collapse of the group's core operations in Iraq. A plethora of Islamist extremist groups with varied long- and short-term objectives continue to operate in Syria's war.

FIG. 2.1 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Syria, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1   • 2-4   ● 5-13   ● 14-30   ● 31-62   ● 63-107
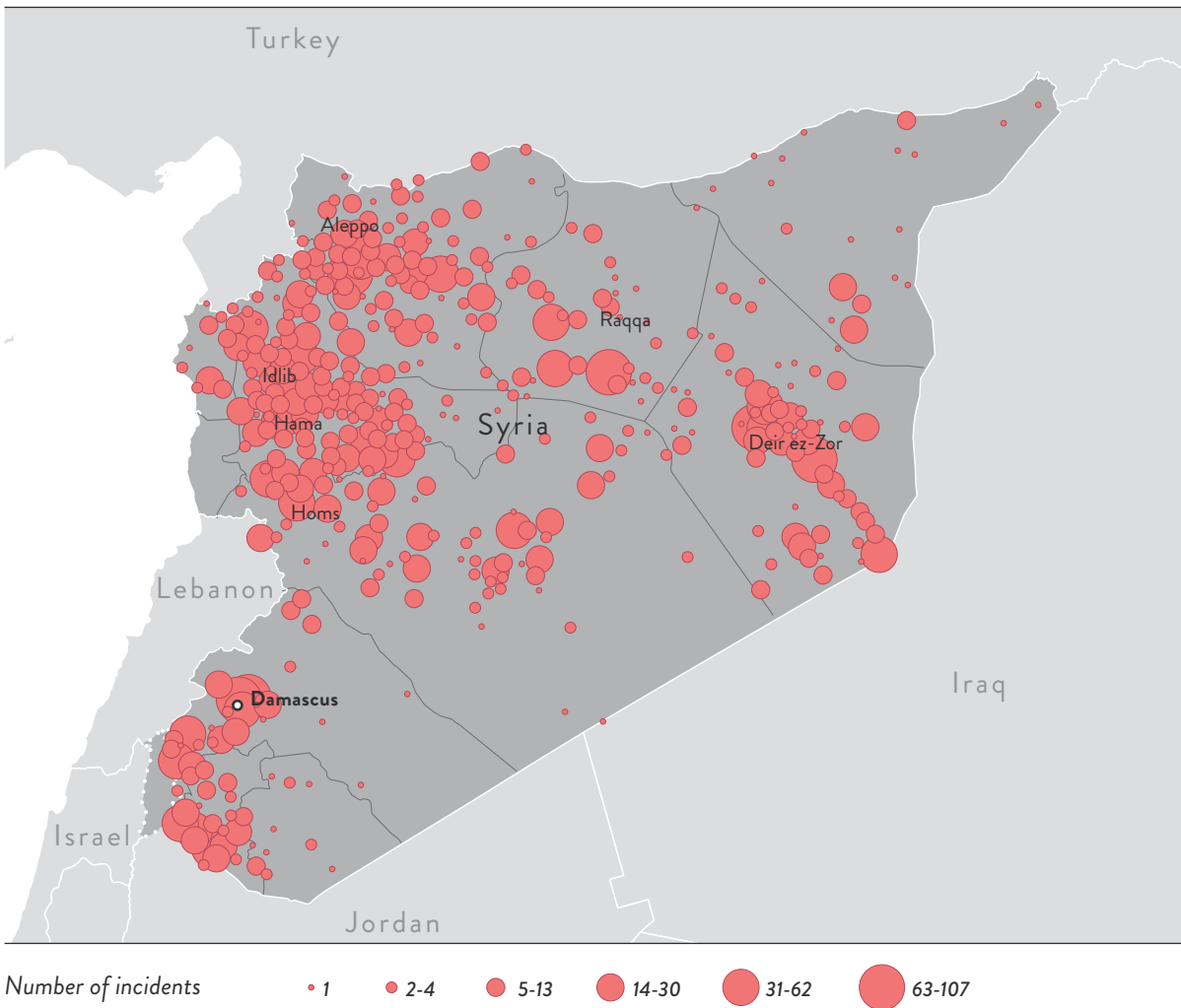
FIG. 2.2 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Syria, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1=	Qaryatayn, Homs	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	128 were executed on suspicion of collaborating with the regime
1=	Uqayribat, Hama	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	Suicide car bombs killed 128 security officials in clashes with the military
3	Al-Rashideen, Aleppo	Tahrir al-Sham	A suicide car bomb targeted buses carrying evacuees, killing 126
4	Northwest Deir ez-Zor, Deir ez-Zor	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	At least 100 civilians were killed after a suicide car bomb struck a refugee centre
5	Al-Shagor, Rif Dimashq	Tahrir al-Sham	A suicide bomber targeted Shia civilians, killing 74

FIG. 2.3 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Syria, 2017

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

25
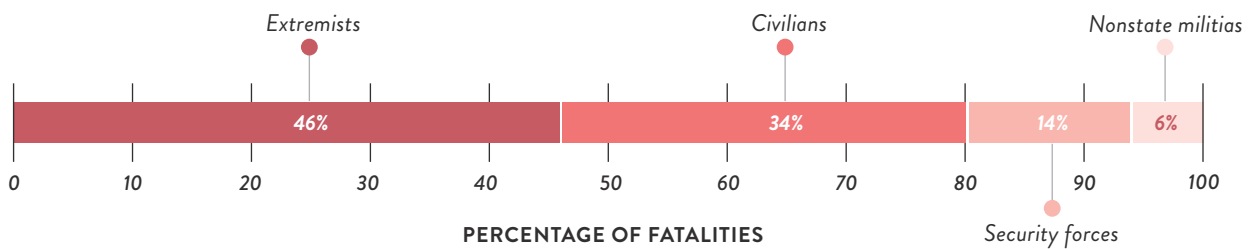
Iraq

In a year that saw efforts to remove ISIS from its remaining territorial strongholds in Iraq, the GEM recorded 17,033 deaths in the country in 2017 as a result of Islamist violence and counter-measures (see figures 2.4–2.6). The GEM found that 12,361 ISIS members were killed during the year. Although the Iraqi army declared ISIS militarily defeated in December, the group began to reconstitute itself as a violent insurgency in 2018.[19]

By exploring the devastating consequences the conflict has inflicted on Iraq's citizens and the efforts taken to eradicate the group, the GEM has highlighted the risks that remain if measures against ISIS are relaxed and the group is given fertile ground to evolve. Monitoring the level of attacks after the liberation of Mosul, the capital of the northern province of Nineveh, in July 2017 has also shown the limitations of military strategies in tackling groups with violent ideologies. The number of deaths despite significant territorial gains against ISIS highlights the need to establish efforts to tackle the violent worldviews that existed before ISIS.

In 2017, ISIS launched 1,238 attacks and was active in 16 of Iraq's 19 provinces. The group comprises a network of factions and brigades through which it conducts its operations across the country. Counter-terrorism efforts in 2017 focused on ISIS's northern territories and on securing the liberation of Mosul. Over half of all state and nonstate activity was recorded in this province, with 78 per cent in Mosul. The Popular Mobilisation Forces, led by the Iraqi army and with support from the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, spearheaded efforts to purge ISIS from its ideological bastion, resulting in the deaths of 3,493 ISIS militants and 684 civilians in Mosul and the areas surrounding it, according to the GEM.

Airstrikes and joint ground and air efforts led to the deaths of 64 per cent of the extremists who were killed in the year. The urban nature of the conflict and

ISIS's exploitation of civilians as human shields meant that 718 civilians died during these counter-terrorism actions in Iraq. A total of 3,878 civilians were killed in 2017 due to the activities of ISIS and efforts to combat it, including action by the state, nonstate militias and international coalition efforts.

The GEM found that civilians were targeted in 417 individual attacks across the country. Over 60 per cent of these attacks occurred in the country's capital. Baghdad was the deadliest capital city in the world for violent Islamist extremism, and the GEM recorded an attack every other day in the city. Baghdad suffered more than 70 per cent of all sectarian attacks in Iraq targeting the country's Shia majority.

ISIS frequently targeted public hotspots and large religious gatherings, using a distorted version of Islam to justify the killing of civilians and fellow Muslims.[20] The GEM documented six targeted attacks on Shia and Sunni mosques in 2017. ISIS launched 119 assaults on markets during the year, killing at least two people per attack.

One in every five attacks launched by ISIS involved suicide bombers, in events that killed 771 people. More than 74 per cent of all suicide attacks occurred in the first half of the year, coinciding with an intensification of the battle to liberate Mosul. During this period, ISIS deployed most of the 595 suicide bombers recorded by the GEM for the group in Iraq throughout the year. Thirty-four incidents involved suicide bombers coordinating efforts with armed gunmen, while seven involved female bombers attacking armed and unarmed targets.

FIG. 2.4 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Iraq, 2017

Number of incidents · 1 • 2-8 ● 9-16 ● 17-33 ● 34-68 ● 69-100 ● 191
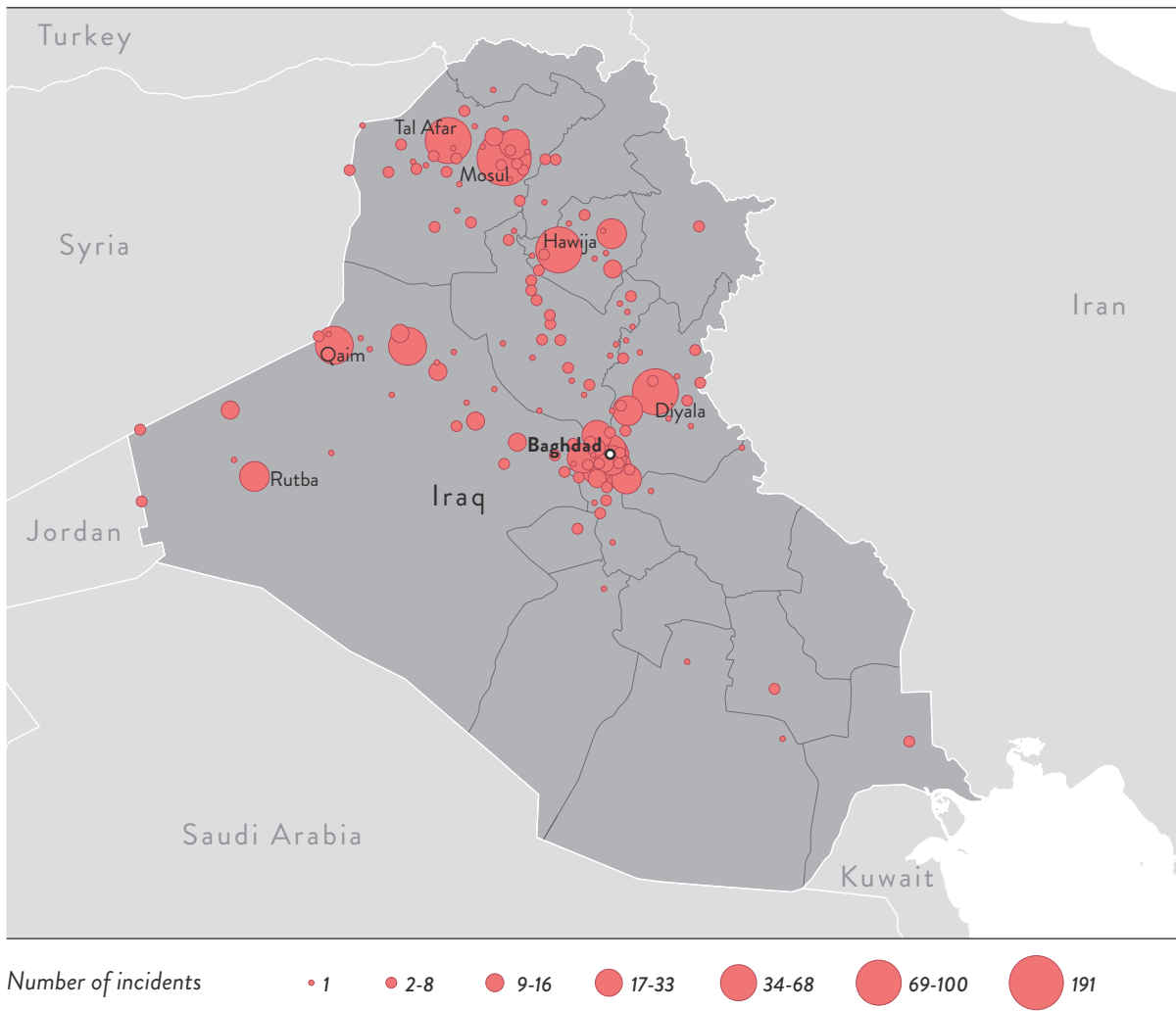
FIG. 2.5 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Iraq, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Tal Afar, Nineveh	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	200 detained Turkmens were executed for attempting to flee Mosul
2	Al-Shira, Nineveh	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	163 civilians were shot dead for trying to flee Mosul
3	Al-Zanjili, Nineveh	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	74 civilians were killed for attempting to flee
4	Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	Militants in military uniforms opened fire in a restaurant, killing 70 civilians
5	Al-Jamanouh, Anbar	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	Militants overran positions of the Popular Mobilisation Forces, killing 68

FIG. 2.6 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Iraq, 2017

Extremists · Civilians · Nonstate militias

| 72% | 23% | 3% | |

Security forces

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

27

Nº· 3
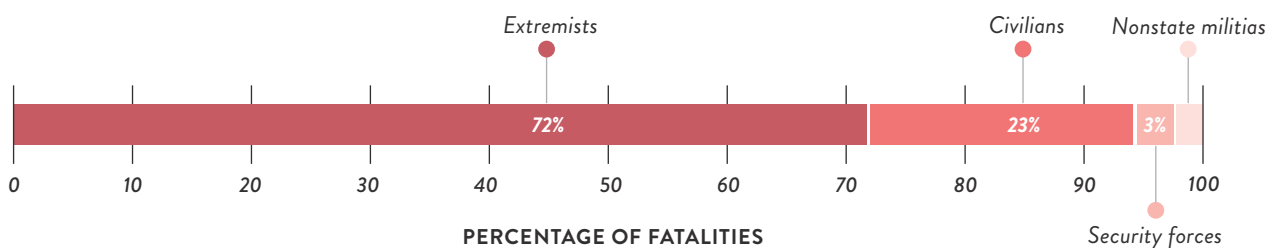
Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, 14,885 people died in 2017 from the actions of violent Islamist extremists and efforts to combat the problem, which has plagued the country for 40 years. In 2017, US President Donald Trump outlined a fresh strategy that shifted from nation building to squarely addressing the country's terrorist threat.[21] Despite increasing military efforts, extremist organisations including the Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan continue to prove resilient (see figures 2.7–2.9).

In 2017, the GEM recorded the deaths of 5,784 members of the Taliban resulting from the actions of the Afghan military, US forces and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The GEM also recorded 23 incidents of group infighting, some involving Taliban splinter factions, which resulted in at least 173 militant deaths. The Taliban appears to be in a state of disarray but has managed to remain an imperious force in Afghanistan.

The year saw airstrikes in 29 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, with 55 per cent occurring in Helmand and Nangarhar. The former is the largest of Afghanistan's provinces, and its opium reserves have been a source of funds for the Taliban. Twenty-one per cent of the group's documented violent activities were in these provinces, although the GEM also recorded a further 590 Taliban-instigated incidents stretching from the western Farah province to Paktia in the east.

The Taliban has frequently targeted urban centres to undermine the Afghan government. The GEM recorded 23 attacks on the country's central and local governments and financial services in 2017. The group was responsible for the deaths of 2,115 security officials and civilians. Over 76 per cent of its attacks occurred in the five months after the start of the Taliban's spring offensive in April, when it said it would target foreign forces and focus on developing the areas "cleansed from the enemy".[22]

ISIS-Khorasan wages a very different insurgency from the more established Taliban. Although Afghanistan does not have the deep sectarian divides that characterise Iraq and Syria, ISIS-Khorasan's 17 deliberate attacks on Afghanistan's Shia population, which left 238 civilians dead, show a determination by ISIS to exploit opportunities to entrench religious conflict to win local support and enforce a sectarian narrative. Twenty-six per cent of all ISIS-Khorasan activity in Afghanistan was sectarian, and 60 per cent of all its attacks targeted civilians.

The GEM highlights how ISIS-Khorasan is engaged in a campaign against Afghan civilians, as the group seeks to add another piece to ISIS's global vision of a so-called caliphate that encompasses the ummah, or entire Muslim community. In a manifestation of ISIS-Khorasan's intolerant view of Muslims who fail to espouse its ideology, the group was responsible for 11 attacks on Sunni and Shia mosques in Afghanistan in 2017.

Meanwhile, the Taliban targeted the military and police in 79 per cent of its attacks. According to the GEM, ISIS-Khorasan and the Taliban targeted NATO and the US military some 30 times in 2017, killing at least 15 US soldiers. Five civilians were killed in a suspected Taliban suicide blast that targeted the Danish military in September, while ISIS-Khorasan shot dead six employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross in February.

The Taliban deployed suicide bombers in less than one-sixth of its attacks, while 39 per cent of ISIS-Khorasan's attacks in Afghanistan were suicide assaults. The use of this tactic by ISIS-Khorasan is emblematic of its Salafi-jihadi tenets. The group's martyrdom attacks are not only militarily effective against an enemy but also demonstrate a fixation on life after death.

FIG. 2.7 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Afghanistan, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1-5   • 6-10   ● 11-25   ● 26-50   ● 51-100   ● 140
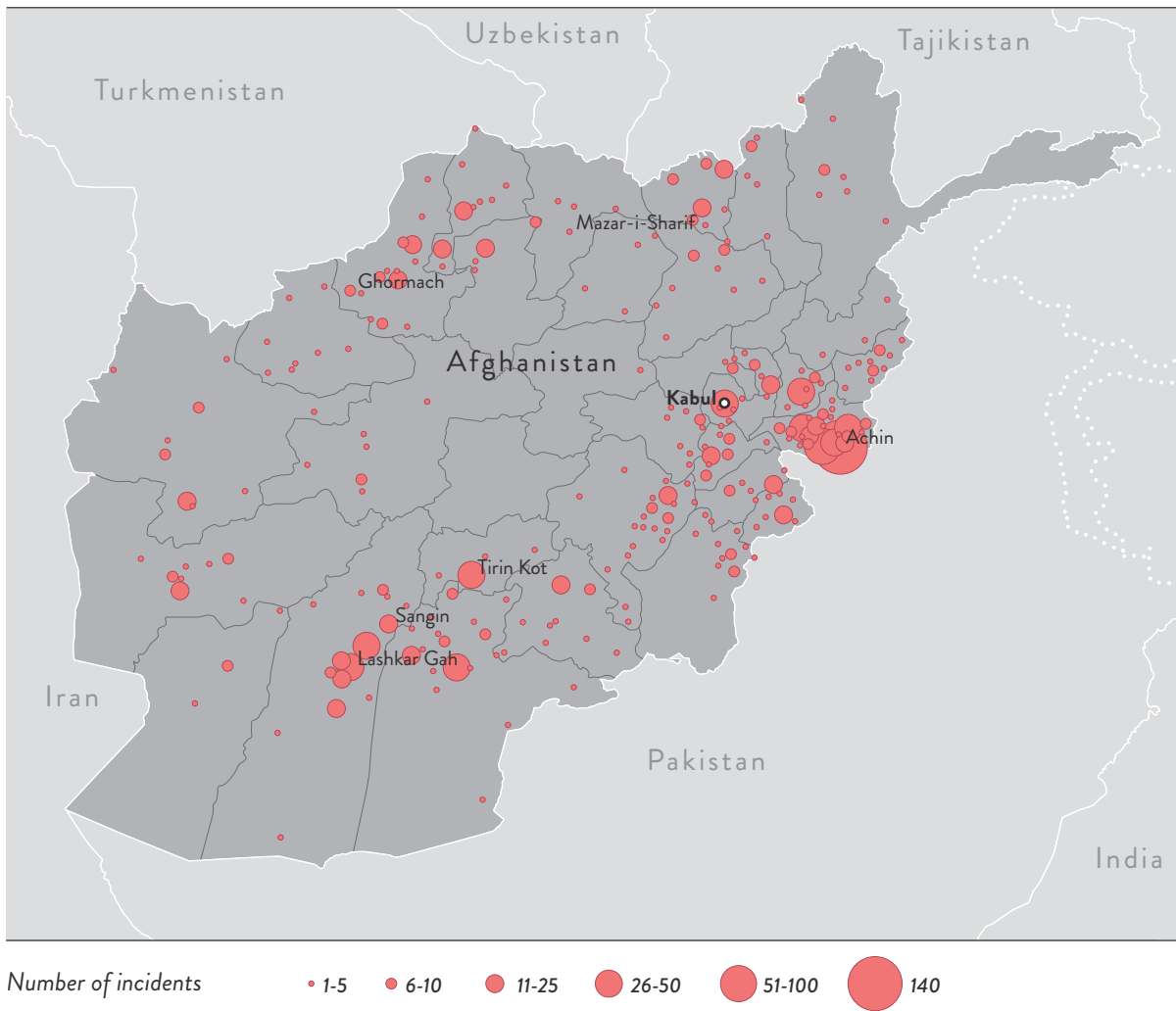
FIG. 2.8 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Afghanistan, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1=	Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh	Taliban	Suicide soldiers disguised as army personnel attacked a military base, killing 150 soldiers
1=	Kabul City, Kabul	Haqqani Network	A car bomb killed 150 after detonating near diplomatic facilities
3	Kabul City, Kabul	ISIS-Khorasan	A suicide bombing at a Shia mosque killed 56 civilians
4	Sangin, Helmand	Taliban	A coordinated assault against the military killed 50
5	Kabul City, Kabul	Taliban	A suicide bombing at the National Assembly killed 46

FIG. 2.9 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Afghanistan, 2017

Extremists   Civilians

79%   9%   11%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

Security forces

Nº· 4
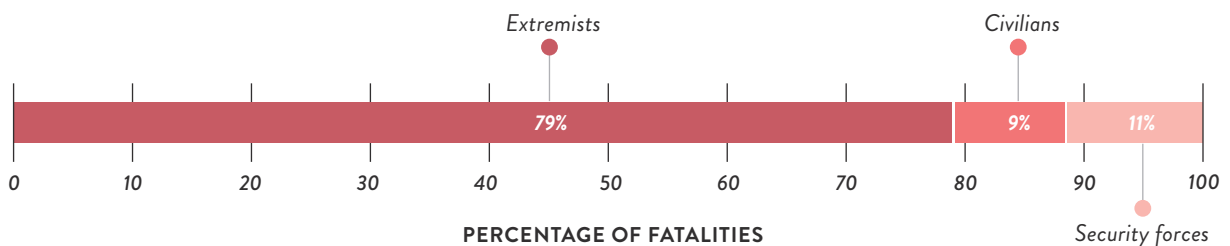
Somalia

Somalia was the African country most affected by violent Islamist extremism in 2017. The GEM recorded the deaths of 4,306 people due to the actions of the militant jihadi organisation al-Shabaab and the multilateral efforts to counter it (see figures 2.10–2.12). The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the US and Kenyan militaries led the international effort against al-Shabaab in the country.

In 2010, four years after it had splintered from the Islamic Courts Union, the group was designated a terrorist organisation by six countries, including the UK, Australia and the US. In 2017 the group launched 982 attacks, making it one of the deadliest groups in the world and impeding international counter-efforts.

Al-Shabaab wages a localised and focused war in Somalia. More than 70 per cent of the group's attacks in 2017 targeted the country's military and police. Over half of the 190 documented incidents in the public space were aimed at Somali professionals, local clan leaders and government officials, killing 749 people. Sixty-one of these attacks were assassinations, which al-Shabaab undertook at a greater rate than any other extremist group documented by the GEM.

In October, al-Shabaab militants carried out a truck bombing in Mogadishu targeting a government building. The killing of 587 people, most of them civilians, was one of the deadliest acts of terrorism in recorded history. Frequent attacks against Somalia's political symbols are emblematic of al-Shabaab's operations. Seventy-two per cent of attacks on government targets and local clan leaders occurred during six months of political sensitivity between February and August, when Somalia and neighbouring Kenya were in the process of electing their presidents.

Al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, deliberately and consistently struck at the heart of Somali society throughout 2017, killing 2,420 people in attacks, according to the GEM. The group's ability to eliminate people in key positions, against a backdrop of strong military measures, deep clannism and complex tribal structures, exposes just how much of a foothold the group continues to have in the country. Al-Shabaab uses a harsh, intolerant interpretation of Islam to justify the killings of those who oppose its vision of an Islamic state in Somalia.

The group lost just 379 militants in these offensives and is among the most resilient of the large-scale extremist organisations documented by the GEM. Somalia's conflict is symptomatic of the resilience al-Shabaab has maintained over the years, despite increased counter-terrorism measures. In 2017, the group launched 270 large-scale coordinated offensives against armed actors, targeting checkpoints and military bases 231 times.

The GEM found that more than one-fifth of al-Shabaab's attacks against militaries were aimed at AMISOM. The year 2017 marked a decade since AMISOM began its operations to purge Somalia of its Islamist threat, but al-Shabaab has not changed course. The GEM found the group active in all 18 of Somalia's administrative divisions. The GEM documented 268 attacks in Mogadishu during 2017, again exposing the group's strategy to undermine those in office.

