



# The New Jihadism

## A Global Snapshot

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In collaboration with  
the BBC World Service  
and BBC Monitoring

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# Executive Summary

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- The aim of this project was to produce a global snapshot of jihadist violence by recording all the reported deaths that were caused by jihadist groups and networks during the month of November 2014.
- This task was made possible by combining the vast intellectual, journalistic and professional resources of the BBC World Service, BBC Monitoring, and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR).
- The findings illustrate the enormous human suffering caused by jihadist violence. Over the course of just one month, jihadists carried out 664 attacks, killing 5,042 people – the equivalent of three attacks per day on the scale of the London bombings in July 2005.
- While comparisons to earlier periods are difficult, the overall picture is that of an increasingly ambitious, complex, sophisticated and far-reaching movement – one that seems to be in the middle of a transformation:

**Geography:** Though Islamic State is the most deadly group and the conflict in Syria and Iraq the ‘battle zone’ with the largest number of recorded fatalities, jihadist groups carried out attacks in 12 other countries. In just one month, they were responsible for nearly 800 deaths each in Nigeria and Afghanistan, as well as hundreds in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan.

**Victims:** Excluding the jihadists themselves, 51 per cent of jihadist fatalities were civilian. If government officials, policemen and other non-combatants are included, the figure rises to 57 per cent. Based on context and location, the vast majority of victims is Muslim.

**Tactics:** While jihadist violence used to be associated with mass casualty bombings – such as the ones in New York, Madrid and London – today’s jihadists employ a much greater variety of tactics, ranging from classical terrorism to more or less conventional operations. In our data, ‘bombings’ were outnumbered by shootings, ambushes, and shelling, reflecting the increased emphasis on holding territory and confronting conventional forces.

**Groups:** More than 60 per cent of the jihadist deaths were caused by groups that have no formal relationship with al Qaeda. Though al Qaeda and its affiliates – especially Jabhat al Nusra in Syria and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – still play an important role, the data shows that treating ‘jihadism’ and al Qaeda as one and the same is less true than ever.

- The scale of jihadist activity that is captured in this report reminds us to be cautious in our judgment of historical trends. Less than four years ago, jihadism – then predominantly in the form of al Qaeda – was widely believed to be dead or dying.

This demonstrates that there can be no quick fixes for what is a generational challenge that needs to be countered not just through military means but political will, economic resources, and a readiness to challenge the ideas and beliefs that are driving its expansion.



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# Introduction

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Less than four years ago, jihadist violence was widely believed to be in a state of terminal decline. Osama bin Laden and his most senior lieutenants had been killed, and the peaceful uprisings of the Arab Spring seemed to usher in a new era of freedom and democracy in which al Qaeda and its jihadist terrorism looked outdated – if not anachronistic. Journalists, academics, and even senior policymakers were ready to move on. Talk of the ‘strategic defeat’, ‘decline’, and ‘fall’ of al Qaeda was common.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of 2014, it is no longer al Qaeda or jihadism that look outdated but the predictions of its imminent demise. Far from nearing defeat, jihadist groups everywhere have regrouped and taken advantage of new conflicts and instability – often in the very countries that saw popular uprisings during 2011. The most spectacular newcomer is ‘Islamic State’, a group that has declared a Caliphate, holds territory from the Syrian city of Aleppo to the outskirts of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, and has rivalled – if not replaced – al Qaeda as the leader of global jihadism.

The aim of this project was to produce a global snapshot of this phenomenon by recording all the reported deaths that were caused by jihadist groups and networks during the month of November 2014. This task was made possible by combining the vast intellectual, journalistic and professional resources of the BBC World Service, BBC Monitoring, and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR).

The findings are both important and disturbing. Over the course of just one month, jihadists carried out 664 attacks, killing 5,042 people – nearly twice the number of people who lost their lives in the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks.<sup>2</sup>

While comparisons to earlier periods are difficult, the overall picture is that of an increasingly ambitious, complex, sophisticated and far-reaching movement:

- Though Islamic State is the most deadly group and the conflict in Syria and Iraq the ‘battle zone’ with the largest number of recorded fatalities, jihadist groups carried out attacks in 12 other countries. In just one month, they were responsible for nearly 800 deaths each in Nigeria and Afghanistan, as well as hundreds in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan.
- Excluding the jihadists themselves and ‘unknowns’, 51 per cent of jihadist fatalities were civilian. If government officials, policemen and other non-combatants are added, the figure rises to 57 per cent. Given context and location, the vast majority of jihadist victims is Muslim.

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking in July 2011, U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta argued that ‘we’re within reach of strategically defeating al Qaeda’; see Elisabeth Bumiller, ‘Panetta, in Kabul, Says Defeat of al Qaeda Is “Within Reach”’, *New York Times*, 9 July 2011. Around the same time, John Brennan, President Obama’s counterterrorism advisor, told a Washington DC audience: ‘It will take time, but make no mistake, al Qaeda is in its decline’; see Brennan, quoted in Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti, ‘Obama Adviser Outlines Plans to Defeat Al Qaeda’, *New York Times*, June 29, 2011. For an academic equivalent, see Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2011)

<sup>2</sup> While the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 as a whole resulted in nearly 3,000 fatalities, the attacks on the World Trade Center are believed to have caused around 2,650 deaths. See ‘Accused 9/11 plotters Khalid Sheikh Mohammed Faces New York Trial’, *CNN*, 13 November 2009.

