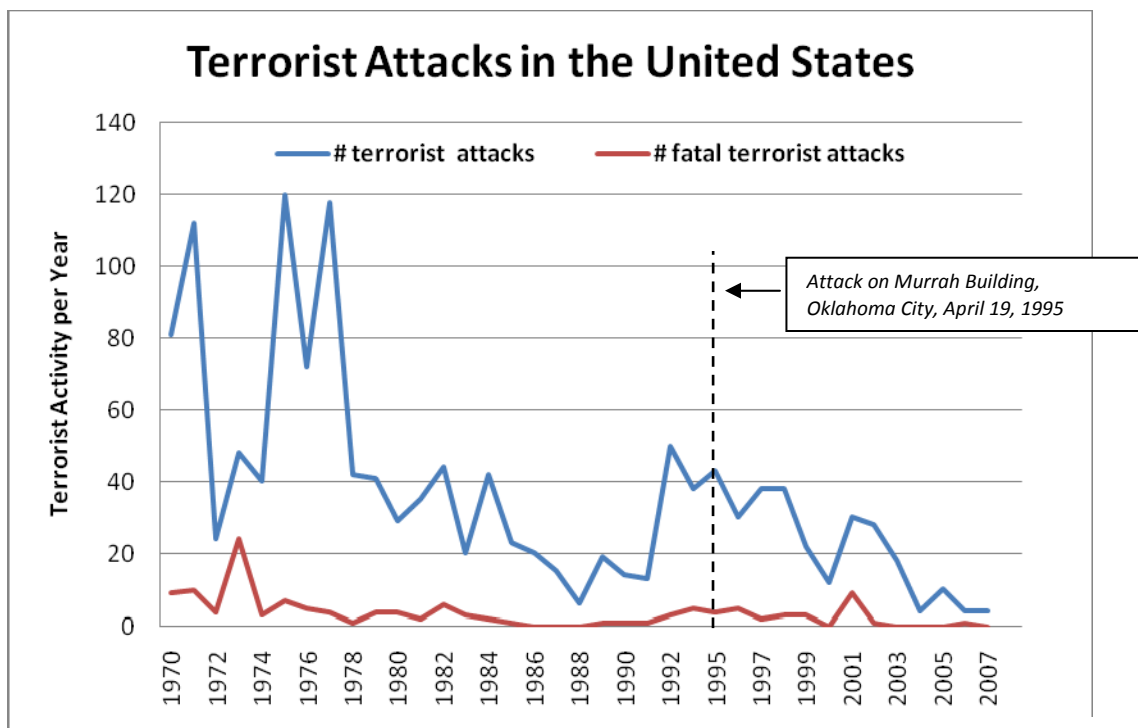


## Background Report: On the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Oklahoma City Bombing

### ➤ ATTACK ON THE ALFRED P. MURRAH FEDERAL BUILDING, OKLAHOMA CITY

On April 19, 1995, a bomb exploded at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, home to offices of a range of Federal agencies. 168 people were killed in this attack, and over 650 were wounded. At the time of this attack, this event marked the most deadly and destructive act of terrorism ever experienced in the United States.



Source: Global Terrorism Database

### ➤ FREQUENCY OF TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THE UNITED STATES

Since 1970, there have been over **1300 terrorist attacks** in the United States—an average of more than 36 attacks per year between 1970 and 2007, as displayed in the figure above. Prior to the Oklahoma City attack in 1995, the United States experienced an average of 48 attacks per year, ranging from aerial hijackings to political assassinations to attacks on religious facilities; since 1995, the average number of terrorist attacks in the United States has declined to 19

Terrorism is defined here as *the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.*