FIG. 2.10 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Somalia, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1-5   • 6-10   ● 11-25   ● 26-50   ● 51-100   ● 101-200   ● 201-230
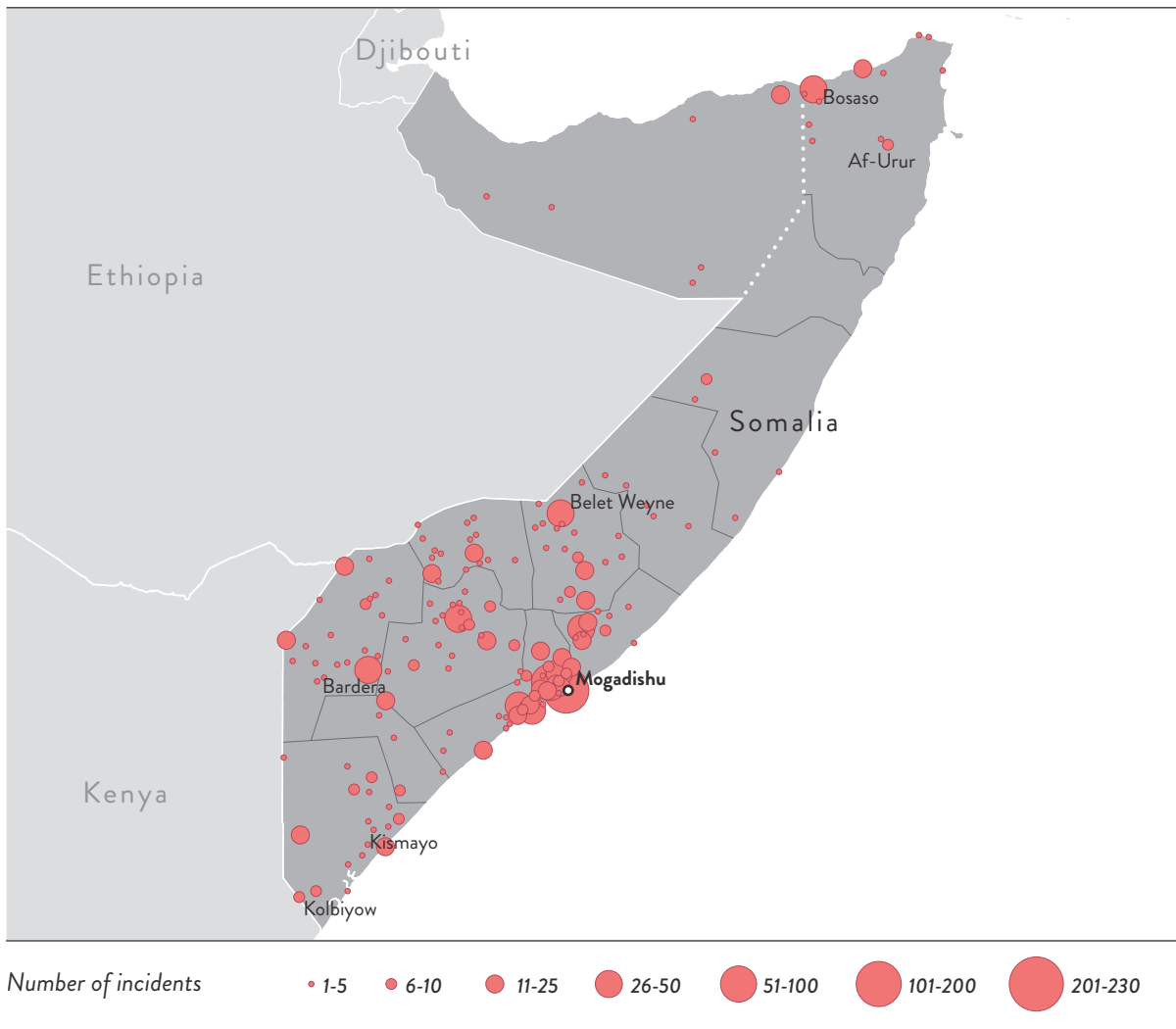
FIG. 2.11 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Somalia, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Mogadishu, Banaadir	Al-Shabaab	Militants carried out a car bomb and gun attack near government buildings, killing 587 civilians
2=	Af Urur, Bari	Al-Shabaab	Militants attacked a military base of Puntland forces, resulting in fighting that killed 50 force members
2=	Kolbiyow, Lower Juba	Al-Shabaab	An attack on a Kenyan military base in Somalia killed 50
4	Medina, Banaadir	Al-Shabaab	A car bombing at a market killed at least 39 civilians
5	Barire, Bari	Al-Shabaab	Militants stormed a military base and killed 30 soldiers

FIG. 2.12 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Somalia, 2017

Extremists — 39%   Civilians — 30%   28%   Nonstate militias — 4%

Security forces

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES
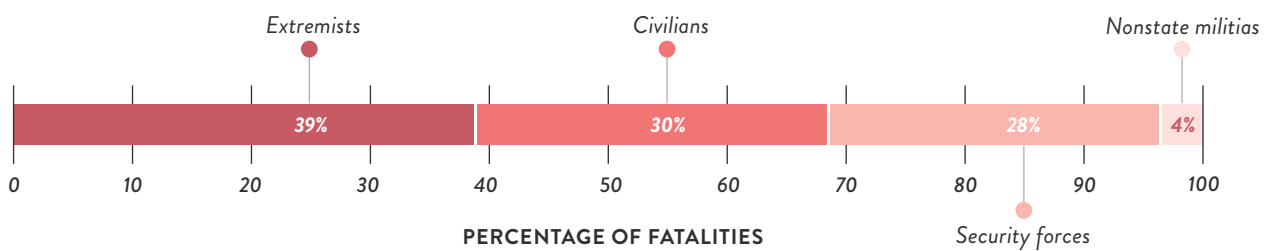
Nigeria

The GEM documented 3,399 deaths in Nigeria as Boko Haram's violent insurgency continued throughout 2017 (see figures 2.13–2.15). The country remains one of the deadliest in sub-Saharan Africa for extremist violence. The GEM recorded four deaths per extremist attack in the country, with an attack occurring on average once every four days. The frequency of assaults exposes the perpetual threat Boko Haram poses, despite the Nigerian government repeatedly claiming to have defeated the group.

In 2017, 1,840 extremists were killed, over one-third as a result of airstrikes conducted by the Nigerian military. More than 30 per cent of these incidents targeted Boko Haram's stronghold in the Sambisa Forest. The area lies in a strategic triangle for the group, straddling the Mandara Mountains and Lake Chad. This base allows the group to reconstitute when its insurgency is severely damaged; but more importantly, it gives the group an operational environment from which to launch attacks outside Nigeria. During 2017, the GEM documented 158 Boko Haram attacks in neighbouring Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

Boko Haram's expansionist vision is underpinned by a Salafi-jihadi ideology that it uses to justify attempts to overthrow the Nigerian government and implement its version of sharia law. The brutal tenets espoused by the group validate its violent tactics against the Nigerian population. Seventy-one per cent of the group's attacks in the Lake Chad Basin targeted civilians in a campaign that was more focused on civilian targets than that of any other extremist group in 2017. Boko Haram launched attacks against civilians in four of Nigeria's 36 states.

The GEM recorded Boko Haram activity in 14 states, demonstrating the expanse of its insurgency in the country. More than 80 per cent of the group's documented attacks were in the northeastern Borno state. Its capital, Maiduguri, suffered 76 attacks during the year, 84 per cent of which directly targeted civilians. The University of Maiduguri was targeted 12 times in attacks that reinforced the group's ideological mantra that Western education (*boko*) is forbidden (haram).

Boko Haram deployed suicide bombers at a greater rate per attack than any other extremist organisation identified by the GEM in 2017. Over two-fifths of all assaults launched by the group involved suicide attackers. The GEM identified 240 individual suicide bombers throughout the year in Nigeria alone. More than 57 per cent of these were female. The intense use of suicide bombers, and the unprecedented deployment of female attackers, exposes the shifting dynamics of Boko Haram's insurgency. The group's unpredictable nature and use of tactics of evasion have enabled a resurgence in the group's violence and fight for an Islamic state in Nigeria.

In 2017, the GEM documented 17 assaults on refugee camps that led to the deaths of 79 people. Suicide bombers were involved in 14 of these operations, again showing how the group deploys its preferred mode of attack against soft targets.

The incidents recorded by the GEM take place against a backdrop of intercommunal and sectarian violence in Nigeria, where roughly half the population is Muslim and roughly half is Christian. The clash between Muslim herders and Christian farmers mainly in north-central Nigeria claimed more than 500 lives in 2017, according to Amnesty International.[23] This conflict, which is triggered largely by competition for scarce land and water resources and exacerbated by climate change, risks escalating further because it is increasingly framed along the country's ethno-religious fault lines.

FIG. 2.13 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Nigeria, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1   • 2-5   ● 6-10   ● 11-25   ● 26-50   ● 51-100   ● 101-115
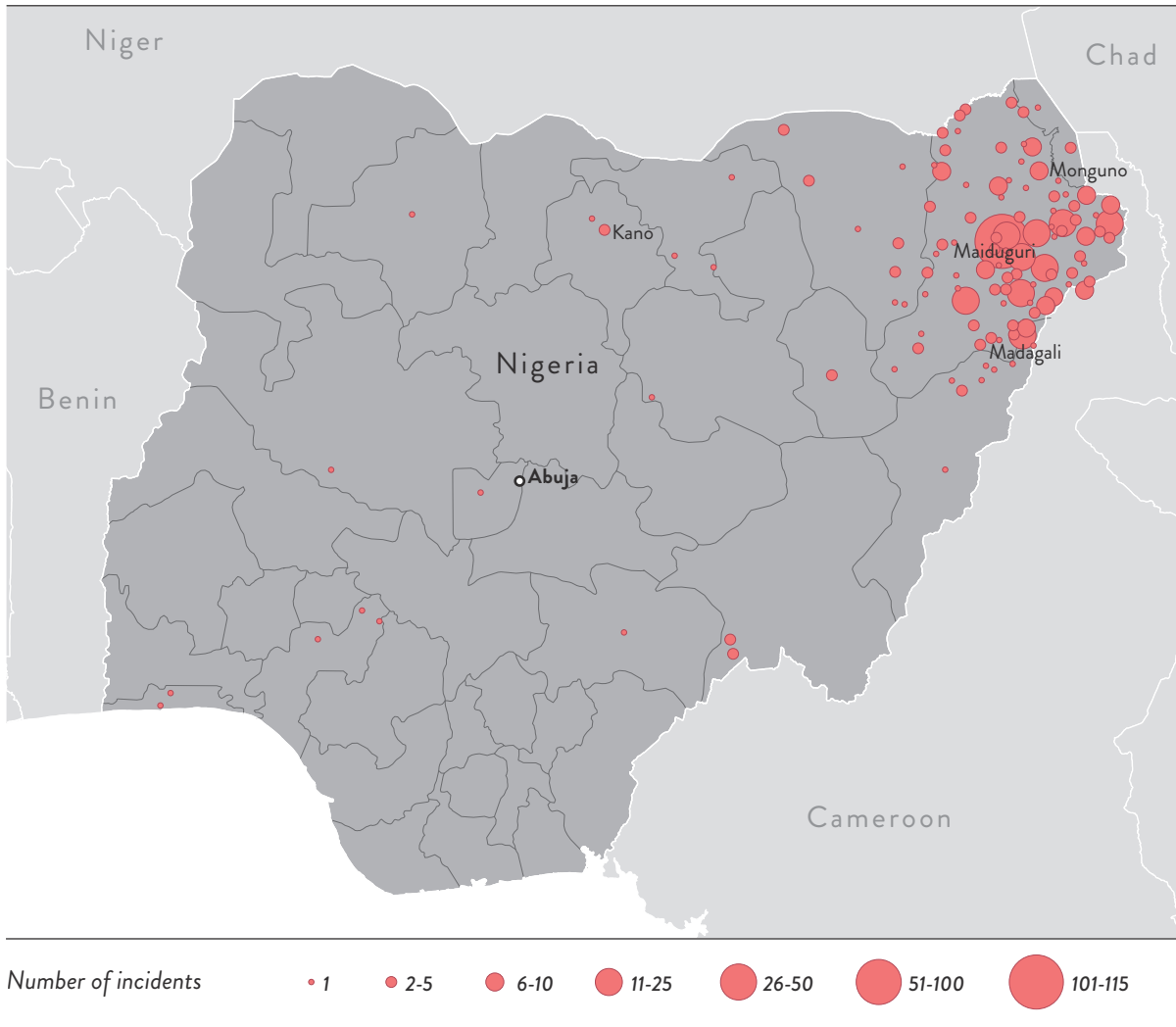
FIG. 2.14 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Nigeria, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Magumeri, Borno	Boko Haram	Militants attacked academic staff being escorted by military personnel, killing at least 69
2	Kuna Araha, Adamawa	Boko Haram	A teenage militant conducted a suicide attack on a mosque, killing 50 civilians
3	Mafa, Borno	Boko Haram	Militants attacked a village and killed 46 civilians
4	Maiduguri, Borno	Boko Haram	42 farmers were killed after travelling to Borno state
5	Damboa, Borno	Boko Haram	Militants attacked Civilian Joint Task Force members, killing 40 fighters

FIG. 2.15 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Nigeria, 2017

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES
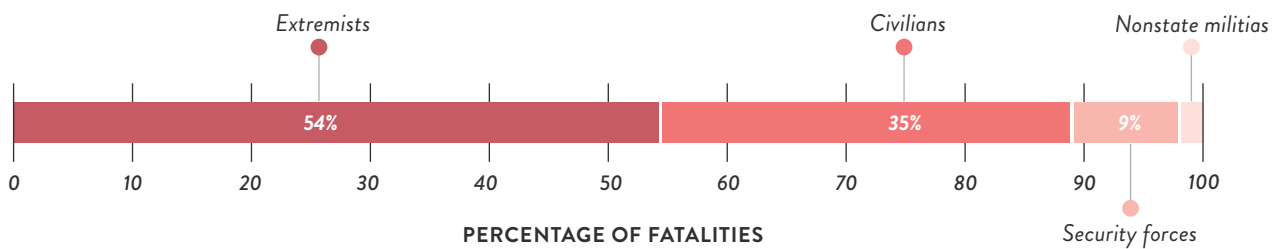
Yemen

Three years since the insurgency against the Yemeni government, extremist militancy is entrenched in the country (see figures 2.16–2.18). According to the GEM, at least 2,497 people were killed in 2017 in incidents involving three violent actors: the Shia Zaidi revivalist movement the Houthis, ISIS in Yemen and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The distinctions in their overall objectives, against a backdrop of tribalism, make for a complex and dire situation, which the UN secretary general has declared the world's worst humanitarian crisis.[24]

The Houthis are the most violent Islamist faction in Yemen. The group, which is backed by Iran, was active in at least 18 of the country's 21 provinces in 2017. Nearly two-thirds of all violent Islamist attacks were perpetrated by the movement, which draws support from the many tribes active in the north of the country. The Houthis seek the implementation of Zaidi religious law via the overthrow of the current Yemeni government, and they employ violent tactics that have impeded international efforts to alleviate the country's besieged population.

At least 55 per cent of the group's violence was aimed at Yemeni troops, the Saudi military (which maintained a presence in the country throughout 2017) and US counter-extremism measures. The GEM also documented two major incidents involving the raiding and looting of banks, one major attack on the media, and the kidnapping of 12 employees of the Norwegian Refugee Council in the port town of Hodeida. The Houthis' tactics are far from indiscriminate, as Hodeida is not only an entry point for international aid but also a route for the group's supporters to deliver weapons and infantry.

In June 2018, Hadi government forces, with support from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, entered the city of Hodeida, in an effort to dislodge Houthi forces. Both countries suffered attacks from the violent actions of the Houthis. The group

targeted Saudi Arabia 27 times in 2017, including 18 cross-border missile and rocket attacks that struck major areas such as the port town of Jizan and the Saudi capital, Riyadh. In December the Houthis fired their first non-test missile at the UAE, targeting a nuclear plant under construction.

Former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who declared his support for the Houthis in May 2015, sided with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in December. He was subsequently accused of treason and killed by a Houthi sniper in the same month.

The GEM recorded the deaths of 960 Houthi extremists from counter-extremism actions in 2017. This figure represents 83 per cent of all Islamist militants killed in counter-extremism operations in Yemen.

AQAP and ISIS in Yemen have leveraged the chaos created by the Houthis. AQAP has been labelled al-Qaeda's most dangerous branch. On average the group killed four people per attack and dedicated nearly one-third of its violent activity in 2017 to suicide bombings. Despite targeting the Yemeni military in over 78 per cent of its attacks, AQAP leader Qassim al-Raymi issued a statement in 2017 declaring its opposition to the Houthis and vowing to fight the movement.

ISIS launched significantly fewer attacks overall, but four of its six attacks involved suicide bombers. In November, ISIS conducted a coordinated assault on a security post in Aden, killing 69 members of the armed forces. The scale and complexity of this incident demonstrate the lethality ISIS can generate in its guerrilla-style attacks, despite maintaining a low profile in a country where other extremist groups are markedly more active. With ISIS operations eroding in Syria and Iraq, Yemen presents fertile territory for battle-hardened militants to perpetuate ISIS's expansionist ideals.

FIG. 2.16 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Yemen, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1   ● 2-3   ● 4-8   ● 9-22   ● 23-39   ● 40
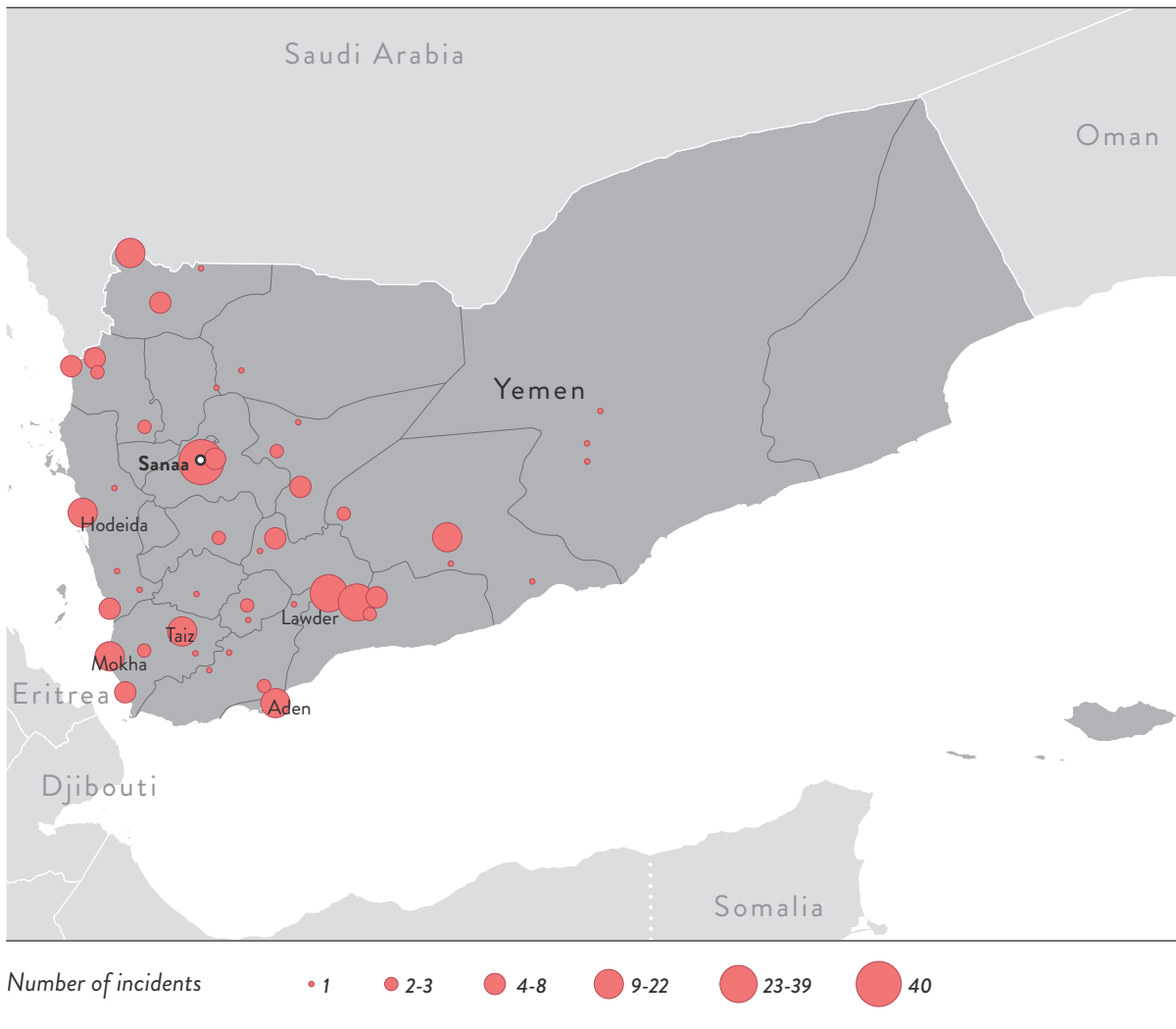
FIG. 2.17 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Yemen, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Khor Maksar, Aden	ISIS in Yemen	Suicide bombers killed 69 after storming a Yemeni security headquarters
2	Sanaa, Sanaa	Houthis	Militants launched an offensive against forces loyal to former President Saleh, killing 24
3	Taiz, Taiz	Houthis	Militants killed 20 soldiers in an attack on a Yemeni military base
4	Qaataba, Dhale	AQAP	A roadside bomb hit a civilian car, killing 12
5	Benghazi, Benghazi	BRSC	A car bomb outside a mosque killed five civilians

FIG. 2.18 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Yemen, 2017

Extremists   Civilians   Nonstate militias

| 58% | 26% | 14% | |

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

Security forces

Nº. 7
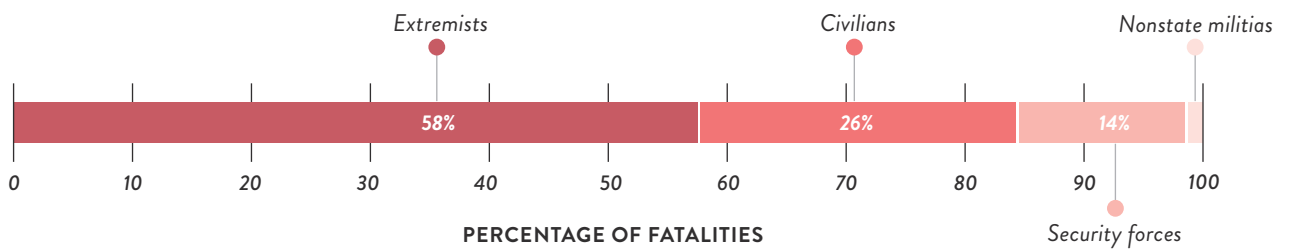
Egypt

Islamist extremism has plagued Egypt for over 70 years. It continues to be the main issue that disturbs the fabric of Egyptian society and limits the country's potential to strike a balance between modernity and conservatism. The violent aspects of Egypt's extremism problem have intensified recently, and 1,546 people died in 2017 because of it, according to the GEM (see figures 2.19–2.21).

Seventy-four per cent of the deaths were recorded in the Sinai Peninsula. This desolate terrain has become a breeding ground for militants, and much violence in the Middle East and North Africa can be traced back to this area.

The GEM recorded the deaths of 683 militants in 2017, with 71 per cent in Sinai. Ground operations conducted by the Egyptian military killed more than two-fifths of these militants in Egypt. Extremists were also targeted by the Egyptian Air Force and the Israeli military in attacks that killed 98 militants, including members of ISIS in Sinai and of al-Qaeda's new front group Jamaar Ansar al-Islam. Despite measures to eradicate the threat of extremism in the country, deaths of security personnel and civilians outnumbered those of militants.

In 2017, 209 violent Islamist attacks resulted in the deaths of 809 people. ISIS in Sinai was responsible for 90 per cent of these. ISIS in Sinai is the deadliest extremist faction operating in Egypt. This formidable branch of ISIS has exploited social discord in the peninsula to recruit disenfranchised locals and breathe new life into the region's myriad Islamist extremist cells by bringing them under one umbrella.

The group's resilience and ability to recruit within Egypt's borders means it can pursue a broad agenda against civilians and the state until its vision of an Islamic state is realised. In November, 40 militants attacked a Sufi mosque in North Sinai. The attack killed 311 people, injured 122 and was the deadliest

attack in Egypt's history. It was one of two assaults targeting Sufis in 2017.

ISIS's actions against the country's Coptic Christian community were among the deadliest acts of religious persecution documented by the GEM globally. Fifty-three per cent of ISIS attacks against the public in 2017 were aimed at the Coptic community.

ISIS in Sinai and ISIS in Egypt—the organisation's affiliate that is active in the rest of the country—killed 97 Copts in 18 attacks. The GEM recorded 13 assassinations of Coptic Christians and attacks on four churches. ISIS previously described Coptic Christians as its "favourite prey" and threatened to eliminate all "worshippers of the cross".[25]

The Sinai insurgency and ISIS's presence across Egypt have impeded the state's efforts to bring people together and find common ideological ground between them. Yet there are more layers to Egypt's Islamist problem than ISIS alone. The country suffered attacks by four other violent Islamist groups in 2017: Jund al-Islam, Lewaa al-Thawra, the Hasm Movement and Jamaar Ansar al-Islam. Aside from Jund al-Islam, which claimed an assault on an ISIS unit in October, these groups targeted security and governmental apparatus in all of their violent activities.

FIG. 2.19 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Egypt, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1-2   • 3-4   ● 5-9   ● 10-18   ● 54   ● 144
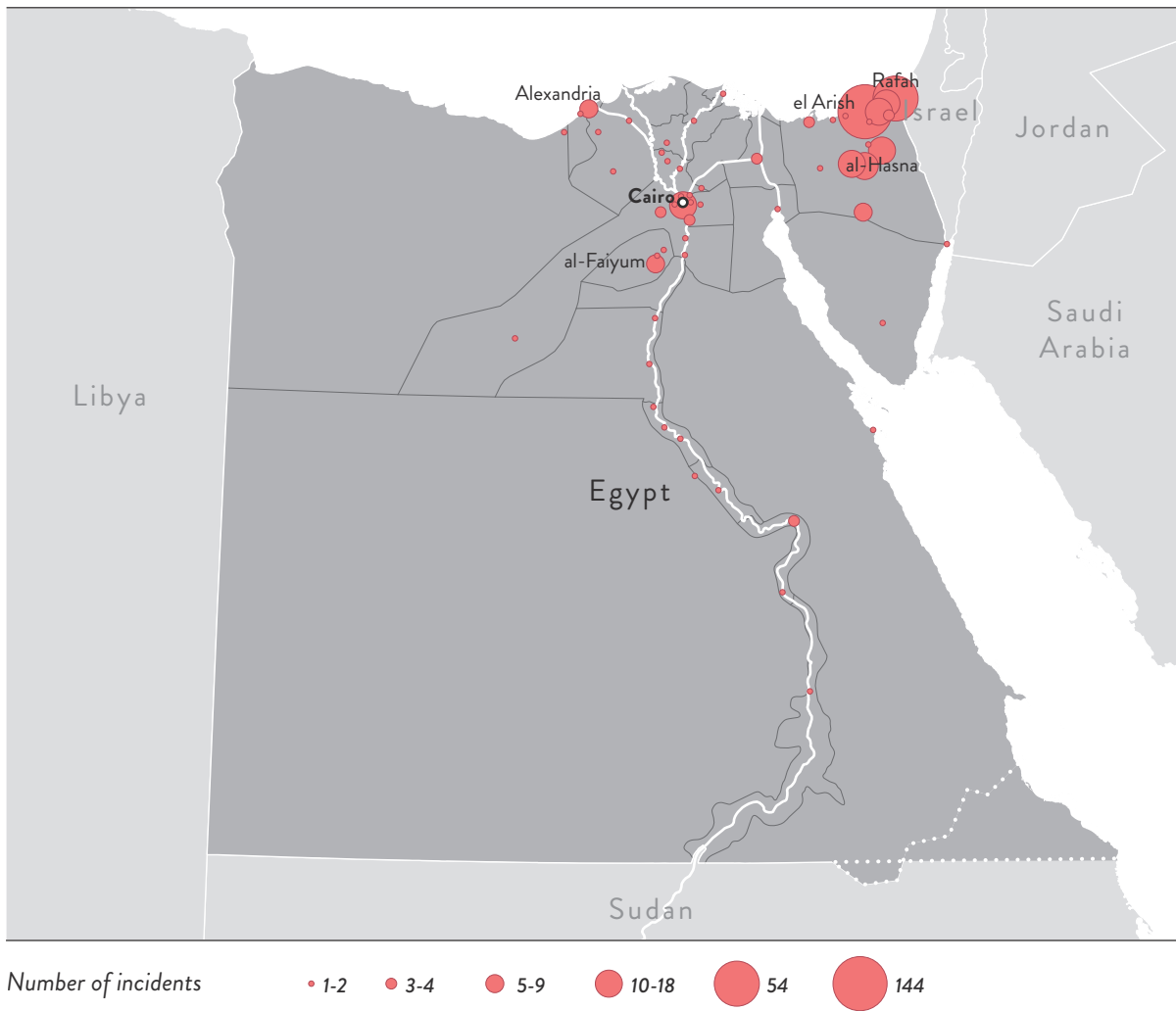
FIG. 2.20 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Egypt, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Bir al-Abed, North Sinai	ISIS in Sinai	A suicide bomber and gunmen attacked worshippers at a Sufi mosque, killing 311 civilians
2	Al-Wahat al-Bahariya, Giza	ISIS in Egypt	Militants ambushed security forces conducting a counter-terrorism operation, killing 54
3	Tanta, Gharbia	ISIS in Sinai	A suicide bomber attacked and killed 29 Coptic Christians at a church
4	Maghagha, Minya	ISIS in Sinai	Gunmen attacked and killed 28 Coptic Christians on a coach
5	Al-Barth, North Sinai	ISIS in Sinai	A suicide car bomber and gunmen attacked a military outpost, killing 23

FIG. 2.21 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Egypt, 2017

Extremists   Civilians   Nonstate militias

44%   32%   22%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

Security forces

Nº· 8
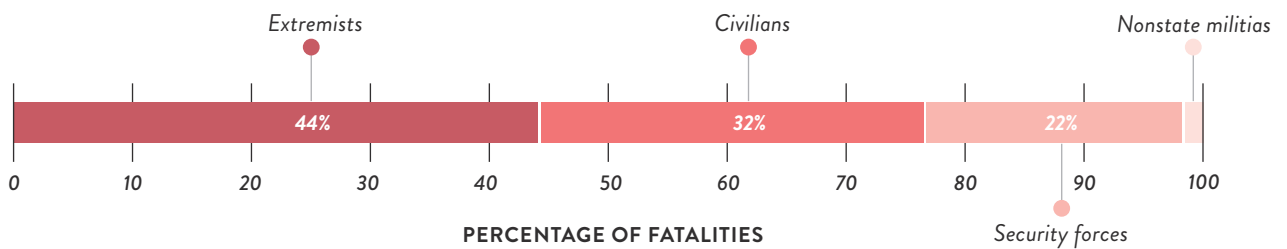
Pakistan

Pakistan's extremist groups are a destructive force in the region. In a country where Islam is practised by over 95 per cent of the population, groups that claim to fight in the name of the religion killed over 1,489 people in 2017 (see figures 2.22–2.24).[26] The nation is host to multiple violent Islamist groups that seek to undermine the Pakistani state and target the foundations of non-Sunni minorities. The World Bank has labelled the country "fertile ground for terrorism" because of its reputation for harbouring militants in the region.[27]

Twelve violent Islamist groups were active in the country in 2017, with seven of them launching attacks. The Pakistani Taliban was the deadliest, killing 173 people, including civilians, governmental figures and those working in the state media. At the same time, the group maintained a focus on eroding the nation's security, targeting the Pakistani military and police in three out of four attacks. Composed mainly of ethnic Pashtuns, the group seeks to topple Pakistan's government and set up an Islamic state in its place.

