START ▶▶
NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

Bombings at the 2013 Boston Marathon

In light of the series of bombs that exploded near the finish line at the Boston Marathon on April 15, START has compiled data on the history of terrorism in Boston, Massachusetts, terrorist usage of coordinated attacks in the United States, and terrorist attacks at previous marathons around the world.

TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN BOSTON

START's Global Terrorism Database (GTD) records 16 terrorist attacks that have occurred in Boston since 1970, but only three since 1990. The most recent recorded terrorist attack occurred in November 1995 when an explosion occurred at the Boston-based headquarters of the Christian Science community. This 1995 bombing caused no fatalities.

According to the GTD, Boston has been the 14th most frequently targeted U.S. city by terrorists in the past 40+ years. Houston, Texas, has similarly experienced 16 attacks during this period. New York (430 attacks) is by far the most frequently targeted U.S. city, with Los Angeles (103 attacks) the second most common target.

The majority of Boston's terrorist activity occurred in the 1970s, with Black nationalists responsible for five of the 12 attacks during that decade. Violent White supremacists and violent far-leftists were also active in Boston during this time.

There have been two fatal terrorist attacks in Boston since 1970, both classified as assassinations: In 1992, Iwao Matsuda—the president of a Japanese university—was assassinated in his hotel during a visit to Boston; in 1995, Paul McLaughlin—a prosecutor specializing in gang-related cases—was shot in his car in a parking lot in the city.

MASS-CASUALTY TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES

While catastrophic events like those of September 11, 2001, demonstrate how deadly terrorists can be, data shows that most terrorist attacks do not inflict a large number of casualties (injuries and fatalities). Historically, each U.S. terrorist attack has resulted in 3.3 casualties on average. Excluding the 9/11 attacks, the average number of casualties per U.S. attack drops to 1.4 casualties per attack. Mass-casualty terrorism is rare in the United States, but it does occur. (*Those average figures do not include 1993 data, for which START does not have a complete annual dataset.)

There have been 28 terrorist attacks in the United States since 1970 known to have resulted in more than 10 casualties. In addition to the attacks of September 11, 2001, mass-casualty terrorism in the United States includes:

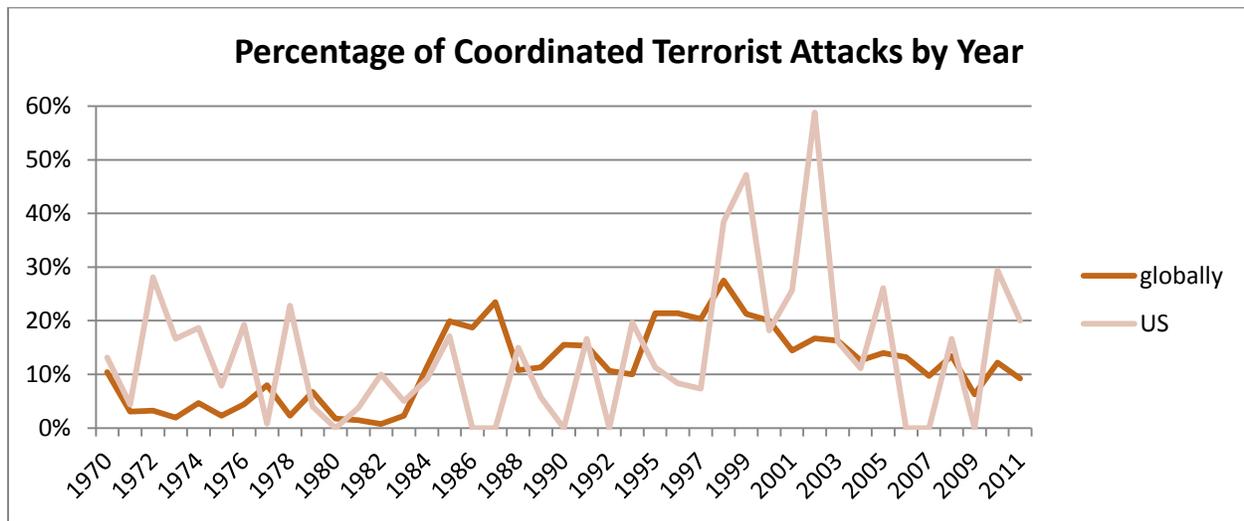| Attack	Year	Casualties
World Trade Center	1993	1048 (including 6 deaths)
Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City	1995	818 (including 168 deaths)
Salmonella poisoning in Oregon	1984	751
Atlanta Olympics Bombing	1996	111 (including 1 death)
Bombing at LaGuardia Airport, NY	1974	85 (including 11 deaths)
Amtrak Rail Sabotage, Arizona	1995	79 (including 1 death)

*The Fort Hood attack was the fourth most lethal attack in terms of fatalities, with 13 dead and 32 wounded.