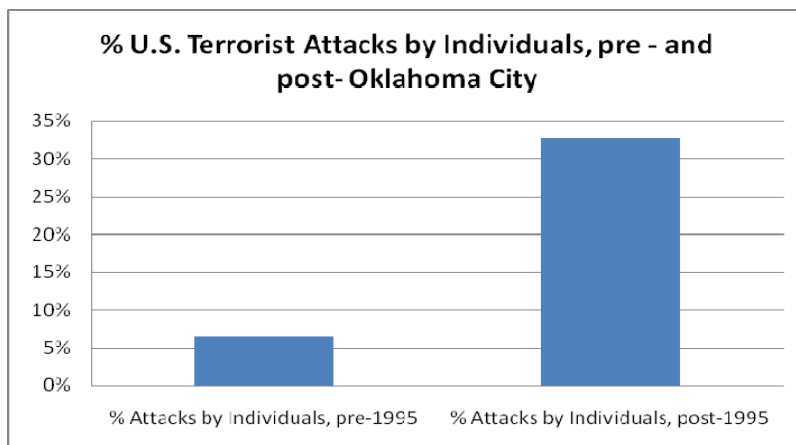
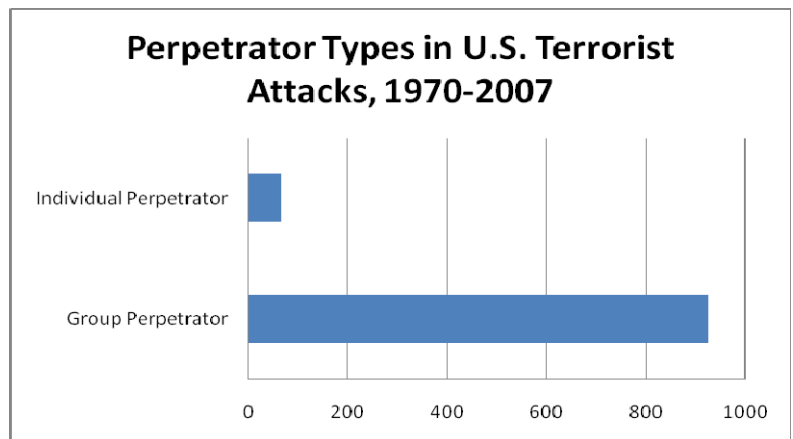
incidents per year.

Of this total number of attacks on U.S. soil, 9.5% have resulted in at least one fatality. Terrorism in the United States has resulted in **3340 fatalities** (2994 of which occurred on September 11, 2001), in addition to more than 2000 injured since 1970. Before 1995, the United States averaged more than 4 fatal terrorist attacks per year. Since Oklahoma City, the United States has averaged 2 fatal attacks per year—including the attacks of September 11, 2001.

➤ **TERRORIST PERPETRATORS IN THE UNITED STATES**

Within hours of the Oklahoma City bombing, Timothy McVeigh was taken into custody in Oklahoma after a traffic stop. Three days later, McVeigh was identified as the suspect in the bombing, and in June 1997, McVeigh was found guilty of 11 criminal counts included in a federal indictment related to the attacks, including conspiracy to use and use of a weapon of mass destruction, destruction by explosive, and 8 counts of first-degree murder. In June 2001, McVeigh was executed. While McVeigh did have accomplices who helped him to launch this attack, it appears that he was operating independently of any organized group or militia in 1995.

Perpetrator information is known for 73.5% of terrorist attacks in the United States, as was the case in Oklahoma City. As the figure to the right reveals, however, Oklahoma City differed from the majority of U.S. terrorist attacks in that the perpetrator in this attack was an individual, rather than a group or terrorist organization. Among U.S. terrorist attacks committed between 1970 and 2007, only **6.5% of attacks** with known perpetrators are committed by individuals versus **93.5%** committed by groups or organizations.



In fact, the attack by an individual unaffiliated with a terrorist organization in Oklahoma City reflected a shift in the nature of U.S. terrorist perpetrators in the mid-1990s. As the figure to the left indicates, since 1995, a much higher percentage of terrorist attacks in the United States have been conducted by unaffiliated individuals, rather than by organized groups. In the period 1995 (post-Oklahoma City)

through 2007, 43 out of 131 incidents with attributed perpetrators were committed by individuals—**33% of all attacks** in the United States in this period.

For the period 1970-2007, the organizations who committed the most terrorist attacks in the United States reflected a wide range of ideological and political beliefs:

Group Name	Description	# attacks
<b>New World Liberation Front (NWLFF)</b>	Far-left organization that primarily targeted corporations in the 1970s	83 attacks
<b>Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (FALN)</b>	Puerto Rican separatist group operating until the early 1980s, launching attacks on U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico	71 attacks
<b>Jewish Defense League (JDL)</b>	Attacked targets it perceived to be anti-Semitic, active through the late 1980s	55 attacks
<b>Omega-7</b>	Anti-Castro Cuban organization active in U.S. urban areas and on Puerto Rico through mid-1980s	42 attacks
<b>Weather Underground/Weathermen</b>	Organization that advocated far-left beliefs in the United States and targeted U.S. cities throughout the 1970s	40 attacks
<b>Earth Liberation Front (ELF)</b>	Committed to protection of the environment, begins terrorist activity in the 1980s continuing through the present	37 attacks

In the years since the Oklahoma City bombing, ELF and the Animal Liberation Front have been the most active terrorist organizations in the United States, with al-Qaeda by far the most deadly organization during this same period.