The group was responsible for attacks on a government college and two girls' schools in 2017, having previously claimed it was targeting the nation's education system in response to state actions against the "families and females" of militants.[28] The group enjoys a symbiotic relationship with many violent jihadi actors in the region and in January claimed responsibility for an IED explosion that killed 25 civilians in retaliation for the state's killing of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi chief Asif Chotu.

The Pakistani Taliban's association with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi reflects the complexities of the country's extremism problem. Such alliances allow the Taliban to exploit the many networks these violent jihadi actors have created in urban areas and to launch its own attacks. Although the Pakistani Taliban is focused on its antistate agenda, the activities of groups including

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Jamaat ul-Ahrar have inflamed sectarian tensions.

In 2017, 247 civilians were killed in sectarian violence perpetrated by four distinct groups. Pakistan's Shia population bore the brunt of the violence, and the GEM documented the deaths of 136 people. Over 36 per cent of these attacks took place in Balochistan province, where Shias constitute 20 per cent of the population. Fifty-seven people were killed in three separate attacks by Jamaat ul-Ahrar and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's al-Alami faction was also violently active in 2017, launching one of the deadliest attacks during the year that killed 67 civilians. This faction has previously confirmed an alliance with ISIS based on a shared sectarian agenda, further demonstrating the hazardous fluidity among Pakistan's extremist actors. Aligning operations with ISIS and its extremely intolerant worldview paints a disturbing picture of the measures extremist organisations in Pakistan are willing to take to maintain a sectarian agenda. Sectarian violence made up one-quarter of ISIS-Khorasan's violent activities in Pakistan, a similar level to Afghanistan. The group killed 164 people in 2017, most of them civilians.

While groups such as ISIS, the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi are at the core of Pakistan's extremist violence, mob movements contribute to daily sectarian violent incidents in the country. These local Islamists do not generate as much impact as more organised groups, but they serve as a platform for violent Islamist organisations to consistently terrorise Pakistan's non-Sunni population.

FIG. 2.22 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Pakistan, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1-3   • 4-8   ● 9-12   ● 13-16   ● 17-26
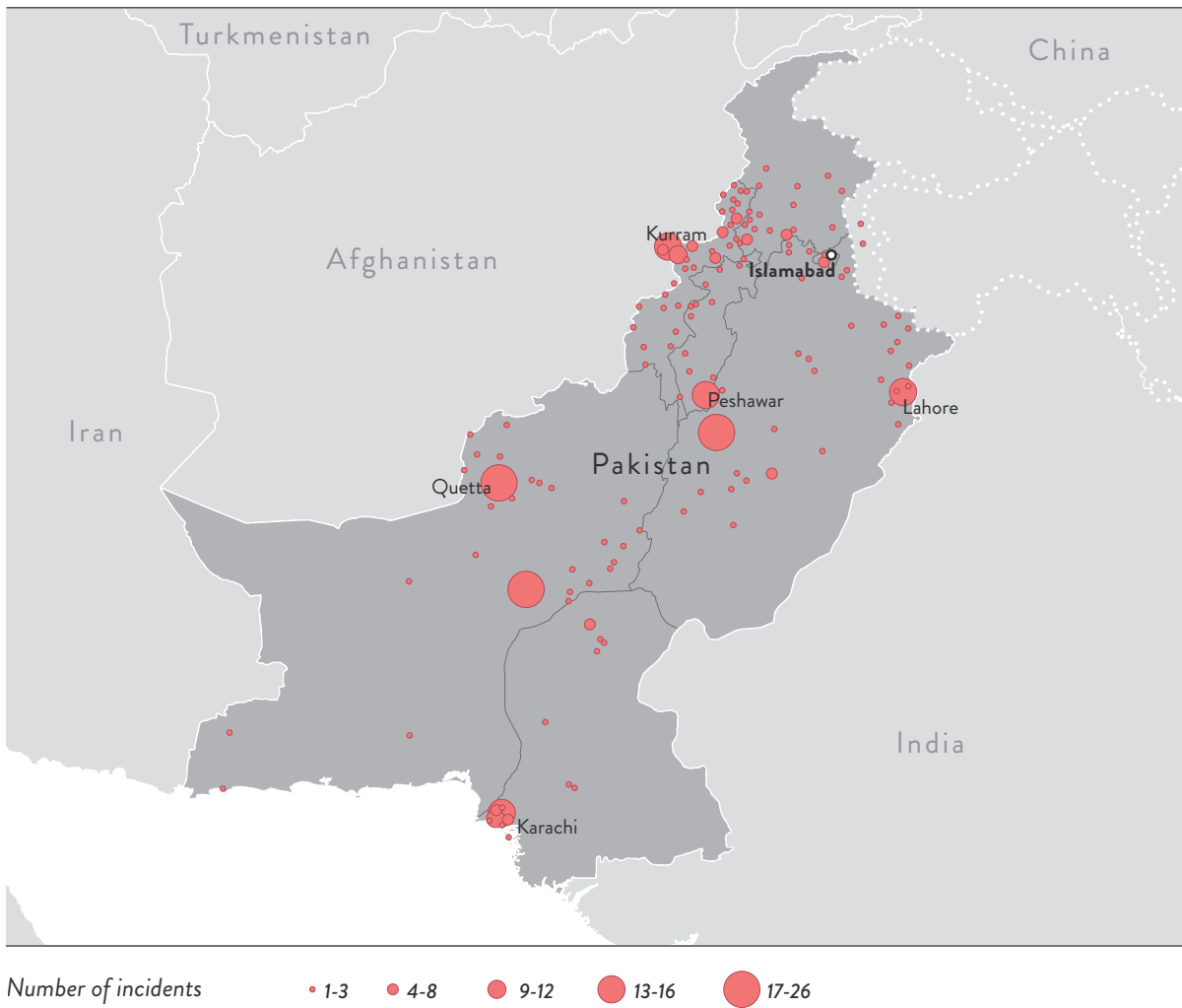
FIG. 2.23 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Pakistan, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Sehwan, Sindh	ISIS-Khorasan	A suicide bomber attacked a Sufi mosque, killing at least 90 civilians
2	Turi Bazaar, KP	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami	Militants targeted Shia civilians in twin bombings, killing 67
3	Lahore, Punjab	Pakistani Taliban	A suicide assault killed 26 civilians
4	Parachinar, KP	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	At least 25 were killed after a bomb detonated at a market
5	Parachinar, KP	Jamaat ul-Ahrar	A car bomb targeted a Shia mosque, killing 22 civilians

FIG. 2.24 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Pakistan, 2017

Extremists   Civilians

| 53% | 32% | 15% |

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

Security forces
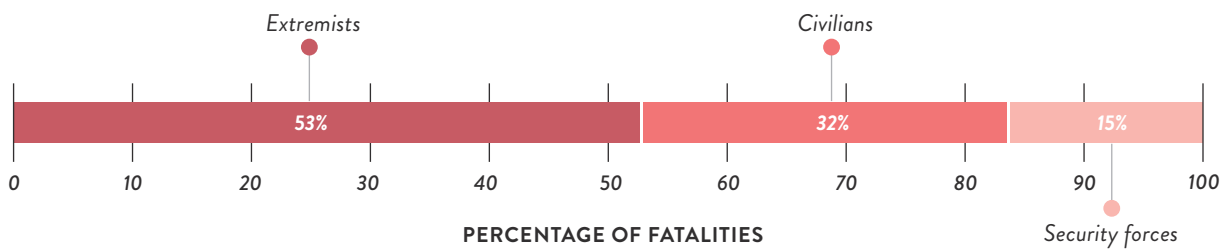
Nº. 9

Libya

Since the ouster of the country's strongman leader Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, Libya's array of violent Islamist groups has impeded efforts to de-escalate the fighting and transformed the country's political and social landscape. According to the GEM, 1,058 people died in 2017 as a direct result of Libya's violent Islamist quagmire (see figures 2.25–2.27). The current conflict involves a myriad of Islamist actors that span the ideological spectrum. Against a backdrop of nationwide fragmentation, 11 groups actively sought a system of governance based on sharia law. Islamist groups in Libya also play a key role in Europe's ongoing migration and refugee crisis.

The most violent extremist element in Libya is the jihadi alliance of Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC). Composed of al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Sharia and with close ties to one of Libya's strongest armed militias, the alliance launched 59 per cent of the Islamist attacks recorded in 2017. These incidents were concentrated in and around the coastal city of Benghazi. Over 91 per cent targeted the Libyan National Army (LNA), which has been engaged in a long-term campaign against local violent Islamist groups. Although the LNA was engaged in war across the country against four distinct violent Islamist groups, 36 per cent of LNA deaths in 2017 were at the hands of the BRSC.

Twenty-eight per cent of the LNA's counter-terrorism operations against the group involved airstrikes, demonstrating the BRSC's resilience. The group justifies its violence on the basis of an ultraconservative strand of Islam and exploits local grievances to garner support. The BRSC was largely defeated in July, but it was alleged to have left behind landmines and IEDs in areas it had controlled. According to the GEM, 88 per cent of incidents involving landmines occurred after the BRSC's defeat. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya has said that the presence of landmines, IEDs and unexploded ordnance hinders the safe return of internally displaced people (IDPs) and threatens access for humanitarian workers.[29]

ISIS in Libya exhibits disparities with other violent Islamist actors operating in the country. While nine of the groups launched attacks in no more than two Libyan provinces in 2017, ISIS pursued its agenda of aggressive expansionism by attacking ten provinces. ISIS in Libya regrouped after losing territory in the country at the end of 2016. The fall of Mosul in Iraq and of Raqqa in Syria also meant ISIS channelled its efforts towards countries such as Libya.

The GEM recorded attacks by ISIS in Libya on checkpoints, mosques, courthouses and embassies. Thirty-six per cent of the group's attacks were against civilians. These violent activities are emblematic of the transnational organisation and show how the group thrives in countries such as Libya where political instability and social marginalisation are pervasive. In February, it was reported that ISIS in Libya was paying smugglers of child refugees in an attempt to coerce new recruits. In early 2017, Quilliam estimated that 88,300 unaccompanied children were at risk of being radicalised.[30]

Libya serves as a gateway to Europe for migrants and refugees escaping conflict and destitution in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In December 2017, 621,706 migrants from 40 countries reportedly made their way into the country.[31] Two years earlier, ISIS had threatened to "flood Europe" with half a million refugees through Libya.[32] The group's radicalisation of refugees in the country's many IDP camps adds credence to the threat and could be a hint at attacks to come by people radicalised in Libya.

FIG. 2.25 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Libya, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1-5   • 6-10   • 11-25   ● 26-50   ● 51-100   ● 101-125   ● 126-175
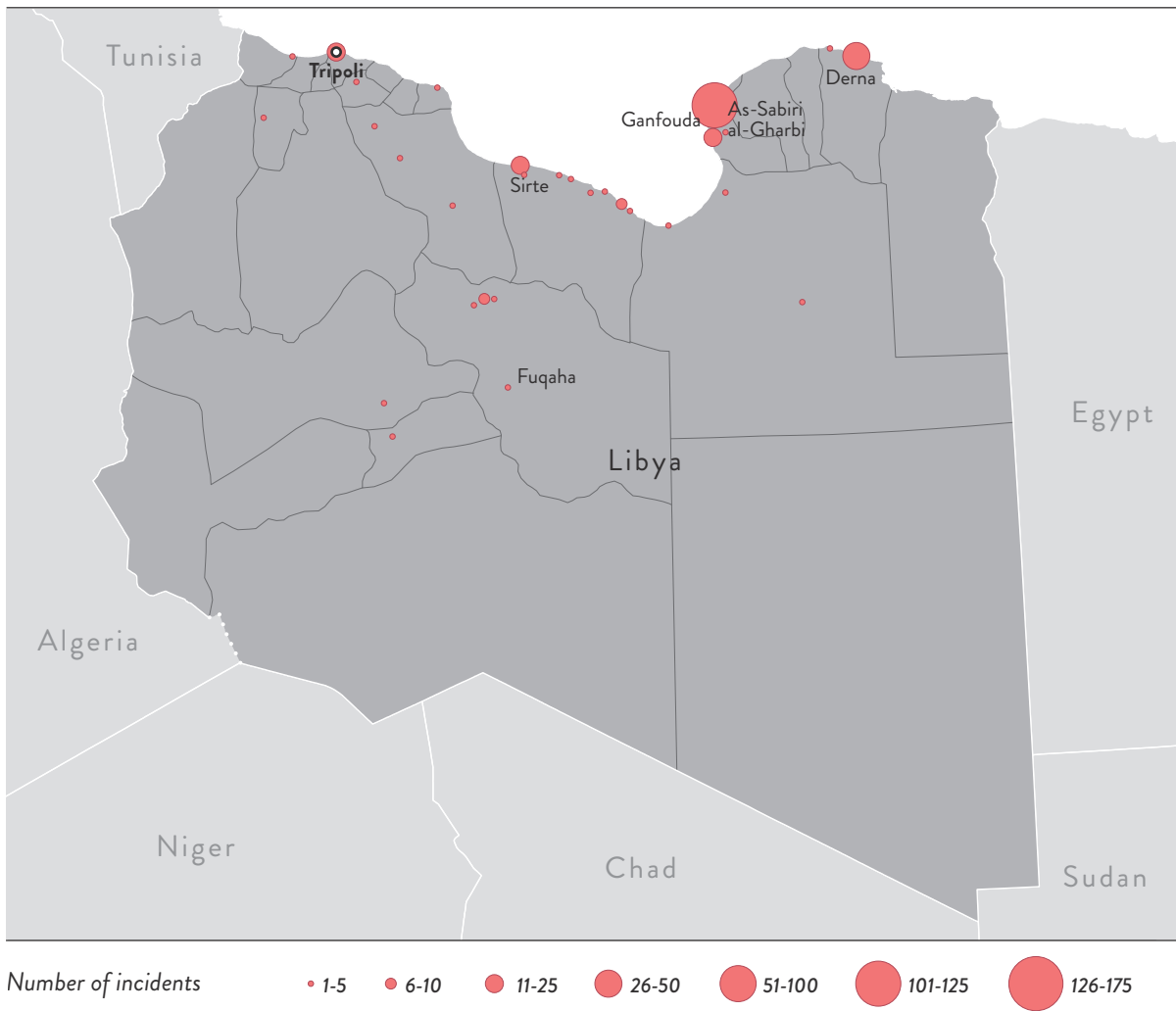
FIG. 2.26 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Libya, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	As-Sabiri al-Gharbi, Benghazi	BRSC	Militants clashed with LNA fighters, killing 17 members
2	Fuqaha, Jufra	ISIS in Libya	Militants killed 14 after attacking LNA fighters
3=	As-Sabiri al-Gharbi, Benghazi	ISIS in Libya	Militants ambushed and clashed with LNA fighters, killing 11
3=	Fuqaha, Jufra	ISIS in Libya	Militants beheaded LNA fighters and civilians at a checkpoint, killing 11
5	Ganfouda, Benghazi	ISIS in Libya	Militants clashed with LNA fighters and killed ten members

FIG. 2.27 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Libya, 2017

Extremists   Civilians   Nonstate militias

47%   9%   43%

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

Security forces

41
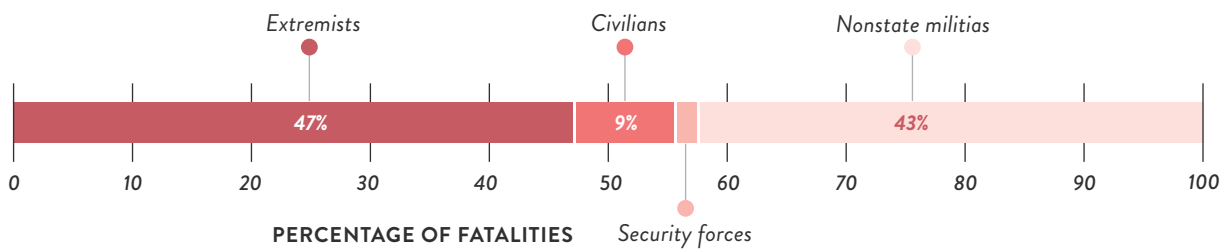
Nº 10

Mali

Against a backdrop of famine and social and political grievances, the spread of radical Islamist groups has devastated many lives in the Sahel. Controlling the violence in Mali is integral to the region's prospects for peace and security. The country suffered at least 493 deaths as a result of extremist violence and efforts to counter it in 2017. Al-Qaeda's monopoly in the Sahel instigated much of that violence. Since 2012, violence in Mali has tended to be confined to the north, but GEM data show that activity in central Mali was just as acute last year (see figures 2.28–2.30).

The GEM documented 156 incidents of Islamist violence across Mali, with seven provinces affected: Mopti, Ségou, Tombouctou, Gao, Kidal, Koulikoro and Bamako. Mopti suffered one-third of all of Mali's attacks in 2017. Security forces and armed militias were targeted in 86 per cent of attacks in these areas. The GEM also documented assaults on educational institutions, local leaders and the government, revealing similarities to the attacks that have plagued northern Mali since the outbreak of civil war in 2012.

State efforts to eradicate militant elements have been supported by the French military and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali. These two international actors were responsible for 61 per cent of extremists deaths in the country in 2017. International missions have helped efforts to counter extremism, and although there has been a geographical shift in the dynamics of the problem—as recognised by the French, who targeted the central province of Mopti in 44 per cent of their operations—northern Mali is still a breeding ground for militants active across the Sahel. In response, extremists targeted the UN mission in Mali at least 37 times in 2017, killing 36 people including military guards and peacekeepers.

In March 2017, the Salafi-jihadi alliance of Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) was formed. This group was responsible for 71 per cent of all violent extremist attacks in Mali that year, according to the GEM. JNIM comprises elements of Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, al-Mourabitoun and the official Saharan branch of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—groups that had previously entrenched themselves in Mali's north. In 2017, however, 45 per cent of JNIM's attacks occurred in the central provinces of Mopti, Ségou, Koulikoro and Bamako, suggesting the alliance is diversifying its objectives beyond the north.

JNIM is the latest incarnation of violent Islamism in Mali, and its activities expose the methods by which it seeks to erode the Malian state. During the year, the group was responsible for attacks on 11 major checkpoints, nine military convoys and one border crossing, in incidents that left 53 dead. There were attacks on nine military bases, including the French army and the UN. The group launched an average of ten assaults each month in 2017, including attacks and hostage takings, and killed a total of 163 people. JNIM also attacked Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Niger, revealing the group's vision for an Islamic state not only in Mali but across the Sahel.

JNIM does not display the tribalism that characterised AQIM's early iterations, in which Algerian Arabs were the preferred recruits. It allows al-Qaeda to cast itself as a pan-Islamic movement. Despite Mali suffering attacks from ISIS in the Greater Sahara in 2017, JNIM is the strongest violent jihadi faction in the Sahel and a franchise that has effectively executed al-Qaeda's strategy of building localised offshoots. With Mali's long-running conflict now spilling over from the north, the extremist threat to the region is more severe than ever.

FIG. 2.28 Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Mali, 2017

Number of incidents   • 1   ● 2-5   ● 6-10   ● 11-15
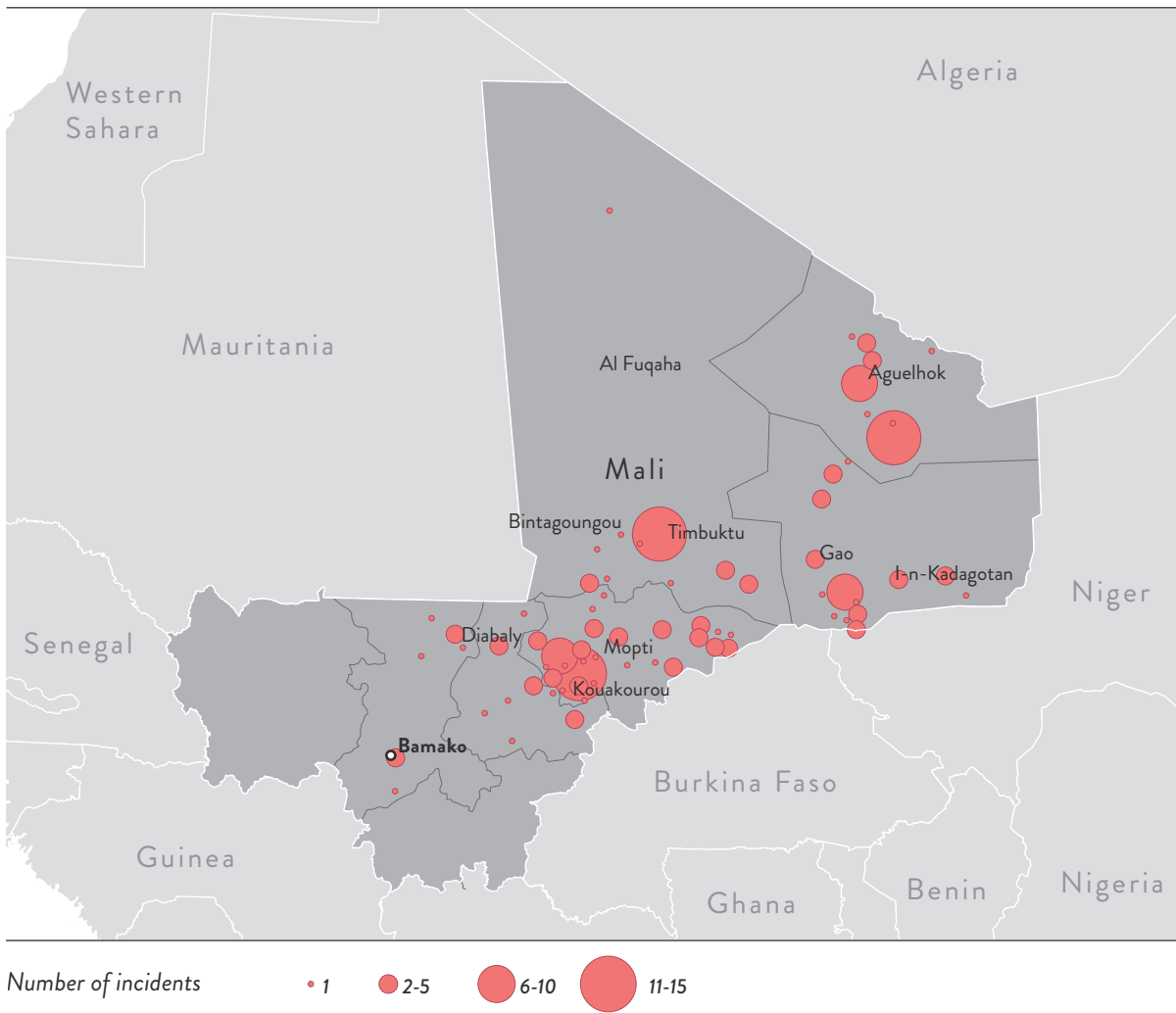
FIG. 2.29 The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Mali, 2017

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Gao, Gao	AQIM	A suicide car bombing struck a military base, killing 77
2	Bintagoungou, Tombouctou	JNIM	A coordinated attack on a military checkpoint killed 12 soldiers
3=	Mopti, Mopti	Ansarul Islam	Militants attacked an army position and killed 11 security officials
3=	I-n-Kadagotan, Gao	JNIM	At least 11 soldiers were killed after a Malian military convoy was ambushed
5	Diabaly, Ségou	JNIM	Militants ambushed an army convoy, killing nine soldiers

FIG. 2.30 Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Mali, 2017
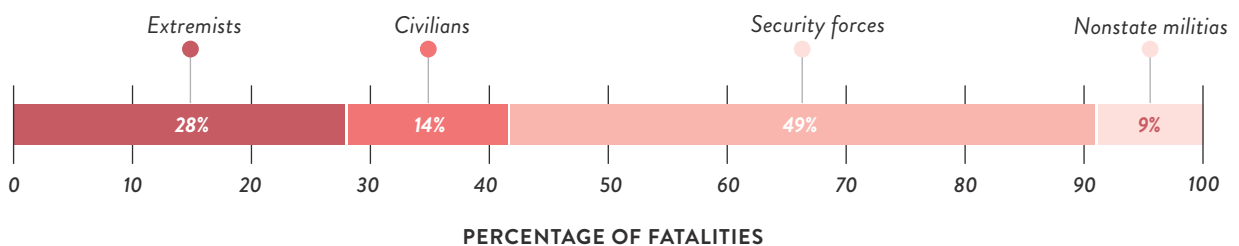
Extremists 28% | Civilians 14% | Security forces 49% | Nonstate militias 9%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES

Civilians as Intended Targets

The Global Extremism Monitor (GEM) in 2017 recorded 6,310 civilian deaths deliberately caused by 47 violent Islamist militant groups in 1,510 attacks across 28 countries. In a manifestation of a brutal and warped ideology, these militant groups used calculated violence with varying objectives to target areas where members of the public can be reached and harmed. Using various statistical measures, the GEM has revealed significant differences between violent Islamist extremist groups operating in today's fiercest conflicts.

This chapter focuses on the violence administered by the most organised and distinct violent Islamist organisations. The violence used by these groups is widespread and not confined to militarised spaces. The patterns of their behaviour suggest a conscious effort to use civilian casualties to further their objectives. In conflict zones, the line between a perceived enemy state and that state's general public is easily blurred through a group's ideological rationale, which is often binary and reduced to 'us and them'. Although militant groups also cause civilian fatalities when targeting security forces, the focus here is on violence in which civilians were the intended targets.

Soft-target attacks, such as on schools, shopping centres and recreational spaces, can appear senseless and chaotic, designed to merely spread fear and maximise damage. The GEM has confirmed that this violence is inherent to many Islamist militant organisations. However, by dissecting this brutality, our analysis has revealed distinctions in the systematic killing of unarmed civilians and the targeting of vulnerable institutions. By recognising both the scale of this terror and the differences in nuance between the perpetrators, front-line responders can better counter this violence.

The GEM analysis has identified the primary victims of Islamist extremist groups. Islamist militant violence overwhelmingly affects Muslim civilians. By monitoring and disaggregating the activities of each group, the GEM also shows that these organisations have complex sectarian and religious prejudices, which shape groups' use of violence in public spaces.[33]

Identifying the differences between soft targets offers an insight into groups' varying agendas. The GEM has categorised each incident based on the intended victim or victims, drawing out specific characteristics when possible. Recording violence at this level of detail helps increase understanding of the different motivations of each organisation. The GEM has analysed attacks on government buildings and staff. Although such spaces are typically better protected than public spaces, the GEM regards them as soft targets, because a group's targeting of them is typically more symbolic than operationally critical.

EXTREMIST GROUPS AND THE PUBLIC SPACE

The GEM reveals the extent and intensity of violence caused by Islamist extremist groups and the direct impact this had on civilians and public spaces in 2017. On average, approximately 17 civilians were killed each day by the actions of Islamist militant groups across the world. GEM data show that these efforts were often the direct result of coordinated campaigns against civilians and public spaces.