- While jihadist violence used to be associated with mass casualty bombings – such as the ones in New York, Madrid and London – today’s jihadists employ a much greater variety of tactics, ranging from classical terrorism to more or less conventional operations. In our data, ‘bombings’ were outnumbered by shootings, ambushes, and shelling, reflecting the increased emphasis on holding territory and confronting conventional forces.
- More than 60 per cent of the jihadist deaths were caused by groups that have no formal relationship with al Qaeda. Though al Qaeda and its affiliates – especially Jabhat al Nusra in Syria and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – still play an important role, our data shows that treating ‘jihadism’ and al Qaeda as one and the same is less true than ever.

This report, therefore, tells the story of a movement in the middle of a transformation – one whose final outcome is impossible to predict. The immediate focus, however, is jihadism’s human cost: with, on average, more than 20 attacks and nearly 170 deaths per day, jihadist groups destroy countless lives – most of them Muslim – in the name of an ideology that the vast majority of Muslims reject. If anything, this highlights the movement’s scale and ambition, but also the long-term political, social, ideological, and military commitment that will be needed to counter it.

The report is divided into three parts: the detailed presentation of findings – dealing, in turn, with geographical spread, groups, victims, and tactics – will be preceded by sections dealing with definitions and methodology.



# Defining Jihadism

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The term jihadism has been contentious ever since it entered into common usage during the late 1990s.<sup>3</sup> One of the most frequent complaints is that it unfairly associates the religious concept of ‘jihad’ with acts of terrorism and extreme violence. For the purposes of this study, it is important, therefore, to distinguish between ‘jihadism’, a modern revolutionary ideology, and ‘jihad’, an Islamic concept which means ‘struggle’ and can refer to all kinds of religiously inspired effort – be they spiritual, personal, political, or military.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the only ones who argue that ‘jihad’ and ‘jihadism’ are identical are ‘Islamophobes’ (who want to portray Islam as inherently violent) and the jihadists themselves.

This does not mean, however, that every Islamically inspired militant group that mobilizes its followers under the banner of ‘jihad’ is also ‘jihadist’. What defines jihadists and the jihadist movement more broadly is the combination of two characteristics:<sup>5</sup>

- First, they downplay the more spiritual and non-violent connotations of the concept, thinking of ‘jihad’ primarily – often exclusively – as fighting, and argue that every practicing, able-bodied Muslim has an obligation to fulfil this duty. In particular, they believe that the West, ‘the Jews’ and other ‘non-believers’ have conspired to suppress Islam, and that even excessively brutal acts of violence are justified to defend ‘Muslim lands’ and liberate the ‘community of believers’ (*ummah*).
- Second, they follow a religious doctrine known as Salafism which promotes an extremely narrow, puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam that claims to reject any form of interpretation and hopes to imitate the ‘perfect conditions’ that existed during the era of the ‘pious forefathers’ (*Salaf*), the first generations that succeeded the Prophet Mohammed. This utopia informs their vision of society. It explains their aggressive hostility towards other sects and religions; the rejection of all forms of man-made law and democracy; and their ruthless enforcement of public morality, dress codes, and other social norms.

The definition that guided the collection of data for this study reflects the ideology’s dual nature. It conceives of jihadism as ‘a modern revolutionary political ideology mandating the use of violence to defend or promote a particular, very narrow vision of Sunni Islamic understandings’.

This definition excludes Shia militant groups such as Hezbollah that justify fighting in the name of jihad but are located outside the Sunni tradition. Indeed, the jihadists of al Qaeda, the Islamic State and like-minded groups regard Hezbollah as ‘apostates’ and have been

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<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Hegghammer, ‘Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism’ in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 244-66.

<sup>4</sup> See John Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 26-8.

<sup>5</sup> See, among others, Dirk Baehr, *Kontinuität und Wandel in der Ideologie des Jihadi-Salafismus* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2009); Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: 2009); Bernard Haykel, ‘On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action’ in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 33-50; Hegghammer, ‘Jihadi-Salafis’, op. cit.; Roel Meijer, ‘Introduction’ in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, op. cit., pp. 1-32; Guido Steinberg, *Der nahe und der ferne Feind: Das Netzwerk des islamistischen Terrorismus* (Munich: CH Beck, 2005); Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

among the most vociferous opponents of Shia militant groups in places like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

The definition also excludes the Palestinian group Hamas which advocates 'jihad' and – unlike Hezbollah – is widely recognized as Sunni. Its religious, social and political doctrine, however, is not Salafist. Jihadist groups such as al Qaeda have repeatedly condemned Hamas for recognizing man-made laws and becoming involved in democratic elections, while Hamas, in turn, has repressed – and fought against – jihadist groups.<sup>6</sup>

Particularly challenging is the Syrian conflict because nearly all of the groups involved in opposing the Assad government are Islamic in character and profess to be involved in some kind of 'jihad'. Based on our analysis of their statements, membership, and overall character, only three Syrian groups can be classified as jihadist in the sense of fighting for a Salafist political order: Ahrar al Sham, Jabhat al Nusra, and the Islamic State.