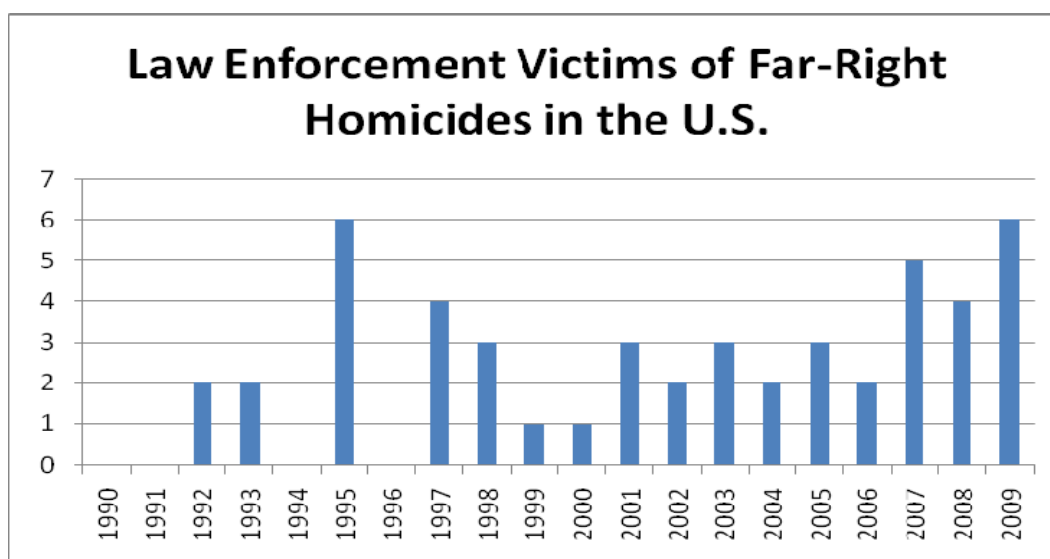
➤ **FAR-RIGHT EXTREMIST ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES**

It is well documented that Timothy McVeigh was a strong supporter of beliefs and attitudes consistent with far-right extremism in the United States. In a letter written by McVeigh while he was in prison, he provided insights into his motivation for the attack, saying he had decided to “go on the offensive - to put a check on government abuse of power, where others had failed in stopping the federal juggernaut running amok.”<sup>1</sup>

Work by START researchers Joshua D. Freilich and Steven M. Chermak demonstrate a long history of violent crimes and terrorist activity by far-right extremists in the United States. Freilich and Chermak have identified **more than 300 homicide incidents** (more than 60% of which were ideologically motivated and/or movement-related) and over 100 additional attempted homicides by far-rightists in the United States since 1990. Excluding the Oklahoma City bombing, these far-rightist homicides have resulted in **over 400 fatalities**. Included among these are **14 suicide missions** resulting in 36 fatalities.

Almost 15% of the victims of far-right homicides during this period have been **law enforcement officials**: There have been 49 known law-enforcement fatalities in far-rightist homicides in the United States since 1990, and over 70% of these victims have been state and local law-enforcement. Per the figure below, 1995—the year of the Oklahoma City bombing—saw the highest levels of homicides of law enforcement by far-rightists until 2009: Six police were also killed by far-right extremists during the course of last year.

<sup>1</sup> “Profile: Timothy McVeigh,” *BBC News*, 11 May 2001. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1321244.stm>.