While these groups were the cause of most violence against soft targets, there are important distinctions in their methods and justifications for killing civilians. Sectarian, political and social hatreds determine the degree of a group's campaign against the public. Similarly, access to resources and financial capacity can affect the efficacy of a group's violence towards civilians. However, all of these groups espouse a hard-line narrative, drawing on an extreme interpretation of Islam that permits the targeting of civilians in battle.

Groups Engaged in Campaigns Against Civilians

Of the 92 extremist groups that perpetrated violence in 2017, the GEM identified four that were engaged in targeted campaigns against civilians—

defined as campaigns in which groups focused at least 50 per cent of their violent activity on soft targets and carried out at least 15 attacks. These groups were Boko Haram in Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger; ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan; Ansarul Islam in Mali and Burkina Faso; and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in Pakistan (see figure 3.1). Other militant organisations, such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, ISIS in Sinai and al-Shabaab, killed scores of civilians but dedicated a greater proportion of their activity to attacking armed forces.

The geographical spread of these civilian-focused campaigns shows that the systematic selection of soft targets is not limited to one militant group. Operational strategies that focus on killing civilians exist in various forms in numerous contexts globally, each with a different degree of severity.

Boko Haram

Of all groups, Boko Haram directed the greatest proportion of its attacks against civilian targets, focusing at least 71 per cent of its assaults on the public space. Despite the Nigerian army repeatedly declaring Boko Haram to be "militarily defeated", the GEM recorded that the group killed on average two civilians per day in 2017.[34] Boko Haram's prioritisation of soft targets affirms that it is engaged in a campaign against civilians.

Although Boko Haram remains largely a Nigeria-based group, it is driven by an expansionist agenda that encourages attacks beyond the country's borders. This is both a product of the ISIS affiliate's ideological drive to spread its creed and a response to military operations against it. Nearly one-third of Boko Haram's attacks in Nigeria in 2017 occurred in Maiduguri, the provincial capital and most populous city of Borno state and the heart of the group's insurgency. GEM data also recorded Boko Haram attacks on civilian targets in neighbouring Cameroon and Niger, resulting in 217 fatalities. At least 79 per cent of all Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon were aimed at civilians. Boko Haram has historically increased its violence against civilians and expanded its geographical reach after increased military pressure.[35] The violence in neighbouring countries allows Boko Haram to demonstrate its ability to remain a threat despite losing ground in Nigeria.[36]

FIG. 3.1 Groups Engaged in Campaigns Against Civilians, 2017
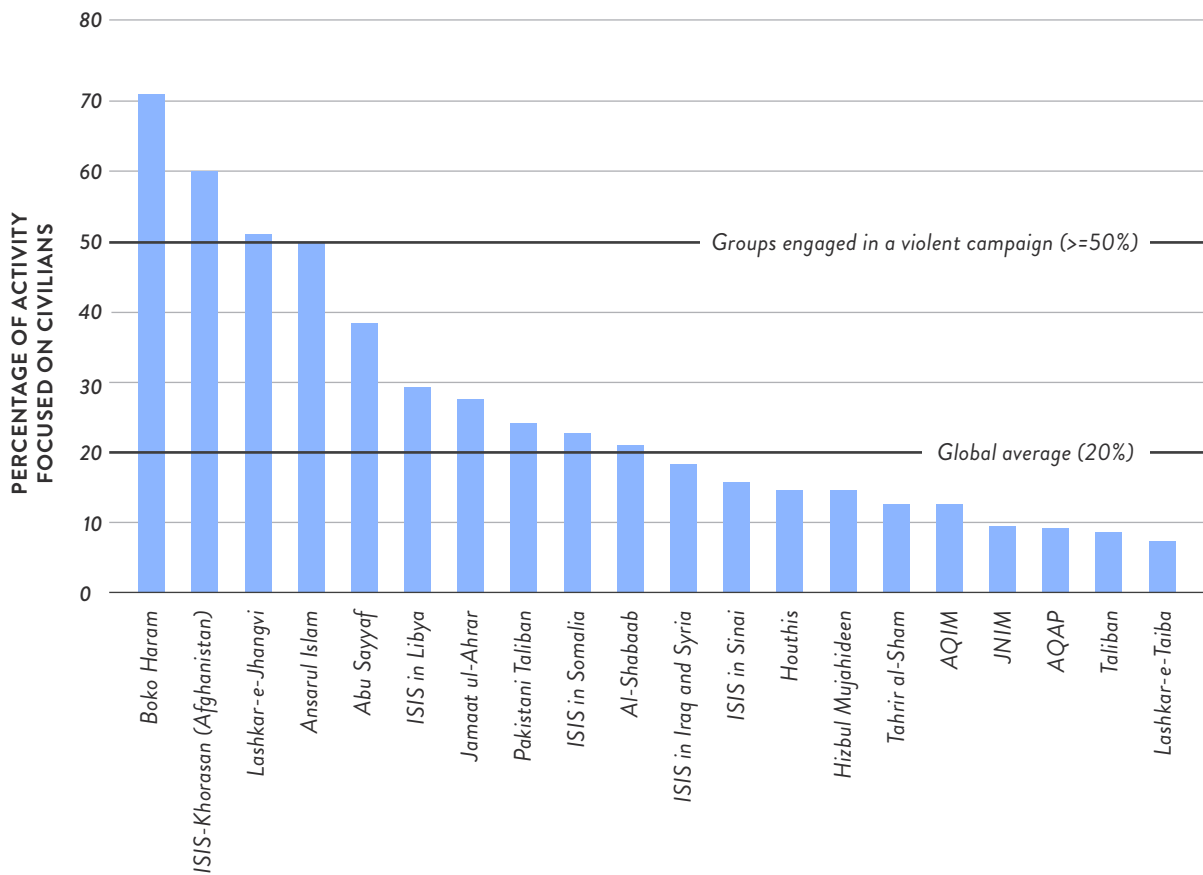
In 2017, Boko Haram's attention on civilians had a demonstrable relationship with state counter-efforts. In the first quarter of the year, the group launched on average 18 attacks against civilians per month. In March, a dramatic increase in security operations against the group led to a proliferation of Boko Haram violence against civilians. Subsequently, incidents against civilians rose to an average of 29 per month. The UN has acknowledged that while military efforts against Boko Haram have diminished elements of its operations, the group has changed its tactics and is increasingly focusing on civilians.[37]

This trend suggests that Boko Haram's reduced capacity to target security forces creates a need for the group to consolidate its status by concentrating on attacks in the public space. It also points to the challenges of countering terrorist violence. The 121 extremist groups captured by the GEM fall under a broad umbrella of Islamist extremist ideology. This ideology varies across a spectrum: different groups employ different tactics, justified by a variety of interpretations of Islamic law. Policy responses have to

be mindful of these ideological nuances to counter the violence.

ISIS-Khorasan

ISIS-Khorasan also employed a methodical violent campaign against public targets in Afghanistan, directing 60 per cent of its attacks at civilians. The group's violence in the country draws on a highly sectarian agenda that led to the killing of 238 people in 2017 in attacks on exclusively Shia Hazara sites.[38] While the group has been entrenched in Afghanistan's eastern provinces, 15 attacks killed 197 civilians in the state capital, Kabul, highlighting the group's attempts to instil fear in the people of Afghanistan and undermine local government efforts to rehabilitate the city.

Ansarul Islam and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi

Ansarul Islam's targeting of civilians accounted for half of the group's activity and 20 deaths in 2017. The majority of Ansarul Islam's assaults occurred in

47

northern Burkina Faso, where the group has taken advantage of a weak security apparatus and instability caused by conflict in neighbouring Mali. Ansarul Islam, which is linked to al-Qaeda-led jihadi alliance Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), is attempting to remove Western influence from the region as well as targeting local security forces.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in Pakistan focused over half of its activity on civilians in 2017, carrying out eight attacks that deliberately targeted civilians and killing 37 people. The group is motivated by a sectarian ideology that is manifested in violence against Shia Muslims in Pakistan.

Deadliest Groups

The scale of Islamist violence directed against the public in 2017 means it is necessary to look not only at those groups that focused the highest proportion of their violence on civilians but also at those that killed the most civilians overall. Exploring these violent Islamist organisations sheds light on the most prolific killers and illustrates the breadth and diversity of the problem. It is clear from the GEM analysis that those groups that most often target civilians, as above, are not typically the same groups that have the most devastating impact on civilian life globally.

ISIS in Iraq and Syria

ISIS in Iraq and Syria was the most devastating killer of civilians recorded by the GEM in 2017, using its brutality to intentionally kill more than 2,080 people in attacks specifically targeted at civilians. This violence was split roughly 3:1 between the two countries, with 1,553 deaths in Iraq and 492 in Syria. Eight of these deliberate civilian deaths were in incidents in Lebanon and Jordan.

Out of ISIS's total of 1,236 attacks in Iraq against a range of targets throughout 2017, the group launched an average of 35 attacks per month deliberately targeting civilians. In Syria, meanwhile, the group launched an average of seven attacks per month against civilians. Since 2014, ISIS in Iraq and Syria has conducted a vicious and calculated campaign against many of the people living in its so-called caliphate. The group's persistent use of cruelty and violence has been well documented and publicised.[39]

In Syria, ISIS focused its intentional targeting of the public on three provinces: Deir ez-Zor, Homs and Raqqa. This violence constituted just 5 per cent of ISIS activity in 2017, as the group prioritised engaging with military and other armed actors. However, ISIS did deliberately kill civilians in Syria who attempted to leave its territory. The group targeted refugees in six attacks, killing on average 36 civilians per assault, which is nearly ten times more than in its other attacks on civilians. ISIS ensured high casualty figures in Syria to instil fear in people and discourage them from fleeing.

In Iraq, ISIS also focused on intentionally killing those seeking sanctuary outside its crumbling so-called caliphate. ISIS killed at least 609 civilians in 2017 in attacks on soft targets in Mosul; 80 per cent of these victims were targeted while attempting to flee the city. At least half of these deaths occurred between May and August, coinciding with advances of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition and of the Iraqi army.

The characteristics of ISIS's campaign against the Iraqi public in 2017 indicated the changing nature of the conflict. Through its violence, ISIS sought to fortify control over its territory and publicise its ideological resolve. The scale of the attacks on escaping civilians ensured that ISIS remained a danger to the Iraqi people, undeterred by encroaching military forces. In September 2017, Iraqi authorities reported that more than 1 million people from northern Iraq had sought refuge due to the conflict.[40]

ISIS's activities against civilians in Iraq were not confined to the northern conflict zones. In Baghdad, attacks in public spaces occurred on average once every two days, making the city the world's deadliest capital for Islamist extremist attacks on civilians. ISIS engaged in a sustained assault on public life in the capital in a possible attempt to undermine reports that military forces were increasing control and weakening the group. The high incidence of attacks on Baghdad also reveals a coordinated tactic that was intended to divert state resources from Mosul, preserve the group's image and undermine the Iraqi government.

ISIS's violence against civilians in Iraq was comparable with Boko Haram's public-space attacks in West Africa. Each group killed over 1,000 civilians in more than 300 incidents over 2017. However, Boko Haram's incidents made up most of its overall

violence, whereas attacks on Iraqi civilians constituted less than half (34 per cent) of ISIS's overall violent activity, indicating that Boko Haram is proportionally more lethal towards civilians than ISIS. By contrast, Boko Haram directed only 20 per cent of its violence towards security targets, while over two-thirds of ISIS's activity in Iraq focused on the armed forces.

This unequal distribution of civilian-targeted operations suggests that ISIS was operating in Iraq on a different scale and with a different strength from Boko Haram. Despite being locked in a territorial battle with a coalition of military forces, ISIS was still capable of deliberately killing more civilians than any other single extremist group. Boko Haram, which lost its territorial strongholds in 2016 when the Nigerian army removed the group from the Sambisa Forest, continued an opportunistic campaign against soft targets.[41] This had devastating consequences on the public space and consumed the majority of the group's capacity.

Other Groups

In Somalia, al-Shabaab's attitude to soft targets was different from that of Boko Haram or ISIS. Al-Shabaab prioritised military or hard targets over civilian or soft targets, with just 19 per cent of its assaults intentionally targeting civilians in 2017. Al-Qaeda helps fund and train al-Shabaab and espouses a military-focused violent agenda, calling on its affiliates to limit their attacks on Muslim civilians. However, the group remained a deadly force in the public space, killing 940 people, making it one of the four highest contributors to civilian fatalities.

Similarly, although the Taliban in Afghanistan focused 91 per cent of its attacks on armed targets, the group also deliberately killed over 267 civilians, demonstrating the extent of its terror. Primarily, the group has been associated with nationalistic goals to govern Afghanistan, attempting to reinstate the strict sharia leadership it held until 2001.

ISIS in Sinai, one of the group's Egyptian branches, claims to be fighting security forces. Yet despite focusing most of its violence on the police and military, its soft-target attacks were in fact deadlier. The group killed 415 civilians in 33 deliberate assaults targeting civilians in 2017. ISIS in Sinai killed the most civilians per targeted attack, claiming on average 12 lives per

assault. While the group does not prioritise killing civilians, ISIS in Sinai was suspected of a large-scale sectarian attack in November that killed over 300 people, amplifying the number of fatalities per assault.

The GEM data gave insight into the varying priorities of Islamist extremist groups. Boko Haram, ISIS in Afghanistan and other groups have strategies that require the sustained, deliberate killing of civilians, as shown by GEM data. These groups are committed to targeting the public space for ideological and strategic purposes. Other groups are less resolved to making soft targets the cornerstone of their violence. Al-Shabaab and the Taliban, for example, focus on confronting security forces, but this does not stop them from killing scores of civilians when it suits their goals.

Controlling the Narrative

Beyond violence, extremist groups are strategic about the propaganda and messaging surrounding assaults on civilians. Militant groups have condemned attacks in the public space that were carried out by other groups. By exploiting and sympathising with public outrage, extremist groups attempt to position themselves as authoritative leaders in the Islamist landscape. Islamist militant groups are aware of the consequences of violence against civilians, including when attacks may hinder their goals and capacity to appeal to the public. Groups have become adept at tailoring their messaging and communication after an assault to control a narrative and promote their desired reputation.

After the deadly sectarian assault on a Sufi mosque in Egypt in November 2017, several extremist groups condemned the suspected ISIS in Sinai perpetrators. Jund al-Sham described the incident as "a great sin and transgression to violate the sanctities of Muslims", and Ansar al-Islam vowed to take revenge on the "transgressors who spilled the blood of the worshipers in a house of Allah".[42]

ISIS in Sinai, which was believed to have carried out the attack, did not claim responsibility. Other groups also avoided claiming assaults that killed many civilians. Al-Shabaab did not take responsibility for an October assault it was suspected to have conducted in Mogadishu, killing 587 people. The bombing targeted a government building but exploded near a fuel

tanker, causing massive destruction. Al-Shabaab was unlikely to have anticipated the scale of the attack and subsequent swell of public anger.

Similarly, reports blamed the Taliban for killing 35 civilians in July during an attack on a hospital in Afghanistan's Ghor district. The Afghan group denied that the assault had targeted patients, claiming it engaged in crossfire with the military.[43]

Conversely, ISIS quickly claimed responsibility for an attack in the US city of Las Vegas that killed 58 people in October. The group called the perpetrator a "soldier of the caliphate" who had answered calls to "target the states of the Crusader alliance".[44] Further investigation did not establish an explicit link between the assailant and the Islamist extremist group. ISIS opportunistically took responsibility for the deadly assault against civilians to bolster its propaganda and apparent capabilities.

PROMINENT VICTIMS

The GEM has analysed demographic information relating to the victims of Islamist violence in 2017. This analysis reveals notable trends about the targeting of Sunni Muslims, the salience of sectarianism and the prominence of violence against Christians.

Sunni Muslims as Primary Victims

The clear majority of attacks perpetrated by violent Islamist extremist groups in 2017 deliberately targeted Sunni Muslim civilians. Nearly two-thirds of all attacks in the public space occurred in states with Sunni Muslim majorities, according to the GEM (see figure 3.2). Attacks in countries where Islam, Christianity or Hinduism is not the majority religion accounted for less than 1 per cent of the total. Extremist organisations that adhere to a warped interpretation of Sunni Islam consistently targeted and killed Sunni Muslims within their reach, despite Islamic scripture prohibiting Muslims from killing other Muslims.

While it is not possible to verify the religion—or irreligion—of each civilian targeted, the GEM has deduced prominent demographic trends from the incidents tracked. Due to the scale of the violence in Sunni-majority states, the monitor was able to ascertain the likely religious affiliations of the victims in these states. Recognising the demographic make-up of the primary victims of Islamist extremist groups helps ensure that counter-narratives robustly and effectively challenge these groups' claims.

Extremist groups have long justified and encouraged the killing of non-Sunni Muslims, whom they see as infidels, drawing on sectarian divides and conflict stretching back hundreds of years. However, the fact that Sunni Muslims were the principal victims of violent Islamist groups shows that the deliberate killing of Muslims goes beyond sectarian attacks.

Violent extremist organisations have claimed that the collateral killing of Sunni Muslims is acceptable because such victims will be welcomed into heaven as martyrs. Yet, these groups also use a perverse ideology to condone the direct, deliberate killing of Sunni Muslims. The perpetrators of this violence have manipulated the disputed Islamic concept of takfir, which refers to the act of one Muslim declaring another to be a non-believer, to legitimise murder. Islamist extremist groups exploit their misunderstanding of the term to justify violence

FIG. 3.2 Religious Majorities of Countries Affected by Attacks Against Civilians, 2017

● Sunni Islam   ● Shia Islam   ● Christianity   ● Hinduism

61%   28%   10%   1%

PERCENTAGE OF ATTACKS
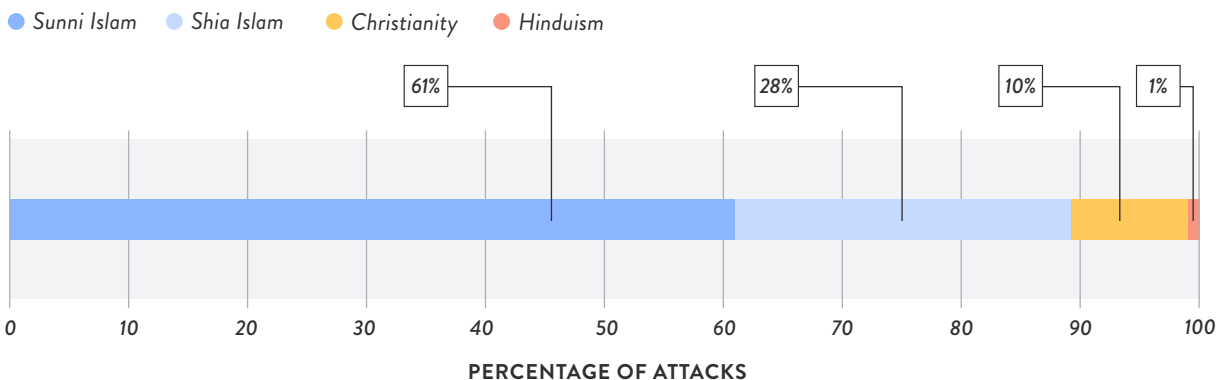
against Muslims deemed apostates. It is because of this perversion of Islamic theology that Sunni Muslims disproportionately bore the brunt of Islamist extremist violence in 2017.

Sectarian Violence

Sectarian violence killed scores of civilians in 2017 across the world. Extremist groups exploited and exacerbated historical and doctrinal divides to undermine efforts at social cohesion in otherwise pluralistic and diverse societies.

Islamist extremist groups directly targeted minority religious sects in six countries in 2017, killing 1,161 civilians. Nine groups perpetrated sectarian attacks against civilians; the biggest contributors were ISIS in Iraq and Syria, ISIS-Khorasan, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami and Jamaat ul-Ahrar. Attacks against minority sects are not carried out exclusively by militant organisations, but these groups proved their ability to deliver sectarian campaigns. The scale and spread of these groups demonstrates the devastating effects of a destructive ideology that exploits historical splits within and between Muslim communities.

Ninety-five per cent of sectarian violence in 2017 focused on Shia Muslims. The GEM also monitored five communities targeted by Islamist extremist groups: Ahmadis, Alawites, Hazaras, Ibadis and Sufis. The countries most affected by sectarian-inspired assaults were Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. But sectarian violence was not confined to these countries, and the most deadly incident occurred in Egypt in November, when 40 suspected ISIS gunmen killed 311 people at a Sufi mosque.

Sectarian attacks in 2017 killed an average of 15 civilians per incident. Nearly 30 per cent were suicide attacks, indicating an intention to kill larger numbers of civilians in crowds and gatherings. Violent Islamist extremist groups design sectarian violence not only to terrify minority communities but also to eradicate them.

Pakistan

Pakistan experienced intense and diverse sectarian violence in 2017. Reflecting the multifaceted nature

of sectarianism in the country, numerous Islamic sects were targeted. The GEM found that 247 civilians were killed in sectarian violence perpetrated by four distinct groups. Attacks on minority sects have historically plagued the region, and perpetrators have not been confined to terrorist militant organisations. Extremist groups have orchestrated deliberate, sustained campaigns in a society entrenched in an ongoing violent sectarian context.

The Shia community was the most frequently targeted Islamic sect in Pakistan in 2017. Anti-Shia violence killed 136 people during the year. Jamaat ul-Ahrar, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the Pakistani Taliban all launched attacks on Shia Muslims, who account for 15–20 per cent of Pakistan's Muslim population.[45] These extremist groups justify the killing of Shia civilians by classifying them as apostates. A member of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi stated that the group intended to "get rid of Shias" in Pakistan.[46]

In Balochistan province, violent Islamist extremist groups targeted and killed Hazaras, an ethnic group that mostly follows the Shia branch of Islam. This minority community has suffered the violent manifestation of an ideology that drives and feeds off local sectarian divides. In 2017, suspected Islamist militants killed seven Hazara civilians and injured eight more in three separate attacks. In an open letter to the Hazara people, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi said that "all Shias are worthy of killing, and the intention is to make Pakistan their graveyard".[47]

Ahmadi civilians were also targeted in brutal sectarian violence in 2017. In the Punjab region of Pakistan, Islamist militant groups assassinated three Ahmadi professionals. In March, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi said it killed an Ahmadi lawyer for "spreading Ahmadi beliefs in the region".[48] Ahmadis have long been oppressed globally due to beliefs that contradict mainstream Islamic sects and because extremist groups in Pakistan exploit and inflame anti-Ahmadi attitudes in the country.[49]

The GEM also recorded ISIS-Khorasan activity in Pakistan. The group focused its sectarian violence in Pakistan on attacking Sufi sites. In February 2017, ISIS-Khorasan killed 90 people in a suicide attack on a Sufi shrine in Quetta. Although Sufism is not a distinct sect, ISIS views this Islamic strain as idolatrous

because of its interpretation of Islamic scripture and the addition of rituals rooted in mysticism. The group therefore seeks to suppress and eradicate support for Sufism through intimidation.

ISIS-Khorasan has previously formed allegiances in Pakistan with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami, and the two have conducted joint attacks on Sufi communities. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami has confirmed its joint efforts with ISIS, saying in 2016, "Wherever there are attacks taking place [in Pakistan] Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami is cooperating with [ISIS] either directly or indirectly."[50] Such an environment creates the potential for cross-fertilisation between highly sectarian groups and factions, with the possibility of increased violence.

Afghanistan

ISIS-Khorasan's sectarian violence has not occurred only in Pakistan. The group's Afghan branch killed 238 civilians in sectarian-fuelled assaults. The GEM found that 26 per cent of its attacks against public targets in Afghanistan in 2017 were sectarian, exclusively targeting Shia Muslims and Hazara communities.

ISIS-Khorasan was involved in all of Afghanistan's sectarian violence in 2017, although in a rare case in August, alleged Taliban and local ISIS fighters killed at least 55 people from a Hazara-majority Shia village in Sar-e Pol province.[51] This was the only sectarian attack linked to the Taliban in 2017, although the group denied involvement in the assault. This incident took place over three days and included brutal violence and hostage taking. The prolonged nature of the assault was an atypical example of sectarian violence in Afghanistan, and the apparent alliance between the two groups was an anomaly.

Iraq

ISIS's sectarian agenda can be traced back to its origins in Iraq. The group has exploited entrenched tensions in Iraq between Sunni and Shia communities to inflame unrest and social tensions. Over 71 per cent of ISIS's sectarian assaults occurred in Baghdad, the Shia-majority capital city. Other ISIS attacks may also have been sectarian in nature, as much extremist activity in Iraq occurs in a context laced with underlying sectarianism, which ISIS may not always articulate or choose to emphasise.

Persecution of Christians

The GEM shows that violent Islamist extremist groups focused their persecution of non-Islamic faiths on Christian communities in 2017, killing 134 people in direct attacks. These assaults took place in four countries and were perpetrated by five violent Islamist extremist groups. Persecution of Christians ranged from large-scale and coordinated assaults that killed up to 30 people in one incident to calculated assassinations. Over half of the fatalities occurred at Christian places of worship.

This violence was not unique to 2017. These groups have long victimised non-Muslims. ISIS has employed extreme brutality towards religious minorities since it declared a caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014. Nor is this phenomenon confined to a single region. In West Africa, Boko Haram has declared war against local Christians, promising to attack "every church" and kill all "citizens of the cross".[52] Violent Islamist extremist groups demand that all people subscribe to their warped doctrine, and those who resist or adhere to other beliefs are actively persecuted.

Egypt's Coptic Christian minority bore the brunt of Islamist extremist persecution of Christians in 2017. ISIS's operations across Egypt, including its Sinai insurgency, intentionally killed 97 Copts in 18 attacks. This violence was concentrated in the restive Sinai Peninsula, where ISIS in Sinai has taken root. Attacks against Coptic Christians comprised 53 per cent of the group's public activity, including 11 assassinations. The deadliest incident occurred in April, when two suicide bombers coordinated attacks on Palm Sunday celebrations, killing 47 people. ISIS carried out a number of multi-casualty assaults against Copts, killing a total of 69 people in only three incidents, including April's bloodshed.

ISIS has declared that Coptic Christians are apostates who must be eliminated from Egypt. The group outlined its hatred in a video in February 2017, describing Copts as its "favourite prey" and vowing to "kill every infidel" and "liberate Cairo". In the footage, the group threatened to wipe out all "worshippers of the cross", specifically referring to the Coptic pope and wealthy Copts.[53] Hundreds of Copts reportedly left Sinai in response to increased violence and fear in February, coinciding with ISIS's threats.[54] Overall, the Middle East's Christian population is in decline.

Christians make up some 4 per cent of the region's population today, compared with 20 per cent before the First World War.[55]

ISIS's anti-Coptic campaign has inflamed existing tensions between Egypt's Islamic and Christian communities. ISIS's brutality against Copts threatens cohesion and peace in Sinai and beyond. It was the only group to target Coptic Christians in the Sinai in 2017, according to the GEM.

Al-Shabaab also pursued a violent campaign against Christians. The group directed its religious persecution outside its stronghold of Somalia, focusing this violence on northern Kenya. Two-thirds of the assaults took place in Kenya's Lamu county. Al-Shabaab used the impact of violence to traumatise the Kenyan population, which is predominantly Christian. The group killed 19 people in deliberate assaults on Christians. On average, three people were killed per attack.

Syria's largest Christian city, Muhradah, was frequently targeted by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham throughout 2017, and at least nine people were killed in deliberate shelling. A Christian church was also targeted by rebels in the Syrian province of Daraa during a morning service. In Pakistan, two ISIS suicide bombers killed ten people in an attack on a Christian church in December.

BREAKDOWN OF PUBLIC TARGETS

Beyond the general population, there are specific targets in the public space that fall victim to Islamist extremist groups. Dissecting and exploring the nature of these attacks offers a deeper insight into why extremist groups designate targets such as media organisations, schools and governments.

Such an understanding shows the significant effect violence has on these sectors and allows for a greater focus on protecting the public space. The targeting of particular sectors of society has detrimental effects on the public beyond the killing of individuals. It erodes public confidence and fosters fear among populations. The GEM analysis has revealed common targets and identified similarities in the strategic and ideological purpose behind the focus on the public space. At the same time, the incidents recorded in each country and carried out by each group are highly context specific.