Also among the groups included in the definition are the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban whose religious doctrine, Deobandi, is traditionally different but whose recent mutations share many assumptions with Salafism and – along with the so-called Ahl-e-hadith – are sometimes considered their South Asian cousin.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that Taliban and other jihadists see eye to eye on every issue of religious practice and military strategy, but they have enough in common for jihadists around the world to recognize, protect and champion the Taliban and their cause.<sup>8</sup>

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6 In the summer of 2009, for example, Hamas security forces stormed a mosque associated with a jihadist group, killing 24 of its members. See Matthew Levitt, Yoram Cohen, and Becca Wasser, 'Deterred but Determined: Salafi-jihadi Groups in the Palestinian Area', *Policy Focus #99, The Washington Institute*, January 2010.

7 Gilles Kepel argues that, even in its earliest versions, the Deobandi approach 'was similar to that of the Wahhabites in Saudi-Arabia'; see Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), p. 58. John Schmidt points out that Deobandism is the 'parent sect' of every jihadist group in Pakistan except for Lashkar-e-Taiba, which has emerged from the Ahl-e-hadith tradition; see John Schmidt, *The Unraveling: Pakistan in the Age of Jihad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Gioux, 2011), p. 59.

8 See, for example, Peter Bergen, 'Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Other Extremist Groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan', *Testimony presented before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 24 May 2011; [http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Bergen\\_testimony.pdf](http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Bergen_testimony.pdf).

# Methodology

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The aim of the project was to produce a snapshot of the scale and geographical distribution of deaths caused by jihadist groups, networks, and individuals. It does not represent an account or investigation of individual incidents – many of which, especially those in conflict zones, will be contested for years to come. We recognize – and have tried to mitigate – the difficulties associated with data gathering in this area, including the fact that attribution remains unclear at times; reporting can be patchy, biased, and delayed; and that incidents may go unreported altogether.

To make the findings as valid as possible, we had our methodology and definitions reviewed by three independent academic experts and conducted a week long ‘trial’ which gave us a first impression of the data and made it possible to anticipate potential problems as well as fine-tune our methodology.

The data and findings presented in this report cover the period from 1 to 30 November 2014. The choice of November – as opposed to other months of the year – was determined by convenience and BBC scheduling, though we consulted with academic experts, carefully considered all arguments and, ultimately, found no compelling reason why November would not be suitable.

In collecting the data, we were able to draw on the vast resources of the BBC, especially its foreign language services and the BBC Monitoring system, as well as local newspapers, broadcast media, specialist blogs, local NGOs, civil society groups, and data gathering projects in areas in which jihadist groups and/or networks are known to be active. For each incident, we recorded date and time, location, type of attack, number of deaths, the status of individuals killed, target, type of target, group, method for determining responsibility, and source(s).

Incidents were gathered by two separate teams – one at BBC Monitoring and another at ICSR – and reconciled at the end of each day. Where differences persisted, a final decision was taken by a Principals group consisting of representatives from the BBC World Service and ICSR.

Incidents were recorded as ‘jihadist’ when they were claimed by, or could be attributed to, groups that meet the definition discussed above. Those that remained unclear – typically incidents involving splinter groups, unaffiliated networks or lone attackers – were kept in a ‘hold’ category until the Principals group had the chance to review them and take a decision based on the available evidence and a rigorous application of our rules and definitions. In most cases, these decisions were informed by a combination of claims of responsibility, responses of other jihadist groups, and/or the nature and location of an incident.

Where the number of fatalities was disputed, we used the numbers given in BBC reporting or whatever was seen as the most credible news source in a given country or region according to local BBC staff. In cases where no such determination could be made, we opted for the method adopted by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), the most comprehensive open source collection of

political violence data for developing states which tends to count the lowest reported number of deaths.<sup>9</sup>

Despite our best efforts to minimize cases of misattribution and clarify conflicting sources of information, a small number of incidents may still be contentious. This is not unusual, nor does it disqualify the overall findings that are presented in the following. Indeed, we are confident that, despite its limitations, the project has produced a comprehensive global snapshot of the intensity and geographical spread of jihadist violence in the current period.

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description, see Clionadh Raleigh, Andrew Linke, and Catriona Dowd, *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) – Codebook 3* (Brighton, Boulder, and Oslo: ACLED, 2014); available at [http://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ACLED\\_Codebook\\_2014\\_updated.pdf](http://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ACLED_Codebook_2014_updated.pdf).

