

## Terrorist Attacks on Educational Institutions

On Tuesday, December 16 the militant group Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carried out a suicide bombing and armed assault at the Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan. More than 140 people were killed in the attack, most of them children, and more than 100 others were injured. To provide context for the attack, this report describes historical patterns of terrorist attacks targeting educational institutions, based on data from the Global Terrorism Database.

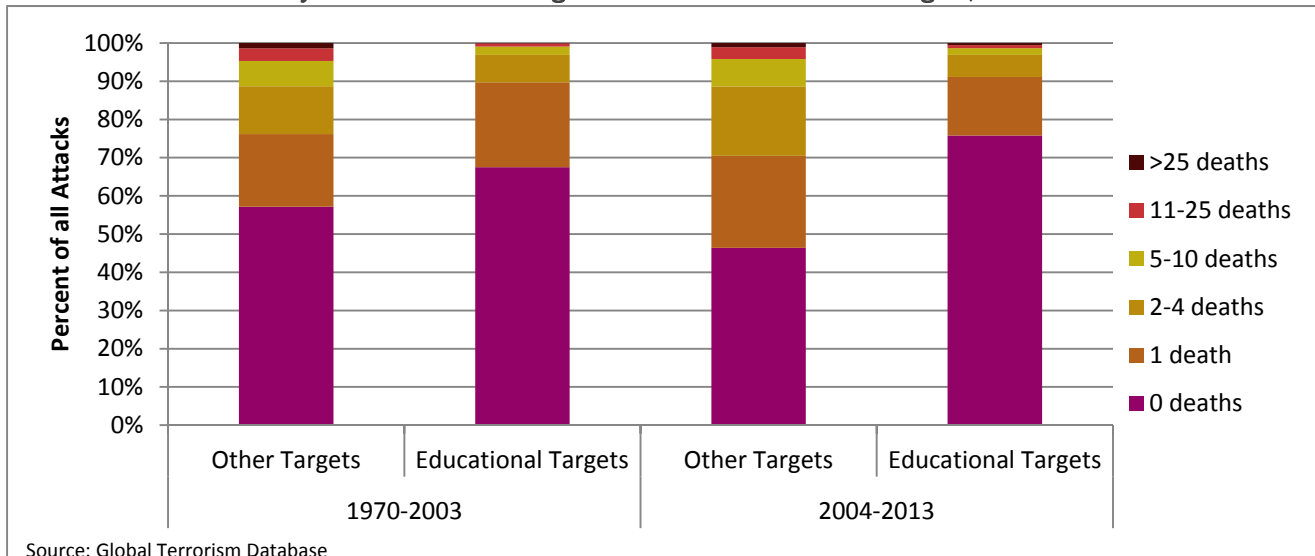
### TERRORIST ATTACKS ON EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS<sup>1</sup>

Between 1970 and 2013 more than 3,400 terrorist attacks targeting educational institutions took place in 110 countries. These attacks comprised 2.7 percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide during this time period.

#### LETHALITY

Although attacks on educational targets have the capacity to be highly lethal, this is certainly atypical. In fact, the average lethality of attacks on educational targets was 0.8 deaths per attack, compared to 2.3 deaths per attack on average for all other types of targets combined. Many attacks against schools and universities, including many of those in Pakistan, took place when the buildings were unoccupied and targeted the facility rather than individuals. This produced a considerably lower likelihood that the attack caused any casualties. More than 70 percent of all terrorist attacks on educational targets between 1970 and 2013 (2,365 attacks) caused no deaths, compared to approximately 50 percent of attacks on other types of targets. Between 2004 and 2013, the percentage of non-lethal attacks against education targets actually increased to 76 percent, while attacks against other types of targets were more likely to be lethal than they had been previously.