Media Organisations

Four extremist groups targeted journalists and media organisations in four countries in 2017—Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen—leading to the killing of 55 people (see figure 3.3). These countries are plagued by long-standing insurgencies that continue to attract media coverage.

The GEM recorded four assassination attempts on journalists in 2017, most in Pakistan. Two attacks on media organisations were coordinated assaults, with numerous perpetrators employing guns and suicide vests.

Extremist groups portray the media industry as representing secular and Western values, such as freedom of speech and human rights. The industry is seen as antagonistic to the binary and absolute worldviews of Islamist extremist teachings.

The discourse provided by media outlets can offer competing narratives to extremist groups. The Taliban has accused Afghanistan's media of attempting to

FIG. 3.3 Violent Islamist Extremist Groups Responsible for Attacks Against Media Organisations, 2017
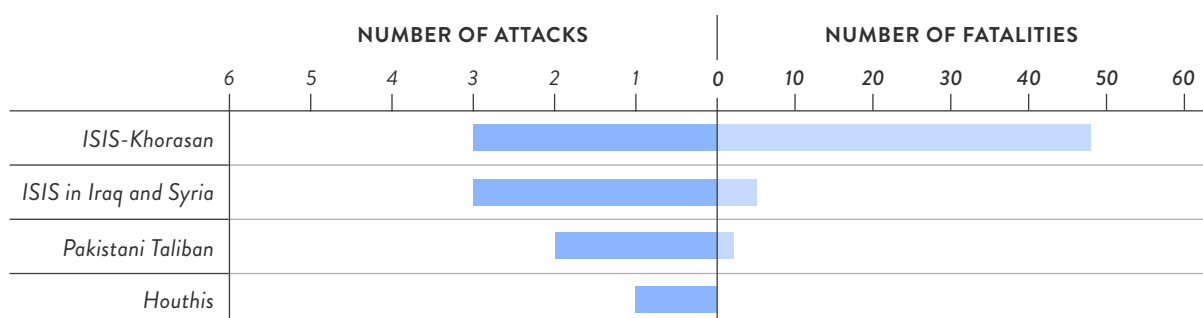
"inject the minds of youth" with ideas that run counter to its violent ideology.[56] By attacking journalists, Islamist extremist groups can also prevent an independent, robust media from reporting the realities of conflict and extremism.

ISIS is undermining efforts to inform citizens in countries where it is active. Free and independent media are vital for the populations of regions suffering from conflict and extremism. ISIS's violence aims to disrupt this process and further destabilise security.

CASE STUDY

ISIS Targets Afghan Media

In 2017, ISIS in Afghanistan targeted the media and journalists on three occasions, killing at least 48 civilians.

In May, ISIS used armed suicide bombers to attack Radio Television Afghanistan in Nangarhar, killing at least six people and wounding 17. In November, ISIS militants disguised as police officers attacked Shamshad TV station in Kabul. The assault, which also involved suicide bombers and gunmen, killed one staff member and wounded 20. The station responded to the assault by calling it an attack on the "freedom of media" and vowing the group would not "silence" it.[57] Also in the capital, 41 people were killed in December when ISIS suicide militants targeted a Shia cultural centre and news agency. The group said the outlet was attacked because it was spreading Shia beliefs.

Educational Institutions

Islamist extremist groups launched 46 attacks on educational institutions in 2017 (see figure 3.4). ISIS in Iraq and Syria and Boko Haram carried out most of this violence. Thirty-nine people were killed in these attacks, which occurred in ten countries: Nigeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Afghanistan, Egypt, Kenya and Niger. Seventy-four per cent of these assaults were concentrated in areas of existing violent insurgencies, where extremist groups were highly active. The targets of this violence included teachers, schools, colleges and universities.

Most assaults on educational sites involved suicide bombers. Eighty-six per cent of attacks on universities used this tactic. The GEM recorded the killings of five teachers in 2017. There were also six arson attacks on educational institutions.

Many of the extremist groups the GEM monitored hold an ideological opposition to mainstream, state-

FIG. 3.4 Violent Islamist Extremist Groups Responsible for Attacks Against Educational Institutions, 2017
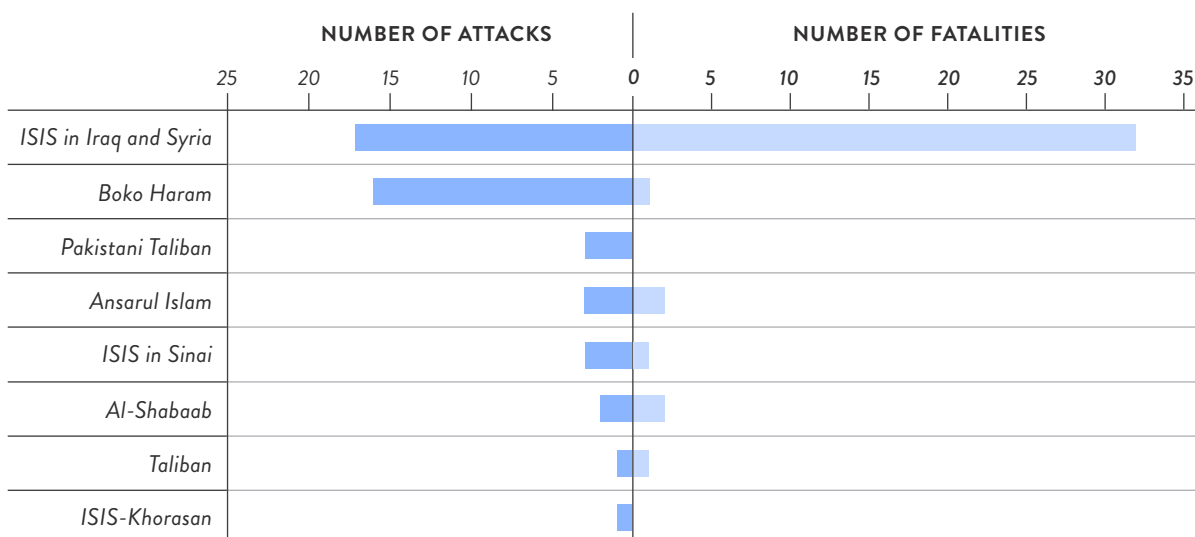
led education. These groups conflated schools and universities with Western, secular values and culture. The ideology of Islamist extremist groups concludes that secular education produces, and is taught by, apostates who should be stopped. The systematic targeting of these institutions narrows the space for open-mindedness, reiterating a destructive and binary worldview.

Violent Islamist extremists intend their ideology to fill the vacuum after school systems break down. Groups such as ISIS have indoctrinated children in their territory with their own violent and perverse ideological syllabus. ISIS aims to brainwash and train its youth, whom it dubs "cubs of the caliphate", in tailored educational programmes.[58] Groups can see a value in both destroying normal education and instilling their own beliefs.

Islamist militants view education systems as part of the state that their insurgency is fighting to overturn. Following attacks against academic institutions, the Pakistani Taliban has warned that it views government schools as producing military personnel who go on to kill the Taliban and its followers. The group has identified schools and learning as a strategic threat that is part of the state it hopes to dismantle.

CASE STUDY

Extremism Impedes Education in West Africa

Islamist extremist groups in West Africa sought to undermine educational institutions in 2017. Espousing a binary ideology that despises secular teaching, these groups have exploited countries in a region that has the world's highest rates of educational exclusion.[59]

In Burkina Faso, Ansarul Islam was responsible for three major attacks on schools during the year. All these attacks occurred in the north of the country, which neighbours war-torn Mali.

In March, Ansarul Islam warned teachers in the Kongoussi area to abandon their syllabus, exclusively teach the Quran and speak in Arabic. The same day, the group assassinated a headteacher in Djibo. Ansarul Islam also burned down a primary school in October. This violence led to Burkina Faso closing hundreds of education facilities in the northern provinces of Soum and Oudalan.

Boko Haram, whose name roughly translates as "Western education is forbidden", has been systematically targeting educational institutions since 2008. The group carried out three attacks against schools and 12 against university sites in 2017. Seventy-five per cent of these incidents occurred in northeastern Nigeria, where the group's insurgency originated, and the remaining 25 per cent in Cameroon and Niger. In 2017, the UN said that 3 million children required emergency educational support due to Boko Haram's violence.[60]

Boko Haram's ideological stance on education led to at least seven attacks against Borno state's University of Maiduguri in 2017. In August, university staff reportedly resigned in response to the violent assaults.[61]

Boko Haram's insurgency risks exacerbating a regional education deficit, furthering economic frustration and susceptibility to radicalisation. This dynamic illustrates a wider strategy employed by violent Islamist extremist groups in West Africa. By explicitly attempting to dismantle educational establishments in unstable areas, Salafi-jihadi groups are creating dangerous environments in which their ideology can flourish.

The targeting of educational institutions is not unique to groups operating in West Africa. In Afghanistan, the Taliban launched a concerted campaign against secular education, which continues to be one of the group's main targets. Attacks on non-religious schools and students who attend them are a demonstration of an ideology that is threatened by secular values.

FIG. 3.5 Violent Islamist Extremist Groups Responsible for Attacks Against Professionals and Labourers, 2017

	NUMBER OF ATTACKS	NUMBER OF FATALITIES
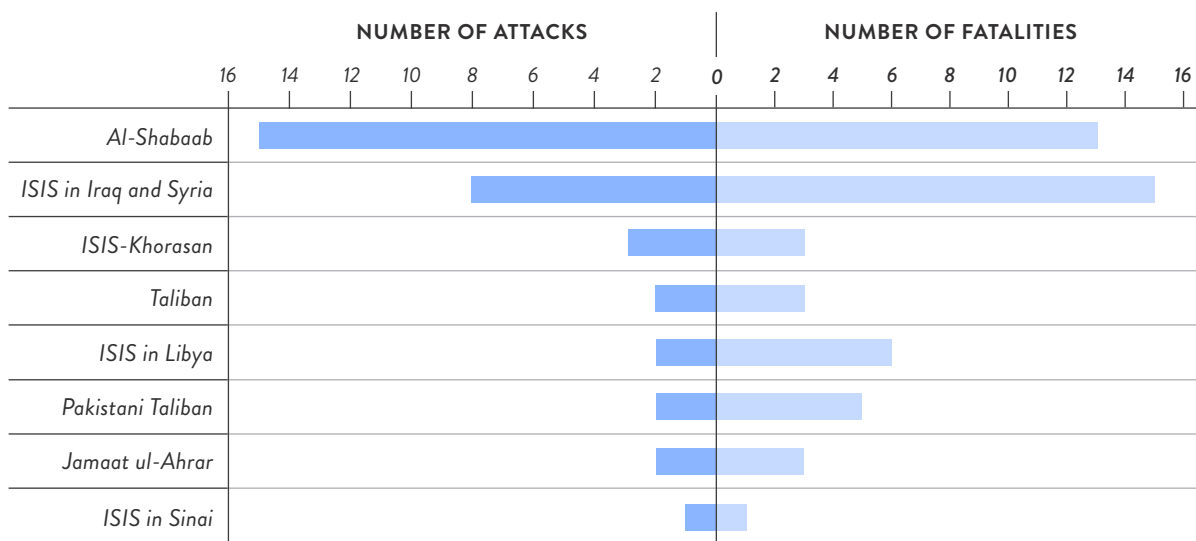
Professions and Manual Labour

Nine violent Islamist extremist groups deliberately targeted professionals and labourers in 2017, killing 49 people in 35 attacks (see figure 3.5). This violence occurred in seven countries. The types of professionals attacked included bank workers, judges, doctors, business people and lawyers. Labourers comprise various infrastructure workers, including people who work for gas and water companies, farmers, traders and telecommunication workers. Nearly half of those targeted were subject to assassination attempts. At least 43 per cent of all attacks against these targets involved gunfire. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) accounted for 20 per cent of these incidents.

Legal systems are an integral component of secular society and have been targeted by Islamist extremist groups, which see lawyers and judges of secular law as defenders of concepts such as human rights and democracy. Jamaat ul-Ahrar has attacked lawyers in Quetta, threatening violence "until the imposition of an Islamic system in Pakistan".[62] In Nigeria, Boko Haram's disputed leader said the group does "not believe in the Nigerian judicial system" and pledged to "fight anyone who assists the government in perpetrating illegalities". The corrosive ideology of Islamist extremist organisations justifies and encourages killing civilians who work for secular legal systems.

These groups also intentionally target industries that support, aid or provide financial gains to the government. Islamist militants use violence against national infrastructure workers to undermine state functionality and further economic objectives. Insurgent groups use such tactics to weaken the state that they are attempting to overthrow and to deter citizens from working in affected sectors.

Systematically targeting individuals who participate in trade and agriculture similarly produces tactical gains for extremist groups. These workers are valuable to the government and ensure the vitality of a country's economic structure. Three of ISIS in Iraq and Syria's attacks on professionals and labourers, which killed 15 people in total in 2017, targeted those working on oil and gas fields and power plants. In February, a senior official at a state-owned gas company was assassinated in a bombing, and in September militants used three suicide bombers to target a power plant north of Baghdad. In the same month, two alcohol traders were assassinated within a week in September in attacks using IEDs. A third of these incidents in Iraq were assassination attempts.

Undeterred, attacks on professionals and labourers can destroy a society's economic potential and discourage prosperity and investment. In turn, this degradation can remove opportunities and potential for citizens, increasing a community's mistrust of the state and susceptibility to radicalisation.

FIG. 3.6 Violent Islamist Extremist Groups Responsible for Attacks Against Governments, 2017

	NUMBER OF ATTACKS		NUMBER OF FATALITIES
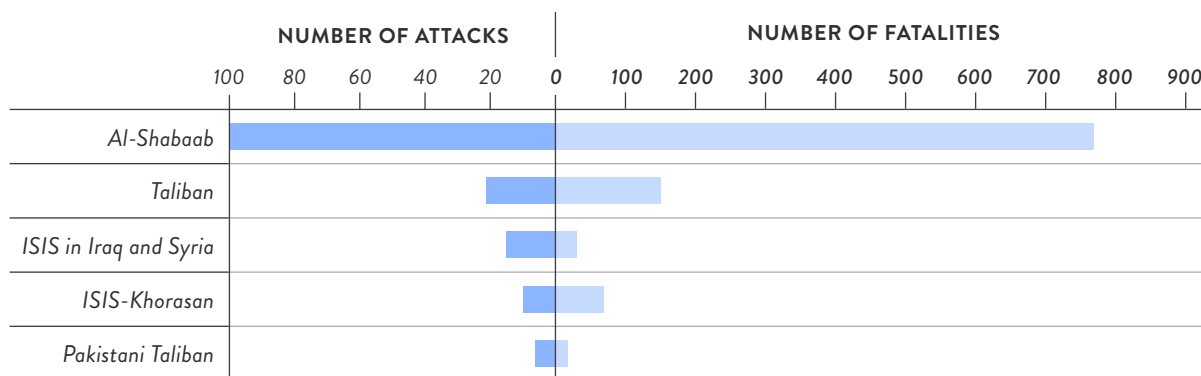
Governments

As part of its efforts to clarify and disaggregate the activities and motivations of violent Islamist extremists, the GEM has categorised government targets as separate entities that require distinct analysis. Governments could be considered hard targets, as they are often militarised and protected by armed forces. However, Islamist extremist organisations reason that attacking government figures can fulfil wider strategic aims. While in some settings the army and state are indistinguishable, the GEM's data collection has separated the two authorities to reflect distinctions in militant groups' violent behaviour. For this reason, the GEM analysis has included government targets as part of the public space.

These targets, which include politicians, mayors, tax collectors, electoral candidates and civil servants as well as government buildings, made up 10 per cent of Islamist extremist attacks on the public space in 2017. The GEM recorded that 1,157 people were killed in these assaults (see figure 3.6). Twenty-three groups targeted government figures in 16 countries.

Additionally, violent Islamist extremist groups launched 44 attacks against local leaders in 2017. These victims included community and traditional leaders, tribal elders, and representatives who held positions of power and seniority in local societies. Although these are generally not official government roles, these figures connect the state and communities.

Most attacks on governments globally involved IEDs, while 11 per cent used car bombs. The GEM recorded 86 assassination attempts on government-related individuals, resulting in the deaths of 93 people.

A combination of strategic and ideological motivations explains why extremist groups target governments. Many of the groups the GEM monitored are insurgent forces looking to rival and gain power from a state they view as illegitimate. Extremist groups have the potential to undermine governments with these assaults, making them seem weak and incapable.

Boko Haram's disputed leader, Abubakar Shekau, has said that the group does not "believe in any system of government" and will "keep on fighting against democracy, capitalism [and] socialism".[63] Purist interpretations of Islam, including Salafism, regard popularly elected governments as unlawful. Such interpretations are based on the premise that God is sovereign. This doctrine does not accept that legislators can create laws, favouring interpretations of sharia law instead.

Islamist extremist groups see secular governance as Western and un-Islamic, condemning political figures as symbols of apostasy. Violent Islamist extremist groups also view governments as a source of competition and have attempted to rule countries and land themselves. ISIS seized territory and declared a caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2014, brutally imposing a violent ideology. The Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, administering its own version of governance and a harsh penal system.

Attacks on a state can deter people from taking up positions in government, undermining the state's legitimacy. This violence plays into the hands of extremist groups, as a strong government is essential

in countering extremism. Moreover, groups can exploit public frustration with the state in their recruitment.[64] Islamist extremists use grievances stemming from government corruption, growing social inequality and insecurity in their propaganda.

CASE STUDY

Al-Shabaab's Government-Focused Violence

Al-Shabaab displayed a concerted effort against the Somali and Kenyan governments in 2017. The group directed one-third of its attacks in the public space at government targets. Al-Shabaab killed 715 people in these assaults in both countries, which were mostly aimed at politicians. Thirty people were killed in attacks on local leaders, mainly in Somalia's Banaadir region. The country's capital, Mogadishu, is in this province. Gun attacks accounted for 34 per cent of the violence against government and local leaders, while IEDs comprised 10 per cent and suicide attacks 8 per cent.

Al-Shabaab made assassinations a consistent element of its antigovernment campaign in 2017. On average, the group carried out five assassination attempts a month, killing 46 people. The GEM's findings corroborate reports that al-Shabaab has designated "assassination squads".[65]

Al-Shabaab has voiced its motivation for targeting governments, describing state representatives as "disbelievers" and "enemies". It has warned against collaboration with governments, stating that "anybody who joins the line of non-Muslims is an apostate who can be killed".[66] The group views the Kenyan and Somali states as illegitimate and un-Islamic, favouring its own warped ideology and interpretation of sharia law.

Al-Shabaab's ideological stance has manifested itself in synchronised efforts to disrupt electoral processes in Somalia and Kenya. In February, Somali parliamentarians elected Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed as the country's president. In August, Kenya elected its president, members

of parliament and devolved government. During this six-month period of political sensitivity, the GEM recorded over 72 per cent of attacks on governments and local leaders. Despite these attempts, all the elections went ahead successfully.

It is essential that the targeting of governments does not undermine the rule of law and progress in this fragile region. Somalia has suffered due to political, economic and security weaknesses. According to the UN, the success of the February election provides "an opportunity for the country to embark on a new and more positive trajectory".[67] Civilians in Somalia and Kenya need the safety and stability of a functioning state that is robustly countering al-Shabaab's violence and ideology.
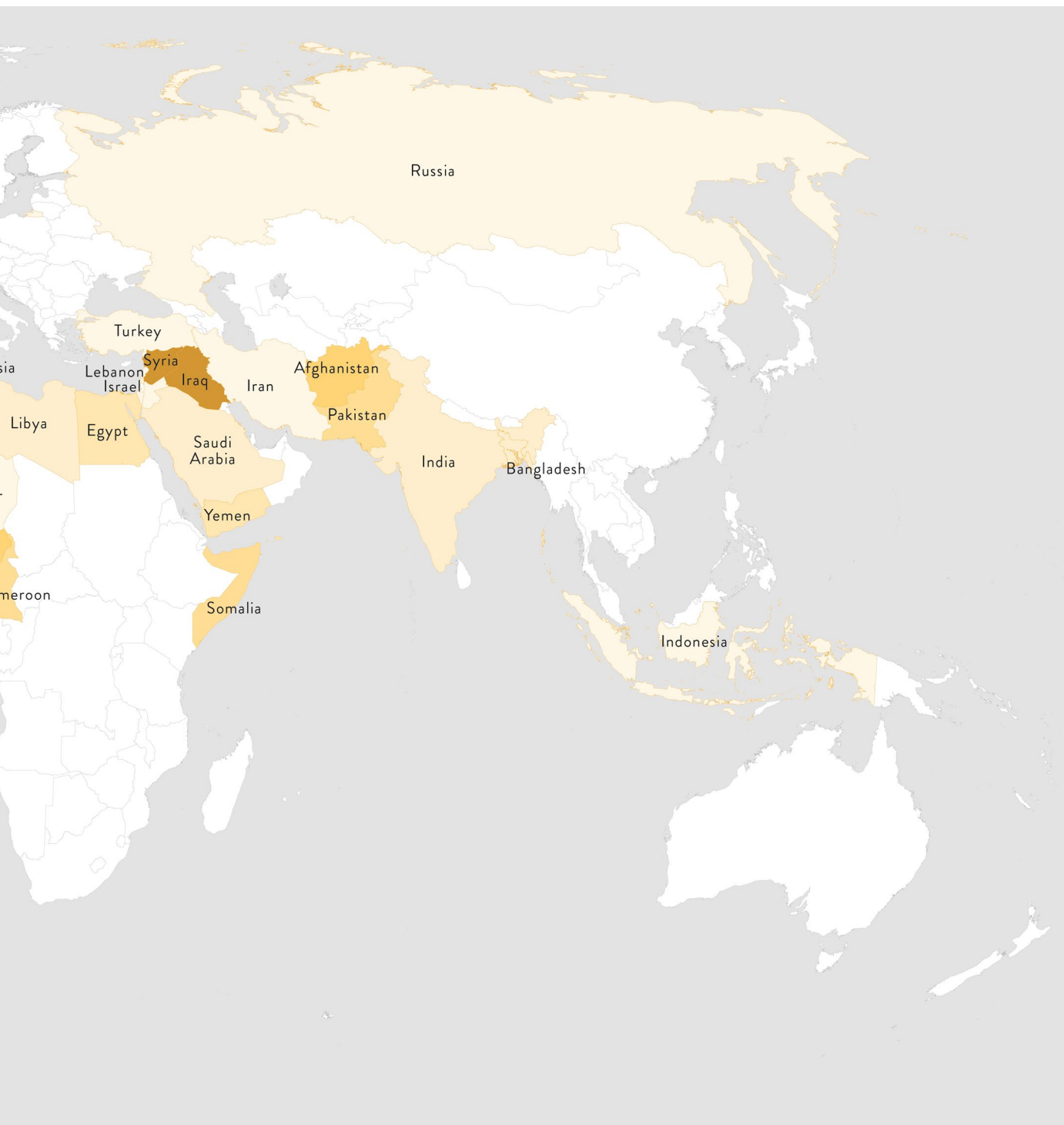

Suicide Bombings

The first modern suicide bombing, in Lebanon in 1981, ushered in a new era of terrorist violence. Since then, Islamist extremist groups have manipulated the concept of *istishhad*, or martyrdom, to build an ideological justification for waging violent jihad.[68] Extremists have perverted this concept, in which a person dies to testify his or her faith in God, to allow for horrific violence against targets including civilians. In 2017, the GEM documented at least 888 suicide attacks and attempted attacks by 1,643 bombers in 27 countries (see figure 4.1).

Extremist groups have crafted this ideological framework to resonate with and reward individuals fighting within groups and those seeking to join. Violent Salafi-jihadi groups have long declared that suicide bombers are heroic martyrs who will be honoured in life after death. ISIS has used its claim that it "loves death more than you love life" to establish itself as a group that can open the route to paradise for its militants.[69] Many violent Islamist extremist organisations exploit Quranic passages that present the afterlife. GEM data from 2017 also show two major groups using women—a matter of much debate among jihadis—to carry out suicide attacks that year.

The use of suicide missions was born out of a need to strike a balance between the resources available to violent Islamists and their stated objectives. The contexts in which these violent Islamists operate, and the capabilities afforded to them, have resulted in groups opting to weaponise their own militants. Suicide attacks are a low-cost, high-impact tool that allows terrorists to kill large numbers of their designated enemies while taking advantage of complex, often urban, terrain. This tactic has transformed and gridlocked conflicts in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, creating formidable violent forces that continue to use human bombs to terrorise.

FIG. 4.1 Map of Suicide Bombings and Attempted Suicide Bombings Worldwide, 2017

SUICIDE BOMBINGS
AND ATTEMPTED
SUICIDE BOMBINGS

	0
	1-2
	3-10
	11-30
	31-100
	101-200
	201-243

Country		Number of Suicide Bombings				
1	Iraq	243	8	Yemen	14
2	Syria	209	9	Egypt	13
3	Nigeria	127	10=	Bangladesh	8
4	Afghanistan	107	10=	India	8
5	Cameroon	62	12	Libya	7
6	Somalia	34	13	Saudi Arabia	4
7	Pakistan	32	14=	Algeria	2

14=	Iran	2
14=	Jordan	2
14=	Lebanon	2
14=	Mali	2
14=	Russia	2
20=	Belgium	1
20=	Indonesia	1

20=	Israel	1
20=	Niger	1
20=	Tunisia	1
20=	Turkey	1
20=	United Kingdom	1
20=	United States	1

USE OF SUICIDE ATTACKS BY GROUP

The GEM recorded 37 violent extremist groups that used suicide bombers to conduct attacks in 2017. The GEM found that 69 per cent of suicide assaults occurred in country-wide conflict zones, emphasising how violent extremists have exploited the tactic in large-scale offensives. The groups discussed here are the most prolific users of suicide bombers. The GEM analysed a sample in which each group launched at least 30 attacks in the year and dedicated 25 per cent or more of its violence to suicide missions. These parameters allow for a revealing analysis of one of the most feared tactics in violent Islamist extremism.

Boko Haram

Suicide bombings were an integral part of Boko Haram's violent campaign in 2017. The GEM found that the group conducted 189 suicide assaults in the year, dedicating 43 per cent of its attacks to these missions. Boko Haram's expansionist objectives meant that it deployed suicide bombers in three countries: Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. The GEM monitored Boko Haram's consistent use of suicide bombings to uncover the reality of a group that has weaponised martyrdom.

Boko Haram's suicide assaults killed 449 people in 2017. On average, the group conducted 16 suicide attacks each month and killed two people per incident. Eighty-one suicide bombers were unsuccessful in their missions, because they either detonated prematurely or were killed or arrested by security forces before they could carry out their attack.

Boko Haram's suicide strategy is characterised by frequent but crude attacks, with varied effects. This strategy aims to undermine key components of the public space in Nigeria and surrounding countries, reflected in the group's violence against civilians. Suicide bombing allows a group's members to disguise themselves among the public, causing maximum violence and spreading terror.

Eighty-three per cent of Boko Haram's assaults in 2017 were directed at civilians and soft targets (see figure 4.2). Eight of Boko Haram's suicide attacks were directed at marketplaces. Throughout 2017, Boko Haram directed ten suicide assaults at mosques

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FIG. 4.2 Scenes of Synchronised Boko Haram Suicide Bombings, 2017

Boko Haram regularly attacked soft targets throughout 2017.