# Findings

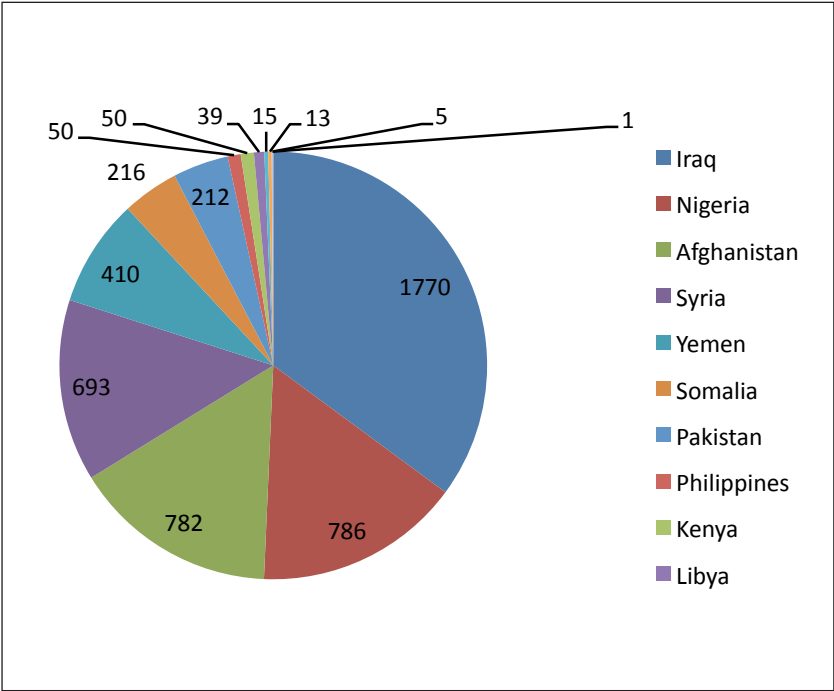
**D**uring the month of November, jihadists were responsible for 664 lethal attacks resulting in 5,042 deaths. This section provides a more detailed overview and assessment of where these fatalities occurred, who was responsible, the status of victims, and the tactics that led to their deaths.

## Geography

As Figure 1 shows, we recorded jihadist fatalities in 14 countries, of which four – Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Syria – produced 80 per cent of the total. Iraq was by the far the worst affected country, accounting for over a third, while Nigeria, Afghanistan and Syria were each responsible for 13-15 per cent. They were followed by Yemen (8 per cent), Somalia (4 per cent), and Pakistan (4 per cent), as well as the Philippines, Kenya, and Libya (each around 1 per cent). Cameroon, India, Niger, and Egypt all accounted for less than 1 per cent.

The geographical distribution reflects what is known about current jihadist ‘battlefronts’. No doubt, the dominance of the conflict in Syria and Iraq – which accounts for nearly half of the fatalities (48.8 per cent) – underlines how much of a center of gravity this conflict has become for the entire jihadist movement. Even so, it would be mistaken to dismiss or marginalize the other conflicts in which jihadist deaths were counted. Taken together, the five conflicts in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan produced nearly the same share (47.7 per cent) as Syria and Iraq without receiving similar amounts of attention in the media. Indeed, the lack of coverage for the conflicts in

Figure 1 Deaths by Country



Pakistan and Afghanistan is particularly striking and suggests a degree of ‘Afghanistan fatigue’ rather than the absence of jihadist activity. Taking into account the number of attacks, it becomes clear that jihadism is far deadlier in some countries than in others (see Table 1). On average, each incident produced 7.6 fatalities, but in three of the 14 countries, this number was significantly higher: in Yemen and Kenya, jihadists caused 11 and 12.5 fatalities per attack, while the average death toll in Nigeria stood at 29.

There are many possible explanations, including groups’ modus operandi, their preferred method of attack, as well as issues related to ideology and sectarianism. For example, the difference in the number of fatalities per attack for Kenya and Somalia (12.5 vs. 6) seems to suggest that al Shabab – the group responsible for virtually all the attacks in both countries – is more careful in Somalia, where most of its victims are likely to be Muslims than in Kenya, a majority Christian country where it may be easier to target ‘infidels’. In the case of the Nigerian group Boko Haram, one might have suspected a similar rationale, except that its biggest operation during the month of November – the most deadly attack in the entire dataset – was an attack on a mosque which killed 120 Muslims. If anything, this illustrates Boko Haram’s extreme brutality and lack of restraint.

**Table 1** Deaths and Attacks by Country

<b>Country</b>	<b>Deaths</b>	<b>Attacks</b>
Iraq	1770	233
Nigeria	786	27
Afghanistan	782	152
Syria	693	110
Yemen	410	37
Somalia	216	37
Pakistan	212	35
Philippines	50	9
Kenya	50	4
Libya	39	12
Cameroon	15	3
India	13	2
Egypt	5	2
Niger	1	1

## Groups

Table 2 lists the 16 jihadist groups that were responsible for deaths. The fatalities caused by the Islamic State account for 44 per cent of the total, followed by Boko Haram (16 per cent) and the Taliban (14 per cent). Other significant contributors to the death toll include al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen (8 per cent), al Shabab (5 per cent), Jabhat al Nusra in Syria (5 per cent), as well as the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) (3 per cent) and its splinter Jamaat ul Ahrar (1 per cent). Responsible for 1 per cent or less were the Afghan Haqqani network, Abu Sayyaf and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters from the Philippines, the Libyan Ansar al Shariah, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jundullah from Pakistan, Ansar Bayt al Maqdis in Egypt, and the Malian. The most deadly group is Boko Haram which carried out attacks in Nigeria and Cameroon during the period of observation and killed, on average, 27 people per incident. It is followed by AQAP (11 fatalities per incident), Abu Sayyaf (8), the two Syrian groups Jabhat al Nusra (7) and Islamic State (7). Jamaat ul Ahrar and the Haqqani network were each responsible for large attacks, killing 60 and 59 people respectively, but since they only carried out this one attack during the period of observation, we didn't feel we had sufficient data to make meaningful statements about their deadliness.