Lethality of Terrorist Attacks against Educational and Other Targets, 1970-2013



In contrast, a relatively small number of terrorist attacks on education targets worldwide were highly lethal. The percentage of attacks on educational targets that caused more than 25 deaths increased more than six-fold, from 0.07 percent (1 attack) between 1970 and 2003 to 0.54 percent (10 attacks) between 2004 and 2013. The most lethal terrorist attack on an educational target took place in 2004 in Russia when several dozen Chechen and Ingush militants affiliated with the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs attacked School Number One in Beslan. The assailants,

<sup>1</sup> The Global Terrorism Database defines terrorism 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.” Attacks on schools, including mass-shootings, that are not carried out in pursuit of a broader goal and intended to send a message to a broader audience beyond the immediate victims do not satisfy the GTD inclusion criteria and are not included in this report. For more information on the GTD collection methodology, see the START website: <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/using-gtd/>

who were armed with firearms and wearing explosives, held approximately 1,200 staff and students hostage for three days. Ultimately, 344 people were killed, including more than 100 children, and more than 700 others were wounded making this one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in modern history. In addition to the Beslan attack, highly lethal attacks on educational targets have taken place in Croatia (1 attack), Iraq (3 attacks), Kenya (1 attack), Nigeria (3 attacks), and Syria (2 attacks), however none of these involved more than 75 fatalities.

## LOCATIONS & TACTICS

The country that experienced the most terrorist attacks on educational targets between 1970 and 2013 was Pakistan, where 753 attacks targeted educational institutions, 724 (96%) of which took place between 2004 and 2013. Between 2004 and 2013, far more attacks on educational targets took place in Pakistan than in the next three countries combined: Thailand (213), Afghanistan (205), and Iraq (184).

Although many attacks on educational targets took place in Pakistan, unlike the recent attack in Peshawar, most were not lethal. In fact, Russia, Iraq, and Nigeria experienced more deaths in attacks on educational targets compared to Pakistan. As a result of the Beslan attack described above, fatalities in attacks on educational institutions comprised nearly one-quarter of all deaths due to terrorist attacks in Russia between 2004 and 2013. In contrast, although several hundred people were killed in terrorist attacks on educational institutions in Iraq during this same ten year period, Iraq suffered far more attacks on other types of targets and therefore attacks on educational targets comprised only 2 percent of all terrorist attacks and 1 percent of all deaths from terrorist attacks.

Ten Countries with Most Terrorism against Educational Institutions, Attacks and Fatalities, 2004-2013

Country	Terrorist Attacks on Educational Institutions	Percent of all Terrorist Attacks	Country	Fatalities in Attacks on Educational Institutions	Percent of all Fatalities
Pakistan	724	10%	Russia	351	24%
Thailand	213	9%	Iraq	339	1%
Afghanistan	205	4%	Nigeria	289	6%
Iraq	184	2%	Pakistan	179	1%
India	143	3%	Syria	138	6%
Nigeria	92	6%	Afghanistan	126	1%
Philippines	56	3%	Thailand	113	7%
Nepal	35	5%	Kenya	50	10%
Turkey	33	7%	India	45	1%
Bangladesh	31	10%	Sri Lanka	21	1%

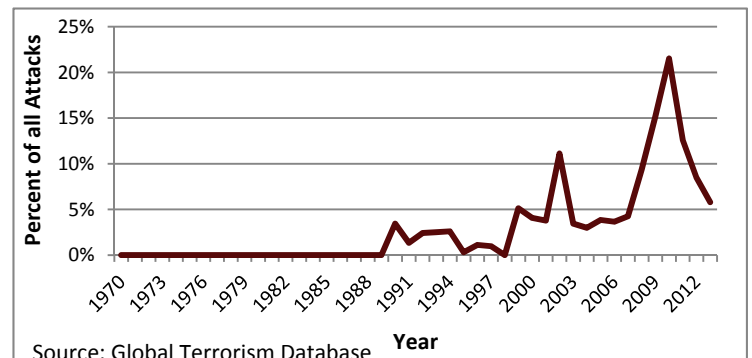
The global prevalence of terrorist attacks against educational institutions was highest in 1970 and 1971 (10% and 9% of all attacks, respectively), when the overall volume of terrorism was relatively low. Between 1972 and 2003, 2 percent of all attacks each year, on average, targeted educational institutions. Globally, 69 percent of attacks on educational institutions between 1970 and 2013 targeted schools, universities, and educational buildings; 19 percent targeted teachers, professors, and instructors, and 11 percent targeted other educational personnel. However, the timing and tactics of attacks on educational targets differ depending on the location or context. To better understand the nature of these attacks, we compare patterns in several key countries that have recently experienced a growing trend in attacks on educational targets—Pakistan, Thailand, Nigeria, and Afghanistan— and one country that experienced a significant number of attacks on educations historically, the United States.