Four incidents involved suicide attackers cooperating with multiple gunmen.
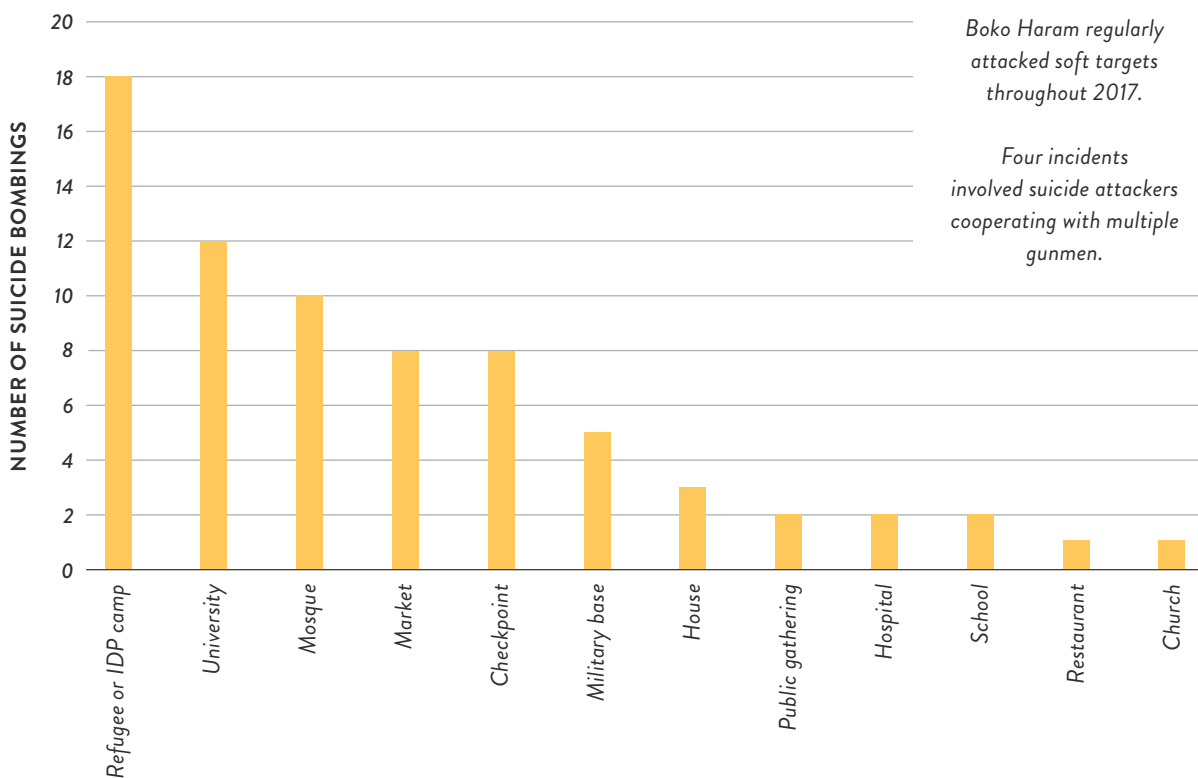
and 15 at camps for refugees and internally displaced people in Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger. Boko Haram's suicide bombers also consistently targeted educational institutions in 2017, reflecting the group's ideological opposition to secular education. Seventeen suicide assailants directed attacks at the University of Maiduguri in Borno state.

The frequency of suicide attacks is a sign of Boko Haram's desire to consolidate amid claims by Nigeria's army that it had defeated the group. In addition, the group's front-line losses in battles with the military have been a factor in the sustained use of suicide bombings.

ISIS-Khorasan

ISIS-Khorasan, which is active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has used suicide bombings to target its enemies with lethal consequences. The group launched 33 suicide attacks to kill 504 people in 2017, including 480 civilians. Forty-two per cent of ISIS-Khorasan's attacks in both countries were composed of suicide assaults, killing on average 15 people per suicide mission. Eighty-five per cent of ISIS-Khorasan's

suicide bombings occurred in Afghanistan, where the group is predominantly based.

ISIS-Khorasan's sectarian ideology was manifested in ten suicide attacks on Shia and Sufi civilians. Five of the assaults in Afghanistan targeted worshippers at Shia mosques. In August 2017, a suicide bomber attacked a Shia mosque in Kabul and gunmen stormed the building, firing at civilians. The assault killed 40 people. Across the border in Pakistan, the group killed 130 people in suicide attacks against Sufi Muslims. At least 90 civilians were killed in February after an ISIS suicide bomber attacked a Sufi shrine in Sindh province. In October, the group killed 20 people when a suicide assailant struck Sufi worshippers in Balochistan.

The group also carried out six suicide attacks on government targets in Afghanistan, including courthouses, embassies and officials' residences (see figure 4.3). In October, a suicide bomber attacked a diplomatic area in Kabul, killing eight people. A suicide assault on a political rally in November killed 11. The group's use of suicide bombings against government officials and political buildings is symptomatic of its

FIG. 4.3 Scenes of Synchronised ISIS-Khorasan Suicide Bombings, 2017

ISIS-Khorasan's suicide attacks were synchronised when non-Sunni religious gatherings were taking place.

ISIS-Khorasan diversified its suicide-attack tactics, with 23 attacks involving suicide vests only, eight attacks involving suicide bombers accompanied by multiple gunmen and two attacks involving suicide car bombs.

NUMBER OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS

Mosque — 7
Public gathering — 3
Government building — 2
Shrine — 2
Courthouse — 1
Checkpoint — 1
Hospital — 1
Convoy — 1
TV studio — 1
Embassy — 1
Stadium — 1
TV station — 1
Church — 1
Official residence — 1

desire to undermine the democratic Afghan state and an opportunity to position itself as one of the country's leading violent Islamist groups.

ISIS in Iraq and Syria

ISIS used suicide bombings to wage high levels of violence in Iraq and Syria. The GEM recorded 411 ISIS suicide attacks in the two conflict-ridden countries (see figure 4.4). This violence killed 2,299 people, including 876 civilians and 939 members of the security forces. It is important to acknowledge similarities and disparities between the two countries and to explore and compare their local dynamics, to avoid misinterpreting the group's violence in the two countries as equal and homogeneous.

The GEM found that 93 per cent of ISIS's suicide attacks in Syria were aimed at security forces, nonstate actors and other extremists. In Iraq, 76 per cent of the group's suicide bombings were either attacks on security targets or incidents of group infighting. Despite this focus, scores of civilians were killed in both countries as a result of the actions of a group that has

made martyrdom a defining component of its violence.

Iraq

ISIS launched 243 suicide attacks in Iraq in 2017, killing 771 people. On average, 20 suicide attacks took place in the country each month. Over 74 per cent of the suicide assaults occurred in the first half of the year, mirroring increasing security operations to remove the group from northern Iraq (see figure 4.5).

Thirty-seven per cent of ISIS's suicide bombers in Iraq carried out their missions in Nineveh, the province in which ISIS's former stronghold of Mosul is located. ISIS's suicide-bombing tactic in Mosul concentrated on sending numerous assailants in waves to target oncoming armed forces. On average, ISIS deployed three suicide bombers per attack in Nineveh. In March, police forces repelled ten approaching ISIS suicide bombers in the Dawasa area of Mosul. ISIS sent five suicide bombers to attack Popular Mobilisation Forces in the city in October, killing four. As ISIS came under increasing military pressure and its territorial grip was loosened, the group used suicide bombings

FIG. 4.4 Scenes of Synchronised ISIS in Iraq and Syria Suicide Bombings, 2017

Security measures regularly targeted suicide assaults. ISIS frequently deployed assailants on suicide missions against soft targets in both Syria and Iraq.
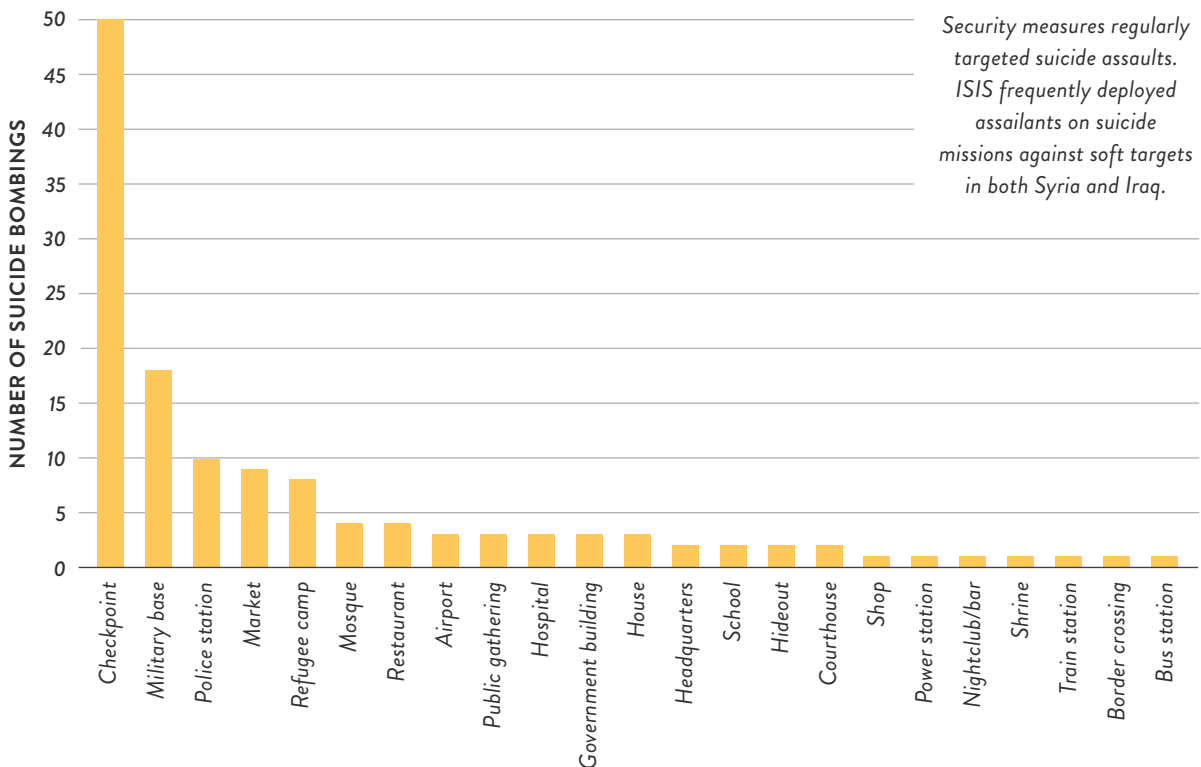
in an increasing and defensive manner. This strategic development indicates that the group became more desperate and its resources more depleted as it was forced to use its militants as weapons.

In contrast, the GEM recorded an average of one ISIS bomber per suicide attack in Baghdad. Despite lower numbers of assailants in the capital, the group killed 152 civilians there. Baghdad, the deadliest capital city in the world for violent Islamist extremism according to them GEM, was attacked by 39 ISIS suicide bombers in 2017. In total, only 7 per cent of the ISIS terrorist attacks to hit Baghdad were suicide assaults. However, these suicide missions were characteristically lethal, accounting for more than one-third of all deaths from ISIS's violence in Baghdad.

Twenty-five per cent of the suicide attacks in Baghdad recorded by the GEM were sectarian in nature. ISIS's suicide assaults are a manifestation of its ideological opposition to Shia Muslims living in Iraq and beyond. In January, ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide car bomb that killed 34 people, saying it had aimed to kill a "gathering of Shia Muslims".[70] During

Ramadan, the group directed two suicide car bombs at popular areas in central Baghdad, leading to the deaths of 30 people. Baghdad's demographic make-up is predominantly Shia, suggesting many of the suicide assaults in the city may have been motivated by sectarian hatred.

Syria

ISIS launched 164 suicide attacks involving 324 assailants across Syria in 2017. The group's territorial reach fluctuated throughout the year, due to various counter-extremism measures to remove the group from the country. Much as in the battle to rid Mosul of ISIS, most of the group's Syrian suicide attacks targeted security forces. Eighty-five per cent of its attacks were aimed at militaries and nonstate actors, including Kurdish militias. In Raqqa, this was manifested in suicide assaults targeting the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Two suicide bombers in the Ajrawi area of Raqqa killed 30 SDF members in May. In the eastern province of Deir ez-Zor, 20 per cent of ISIS's suicide attacks targeted military bases and checkpoints. ISIS has adapted its use of suicide

FIG. 4.5 Timeline of ISIS Suicide Bombings in Iraq, 2017
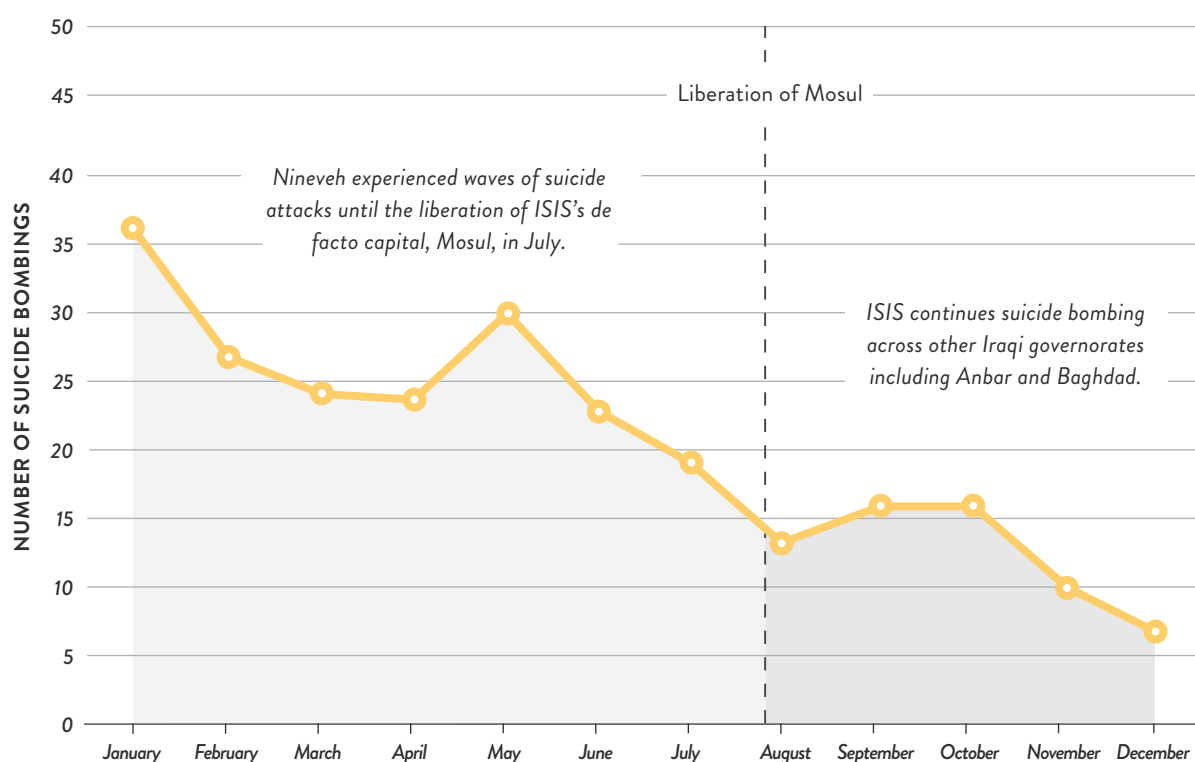
bombings in Syria to the evolving fighting.

Similarly, ISIS's suicide attacks against civilians in Syria are symptomatic of a country engulfed by conflict. The group used martyrdom to attack and stem the flow of civilians fleeing its shrinking territories. In 2017, suicide attacks at refugee camps in Syria and on the Jordanian border killed 178 civilians. In November, more than 100 people were killed in an ISIS suicide car bombing that targeted displaced people in Deir ez-Zor. ISIS killed 50 civilians in October when three suicide car bombers hit a refugee camp elsewhere in Deir ez-Zor. At the Rukban displacement camp in Jordan, a suicide car bombing killed four members of security forces and seven civilians at a camp for displaced people in January. ISIS's use of suicide bombings is exacerbating a displacement crisis in a country the UN has described as the "world's biggest producer of refugees".[71]

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

The suicide-bombing campaign of another group in Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), attempted to undermine security forces in a country that has been enveloped by violent Islamist extremism. Al-Qaeda's largest branch dedicated 31 per cent of its activity in 2017 to suicide bombings. The majority of AQAP's suicide activity targeted forces of the UN-backed Yemeni government and its allies, killing 43 security personnel over the year.

Fifty per cent of AQAP's suicide missions took place in the port city of Abyan, the centre of the group's Yemeni insurgency. In October, the group used suicide car bombs to attack members of the al-Hizam Brigade, a militia trained in the United Arab Emirates, killing four of the militia members and wounding ten. AQAP quickly claimed the incident, saying the security branch was targeted due to "[the United Arab Emirates'] role in fighting Islam and Muslims".[72]

In February, an AQAP suicide car bomber killed three people, including a child, when the car was driven at a sports and culture club in a Houthi-held district of Bayda province. Houthi militants fired at the oncoming car, causing it to detonate before reaching its target. Such an attack against a rival Islamist militant group was an anomaly in Yemen in 2017. However,

Yemen has become a crowded theatre of conflict with many competing actors vying for control. AQAP is immersed in a violent campaign against security forces and has used suicide bombings in an attempt to weaken enemies it sees as wrongfully governing on its desired territory.

The Taliban

The Taliban has historically positioned itself against suicide tactics, but the group has incorporated such bombings as its warfare has evolved.[73] In 2017, the Taliban dedicated 13 per cent of its activity to suicide missions. Ninety-six Taliban suicide bombers carried out attacks in 2017, killing 617 people, including 232 civilians. The Taliban has been a powerful and violent fighting force in Afghanistan since it fell from power in 2001, engaging with sophisticated armed forces on the battlefield. The group, which has sought to position itself as a viable governing force, has deployed willing martyrs against national and international troops, to devastating effect.

Eighty-three per cent of the Taliban's suicide assaults in 2017 were directed at military and police targets (see figure 4.6). The group focused 30 per cent of its suicide attacks on security sites, including military bases, checkpoints and police stations. In April, two suicide bombers and multiple gunmen, disguised as security personnel and driving military vehicles, attacked an army base in Mazar-i-Sharif. The coordinated assault killed 140 Afghan soldiers, making it one of the deadliest attacks at a military site in 2017. Three days later, the Afghan minister of defence and army chief of staff resigned, following a swell of public anger and fatigue.[74] This assault seemingly fulfilled Taliban objectives to erode Afghan stability.

In 2017, the Taliban deployed nine suicide bombers in six attacks on government targets, killing 104 people. Half of these incidents occurred in Kabul. In January, a twin suicide bombing on the National Assembly in the capital killed 46 people. Most of those killed were parliamentary workers. Also in Kabul, a suicide car bomb targeted a bus carrying government officials in July, killing 30. The Taliban has used suicide bombers to pursue and attack a government it deems illegitimate, in an attempt to regain power in the country.

FIG. 4.6 Scenes of Synchronised Taliban Suicide Bombings, 2017

NUMBER OF SUICIDE BOMBINGS

The Taliban deployed suicide car bombs in 47 per cent of its suicide attacks, which regularly targeted the state military.

Six incidents involved multiple gunmen cooperating with suicide bombers.
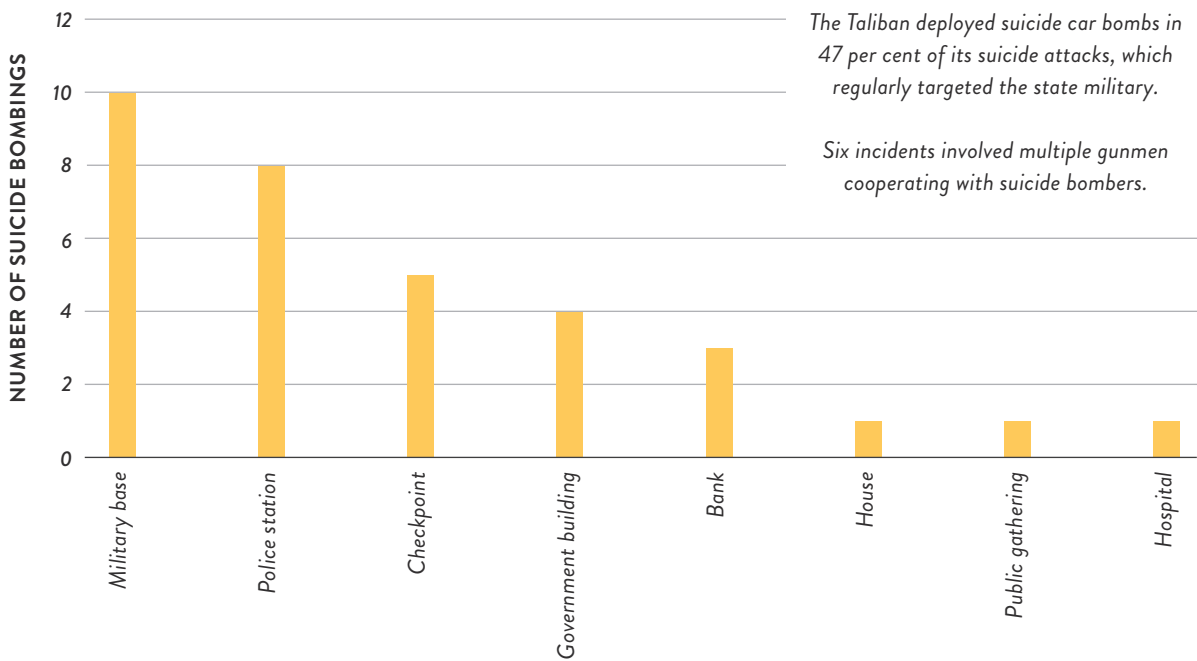
The Taliban's desire to govern the nation has encouraged the group to appeal to the Afghan people. This has affected its attitude to the use of suicide assaults and the propaganda surrounding them. The Taliban has condemned ISIS's use of suicide bombers. For example, in November, when ISIS claimed a suicide attack on a Pashto-language broadcaster in Kabul that killed two civilians and wounded 20, the Taliban was quick to deny involvement. Pashto is an Afghan official language that is spoken by the Taliban and in areas the group controls. The group has at times endeavoured to distance itself from suicide attacks that it believes may disillusion the public.

Despite overarching strategies and objectives such as governing the Afghan nation and removing foreign troops, the Taliban is fractured, with a number of competing factions.[75] Suicide bombings highlight internal divisions and infighting in the group. This has often manifested itself in factions contesting leaders and struggling to control territories, a trend that is indicative of the Taliban's size and scope and the length of its insurgency. In 2017, there were three suicide attacks by Taliban members on other factions of the group. In June, a suicide bomber hit a checkpoint run by rival Taliban members in Helmand province, killing nine militants.

The Pakistani Taliban

The Pakistani Taliban used 25 suicide bombers to conduct mass violence in Pakistan in 2017. The group conducted 18 suicide attacks, which made up a quarter of its overall violent activity in Pakistan. These suicide assaults killed 68 people, including 34 members of security forces and 34 civilians. The group seeks to destroy the Pakistani state and its military, and replace the current apparatus with its interpretation of sharia law. Seventy-eight per cent of the group's suicide activity was directed at security forces or the Pakistani government.

The Pakistani Taliban used suicide bombings in 2017 to erode the stability and functionality of the state. This was borne out in April, when a Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber struck a government team in Lahore conducting a state census, killing four soldiers and two data collectors. Similarly, the group attempted to use suicide attacks to assassinate two prominent members of civil society in 2017. In July, a suicide assassination killed a district police officer and his security guard in the Pakistani-Afghan border town of Chaman, Balochistan. These actions reveal how the Pakistani Taliban can impede the state's ability to perform its duty to its citizens.

FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS

Women are engaging in Islamist extremism at a growing rate. Groups are not only recruiting women to fill a void or achieve a tactical surprise against the enemy but also moulding them to take part in the most violent activity: suicide bombing. The GEM explored the use of female suicide bombers to expose the measures that extremist groups take to sustain their violence and protect their ideological movement.

The GEM recorded 100 suicide assaults conducted by 181 female militants in 2017. Female suicide bombers were deployed by two groups in five countries: Cameroon, Iraq, Niger, Nigeria and Syria. On average, four out of five of these attackers successfully detonated their explosives during their operations. These assaults killed 279 people, 94 four per cent of whom were civilians. Boko Haram deployed the most female suicide bombers, while changes in ISIS's ideological parameters meant that the group also enlisted female assailants. All of these Islamist

militant organisations adhere to Salafi-jihadi teachings, which largely prohibit women's participation on the battlefield.

The main groups to deploy female suicide bombers were two of the deadliest in the world for suicide attacks: ISIS in Iraq and Syria and Boko Haram. These two groups emerged at the start of the 2010s, and at that time, the idea of women in their ranks was unthinkable. In the meantime, these groups have entrenched themselves in their respective countries, providing the backdrop to intractable conflicts and establishing themselves as resilient members of the global violent jihadi movement. The use of female suicide bombers not only signals a shift in tactics but also emphasises an evolution in the collective mindset of violent extremist groups.

ISIS in Iraq and Syria

ISIS has historically prohibited the participation of women in combat, in accordance with traditional

FIG. 4.7 Timeline of Selected Boko Haram Female Suicide Bombers, 2017

Eight-year-old girl detonates while trying to enter refugee camp in Bama, Nigeria, killing herself and no others

Female bomber kills three civilians when she attacks house of military commander in Kaleri, Nigeria

Two female bombers kill only themselves when they attack University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

Two female bombers attack military base in Konduga, Nigeria, killing two soldiers

Female bomber kills soldier when she attacks military base in Kolofata, Cameroon

Five female bombers take part in coordinated attacks on University of Maiduguri, killing nine civilians

January February March April May June

Female bombers kill six in attack on market in Madagali, Nigeria

Female bomber carrying baby, and two male bombers, attack checkpoint in Madagali, killing nine

Female bomber attacks trucks in Wumyeduga, Nigeria, killing three

Female bomber detonates outside church in Maiduguri, damaging it

Female bomber blows herself up as worshippers leave mosque in Maiduguri, killing six civilians

Four female bombers and one male bomber attack military base in Molai, Nigeria, killing only themselves

Salafi-jihadi teachings. The group has relied on men to fight, while women have been expected to remain at home to raise the next generation of militant jihadi men and of women who carry out domestic work. However, as the group was increasingly on the defensive and under attack from the international anti-ISIS coalition and local forces, its territory and manpower were diminished and women were called to arms. In October, ISIS declared it an "obligation" for women to participate in jihad, urging them to "prepare themselves to defend their religion by sacrificing themselves by Allah".[76]

ISIS was the largest deployer of female suicide bombers in the Middle East and North Africa in 2017. The GEM recorded seven female ISIS suicide bombers in Iraq, illustrating a profound shift in the group's ideological strategy, as it had not used female suicide bombers before. Three of these assaults were carried out successfully, killing 30 civilians and one member of the Iraqi army, while four bombers were arrested before their explosives detonated. Four of the female

ISIS bombers in Iraq attempted suicide attacks in Mosul, the group's former stronghold.