**Table 2** Deaths and Attacks by Group

Group	Deaths	Attacks
Islamic State	2206	306
Boko Haram	801	30
Taliban	720	150
AQAP	410	36
Al Shabab	266	41
Jabhat al Nusra	257	34
Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan	146	32
Jamaat ul-Ahrar	60	1
Haqqani Network	59	1
Abu Sayyaf	41	5
Ansar al-Shariah Libya	39	12
Lashkar-e-Toiba	18	3
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters	9	4
Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis	5	2
Jundullah	4	1
MUJAO	1	1

The data illustrates how a very small number of groups is responsible for much of the jihadist activity worldwide. Our original guide list contained the names of nearly 50 groups, of which two thirds carried out no deadly attacks at all. Of the 17 that did, nine were responsible for 5 or less attacks, with just eight perpetrating 97 per cent of attacks and causing 96 per cent of deaths. This demonstrates that, in many places, jihadist deaths continue to be relatively rare despite the presence of jihadist groups. It also suggests that the concept of

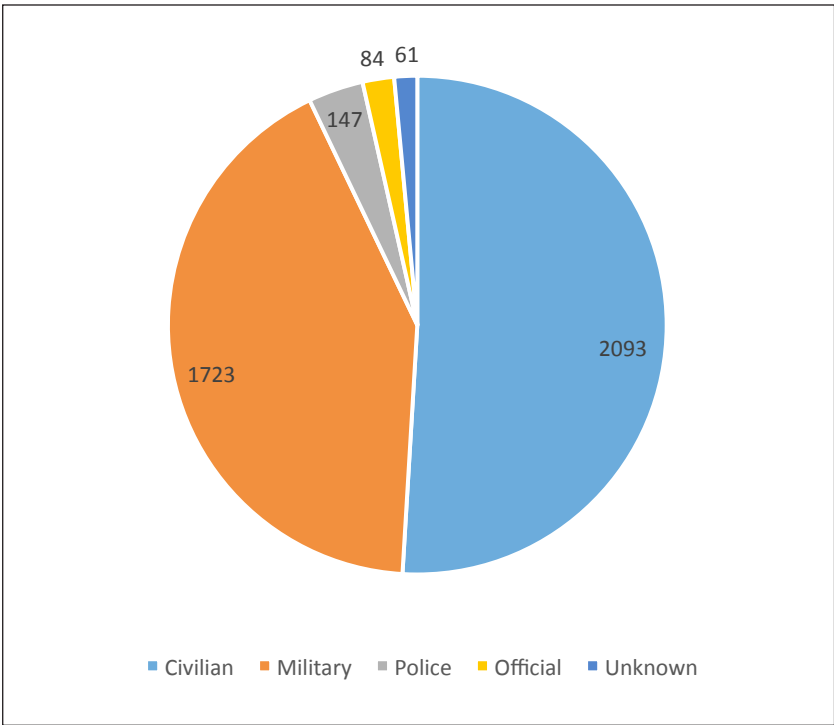
terrorism is no longer sufficient in capturing the actions or strategies of jihadist groups: the eight groups that are responsible for most of the deadly attacks are all involved in large-scale ethnic conflicts and/or civil wars, engaging in a whole range of tactics and methods (see below).

One of the most dramatic developments that emerges from our data is the fact that al Qaeda and jihadism are no longer synonymous (if they ever were). The two most deadly groups, Islamic State and Boko Haram, which account for 60 per cent of all jihadist deaths, have no formal affiliation with al Qaeda. They represent a new breed of jihadist groups which thrive on religious and sectarian fault lines, are state builders, and seem to have fewer restraints in using excessive forms of violence. This is not to say that al Qaeda has disappeared altogether. Its main affiliates – AQAP, al Shabab, and Jabhat al Nusra – still account for a fifth of the total, and they are often cited as the most sophisticated groups in terms of skills, doctrine, and tradecraft. But the split has become obvious, and it seems likely that patterns of conflict and competition between jihadist groups will become more frequent.

### Victims

Since the project recorded all deaths caused by jihadist violence, this included jihadists who were killed by other jihadists – or indeed by themselves. Of the 5,043 recorded deaths, we counted 935 jihadist militants who died as a result of ‘friendly fire’, infighting between different jihadist groups (especially in Syria), and as suicide bombers. If they are excluded, we are left with 4,108 victims of jihadist violence, of which nearly 51 per cent (2093) can be categorized as civilian while 42 per cent are military personnel (see Figure 2). The remainder are police (3.5 per cent; 147), government officials (2 per cent; 84), and a small number of individuals whose status could not be determined (1.5 per

Figure 2 Deaths by Victim Status





cent; 61). If government officials and police are added to the civilian category, the share of non-combatants rises to 57 per cent. Among them are at least 84 children.

As Table 3 shows, the balance between civilian and military victims differs from country to country. In Syria and Afghanistan, two of the most significant jihadist ‘battlefronts’, the military victims outnumbered the civilians by a factor of more than two to one. By contrast, the vast majority of victims in Nigeria and Kenya (both 96 per cent) were civilian. Somalia, on the other hand, has the highest number of deaths among government officials (22), reflecting al-Shabab’s strategy of assassinating politicians and senior civil servants that support the transitional government.

**Table 3** Deaths by Status and Country

	<b>Civilian</b>	<b>Military</b>	<b>Police</b>	<b>Official</b>	<b>Jihadist</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Total</b>
Afghanistan	124	285	95	21	248	9	<b>782</b>
Cameroon	3	2	0	0	10	0	<b>15</b>
Egypt	0	5	0	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
India	5	3	0	0	5	0	<b>13</b>
Iraq	815	562	33	13	292	55	<b>1770</b>
Kenya	48	0	2	0	0	0	<b>50</b>
Libya	3	36	0	0	0	0	<b>39</b>
Niger	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Nigeria	681	28	3	15	59	0	<b>786</b>
Pakistan	70	35	13	11	76	7	<b>212</b>
Philippines	12	14	0	0	24	0	<b>50</b>
Somalia	30	145	1	22	18	0	<b>216</b>
Syria	151	372	0	2	166	2	<b>693</b>
Yemen	138	235	0	0	37	0	<b>410</b>

We did not attempt to record the religious affiliation of victims, which – in any case – would have proved impossible, given that most of the reports about jihadist killings do not include the victims’ full names, never mind their ethnic and religious identities. However, considering that only about 16 per cent of the deaths took place in non-Muslim majority countries (Nigeria and the Philippines) and that very few of the incidents in Muslim majority countries specifically targeted non-Muslim religious minorities, it is reasonable to conclude that the vast majority of victims – perhaps 80 per cent or more – were Muslim, albeit from different sects.

The figures confirm what many analysts and experts have suspected for years, namely that the overwhelming majority of jihadist victims are Muslims and non-combatants.<sup>10</sup> The share of civilians and non-combatants is not, however, as high as expected. Given al Qaeda’s reputation for, and strategy of, attacking ‘soft’ civilian targets in the West, one might have expected the civilian death to be close to 100 per cent. But jihadist campaigns have always been more local and

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Yassin Musharbash, ‘Al Qaeda Kills Eight Times More Muslims Than Non-Muslims’, *Spiegel Online*, 3 December 2009; available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/surprising-study-on-terrorism-al-qaeda-kills-eight-times-more-muslims-than-non-muslims-a-660619.html>.

more complex than Western reporting has suggested, especially since the Arab Spring when jihadists have returned to Middle Eastern countries and taken advantage of regional instabilities and lack of effective governance in many of the affected countries. More than ever, jihadists are now holding territory and fighting against conventional forces, which explains the relatively high percentage of military fatalities.

The jihadists' 'return' to the Middle East is also the explanation for the very high percentage of Muslim fatalities. If jihadists are fighting insurgencies in Muslim majority countries, we shouldn't be surprised that the vast majority of victims are Muslims too. That said, from a jihadist perspective, not every Muslim is the same. For the Islamic State, for instance, Shiites, especially those involved in the security forces, are as bad – if not worse – than Christians or Jews. They are regarded as 'apostates' – people who are 'pretending' to be Muslims without adhering to the faith's core principles and who therefore constitute legitimate targets. Ten years ago, the 'old' al Qaeda may have objected to targeting other Muslim sects,<sup>11</sup> but in the current climate of heightened sectarian tension, the idea of targeting other Muslims – as long as they belong to the 'other' sect – has, sadly, become more plausible.

## Method

The popular association of jihadism with terrorism, and of terrorism with bombing, is not reflected in our data. As Figure 3 shows, jihadists are now involved in a wide range of tactics of which bomb attacks have become a minority, representing just over a third of the deadly attacks (36 per cent). Shooting and ambushes account for 30 and 10 per cent respectively, while another 10 per cent are made up of executions. Less frequent are incidents of shelling (5 per cent), as well as other and unknown tactics (9 per cent).

Table 4 gives a detailed account of the methods that were used. It shows that jihadists principally resort to three types of bomb attacks: car bombs (38 incidents), suicide bombs (38), and – most frequently – improvised explosive devices (IED) (128). We also distinguished between beheadings, which – despite the public attention they generate – have been comparatively rare (11 incidents), especially when compared to executions by gunfire (50). One of the most surprising discoveries was the occurrence of two stabbings, of which one killed a staggering 48 people – a new and potentially disturbing trend.

The least lethal tactic are IEDs which produce, on average, 4 deaths per incident. Beheadings, with an average of 5, are only marginally more deadly, though one mustn't underestimate their propaganda and intimidation value. Shelling, shootings, 'traditional' executions, and car bombs result in an average of between 6 and 8 deaths, while ambushes generate 10. Stabbings aside, the most lethal tactic is suicide bombings, producing on average 17 deaths per incident. The high lethality of stabbings may be an exception, resulting from the one incident in which 48 people died, but the deadliness of suicide bombings is a long-established fact and often said to be one of the principal operational reasons for their 'popularity' among terrorist groups.<sup>12</sup>

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11 See Emily Hunt, 'Zarqawi's "Total War" on Shiites Exposes a Divide among Sunni Jihadists', *Policywatch 1049*, The Washington Institute, 15 November 2005.

12 See Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), Chapter 2.

Figure 3 Attacks by Method

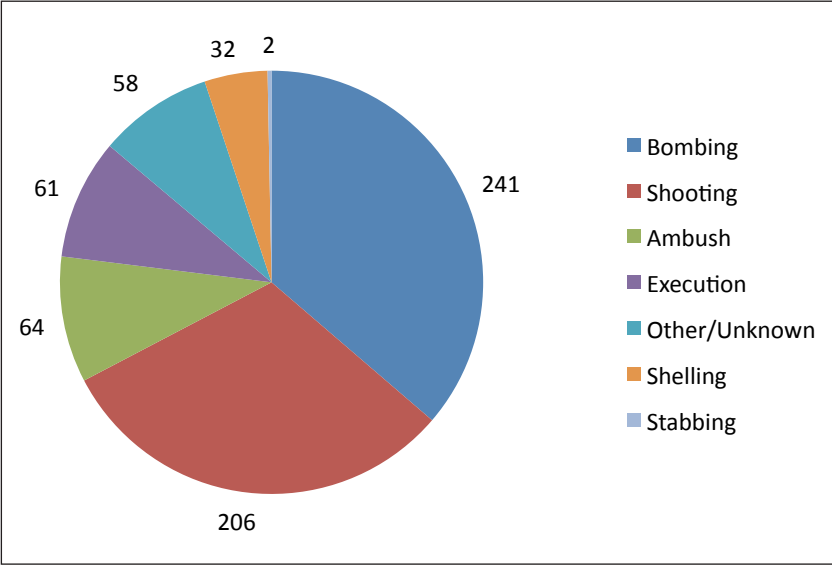


Table 4 Deaths and Attacks by Method

Method	Subtype	Attacks	Deaths	Attacks	Deaths
<b>Bombings</b>				<b>241</b>	<b>1653</b>
	Car bomb	38	307		
	IED	125	555		
	Suicide bomb	38	650		
	Other bomb	37	141		
<b>Shooting</b>				<b>206</b>	<b>1574</b>
<b>Ambush</b>				<b>64</b>	<b>666</b>
<b>Execution</b>				<b>61</b>	<b>426</b>
	Beheading	11	50		
	Other execution	50	376		
<b>Shelling</b>				<b>32</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>Stabbing</b>				<b>2</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Other</b>				<b>7</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Unknown</b>				<b>51</b>	<b>429</b>

There are subtle, but significant, differences between countries (see Table 5). In Somalia and the Philippines, for example, the predominant tactic was shootings, representing more than half of all attacks. In Yemen, by contrast, shootings were rare (21 per cent), while IEDs represented more than a third. Eight of the 11 beheadings took place in Syria, but the tactic seems to have spread to Libya (2 incidents) and Yemen (1) too. Executions by gunfire took place in five countries, though Syria and Iraq accounted for 94 per cent of the cases. The use of suicide bombings, on the other hand, occurred in all major conflict

zones, with Iraq (11 incidents) and Afghanistan (15) having the most incidents.

**Table 5** Deaths and Attacks by Method and Country

Country	Type of attack	Deaths	Attacks
Afghanistan	Ambush	173	33
	Suicide bomb	169	15
	Shooting	145	34
	IED	120	35
	Unknown	94	11
	Bomb	45	13
	Shelling	19	7
	Car bomb	15	3
	Execution	2	1
<b>Afghanistan Total</b>		<b>782</b>	<b>152</b>
Cameroon	Shooting	14	2
	IED	1	1
<b>Cameroon Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>
Egypt	Unknown	5	2
<b>Egypt Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
India	Shooting	14	2
	Ambush	3	1
<b>India Total</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>
Iraq	Shooting	357	46
	Execution	301	24
	Car bomb	264	29
	Ambush	229	13
	Unknown	223	24
	IED	171	55
	Shelling	139	14
	Suicide bomb	47	11
	Bomb	36	15
	Other	3	2
<b>Iraq Total</b>		<b>1770</b>	<b>233</b>
Kenya	Shooting	49	3
	Unknown	1	1
<b>Kenya Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>4</b>
Libya	Shooting	23	5
	IED	7	2
	Beheading	4	2
	Ambush	3	1
	Unknown	2	2
<b>Libya Total</b>		<b>39</b>	<b>12</b>

Country	Type of attack	Deaths	Attacks
Niger	Shooting	1	1
<b>Niger Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Nigeria	Suicide bomb	310	6
	Shooting	204	10
	IED	103	4
	Stabbing	48	1
	Bomb	45	1
	Unknown	36	2
	Ambush	25	2
	Execution	15	1
<b>Nigeria Total</b>		<b>786</b>	<b>27</b>
Pakistan	Shooting	91	6
	Suicide bomb	60	1
	IED	29	12
	Shelling	21	2
	Bomb	6	3
	Unknown	5	1
<b>Pakistan Total</b>		<b>212</b>	<b>35</b>
Phillippines	Shooting	46	7
	Shelling	4	2
<b>Phillippines Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>9</b>
Somalia	Shooting	90	21
	Ambush	73	4
	IED	34	5
	Execution	8	1
	Bomb	6	2
	Unknown	3	2
	Car bomb	2	2
<b>Somalia Total</b>		<b>216</b>	<b>37</b>
Syria	Shooting	367	52
	Ambush	76	7
	Unknown	54	3
	Execution	50	23
	Suicide bomb	42	3
Syria	Beheading	34	8
	Other	26	5
	IED	22	1
	Shelling	12	4
	Car bomb	8	2
	Bomb	1	1
	Stabbing	1	1
<b>Syria Total</b>		<b>693</b>	<b>110</b>