Source: Extremist Crime Database

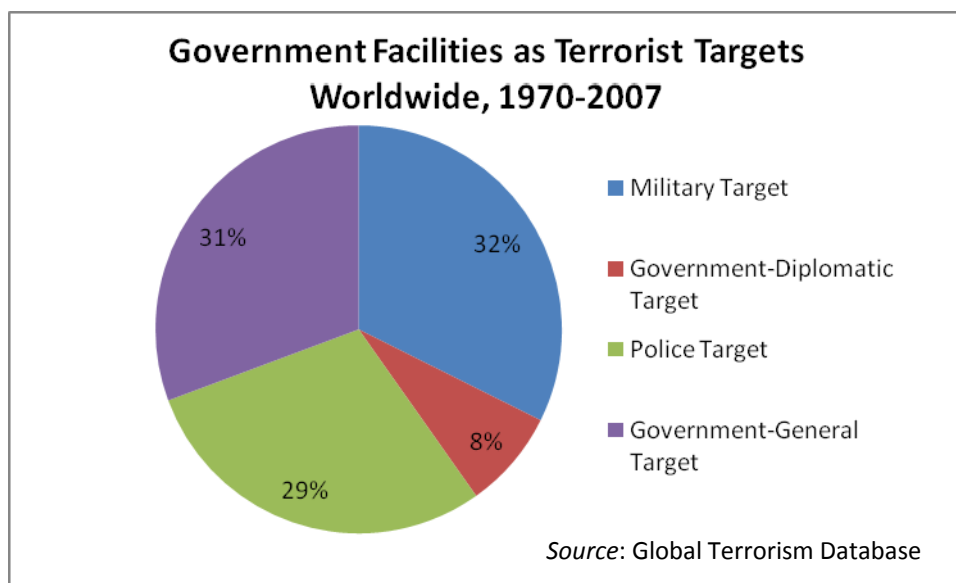
➤ **MASS-CASUALTY TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD**

In 1995, the bombing of the Murrah Building resulted in 168 fatalities and registered as the 25<sup>th</sup> most deadly terrorist attack worldwide since 1970, and the deadliest ever in the United States. Since the attack in Oklahoma City, there have been 27 terrorist attacks around the world resulting in more than 168 deaths, making it the **52<sup>nd</sup> most deadly terrorist attack in the world**. In 2001, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks emerged as the deadliest terrorist attacks ever in the United States as well as globally. Other recent mass-casualty attacks have included the 2004 attack on a school in Beslan, Russia (344 deaths), an attack by a Maoist group on a town in Nepal (518 deaths), and a series of ethnically motivated attacks against groups in Rwanda and Burundi.

In the past 15 years, there has been an **increase in the rate of deaths per terrorist attack** globally, rising from 2.1 deaths per incident for the period 1970 to 1995 to 2.8 deaths for incidents in 1995 and beyond.

➤ **GOVERNMENT FACILITIES AS TERRORIST TARGETS**

The Murrah Building in Oklahoma City contained regional offices of a range of Federal government agencies, including the U.S. Secret Service, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, and other agencies. Since 1970, terrorists have targeted government targets—including government buildings, embassies, consulates, military bases, and police stations—in over **33,600 attacks worldwide**. More than 40% of all terrorist activity in this period has targeted government facilities, and terrorists have targeted military, police, and general government facilities at almost an equal rate globally, per the figure below, with fewer attacks targeting diplomatic facilities.



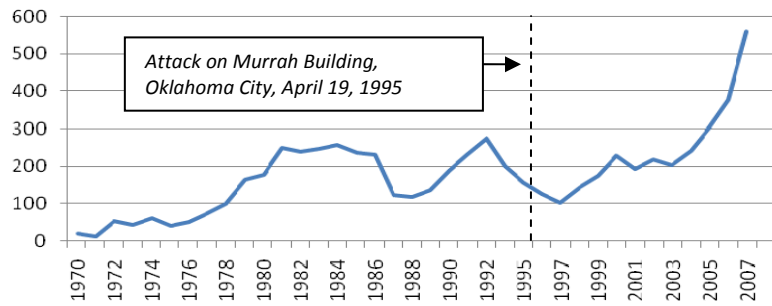
These targeting trends shift, however, when looking just at the United States: Of the 1347 terrorist attacks in the United States between 1970 and 2007, 341 attacks (25.3%) have targeted government facilities, including the Oklahoma City bombing. In the United States, private businesses are the most common terrorist targets. When terrorists target government facilities in the United States, they are most likely to attack general government facilities (as noted in the figure below), while military targets are the least common type of government facility to be attacked by terrorists in the United States.