In July, two female suicide bombers who were hiding among civilians fleeing Mosul attacked Iraqi troops, killing one soldier and wounding several others. A Turkish woman was detained in September while attempting to carry out a suicide assault on troops deployed in the northern Iraqi province of Nineveh. A woman was arrested in February while carrying out a suicide attack at a girls' school in Mosul. The GEM also identified ISIS's use of female suicide bombers in Syria. In September, two female assailants launched an assault on security forces in Uqayribat and Homs alongside two male counterparts, killing only themselves.[77]

The nine ISIS female suicide bombers documented by the GEM confirm how this deadliest of extremist groups has modified its tactics and ideological stance. ISIS's desire to remain a force means that it has needed to adapt to increased counter-extremism
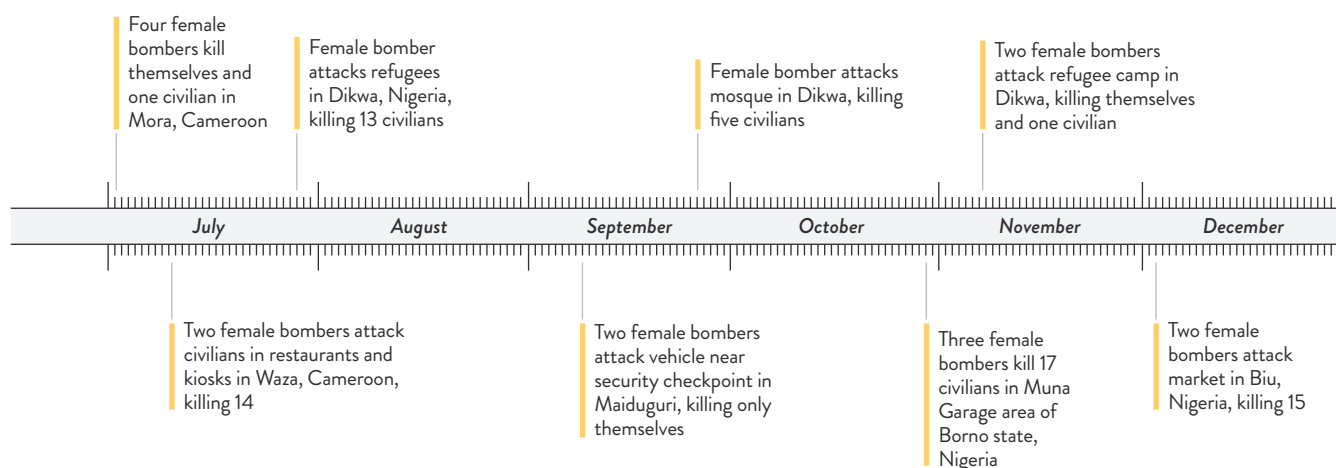
measures. Iraq and Syria have been plagued by ISIS since 2014, but the group is now a transnational entity comprising 13 distinct affiliates that all adhere to its Salafi-jihadi ideology. These entities are likely to emulate the tactics of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, increasing the number of women being deployed as suicide bombers in other countries.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram used more female suicide bombers than any other group in 2017. The group offers the clearest example of how extremist organisations are willing to drastically change their operations. Boko Haram conducted its first suicide bombing in 2011, striking the Abuja police headquarters. The assailant was a male member of the group who detonated his vehicle killing five people.[78] It took another three years for the first female suicide bomber to detonate herself on behalf of Boko Haram.

By identifying and exploring individual female assailants, the GEM has exposed the gender distinctions that characterise Boko Haram's violence. The group used women in 49 per cent of its suicide attacks in 2017, deploying 172 female assailants in three countries—Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger—and killing 248 people, including 233 civilians (see figure 4.7). In comparison, 175 male Boko Haram suicide bombers conducted assaults in 2017. By disaggregating seemingly chaotic violence, the GEM has exposed the strategic importance that Boko Haram has placed on female attackers.

Boko Haram's incorporation of women and children into its military campaigns has historically made the group an outlier in Salafi-jihadism. When Boko Haram first deployed suicide bombers in 2011, it used only men. As the group has continued and developed its terrorist campaign in northeastern Nigeria and beyond, it has evolved its violent tactics. In April 2014, the group abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, in northeastern Nigeria.[79] Reports have emerged in recent years of Boko Haram forcing young women and girls to conduct suicide assaults.

Boko Haram has exploited vulnerable local female populations in Nigeria and the Sahel to mitigate security challenges. The group has found that security forces are less likely to kill or arrest female assailants, increasing the probability that a female-instigated

terrorist attack will succeed. While the authorities in Nigeria prevented 27 per cent of attempted male-led suicide bombings in 2017, only 21 per cent of female bombers were thwarted.

Boko Haram conducted 86 suicide attacks using only female assailants, deploying 161 women. This accounted for 93 per cent of the female-instigated Boko Haram suicide attacks recorded by the GEM. The group also carried out six attacks involving only male perpetrators, using seven men. Boko Haram deployed more female than male suicide bombers in coordinated simultaneous attacks, exposing the emphasis Boko Haram places on women. In March, four teenage girls conducted a suicide attack close to Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria, killing six people. In October, three female suicide bombers attempted to attack a hospital in Molai, on the outskirts of Maiduguri, killing themselves and no others. A fourth female assailant detonated explosives in a nearby village.

Boko Haram used more female than male suicide bombers to target civilians and public spaces. Of the female-led suicide bombings recorded by the GEM in 2017, 82 per cent attacked elements of the public space such as markets and schools. Given the lower arrest rate of female than of male assailants, Boko Haram's use of women in such operations increases the probability of a successful attack and aims to maximise fatalities and damage. Three women conducted a suicide assault on civilians in the Muna Garage area of Maiduguri in October, killing 17 people and wounding 18 others.

The willingness of women and girls to take part in suicide attacks is the subject of much debate. Although women conduct suicide attacks, this does not mean that every woman involved does so by choice. In the case of a successfully detonated suicide belt, it is difficult to assess an individual's level of intent. In interviews, some women and girls who have been intercepted on suicide missions have expressed allegiance and loyalty to Boko Haram, while others say they were coerced, according to reports. Human Rights Watch claims the group is forcing women and girls to carry out suicide assaults against their will.[80]

Executions

Islamist extremist organisations executed 1,976 individuals in 2017, according to the Global Extremism Monitor (GEM), under a self-declared religious mandate and based on a literalist interpretation of sharia law. These executions, which were conducted by 21 extremist groups in 15 countries, were carried out in retribution for alleged offences. Violent Islamist organisations use executions to bolster their rule and order, ensuring local communities conform to their authority. Public executions demonstrate the scale of a militant group's autonomy and power over a territory.

Beyond this, violent Islamist organisations use executions for strategic aims. Militants coerce civilians and opposing military forces by using fear to quash dissent. At times, local populations agree to take up arms for a terrorist organisation to avoid punishment. At other times, civilians are forced to act as human shields to escape execution. Groups also employ executions to consolidate their strength at times of weakness, amid heightened counter-terrorism operations.

ISIS in Iraq and Syria embodied the most devastating use of executions in 2017. It demonstrated the level of brutality a violent Islamist extremist group can reach when it begins an exercise in state building. All the extremist groups that conducted executions in 2017 adopted a warped ideological justification for killing scores and devastating communities.

DEADLIEST GROUPS

The GEM recorded 21 extremist groups worldwide that executed individuals in 2017 (see figure 5.1). These groups justify the use of violence on the basis of a literalist interpretation of Islam and seek the implementation of sharia law as the primary mode of governance.

The GEM found that 38 per cent of the groups that conducted executions were either directly affiliated to ISIS or allied to the organisation. Twenty-four per cent were directly linked to al-Qaeda. Through a global network of factions, these two parent organisations seek to demonstrate their version of governance and warped interpretation of Islam.

ISIS in Iraq and Syria

Fifty-seven per cent of all executions the GEM documented in 2017 were carried out by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. At least 1,568 people were killed by this group, affirming it as the world's deadliest extremist group for executions. The GEM has delved into the circumstances behind these executions, finding that ISIS commands authority through fear while implementing its binary worldview, which sees societies as either good or evil. These actions also drive forward wider strategic aims to benefit the group's insurgency.

ISIS's hard-line nature has become a central part of its global identity. Since declaring a caliphate across Iraq and Syria in 2014, ISIS has developed and

FIG. 5.1 Groups Responsible for Executions, 2017
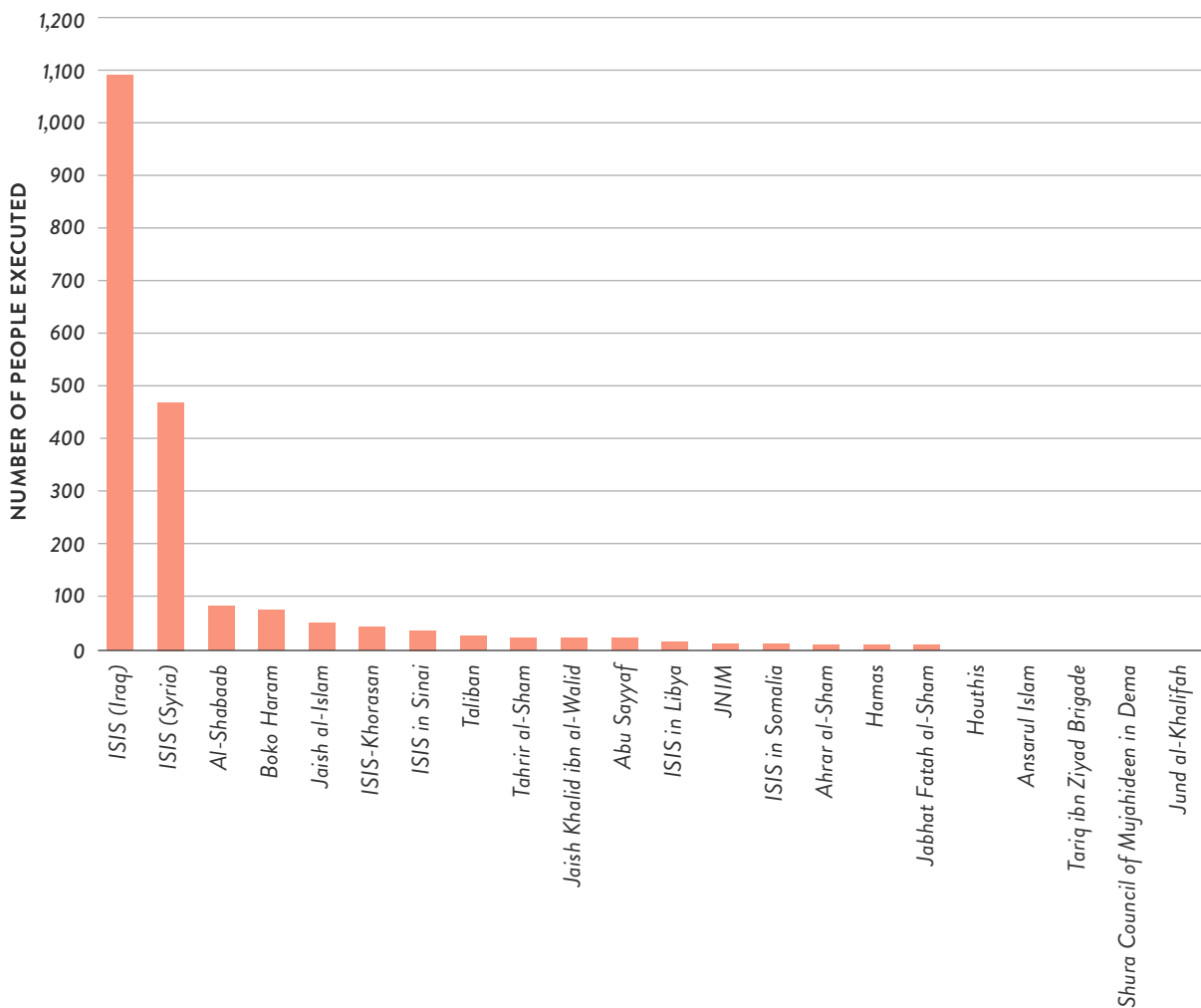
implemented rules to govern civilians, monitor the behaviour of militants and discipline senior members in its areas of control. In its propaganda, the group has championed itself as an agent for positive change, claiming, "For the first time in years, Muslims are living in security" and "Corruption, before an unavoidable fact of life in both Iraq and Syria, has been cut to virtually nil while crime rates have considerably tumbled."[81]

In his first official speech as the group's so-called caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stated the significance of being able to govern in accordance to sharia: "So if [the caliph] orders the people to fear Allah and he is just, then he is rewarded. And if he orders with anything else, then he will be held accountable for that."[82] Efforts to integrate a governance structure reinforce the group's claims to legitimacy, enabling it to evolve from an insurgency into what it perceives as a state and to justify the expropriation of land.

The violent governance practices of ISIS in Iraq and Syria are based on the group's "Documents of the City", which were issued in 2014 to residents of the group's declared territories. Stating the obligations for life in the so-called Islamic state, these constitution-like texts also listed punishments, which ranged from amputation and exile to lashing and death.

In 2016, ISIS released a document entitled "Clarification [regarding] the *hudud*" to serve as a reminder and warning to those under the group's governance. The *hudud*, or list of punishments, is derived from a literalist interpretation of Islam that exploits historical narratives and fails to take historical context into account. Many of the punishments listed have been codified into law in a number of Muslim-majority states. However, under ISIS, the frequency and severity of the punishments depicts an extreme level of barbarism embraced by an organisation that rejects contemporary positive law.

The gulf of difference between ISIS's executions in Iraq and Syria highlights the variation in the group's operations. In Syria, ISIS was responsible for at least 19 per cent of fatalities from executions. This is a significantly lower proportion than in Iraq. Activities in that country were restricted to the northern Nineveh province, from where ISIS regulated and controlled the behaviour of the population in a prized area. Over 47 per cent of ISIS executions were recorded in this

province, where the group's de facto capital of Mosul is located.

In Iraq, ISIS killed on average 12 people per execution, over five times more than in Syria. There, executions were spread across eight provinces in 2017, with the eastern town of Deir ez-Zor accounting for more than two-thirds. This uneven spread is symptomatic of the fragmented nature of ISIS's operations in Syria in 2017. Over the year, the Syrian government wrested back territory from the group in many provinces, diluting its capacity to exercise authority and govern residents.

Further dissection of the data reveals similarities in the composition of the group's victims. In both Iraq and Syria, ISIS killed militants in its own ranks. Additionally, over 77 per cent of those killed by ISIS in Syria were civilians, as opposed to people killed for being enemies or for renouncing membership of the group. In Iraq, the same targeting of civilians accounted for more than 87 per cent of ISIS's executions. Despite losing territory in both countries in 2017, these high proportions of civilian targeting demonstrate how ISIS harnesses authority and violence to offset territorial losses and a weakened image.

By providing a quasi-judiciary and enforcing governance, ISIS tries to legitimise itself in a region where corruption has been endemic. Before the group's emergence in Syria and Iraq, the two countries were ranked 168th and 171st respectively out of 177 in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perception Index.[83]

Other Groups in the Middle East

Although ISIS was the most active group to engage in executions across the Middle East, a further seven groups killed individuals after levelling accusations against them. Five of these were Syria-based groups that sought to establish an ultra-conservative Islamic system of governance: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Jaish Khalid ibn al-Walid, Jaish al-Islam, Ahrah al-Sham and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham.[84] GEM research shows that 29 per cent of incidents carried out by these groups involved the executions of other members of violent Islamist groups or people belonging to rebel factions.

Hamas and the Houthis were the remaining groups in the Middle East that executed individuals in 2017.

Hamas engaged in the executions of alleged spies and those suspected of collaborating with Israel, while the Houthis killed people on charges of rape. Although dissimilar in nature, these incidents highlight the severity of punishments handed down to individuals who fail to abide by the laws dictated by violent Islamist extremist groups.

Groups in North Africa

In North Africa, three of the five groups that executed individuals in 2017 were native to Libya: the Tariq ibn Ziyad Brigade, the jihadi alliance of the Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna and ISIS in Libya. Ten of the 14 people executed in Libya were members of the anti-Islamist Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar. Executions took place in four districts of Libya—Derna, Jufra, Tarnah and Ajdabiya—highlighting the diffuse nature of the country's extremist dynamics.

Libya has been a fractured state since the 2011 ouster of leader Muammar Qaddafi, which led to a number of Salafi-jihadi groups feeding off the power vacuum, poor living standards and marginalisation of minorities. Many groups fighting across Libya have sought to install governance structures in the form of status, salaries and services. Meanwhile, harsh rule and summary executions have allowed Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya to stake a claim to a form of legitimacy amid the many actors seeking to gain power.

Jund al-Khalifah Algeria and ISIS in Sinai also executed individuals in North Africa in 2017. The latter executed 37 people throughout the year, and the nature of its killings is emblematic of the environments in which the group is immersed. Convoluted tribal dynamics and a strong military presence in northern Sinai have created fertile ground for mistrust.

Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa

Al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab executed 82 people in 2017, and in a similar vein to ISIS, the group prioritised executions of civilians. At least 73 per cent of the group's killings involved civilians. The group conducted many of its executions in front of local crowds, often followed by self-proclaimed al-Shabaab judges announcing the executions through the group's radio station, Andalus. Making the public aware of the

executions is crucial in al-Shabaab's efforts to instil fear in local people. Al-Shabaab has been trying to impose its strict version of Islam across Somalia, and despite renewed efforts by the state to remove extremist elements, the group has still been capable of enforcing its own judicial system on local populations.

While al-Shabaab conducted nearly twice as many executions as any other sub-Saharan African extremist organisation, the GEM recorded a further four groups in the region that conducted executions in 2017: Boko Haram, Ansarul Islam, ISIS in Somalia and JNIM. At least 88 people were killed in these acts of violence, with Boko Haram responsible for 80 per cent of these deaths.

Since 2014, Boko Haram has claimed to be targeting the Muslim "establishment" in Nigeria for not defending the population, accusing it of "corruption" and "perverting Islam".[85] Similarly, Islamic preacher Malam Ibrahim Dicko, the leader of Ansarul Islam, founded the group by denouncing corruption, inequality and abuses by the Malian state.[86] Such rhetoric is characteristic of the sub-Saharan African groups in the GEM data sample. These groups regularly exploit what they perceive to be nations of weak governance, immoral culture and endemic corruption to garner local support.

Groups in Asia

Sixty-one people were executed in three Central and South Asian countries in 2017 at the hands of two groups: the Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan. With the exception of a Chinese couple killed in Balochistan, Pakistan, on charges of preaching, all ten of ISIS-Khorasan's executions took place in Afghanistan. The Afghan-Pakistani faction sits as a small piece in ISIS's global network of affiliates, which collectively seek an Islamic system of governance across the world. The Taliban, by contrast, ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 in what was known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The group commands a force of more than 60,000 militants, compared with ISIS-Khorasan's much lower 1,000–2,000. As of early 2018, the Taliban controlled roughly 10–12 per cent of the Afghan population.[87]

Nearly one-third of the Taliban's executions involved allegations of adultery. The group handed

down punishments for lifestyle offences rather than crimes that inhibit its insurgency. Meanwhile, 69 per cent of those killed by ISIS-Khorasan were alleged to be spies. This may indicate the group's lack of support in Afghanistan, where the more extreme Wahhabi Salafi-jihadi tenets that ISIS-Khorasan espouses have created enmity towards it.

In East and Southeast Asia, Abu Sayyaf continued its trend of executing hostages it had kidnapped. The group regularly abducts individuals and then issues ransoms for their release. Failure to make the exact payment by deadlines set by the group has for the most part resulted in the deaths of the hostages. Following the beheading of German hostage Jürgen Kantner in February 2017, a government envoy said, "Up to the last moment, many sectors, including the armed forces, exhausted all efforts to save his life. We all tried our best but to no avail."[88]

ACCUSATIONS

The GEM has found ideological endorsements in many of the executions conducted by groups in 2017. At the same time, groups often synchronised their killings to support a wider strategy. Consolidating

authority, instilling fear and steering the behaviours of populations were some of the motivations for the executions recorded throughout the year.

Fleeing

ISIS in Iraq and Syria was the only group in 2017 to kill civilians attempting to flee a territorial stronghold. Although many were killed while doing so, the executions discussed here focus explicitly on those intercepted and charged with attempting to escape. These killings constituted 28 per cent of all data recorded on executions, emphasising the group's desire to maintain authority over residents of its territories. Most of these killings were carried out in Iraq. ISIS in Iraq and Syria was also the only group to execute militants seeking to desert the battlefield, according to the GEM.

Sixty per cent of these executions took place in and around Mosul, where ISIS occupied its largest urban stronghold in 2017. Although the 548 deaths occurred throughout the year, there was a surge during the anti-ISIS besiegement and heavy bombardment of the city from May (see figure 5.2). In the final weeks before the liberation of Mosul in

FIG. 5.2 Timeline of Executions of Civilians Attempting to Escape ISIS in Iraq and Syria, 2017
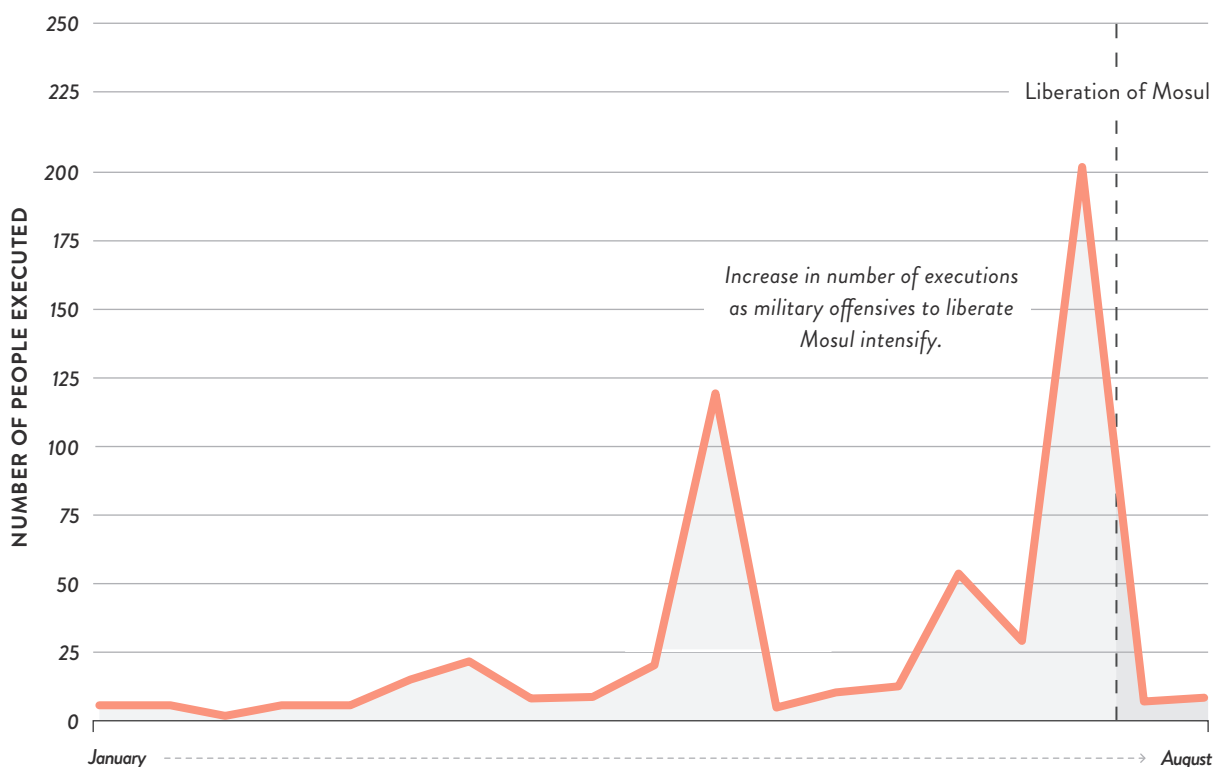
July 2017, the GEM captured the executions of 200 Iraqi Turkmens, including women and children. ISIS had held the hostages in prison for two months for attempting to flee to safer regions. Given that prisons are often places where inmates can be indoctrinated with the ways of ISIS, with many ISIS clerics visiting prisoners, the removal and subsequent execution of these Turkmens reveals how ISIS prioritises its wider insurgent objectives—in this case, the need to instil fear and maintain control of a population that was seeking liberation—over the indoctrination of inmates.

ISIS also forced residents to remain in the urban conflict zone of Mosul. Many of these inhabitants were used in coercive measures to ward off potential offensives against ISIS-held positions. ISIS is widely reported as using civilians as human shields. After an airstrike on the al-Aghawat al-Jadidah neighbourhood in western Mosul that left at least 230 civilians dead, the UN released a statement reaffirming that "international humanitarian law is clear" and "combatants cannot use people as human shields".[89] Many local people attempted to seek solace by trying

to flee Mosul, despite the restrictions ISIS placed on them. In May, the group shot dead 13 civilians after they attempted to leave their houses. Later that month, ISIS executed 47, mainly women, children and elderly people as they tried to flee towards security forces.

By accusing and killing civilians attempting to leave the religious fold, ISIS can discourage others from escaping and label those who seek escape as weak in faith and treacherous. Sixteen-year-old Abdul Malik recalled an ISIS fighter saying, "You will never leave this house" and "We will die here, and so will you."[90] Orchestrating the movements of residents is a means to generate artificial and temporary defences, but at the same time, the group uses its brutality and religiosity to exploit civilians as instruments of its violent jihad. Attempting to leave, or failing to become a subject of the caliphate, is a crime in the group's "Documents of the City". Article 9 of ISIS's penal code states that "God commands that you join the society [Islamic State] and renounce factions and strife. . . . Division is one of the traps of the devil."[91]

FIG. 5.3 Foreign Fighters in Iraq or Syria by Country of Origin, October 2017

NUMBER OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS
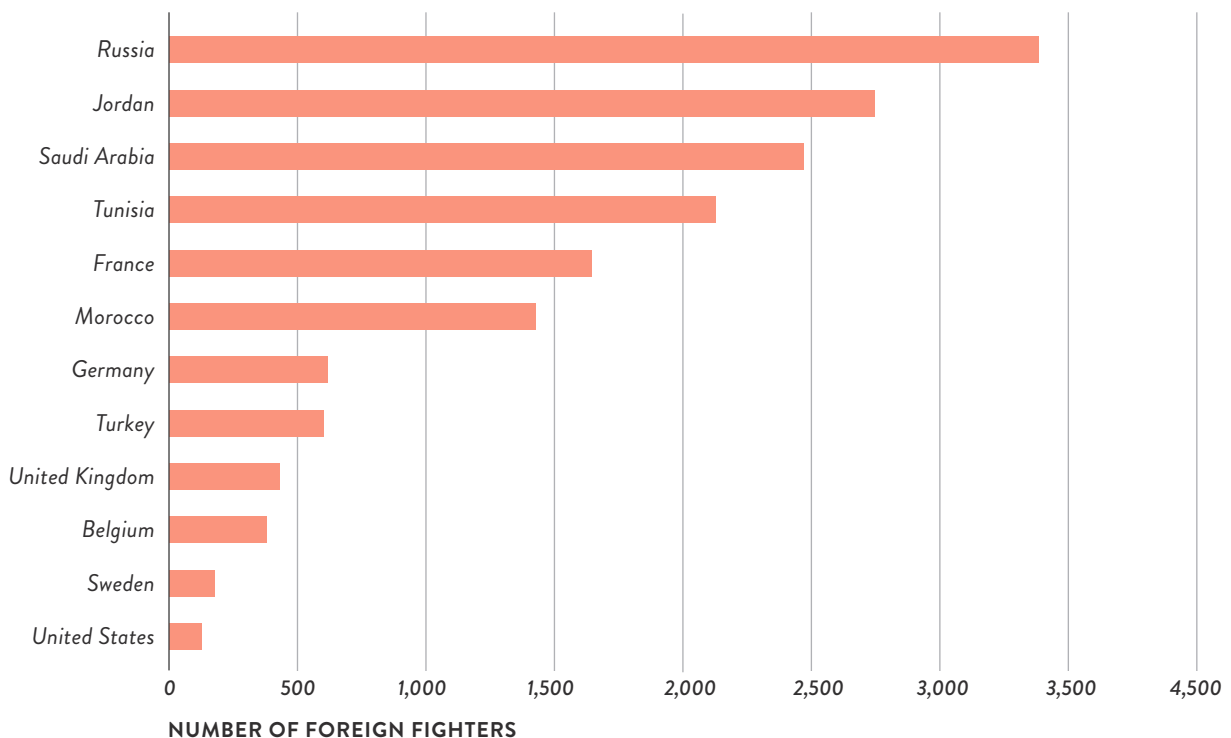
Source: Richard Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees", The Soufan Center, October 2017

Seventy-six members of ISIS made efforts to leave the group's stronghold in 2017, according to the GEM. As these events portray a weak and treacherous image of the group, many of them are unlikely to have reached the public domain. In May, ISIS ordered the execution of three of its own members after they attempted to escape the battlefield in Raqqa. The militants were accused of high treason and disloyalty to Baghdadi, and were subsequently shot dead in front of hundreds of locals in downtown Raqqa. According to ISIS propaganda, "The leader is required to ensure that he and his soldiers are held responsible for the rights that Allah has made obligatory and the limits that He has set."[92] ISIS was the only group to execute people in its ranks on such charges. These findings add to the evidence that many who end up joining ISIS may fail to grasp the realities of daily life in the group.