## PAKISTAN

In Pakistan terrorist attacks on educational institutions took place between 1990 and 2013, and targeted schools, universities, and educational buildings at a much higher rate (88%) than worldwide (69%). The vast majority of the attacks on educational infrastructure in Pakistan (94%) were non-lethal, and they typically involved the use of explosives (90%) or arson or incendiary devices (7%) against primary, middle, or high schools that were unoccupied at the time of the attack. The primary goal of these attacks appears to be disruption of the educational process, particularly at girls' schools, rather than loss of life.

Although the perpetrators were unidentified in more than

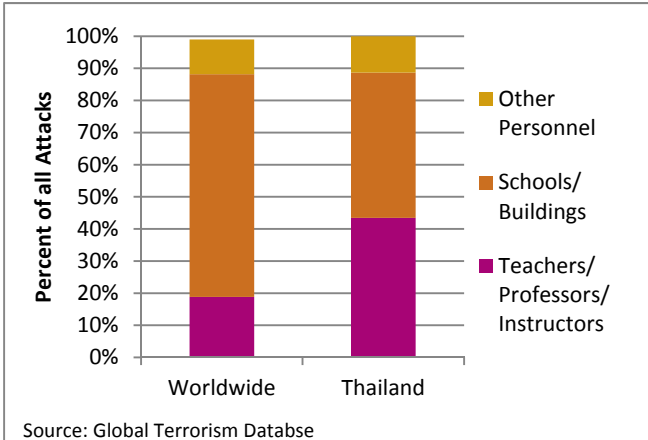
Prevalence of Terrorist Attacks on Educational Targets in Pakistan



three-quarters of the attacks on educational institutions in Pakistan, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was responsible for 136 such attacks, 77 percent of those with known perpetrators. Nearly all of the attacks attributed to TTP (131) were not lethal, however four attacks killed one or two individuals. One TTP attack, at Hussaini Madrassa in Peshawar in 2013, was carried out by a suicide bomber and two gunmen and killed 14 people and wounded 32 others.

## THAILAND

Types of Educational Targets of Terrorist Attacks, Worldwide and in Thailand, 1970-2013



In Thailand, terrorist attacks against educational targets occurred between 1980 and 2013, but were much more common in the 2000s and involved different tactics than those in other locations. Attacks on education in Thailand were more than twice as likely to target teachers, professors, and instructors (43%, compared to 19% globally). Nearly all of these attacks were either armed assaults (66%) or bombings (30%) aimed at teachers and the police or military security forces that routinely escorted them on their commute. Although Thailand also experienced numerous non-lethal attacks on vacant school buildings like those in Pakistan, these comprise approximately half of all attacks on educational targets. Overall, terrorist attacks against educational targets in Thailand were much more likely to be deadly—more than 40 percent of attacks resulted in at least one fatality.

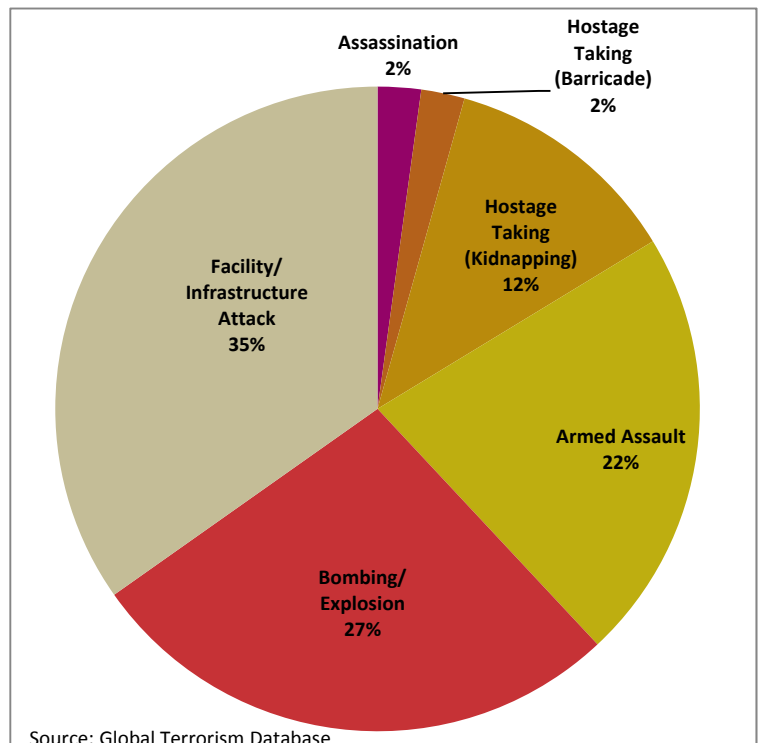
## NIGERIA

With the exception of one attack that took place in 1988, all terrorist attacks on educational targets in Nigeria occurred between 2008 and 2013, the most recent year for which data are available. The group commonly known as “Boko Haram” (a Hausa phrase that loosely translates to “Western education is a sin”) was responsible for carrying out all such attacks for which a perpetrator was identified (69%). Preliminary data from the first half of 2014 indicate that this group’s practice of targeting schools continued as they gained greater notoriety for kidnapping 276 students from a government-run secondary school for girls in Chibok, and also carried out approximately 10 other attacks targeting educational institutions.

Terrorists’ tactics against educational targets in Nigeria were somewhat varied and primarily included armed assaults (22%), bombings (27%), facility/infrastructure attacks (35%), and kidnappings (12%). They were considerably more likely to target schools, universities, and educational buildings (76%) than teachers or other personnel (24%). Educational targets of terrorist attacks in Nigeria included primary and secondary schools as well as colleges, universities and religious institutions. Although 63 percent of attacks on educational targets in Nigeria were non-lethal, several devastating attacks against schools have taken place. In addition to the kidnapping in Chibok in 2014, Boko Haram carried out two assaults in 2013 that each killed more than 40 people at a secondary school and an agricultural college, respectively, in Yobe state.

A distinct pattern among attacks against educational targets in Nigeria involves the prevalence of multi-part, coordinated attacks. Among all terrorist attacks on educational institutions worldwide, approximately 15 percent were part of a coordinated attack. Among all terrorist attacks in Nigeria against any type of target, 28 percent were part of a coordinated attack. However, 46 percent of all attacks on educational institutions in Nigeria were part of a coordinated event in which multiple attacks

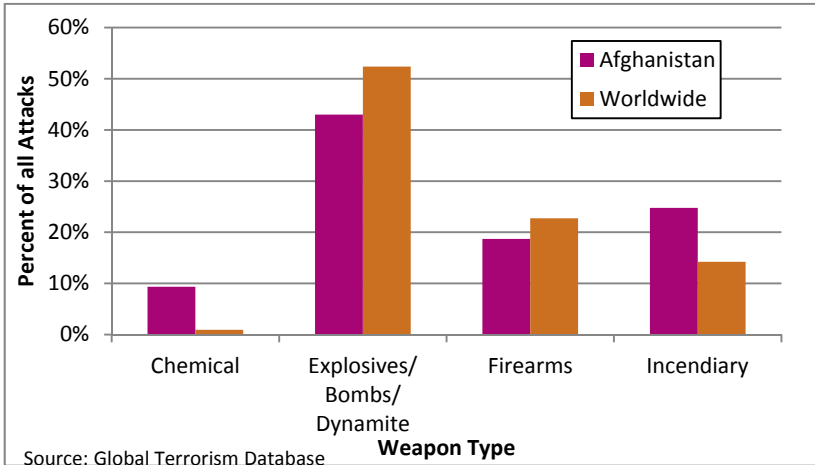
Tactics of Terrorist Attacks on Educational Targets in Nigeria, 1988-2013



either on other educational targets or other types of targets were linked together based on timing, location, and perpetrator. For example, in October 2012 Boko Haram burned eight different schools in one night, though no casualties were reported.

