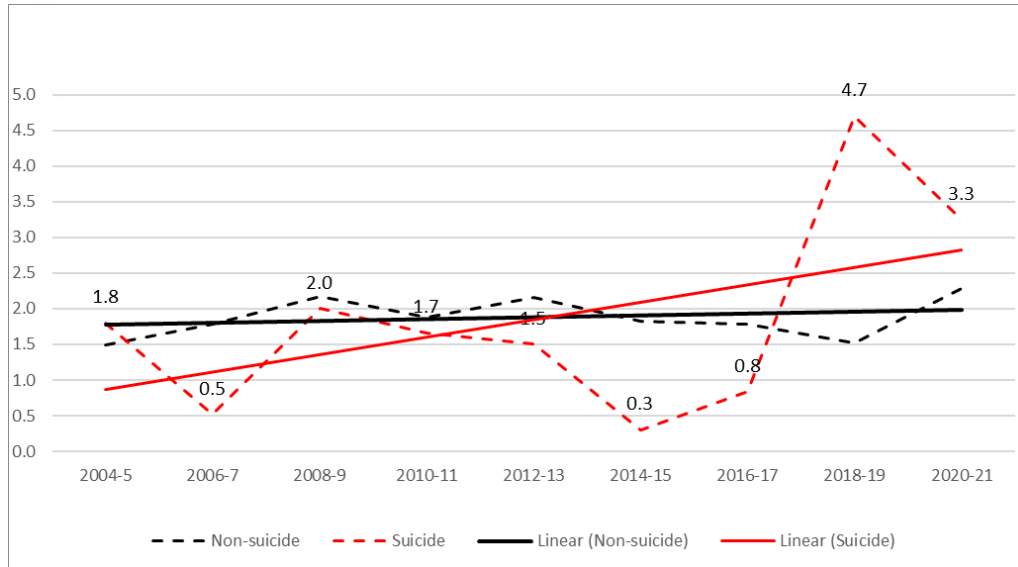


Evolving Patterns of Violence in Developing Countries

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Lethality of Suicide and Non-suicide Attacks in Group 2 Countries

When horrific terrorist attacks occur in economically advanced countries such as those in North America and Europe, they are widely reported and remembered. The spectacular attacks against passenger trains in Madrid in 2004, which killed 191 people, and in London in 2007, which killed 52, have not been forgotten. The fear remains.

In contrast, people rarely know about—let alone remember—the far more frequent and often bloodier attacks in less economically advanced countries. As examples, in 2006, a jihadist group detonated 7 bombs on commuter trains leaving Mumbai, killing 189 and injuring at least 800; in 2010, Maoist insurgents derailed a train in West Bengal, killing 48 and injuring 800; in 2014, a jihadist car bomb exploded at a bus station in Nigeria, killing 71 and injuring 24.

This report examines the violent attacks in these countries. It is a companion to the August 2022 MTI report on violence in economically advanced countries, *Changing Patterns of Violence Pose New Challenges to Public Surface Transportation in the United States*.¹ Here, we ask whether attacks

are more frequent and lethal in less economically advanced countries, and examine the differences and similarities of the attacks in terms of location, targets, attackers, attack methods, and use of suicide attackers.

STUDY METHODS

The authors used the MTI Database on Terrorism and Serious Criminal Attacks Against Public Surface Transportation, which contains 5,762 attacks that occurred between January 1, 1970, and May 31, 2023, against public surface transport targets around the world. The analysis also relied on qualitative information held by the authors.

The attacks studied were selected by time and target. The study looks at only those that occurred between January 1, 2004, and December 31, 2022, and only those against passenger train and train stations, buses and bus stations and stops, all rail infrastructure, and operating and security personnel. A total of 3,836 attacks worldwide, which resulted in 7,412 fatalities and 21,857 injuries, were included in the study.

¹ <https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/SP0822-Jenkins-Butterworth-Changing-Patterns-Violence-Transit>

To avoid potentially offensive terms, the researchers simply called the economically advanced countries “Group 1” and defined them as members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) but excluded some members that have long-standing insurgencies. The countries in “Group 2” are developing and others that are not OECD members. Israel and the West Bank were placed in “Group 3” because of their unique and long-standing conflict, which MTI will analyze in a separate report.

The analysis showed that Group 2 countries did not have—as Group 1 did—a small set of very lethal attacks that were statistical outliers but had a higher level of violence overall.

The frequency and lethality of attacks in Group 2 countries were compared with those in Group 1, and trends were identified in terms of regions, countries, groups of targets, attack methods, and attackers (and also combinations of the three), as well as suicide attackers.

While the percentage of suicide attacks in Group 2 countries is only 3% and not increasing, suicide attacks have become more lethal than non-suicide attacks measured in Fatalities Per Attack.

FINDINGS

- Group 2 countries have experienced more than seven times the number of attacks in Group 1 countries; average lethality was three times greater. Many Group 2 countries have long-running and often lethal insurgencies.
- There were few changes over time in the pattern of attacks in Group 2, although the overall volume has decreased slightly, as has overall lethality. But both are still higher than in Group 1.
- Group 2 countries experience far more attacks on buses and bus depots and stops, reflecting greater reliance on public bus travel.
- Explosives dominate the attack methods in Group 2 countries, accounting for 55.7% of the attacks and 60.2% of the fatalities. Firearms were used in 20.7% of all attacks. Other lethal attack methods include stabbings and massacres. By contrast, the use of explosives in attacks has decreased in Group 1 countries.

- Unknown groups were the largest category of attackers, accounting for 45.8% of the attacks and 33.5% of the fatalities. Attackers motivated by jihadist ideology were responsible for 9.7% of the attacks but 33.7% of the fatalities. Jihadists were the most lethal attackers in both Group 2 and Group 1.
- The most lethal combinations of attacker group, attack method, and target category in Group 2 countries were jihadist attacks involving explosives targeting buses and bus stations and stops, followed by armed assaults on buses by unknown attackers.
- Suicide attacks accounted for only about 3% of the attacks in both groups. But while the percentage of such attacks has declined in Group 1, it has gone up in Group 2, and the difference between suicide and non-suicide attacks in Group 2 is greater than in Group 1.

POLICY/PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

No policy or professional recommendations were explicitly made in this report.

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2344



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