Militants' attempts to leave coincide with increased levels of state and nonstate military intervention. In May, seven members were executed for trying to flee during battle, as Iraqi forces conducted clearance operations in the last few districts held by the group in Mosul. Four senior leaders were killed for fleeing the group's stronghold in Anbar, western Iraq. Such incidents reveal the merciless and intolerant nature of ISIS. It is clear that an individual's status, rank and membership in the group become void on betrayal. The impression of fellowship and brotherhood is propagated merely as an illusory recruitment tool. According to one ISIS defector who admitted succumbing to the extremist group's propaganda, "There are many people in ISIS like me. Tens of thousands. If they'd known the truth they wouldn't have joined."[93]

Up to 30,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries are believed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS and other violent Islamist groups (see figure 5.3).[94] Many decide to make the journey after being swayed by the narratives of success and utopia projected by extremist groups. The reality is a brutal environment in which existential dedication to the group's ideology and universal worldview is the single most important factor. Only the most committed members can continue with ISIS as the group begins its next phase as an insurgency after the fall of the so-called caliphate. Meanwhile, up to 2.6 million residents who were forced to live under the group's ultraconservative vision of an Islamic state remained displaced in Iraq as of January 2018.[95]

Spying

Executions of those charged with spying and with passing information to and collaborating with perceived enemies are symptomatic of the mistrust and paranoia that engulf militant insurgencies. Seventeen per cent of all executions recorded by the GEM were of people who had been accused of spying. This category extends beyond ISIS in Iraq and Syria and includes a further 11 violent Islamist extremist groups. Many of the groups that accuse people of being spies are engaged in conflicts involving multiple state and nonstate actors. The accused include civilians and militants.

ISIS was responsible for 66 per cent of all those executed on charges of spying (see figure 5.4). "Spying for unbelievers" is listed as a crime punishable by death in "Clarification [regarding] the *hudud*". The executions of 134 people in Iraq and 194 in Syria point to a fundamental mistrust among the group's insurgents. In October, 128 civilians were executed in central Homs, Syria, during a three-week period. Of those, 83 were killed in the two days before the Syrian military retook the town from ISIS. The group accused the victims of being "agents of the regime".[96]

In January, two men were crucified after claims they supported the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish militia, and the US-led coalition. The following month, militants drowned 13 civilians in central Mosul on charges of collaborating with security forces. According to Article 2 of the ISIS penal code, "We show mercy to a Muslim, unless he has apostatized or given aid to criminals."[97] The severe punishments handed down to those accused of spying can be considered attempts to dissuade others from engaging in similar acts of espionage, which ISIS sees as an activity that threatens its version of a state.

These punishments reinforce another key point: ISIS is not as strong or as unified as it appears. In April, eight members of the group, including senior commander Abu Abdul-Rahman al-Hayali, were killed on charges of leaking information to Iraqi security forces. This highlights not only the divisions between members of the group but also the extent to which extremists offset paranoia to enforce loyalty.

ISIS's affiliate in Egypt's Sinai province was responsible for 11 per cent of executions on charges

FIG. 5.4 Groups Responsible for Executions on Charges of Spying, 2017
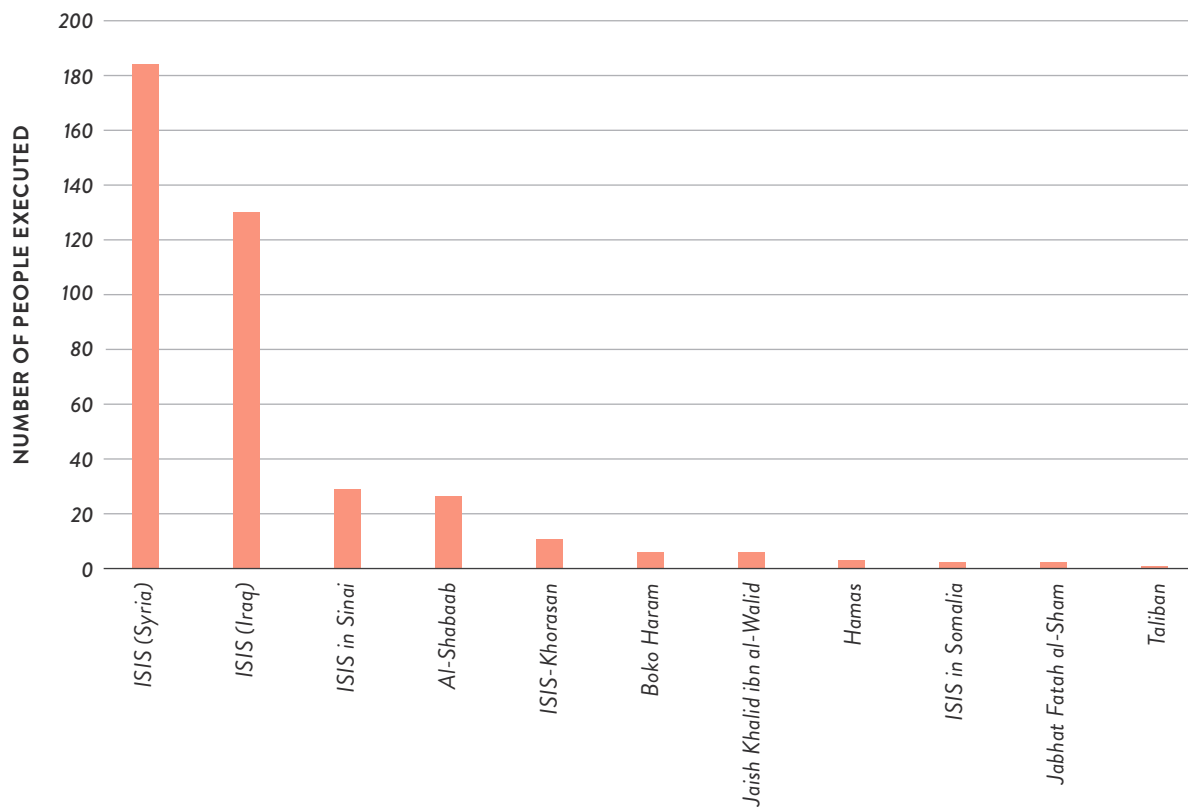
of spying in 2017. The vast majority of those killed were accused of collaborating with the Egyptian army and government. The group executed five civilians in February it claimed had been spying for the army, and in June, ISIS released a photo of a beheaded individual the group suspected of being an agent for the Egyptian intelligence services and police.

Egypt's Sinai province harbours a myriad of actors engaged in high-intensity conflict, including Bedouin tribespeople whom ISIS has sought to radicalise and recruit. However, many of these indigenous groups also actively oppose the group's efforts to "burn, kill and rob in the name of religion", in the words of Tarabin tribe leader Ibrahim al-Rajai.[98] GEM data confirm the intertwining of actors in this region, which has potentially encouraged the group to seek out infiltrators and spies.

Al-Shabaab also conducted executions against alleged spies in 2017. The group accounted for 7 per cent of the total number executed on these charges, killing 18. In December, the group executed five civilians who confessed to leaking information to

intelligence services in Somalia, the United States and Jubbaland, an autonomous region in southern Somalia. Seven people were executed in separate incidents following accusations of collaboration with Ethiopian and Kenyan troops.

Much like the ISIS executions, al-Shabaab killed the accused in front of local crowds. Al-Shabaab demands subservience from Somali communities, and executions aim to shore up civic obedience through fear. With at least 21,000 troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia operating across the war-ravaged country, and more than 500 US troops stationed there, al-Shabaab strives to eliminate the potential for civilians to engage with those fighting the group. Mitigating the risk of collaboration with the authorities is a key factor in the group's ability to exercise jurisdiction and realise its vision of an Islamic state in Somalia.

A further eight extremist organisations were recorded to have conducted executions of alleged spies in 2017: ISIS-Khorasan, Boko Haram, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (which became Hayat Tahrir al-Sham), Jaish

Khalid ibn al-Walid, Hamas, the Taliban, JNIM and ISIS's nascent faction in Somalia. With the exception of ISIS in Somalia, whose activities are confined to the north of the country, all extremist groups in this list are regularly confronted by state and nonstate actors. Such environments have the potential to breed mistrust and tenuous alliances. In this context, executions on charges of spying are a key tactic that violent Islamist extremist organisations use to impose loyalty on their ranks, deprive local people of their liberty and consolidate their jurisdiction.

Criminality

Attempts to replicate a form of law and order serve as a foundation for violent Islamist extremist groups to create an Islamic society in their areas of control. The GEM has explored these groups' efforts to govern citizens and has dissected the allegations made against them. A fervent desire to join such strict Islamic societies is what drove many people to journey to conflict zones and subscribe to the ideological vision of extremist organisations.[99]

The GEM recorded the deaths of individuals executed on charges of adultery, sorcery, drug dealing, blasphemy and murder. Many of these charges are proscribed in the religious texts of Islam. Twelve violent Islamist extremist organisations conducted executions on such charges in 2017, according to the GEM. These groups espouse varying ideologies, from the Zaidi revivalism that guides the Houthi movement to the Salafi-jihadi thread that underpins Tahrir al-Sham in Syria. However, the consensus shared by these groups is a desire to implement an interpretation of divine sharia law to create what they see as a just and righteous Islamic state.

Adultery and Rape

Five groups executed 26 people on charges of adultery and rape in 2017: al-Shabaab, the Taliban, the Houthis, Tahrir al-Sham and ISIS. Adultery and rape are strictly forbidden under Islamic sharia law; these crimes belong to the *hudud* punishments, which are considered fixed and mandated by God. Extremist groups attempt to emulate the period of conflict during the time of the Prophet Mohammad, with misinterpretations of this era providing ISIS with a justification to enforce archaic practices. For example,

ISIS has enslaved scores of women, particularly from Iraq's Yazidi population, many of whom have been raped and tortured by members of the group on the grounds that they are spoils of war.[100] In Nigeria, Boko Haram members have raped kidnapped women and girls and forced to them marry militants.[101]

Violent Islamist extremist groups regularly take justice into their own hands to consolidate a message of puritanical Islam. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has established a state within a state, with its own legal code. An example of this is the group's approach to adultery, on which its punishments are at odds with those of the central Afghan government. After the Taliban executed Amir Begum for adultery in February 2017, a spokesman for the Badakhshan provincial governor said, "We strongly condemned the brutal killing of Amir Begum in front of the eyes of her family members", adding that if there were any truth to the allegations, they should be taken up by a court, not by armed men.[102]

The Taliban was the only group to hand down a sentence other than stoning to those found guilty of adultery, killing two women and a man by gunfire. The Quran does not mention stoning specifically as a punishment for any crime, but all schools of jurisprudence agree to the stoning of offenders who are "adult, free, Muslim, and . . . married", on the basis of the Hadith, a collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Mohammad.[103] ISIS and al-Shabaab executed individuals by stoning in 2017 after processing the claims through their quasi-judicial courts. In October, al-Shabaab publicly stoned a woman for having an extramarital affair. The group's district governor for the Jubba region, Sheikh Mohamed Abu Abdalla, said, "Her legal husband brought the case to the court. She admitted she illegally married a second husband."[104]

Sorcery

The belief in polytheism or engaging in acts considered idolatrous, such as sorcery, witchcraft and black magic, is strictly forbidden in Islam. The GEM recorded four groups that executed a total of seven individuals for engaging in such acts in 2017: ISIS in Iraq and Syria, ISIS-Khorasan, ISIS in Sinai and Jaish Khalid ibn al-Walid, which was active in southern Syria. On sentencing two Sufi men in Egypt's Sinai to death

by decapitation, ISIS in Sinai militants said the crime had been committed on the basis of "apostasy, sorcery, claiming the ability to tell the future, and leading people to polytheism".[105] ISIS deems adherents of Sufism, an approach in Islam that promotes mystic rituals for worship, to be sorcerers and heretics.

Similarly, talismans are considered haram and a form of *shirk*—the worship of anyone or anything besides Allah. The GEM recorded the death of a man at the hands of ISIS-Khorasan who was executed in Sar-e Pol, Afghanistan, for allegedly offering talismans to locals. Although uncharacteristic of ISIS-Khorasan, which tends to focus its punishments on defectors or spies, this incident highlights the rigid view ISIS holds of those who fail to follow the strict, monotheistic practices in its interpretation of Islam. In Syria, ISIS executed individuals for similar acts deemed un-Islamic. Three people were executed by the group in 2017 after they were accused of being wizards and performing magic.

Drug Dealing

Al-Shabaab was the only group documented by the GEM to have accused and executed people for selling drugs. In May, two men were beheaded by the group for dealing khat, a leaf-based stimulant. Al-Shabaab has deemed the drug haram and in 2012 banned the chewing and trading of the plant in many of the group's strongholds.[106] Despite al-Shabaab's imposition of rules regarding the taking and selling of narcotics, and its attempts to control Somalis' day-to-day activities, security professionals have argued that the trade in such drugs is in fact a funding source for the group's terrorist activities in Somalia.[107]

Blasphemy

The GEM recorded eight cases of people being executed on charges of blasphemy in 2017. The Quran reprimands those guilty of such crimes, but it is only in the Hadith that death is suggested as a punishment.[108] Violent Islamist extremists killed 11 people for engaging in such acts, with Jaish Khalid ibn al-Walid executing five of them. The group seeks to implement sharia law in areas under its control, enforcing a strict dress code and schedules for prayer. In July, militants shot a man at point-blank range over accusations of blasphemy. The group later released photos of the killing and

stated that any person who insults Allah will face death.

ISIS in Iraq and Syria also executed people deemed guilty of insulting God, the prophet and Islam. The group executed six people on these charges in 2017, including one in November for insulting Allah and another in July for cursing God. ISIS's "Documents of the City" states that blasphemy of God and of Islam requires punishment by death. For individuals accused of blasphemy against Allah, death is served not only to those who are guilty but also to those who repent for such actions. ISIS believes that it is a religious obligation to declare a caliphate and that the rules and regulations governing the so-called Islamic state are inherent in God's law. Therefore, to undermine and defame the name of God is the ultimate sin, and ISIS has shown it will condemn anyone who commit such crimes to a violent death.

Murder

In January 2017, ISIS executed two men in Raqqa on murder charges. The group claimed the accused had broken "into the homes of Muslims . . . attacking their owners and killing them".[109] The group also punished militants for similar crimes, executing five members by firing squad for the murder of another militant. The members were executed in front of locals—a warning that the so-called caliphate will impose its law on its entire population, regardless of their membership of ISIS as a group.

Rebellious Acts

Extremists pursue a puritanical form of Islam that they use to proselytise followers. While many people reject such pathways from the outset, those who adhere initially may come to renounce the ideology over time. In extremist-held areas, such renunciation carries life-threatening consequences.

Refusing to Join

The GEM found that 45 people were executed in Iraq in 2017 for refusing to join ISIS. Since the group began to misappropriate land across the Middle East and North Africa, ISIS has sought to consolidate its ranks and increase the number of fighters at its disposal. In 2014 it was reported that the group boasted up to 31,500 fighters across Iraq and Syria.[110]

However, following an increase in military efforts to eradicate the group, estimates at the end of 2017 placed the number of remaining fighters in the low thousands.[111]

In 2017, reports of forced conscription surfaced.[112] After the liberation of Mosul, ISIS circulated a statement in Deir ez-Zor calling for all men aged between 20 and 30 to take up arms against Syrian government forces. Such tactics intensified once it became clear the group was losing fighters at an increasing rate in Iraq and Syria. Yet at the same time, many recruits refused to subscribe to the group's hard-line form of Islam.

In April 2017, three months before Mosul was captured by an alliance of military actors, 42 men were executed for refusing to join the group. Furthermore, one source revealed that "[ISIS] militants in Mosul are looking for women to get [the men] involved in the so-called jihadul Nikah [sexual jihad]".[113] Sexual jihad refers to the practice of women either being forced or offering voluntarily to be married to militants. In the case of the 42 men executed, ISIS used sexual jihad to entice fighters to take up arms; when the men still refused to do so, they were executed.

This episode depicts not only the measures ISIS employs to motivate its militants but also the tactics to which it resorts at times of desperation. Such cases are revealing of the realities of fighting against an entity such as ISIS. In a context where the numbers of militants are unpredictable and difficult to ascertain, the response must consist of multifaceted military strategies that take into account the impulsive nature of the group's operations.

Disobeying Orders

Similarly, the GEM recorded the deaths of 65 people at the hands of three extremist groups for not following instructions. ISIS executed 87 per cent of these people, including 14 of its own members. In July, the group shot dead five ISIS members for their reluctance to fulfil duties as instructed by the group. One month later, ISIS killed five of its own leaders for similar crimes.

Civilians were the most vulnerable when it came to receiving orders. The most notable incident the GEM recorded occurred in March, when the group shot

dead 23 civilians for refusing to evacuate their homes in Mosul and move to other districts with the militants. Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram also executed civilians for failing to take orders, with the latter killing eight men after they tried to defy the group's sharia police. In a video of the execution published shortly afterwards, a militant is heard saying, "These people are not different from vigilantes fighting us, spies and Nigerian soldiers."[114]

Disrupting Operations

The executions of 18 individuals for engaging in other acts deemed rebellious further illustrates locals' hostility towards violent Islamist extremist groups. In 2017, ISIS in Iraq and Syria and Tahrir al-Sham killed individuals for attempting to derail their operations. ISIS executed five people in February on the charge of forming anti-ISIS cells and plotting assassinations against the organisation. In September, the Salafi-jihadi coalition of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham was suspected of slaughtering a school principal who was accused of insulting and strongly criticising the group.

Many groups also accused people of being rebellious. In July, ISIS leader Abu Qutaiba was alleged to have been stirring sedition through a Friday prayer sermon by inadvertently suggesting Baghdadi had been killed. Shortly afterwards, the militant was arrested and burned to death in the group's Tal Afar stronghold.

Appendices

Appendix

Methodology

The Global Extremism Monitor (GEM) has been designed to track:

- attacks and attempted attacks;
- victims (killed and wounded);
- perpetrators (killed and wounded);
- types of violent offensive (large-scale coordinated attacks on armed actors, attacks targeting the public space);
- nature of attacks (including raids, assassinations, sectarian violence and engagement between groups);
- method of attacks;
- number and gender of suicide bombers;
- nature of executions; and
- demographic information of victim(s).

The GEM also looks at the counter-extremism efforts and responses being implemented by governments, including airstrikes, ground operations, ground and air operations, and arrests.

The monitor recorded steps taken by nonstate actors against extremism. These include, but are not limited to:

- Kurdish peshmerga in Iraq and Syria;
- vigilante groups, for example the Civilian Joint Task Force fighting Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria; and
- tribal and clan factions, working with or alongside multistate coalitions.

SOURCES

The GEM draws information from over 400 English-language news sources that reported on incidents of Islamist extremism throughout 2017. Multiple news sources were used to verify accounts and information for each incident recorded. Over 700 additional materials, including reports, briefings and official group material including statements and propaganda, as well as existing data sets, were used to corroborate facts and reporting of incidents.

The GEM's investigation of stories attempted to eliminate as much media bias as possible. The monitor employs multiple news sources to corroborate events and limit the amount of media bias in the events recorded. Consequently, the GEM data are a blend of local and international news sources, which are required to capture local events that often go unreported by the international media.

When verifying accounts, researchers did not take claims of responsibility to be a reliable account of an event. The GEM attempted to ascertain the true story of an event. For example:

- In the reporting of incidents and numbers killed, political agendas or propaganda may obscure the facts, for instance when local security forces wish to inflate death counts of militants killed in operations, or when extremist groups downplay losses to maintain an image of success and strength.
- Attacks that are not Islamist related may be claimed by groups for media attention, for example ISIS claiming October's Las Vegas shooting or June's casino shooting in the Philippines.
- In so-called lone-wolf attacks, there is sometimes insufficient corroborated information on the exact direct relationship with a group to verify the extent of lone-wolf activity.
- Numbers of people killed by violent Islamists are often inflated in reports of claims.
- Violent Islamists often fail to report the extent of any damage they have received.

When existing databases were used, all incidents were recoded and categorised according to the methodology designed for primary-source data gathering. When multiple sources were used, all events recorded by the GEM were verified for duplicates.

CODING CRITERIA

After the verification process, each incident and event was recorded singularly in a spreadsheet for each country. Events were categorised for:

- date of incident or attack, including for attempted attacks;
- location of incident or attack (including geolocation at provincial and neighbourhood levels);
- scene of incident or attack (for example, religious institution, school, tourist place, bank, refugee camp, hospital, or government building or embassy);
- numbers and details of victims (killed and wounded);
- numbers and details of perpetrators (killed and wounded) at group and individual levels;
- target of violent attack or incident (for example, civilians, military, government, police, nonstate militias or vigilantes);
- method of attack (including raids, offensives, assassinations, intergroup engagement, suicide mission and airstrikes);
- tactics for attack (weaponry used, for example landmines, improvised explosive devices, vehicle ramming, stabbing, chemical weapons or drones);
- motive for attack (based on official claims where available, as well as scene and location of attack, details of victims and details of perpetrators), for example religious sectarian (including inter- and intra-sectarian), political and social (based on government or military targets, targeting of local leaders and undermining national security operations), competition and territorial disputes;
- hostage takings and arrests (including state-government arrests of terrorist suspects);
- number and gender of suicide bombers, including intercepted bombers; and
- reasons for extremist punishments (for example capital punishments, including executions, stoning and burnings, as well as amputations and lashings), including blasphemy, espionage, fleeing group territory, adultery, sorcery and drug usage.

Over 50,000 events were documented in 2017. The GEM translated these events into thematic data strands and recorded them in a bespoke data set that captures the themes that characterise extremism.

The data set was updated every quarter and verified according to the standardised verification process (see below).

DATA CAPTURE ON GROUPS

Tracking and monitoring groups has allowed the GEM to attribute an instigator to an event when such information is missing in news reports and the GEM could establish an instigator from other data recorded, including location analysis. In such cases, instigators are recorded only if there is a high probability of the group's involvement.

For Syria, the GEM designed a specific data set to track and monitor the activities of groups in that country. The monitor captured data on all actors involved in the Syrian conflict, including rebel groups, nonstate militias and proxy actors. This was required to better understand the role violent Islamists play and their interaction with an array of actors.

GEOLOCATION

Geocoding for the GEM was conducted at the provincial and neighbourhood levels. The latitude and longitude of each incident was recorded to allow for GIS mapping of activity. Occasionally, the exact geolocation of an incident could not be verified. These typically occurred in conflicts such as that in Syria, and in countries with unclear coordinate data. In such cases, coordinates were attributed to incidents that were recorded in a province matching the activity common to a group's insurgency. If there was a discrepancy in reporting where an incident took place, or if reporting suggested the incident took place along a border, towns were attributed near the disputed area where known activity was taking place, based on the likelihood that the incident was in line with overwhelming trends.

DATA VERIFICATION

A multiphase cleaning and verification process was essential. Inaccurate or contradictory information was flagged in the first phase of data collection. After the initial news coverage of an event ended, researchers corroborated information from media, government statements and academic sources to confirm details and address discrepancies. Existing data sets that

capture armed conflict at the national and global levels were introduced to corroborate GEM capture, address discrepancies in accounts and confirm the absence of gaps in the final data set.

CIVILIANS AS INTENDED TARGETS

When it can be determined, the GEM records the intended target(s) of an attack. In most cases, this is strongly related to the scene and location of an incident or attack and the type of victims (e.g. worshippers, military personnel, government figures, local leaders or humanitarian workers). In some cases, supplementary indicators are used. For example, the GEM has corroborated media reporting with group statements following the claim of an incident.

In addition to recording the numbers of victims per incident, the GEM also has ascribed characteristics when this is indicated in the reporting. For instance, while gathering details to determine types of victims, the GEM data set is designed to be disaggregated according to motive for attack (e.g. sectarian) and method of attack (e.g. suicide mission, offensive). Depending on the event, researchers allocate illustrative and contextual detail to supplement the primary fields of coding. These secondary data points and categories allow for wider analysis after coding, where multiple elements in the data set can be referenced to build a wider picture per incident.

SUICIDE BOMBERS

The GEM captures information on suicide attacks and attempted suicide attacks globally. Beyond recording suicide attacks, the GEM was designed to accommodate the capture of:

- methods of operation: whether a suicide vest or a suicide car bomb was detonated in an attack;
- gender dynamics: whether female or male assailants were deployed on suicide missions; and
- efficacy: whether the assailant deployed on a suicide mission managed to detonate his or her explosive device. If the assailant was intercepted before self-detonation, the mission was recorded as unsuccessful.

Researchers gathered evidence to determine the existence of any of the above attributes in a suicide attack. Media sources and extremist statements were cross-referenced to better understand how events unfolded and who was involved in the missions.

EXECUTIONS

The GEM captures information on punishments and executions by violent Islamist groups. The fields relating to executions and punishments in the data set were qualitatively rich and drawn from media reporting as well as group self-reporting. Details recorded, when possible, include the accusations made against a person or persons, and the legal verdict(s) applied.

Glossary

Sharia

Islamic law or norms as revealed in the Quran and the practices of the Prophet Mohammad, interpreted and applied by Islamic jurists through multiple schools of thought. Islamist groups often claim to be implementing their interpretation of sharia through their actions.

Caliphate

A form of Islamic governance that emerged after the death of the Prophet Mohammad. The leader, known as the caliph, must be appointed by consultation according to Sunni thought and should represent the interests of the entire Muslim community.

Hadith

A collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, which constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran.

Haram

Forbidden by Islamic law.

Hudud

A set of punishments derived from a literalist interpretation of Islam.

Islamism

A modern religious-political ideology that requires a dominant role for an interpretation of Islam as state law.

Istishhad

The Islamic concept of martyrdom.

Shirk

Idolatry or polytheism, literally associating others with God.

Salaf

The first three generations of Muslims after the Prophet Mohammad.

Salafi-jihadism

A transnational religious-political ideology based on a belief in violent jihadism and return to the perceived Islam of the Prophet's followers. This is the worldview espoused by groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda.

Takfir

The act of declaring that a fellow Muslim is guilty of apostasy and therefore no longer a Muslim.

Ummah

The global Muslim community.

Appendix

About Us

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change aims to help make globalisation work for the many, not the few. We do this by helping countries, their people and their governments address some of the most difficult challenges in the world today.

We work to promote co-existence and counter extremism by tackling the ideology behind violence, not just the violence itself. We work with governments and leaders of fragile, developing and emerging states to enhance their effectiveness. We work to support increased stability and understanding in the Middle East. And we work to revitalise the centre ground of politics and equip today's leaders to combat the rise of false populism.

Our Co-Existence work identifies defeating the threat of extremist ideology and violence as a long-term and multidimensional challenge. To prevent extremism, it is essential to address the problem before it becomes violent and recognise that violence is symptomatic of an underlying way of thinking.

Our research and programme delivery have shown that extremism prospers when ideology and the role of religion in society are not properly considered, or are ignored. Extremism also thrives where there is a leadership vacuum, where civil society is weak or blocked, where there is a lack of participation in state institutions by local communities, or where there is a lack of trust between the state and citizens.

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Maz Kamali was a researcher in the Co-Existence team at the Institute. A graduate of SOAS University of London, his main research interests include early Islamic and Middle Eastern history, contemporary Middle Eastern politics and society, and geopolitical conflict. Maz has written commentaries on topics including ISIS propaganda, al-Qaeda and Myanmar's Rohingya minority.

Appendix

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The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change is launching its annual Global Extremism Monitor (GEM). Each year, the monitor tracks violent Islamist extremism, and efforts to counter it, worldwide. Drawing on English-language open-source data, our analysis reveals the international spread and scale of Islamist extremist violence. In 2017, the GEM documented 27,092 incidents of violent Islamist extremism and state and nonstate efforts to combat it. At least 84,023 people in 66 countries died during the year because of this problem.

Violent Islamist extremism is not new. Many of the 121 groups monitored by the GEM can trace their origins back 30 to 40 years, and their genesis is intertwined through a convergence of networks and ideological agendas. Over that time, despite counter-terrorism efforts from local counter-insurgencies to international military coalitions, the challenge has proliferated.

Security measures can only hope to contain the problem. Solving it requires preparing for a generational struggle against the ideas that underpin extremist violence. Ideology is the greatest tool for the global jihadi movement. The long-term fight against it will need a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy.