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CHANGE

# Islamist Extremism in 2017: The Ten Deadliest Countries

CO-EXISTENCE

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Violent Islamist extremism struck 66 countries in eight regions in 2017. It claimed the lives of at least 84,023 people. Its grip reached every corner of the world. Islamist violence inspired people in countries from Russia and the United States to Mozambique, Austria and Gabon. Because this extremist violence did not affect all geographies equally, it is necessary to explore the distinct ways in which extremism manifested itself in different environments. Extremist ideology is the key driver of this violence, but unique social, political and economic contexts also affect the directions extremists take.<sup>1</sup>

**This second part of the Global Extremism Monitor 2017 examines the ten countries that suffered the most fatalities from violent Islamism in 2017. Together these states experienced 97 per cent of all fatalities globally, according to our data. Access the full Global Extremism Monitor 2017 here (<https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/collections/global-extremism-monitor>).**

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<sup>1</sup> Emman El-Badawy, Milo Comerford and Peter Welby, Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding Ideology and Propaganda, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 6 October 2015, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/inside-jihadi-mind-understanding-ideology-and-propaganda>.

Factoring in all these elements, the GEM has built individual country profiles that provide insights into the violence. Ten states together experienced 97 per cent of all fatalities globally: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, Egypt, Pakistan, Libya and Mali. Of these, five—Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq—were among the ten most fragile nations in the Fund for Peace’s 2017 Fragile States Index.<sup>2</sup>

By counting each person killed, the GEM measures the activity and deadliness of a country’s violent Islamist problem. The monitor contextualises the violence by disaggregating groups’ motivations, intended targets and modes of attack, and the gender of the perpetrators. In doing so, the GEM shows each state’s distinct experience of violent extremism in 2017. The monitor also explores the counter-terrorism actions of state and nonstate actors, from operations on the ground to airstrikes and militia activity.

In embattled areas, accurately detailing Islamist activity reflects the complex relationship between violent militants, those attempting to combat them and the geographies in which they operate. By mapping conflict at the neighbourhood level, the GEM tracks this violence geographically to illustrate deeply complex local characteristics, including sectarianism and large-scale civilian displacement.

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2 “2017 Fragile States Index”, Fund for Peace, 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/951171705-Fragile-States-Index-Annual-Report-2017.pdf>.

## 1. SYRIA

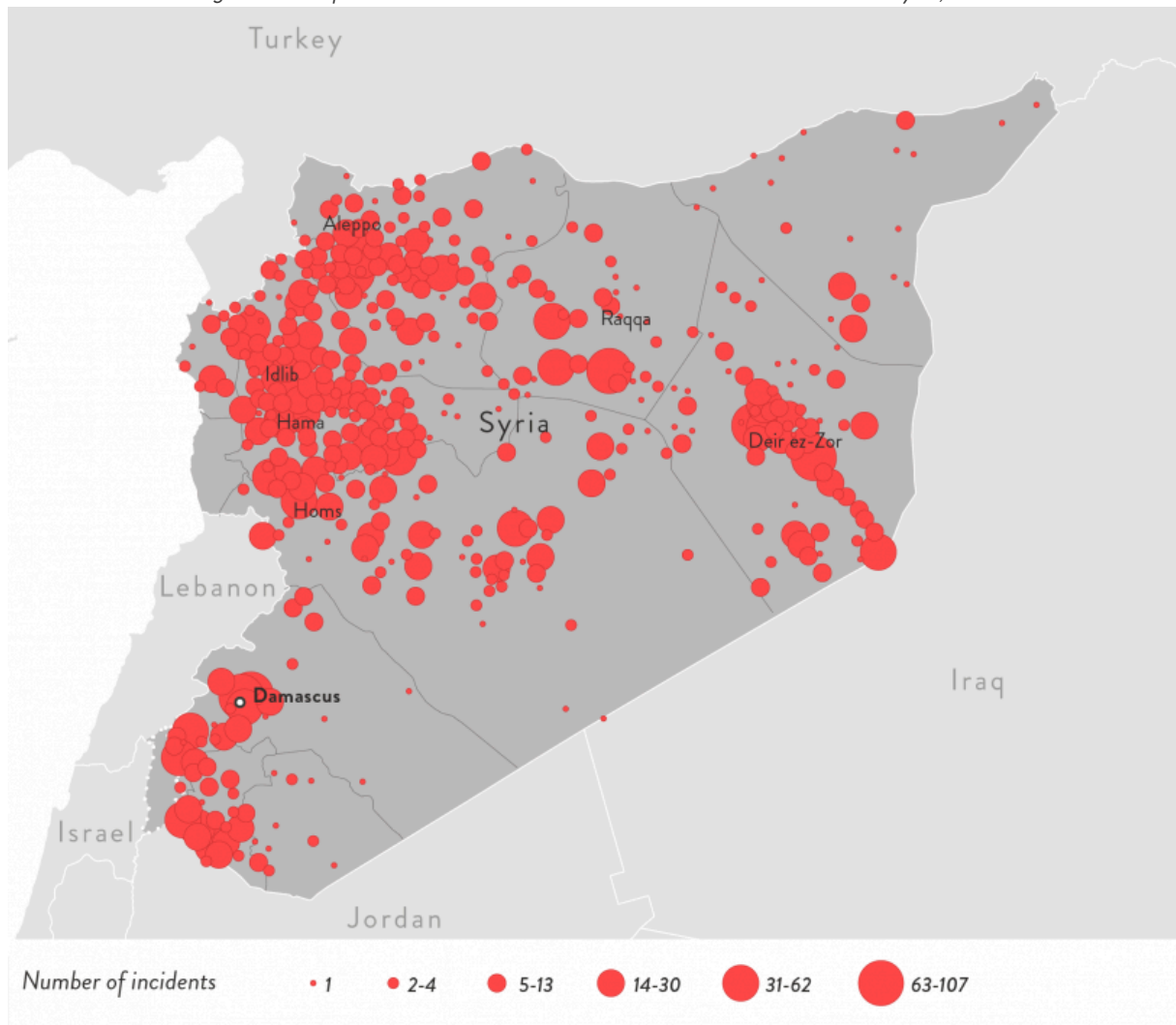
Syria's civil war entered its seventh year in 2017, and the GEM documented the deaths of 34,853 people, including 15,992 extremists, as a result of Islamist violence and counter-measures. Syria is the country most affected by violent Islamist extremism. Its situation is unlike that of any other state monitored by the GEM.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-nine violent Islamist groups were actively engaged in conflict in 2017, considerably more than in any other country. The groups' affiliations and allegiances are very interchangeable, and their presence in every province of the country highlights the devastating realities of one of the world's most complex conflicts (see figures 2.1–2.3).