## AFGHANISTAN

**Weapons Commonly Used in Terrorist Attacks on Educational Targets, Worldwide and in Afghanistan, 1970-2013**



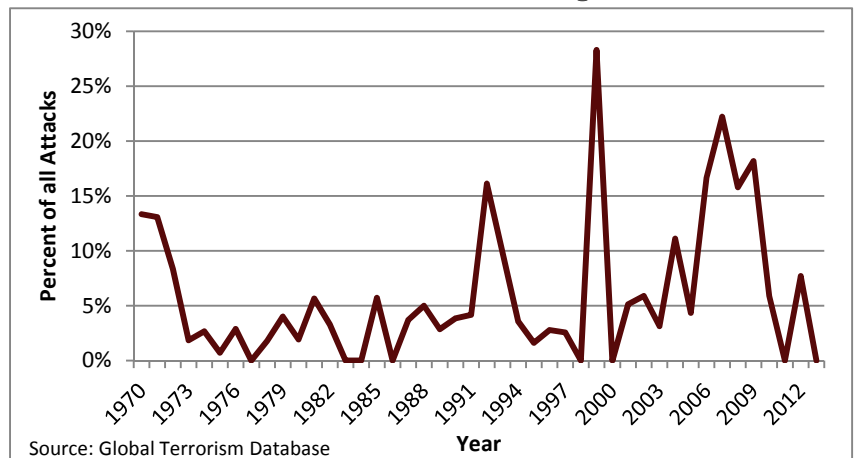
Like attack patterns in Nigeria, the first attack on an educational target in Afghanistan was recorded in 1988, but no others occurred until the 2000s when their prevalence increased considerably. Also, like Nigeria, only one group in Afghanistan was responsible for all of the attacks on educational targets in which a perpetrator was identified (46%)—the Taliban. As we see with most attacks on educational targets, many of those in Afghanistan were non-lethal (71%), however a unique pattern emerges with respect to the injuries caused by these attacks. While it appears that some of the attacks were intentionally non-lethal (e.g., they targeted vacant buildings), they were much more likely to cause non-fatal injuries. Notably, between 2009 and 2013, 20 attacks involving chemical weapons such as toxic gas or poisoned water supply were reported in Afghanistan. Although these attacks were non-lethal, symptoms were reported by scores of

students and staff, including five incidents in which more than 100 people became ill.<sup>2</sup> Authorities typically suspected that the Taliban was responsible for these attacks, though the group did not claim responsibility for these attacks and often denied involvement.

## UNITED STATES

The unusually high prevalence of attacks on educational institutions worldwide in 1970 and 1971 was almost entirely driven by patterns of terrorist activity in the United States. Of the 103 attacks on educational targets worldwide in 1970 and 1971, 91 (88%) took place in the United States. These attacks, which occurred in 23 different states, occurred in the context of the anti-war movement and in the wake of the civil rights movement. Responsibility for the attacks was occasionally attributed to formal organizations like the Weather Underground (5%) or the Chicano Liberation Front (10%), but more often the only information available about the perpetrators of these attacks is that they were “student radicals,” (50%; nearly all attacks were at colleges and universities) “white extremists” (13%; often located at recently desegregated schools), or “black nationalists” (8%).<sup>3</sup> None of these attacks on schools caused any deaths; four resulted in injuries. As the United States’ engagement in the Vietnam War declined, the relative frequency of attacks on educational targets decreased dramatically—there were only five in 1972.

**Prevalence of Terrorist Attacks on Educational Targets in the United States**



A second wave of terrorist attacks on educational institutions in the United States began in the late 1980s. Between 1987 and 2013, 80 percent (32 attacks) of all terrorist attacks on educational institutions in the United States were carried out by radical

<sup>2</sup> In 2012 the World Health Organization (WHO) reported results of their investigation into the suspected poisoning incidents. The WHO indicated that laboratory analysis of more than 200 samples of blood, urine, and water revealed no conclusive evidence of deliberate poisoning, and that the most likely explanation is Mass Psychogenic Illness, a form of Mass Hysteria.

<http://www.newsweek.com/are-taliban-poisoning-afghan-schoolgirls-evidence-65587>

[http://applications.emro.who.int/dsaf/epi/2012/Epi\\_Monitor\\_2012\\_5\\_22.pdf](http://applications.emro.who.int/dsaf/epi/2012/Epi_Monitor_2012_5_22.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> These generic perpetrator designations do not reference cohesive or discrete groups. The violent behavior discussed in this report was carried out by extremist subsets of broader ideological movements and is not representative of the behavior of these movements more generally.

environmentalist groups, including the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Earth Liberation Front (ELF), and groups calling themselves “The Justice Department” and “Revolutionary Cells- Animal Liberation Brigade.” These attacks typically targeted university research laboratories or researchers personally, and caused extensive property damage but no deaths and only one injury. Although the specific value of the damage was often not reported, the eleven attacks for which values are known caused more than \$5.6 million in damages.

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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The data presented here are drawn from START’s Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and reports from news media. The GTD contains information on more than 125,000 terrorist incidents that have occurred around the world since 1970. For more information about the GTD, visit [www.start.umd.edu/gtd](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd).

## START ►►

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