COORDINATED ATTACKS IN THE UNITED STATES

Reports indicate that two bombs exploded near the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon. Early reports had indicated that additional devices in the area were defused prior to detonation, but those reports have been discredited.

Globally, 12 percent of the more than 100,000 terrorist attacks that have occurred since 1970 have been part of a coordinated attack, where the perpetrators have targeted multiple targets within a short period of time. The rate of such complex, coordinated attacks in the United States is consistent with the global average, with 300 of the 2,362 attacks in the United States between 1970 and 2011 qualifying as part of a "multiple" attack.

At different points in history, though, this tactic has been particularly popular among terrorists targeting the United States. The figure below presents trend data on the percentage of terrorist attacks each year that are categorized as such coordinated attacks (versus singular attacks). During the last 15 years, the percentage of such attacks in the United States has tended to exceed the global average. Given the complications that such attacks create for counterterrorism efforts as well as first responders, this could be an important trend to consider for the United States.

Percentage of Coordinated Terrorist Attacks by Year

INCENDIARY DEVICES AND EXPLOSIVES IN THE US

The most common weapons used in the 207 terrorist attacks in the United States from 2001 to 2011 were incendiary devices and explosives. For the entire duration covered by START study, "Integrated United States Security Database (IUSSD): Data on the Terrorist Attacks in the United States Homeland, 1970 to 2011," these two categories accounted for more than 81 percent of all the weapons used in the attacks.

Incendiary devices accounted for more than half of all weapons used over the last decade, representing a large increase in the use of such weapons compared with the norm for the 1970 to 2011 time period. However, from 2001 to 2011, the use of explosives such as dynamite, grenades and "car bombs," is markedly lower, accounting for only 20 percent of all weapons used compared with 52 percent for the entire sample from 1970 to 2011.

MARATHON-RELATED ATTACKS

APRIL 2008: COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

On April 6, 2008, a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam militant blew himself up, killing 14 civilians, including the minister of highway and road development, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle. The attack occurred as the minister was flagging the start of a road marathon. The attack injured 83 others in Weliweriaya, northeast of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

JANUARY 2006: LAHORE, PAKISTAN

1. On Jan. 28, 2006, in a series of related incidents, protesters of a marathon in which women and men would participate together in Lahore, Pakistan, set at least two buses on fire with unspecified weapons. The protesters were supporters of the Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal, or the United Action Forum coalition. There were no casualties and no reported claims of responsibility.

2. In a related incident, on Jan. 27, 2006, marathon protesters threw stones at policemen and at public property, and set four buses on fire with unspecified weapons. The protesters were supporters of the Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal, or the United Action Forum coalition. At least four people were injured in the protests, two of them police officers.

MAY 2005: GIDEON'S GREEN, NORTHERN IRELAND

On May 2, 2005, suspected Irish Republican Army members planted a pipe bomb at Gideon's Green, Newtownabbey in Belfast along the route of the Belfast Marathon. It was disabled before it could harm anyone, including the target of the attack, Chief Constable Hugh Orde. An unidentified perpetrator called in a warning about the bomb indicating that Hugh Orde was the intended target of the attack.

MAY 2003: BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

On May 5, 2003, a substantial bomb was left in a van by two masked men in Belfast, North Ireland, in front of the motor tax office a few hours before the annual Belfast marathon. The owner of the van called the police who defused the bomb before it exploded. Police suspected that the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) was responsible for the incident.

MAY 1998: BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

On May 3, 1998, suspected Irish Republican Army (IRA) militants fired two Mark 6 mortars at the Grosvenor Road Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) station in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The mortars, however, did not detonate and no injuries or damage were reported. The discovery of the mortars disrupted the Belfast Marathon, which was to be held the day after this incident.

NOVEMBER 1994: MANAMA, BAHRAIN

On November 25, 1994, protestors attacked participants of a marathon along the al-Budayyi' Highway using a number of blunt objects, including sticks and rocks. Three marathon runners were injured, including a British national and a person from Saudi Arabia. While the specific motive for the attack is unknown, it is believed that the perpetrators were protesting the route of the marathon because of its proximity to a site believed to be the remains of a mosque. Protesters were also angered by the dress of female participants in the race.