Country	Type of attack	Deaths	Attacks
Yemen	Shooting	177	8
	Ambush	84	3
	IED	68	13
	Suicide bomb	22	2
	Car bomb	18	2
	Unknown	18	3
	Beheading	12	1
	Shelling	9	3
	Bomb	2	2
<b>Yemen Total</b>		<b>410</b>	<b>37</b>

Our data reflects the transformation of jihadist groups away from organizations that used to be mostly involved in terrorism to more conventional forces that are fighting to gain or hold territory against state armies. Though it was never right to think of jihadist groups as doing little more than suicide bombings, our figures prove quite how mistaken this idea would be in today's environment. During the period of observation, jihadists were responsible for nearly as many incidents of shelling as they were for suicide bombings, while bombings overall are outnumbered by ambushes and shootings, reflecting a more traditional approach towards deploying military force. Indeed, the places in which jihadists are focused on territory and fighting more conventional battles – Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan – are also the ones in which the more 'conventional' tactics predominate.

On the other end of the spectrum is the use of tactics that require little technical sophistication but generate enormous attention, publicity, and – literally – a sense of terror. This is particularly true for beheadings which the Islamic State's predecessor al Qaeda in Iraq introduced in 2004 but long remained the only practitioner of.<sup>13</sup> Our data suggests that beheadings – along with other types of executions – have become significantly more frequent and, furthermore, that the tactic has started spreading to other conflict zones. Combined with reports about beheading plots in a number of Western countries, it seems reasonable to conclude that this tactic now constitutes a global trend and – just like suicide bombings and IEDs, which used to be virtually unknown in many parts of the world – may represent a case of tactical 'contagion'.<sup>14</sup>

13 See Rukmini Callimachi, 'Qaeda Commander Denounces Decapitations as Used by Islamic State', *New York Times*, 8 December 2014.

14 See Manus I. Midlarsky, Martha Crenshaw, and Fumihiko Yoshida, 'Why Violence Spreads: The Contagion of International Terrorism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 24 (1980), pp. 262-98.

## Conclusion

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The data that was presented in this report is no more than a snapshot. It captured one month of jihadist activity around the world, using reported deaths as an indicator of their presence and modus operandi. We are confident that the data that we collected by drawing on the enormous resources of the BBC World Service, BBC Monitoring, and ICSR is a (more or less) comprehensive picture of what happened during the period of observation, November 2014. We can't be sure, however, how representative it is of longer periods – say, the year 2014 – and whether it fully reflects the trends and transformations that are currently taking place.

Despite those limitations, three general points are worth making:

- First, our data highlights the significant human cost of jihadism. In just one month, jihadist groups killed 5,042 people – the equivalent of three attacks on the scale of the London bombings in July 2005 each day. Contrary to the often articulated complaint that jihadism is over-reported and that groups like the Islamic State get too much coverage, our survey seems to suggest that most of the victims receive practically no attention. Hardly any of the attacks that formed the basis for our analysis were reported in the Western media. Indeed, even the suicide bombings – of which there were 38 – made virtually no headlines except in the countries in which they took place. Yet most of the victims of jihadist violence continue to be non-combatants, and the vast majority is Muslim.
- Second, the scale of jihadist activity that was captured in this report reminds us to be cautious in our judgment of historical trends. Less than four years ago, jihadism – then predominantly in the form of al Qaeda – was widely believed to be dead or dying. Yet, as a result of opportunities created by the Arab Spring and the sense of momentum and excitement generated by groups like the Islamic State, jihadists now seem to be stronger and more active than ever. This shows that jihadism is a global movement, that global movements don't just disappear, and that ideas and ideologies can't be eliminated through drone strikes – however effective those tactics may have been in decimating al Qaeda's leadership.
- Finally, the data shows that the jihadist movement is in the middle of a transformation. Though never quite as exclusively terrorist in orientation and approach as public perception suggested, the jihadist movement has been drawn into an increasing number of 'traditional' confrontations with states and embraced strategies that are focused on holding territory and establishing forms of governance. The most excessively brutal parts of the movement – the Islamic State and Boko Haram – also appear to be the most dynamic, creating precedents for the adoption of new tactics that are spreading to other parts of the world. Not least, al Qaeda's quasi leadership of the global movement has been challenged, which means that jihadist groups may in future be just as likely to fight each other than their perceived enemies.

None of these developments are good for news for the states and societies that jihadists threaten. Confronting this threat will be a generational challenge involving not just military power but political skill, economic resources, and – not least – a readiness to challenge the ideas and beliefs that are driving its expansion.





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