➤ **TERRORIST USAGE OF IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES**

Like 45.6% of terrorist attacks worldwide and 55.5% of terrorist incidents in the United States, the weapon used in the Oklahoma City attack was a bomb or explosive device.

### Terrorist Usage of IEDs Worldwide, 1970-2007

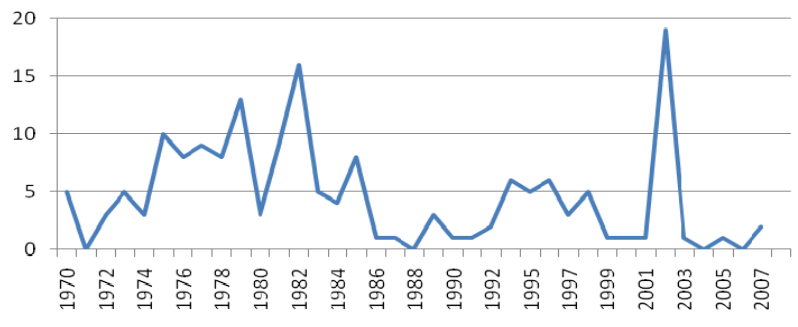


The massive explosive that McVeigh detonated in Oklahoma was built using 50 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, as well as a range of other explosive materials, packed into a rented Ryder truck. This weapon is classified as an improvised explosive device (IED). Since 1970, terrorists have used an IED in **6568 attacks** around the world, with the amount IED usage by terrorists increasing since the late

1990s. **36%** of these terrorist IED attacks involved vehicle-borne IEDs, as in Oklahoma City. Much of the surge in IED usage in the current decade is accounted for by terrorist activity in Iraq and Afghanistan: 65% of the IED terrorist cases in 2007 occurred in one of these two countries, but Israel, Greece, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand all experienced more than 10 IED terrorist attacks in 2007.

In the United States, terrorists have used IEDs in 169 attacks since 1970, including Oklahoma City. **12.5% of U.S. terrorist attacks involve IEDs**, compared to a global rate of usage of about 8%. Per the figure to the left, the greatest number of IED terrorist attacks in the United States occurred in 2002, when 19 IED terrorist attacks occurred in the country. 18 of these 19 attacks were conducted by one perpetrator—Luke Holder, a college student who planted a series of bombs constructed of steel pipes and nine-volt batteries in locations throughout the midwestern United States, accompanied by anti-government writings.

### IED Terrorist Attacks in the United States, 1970-2007



148 of the 169 IED terrorist attacks in the United States, or 87.5% of the attacks, resulted in no fatalities, while 10 of these attacks resulted in between 1 and 11 deaths. The IED attack on the Murrah Building in 1995 is, by far, the deadliest IED terrorist attack in U.S. history, with 168 fatalities.

#### Additional Information

**START:** The research summaries presented here are based upon ongoing projects being conducted by National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror (START) is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence, START, based at the University of Maryland, College Park, aims to provide timely guidance on how to disrupt terrorist networks, reduce the incidence of terrorism, and enhance the resilience of U.S. society in the face of the terrorist threat. The material presented here is the product of START and does not express the opinions of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The **Global Terrorism Database (GTD)**, [www.start.umd.edu/gtd](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd) contains information on more than 80,000 terrorist incidents that have occurred around the world since 1970. GTD is a project of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror (START). Interested users can access information on specific terrorist incidents via GTD's website ([www.start.umd.edu/gtd](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd)); for instance, details on Oklahoma City can be accessed via <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=199504190004>). Users can also download the entire database via the form at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/contact/>. An updated version of the database, with information on incidents through 2008, will be released in May 2010.

The **Extremist Crime Database** is a relational database on the (violent) incidents & (financial) schemes, suspects, victims & targets, suspects & victims' social ties, and group characteristics of *all known violent and financial crimes* (as well as an assessment of the quality of the open-source information used to code the database) committed by far-rightists, jihadists & Arab nationalists, and animal and environmental rights extremists in the U.S. since 1990. The ECDB is the first of its kind database and it is a valuable resource for policymakers and researchers. Since 2006, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) directly, as well as through the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), has funded the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). The material presented here is the product of START and does not express the official opinion of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

***For additional information, please contact START at 301 405 6600 or [kjsmarick@start.umd.edu](mailto:kjsmarick@start.umd.edu).***

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