The GEM recorded 17,422 incidents involving violent Islamists in 2017. ISIS was the deadliest group in the country, launching 44 per cent of all extremist attacks. The group targeted 44 different actors, from other extremist groups to militaries to civilians.

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3 For background on Islamist extremist groups active in the Syrian Civil War, see *If the Castle Falls: Exploring the Ideology and Objectives of the Syrian Rebellion*, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 21 December 2015, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/if-castle-falls-exploring-ideology-and-objectives-syrian-rebellion>.

Figure 2.1: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Syria, 2017



Efforts in 2017 to combat ISIS, whose so-called caliphate stretched across parts of northern Syria and Iraq, culminated in October, when the Syrian Democratic Forces led an offensive that liberated Raqqa.

As a result of these efforts to strike at the ideological heart of ISIS, the group's social media output, which it had used to attract thousands of recruits and consolidate morale among militant members, declined by 66 per cent.<sup>4</sup> ISIS suffered considerable losses throughout the year, with counter-extremism actions killing 7,891 ISIS militants, according to the GEM. Of these, 56 per cent

<sup>4</sup> "Analysis: Islamic State media output goes into sharp decline", BBC Monitoring, 23 November 2017, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1dnnj2k>.

occurred in Deir ez-Zor and Homs, where the group proved difficult to purge. Despite increased efforts to eradicate ISIS, the group launched attacks in all 14 Syrian provinces, deploying 326 suicide bombers as well as 365 landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

*Table 2.2: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Syria, 2017*

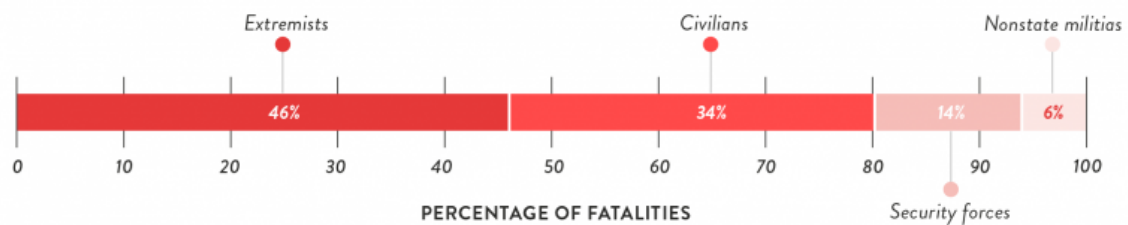
	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1=	Qaryatayn, Homs	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	128 were executed on suspicion of collaborating with the regime
1=	Uqayribat, Hama	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	Suicide car bombs killed 128 security officials in clashes with the military
3	Al-Rashideen, Aleppo	Tahrir al-Sham	A suicide car bomb targeted buses carrying evacuees, killing 126
4	Northwest Deir ez-Zor, Deir ez-Zor	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	At least 100 civilians were killed after a suicide car bomb struck a refugee centre
5	Al-Shagor, Rif Dimashq	Tahrir al-Sham	A suicide bomber targeted Shia civilians, killing 74

Offensives against ISIS's key strongholds only marginally affected ISIS's operational capacity in Syria. Twenty-eight other Sunni Islamist extremist groups were active in the country, with 18 of them launching attacks. In January, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, the Ansar al-Din Front, Jaysh al-Sunna, Liwa al-Haqq, the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement and disaffected members of Ahrar al-Sham merged into Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). HTS launched 41 per cent of the violent Islamist attacks in Syria recorded by the GEM in 2017 and killed 1,540 people including security personnel, nonstate actors and civilians. The group's activities exemplify the convoluted conflict playing out in Syria: HTS was engaged in violence against 14 other violent Islamist actors.

Using a distorted version of Islam to justify the use of violence, Syria's extremist groups are engaged in both urban and rural

warfare. The GEM monitored extremist activity in hundreds of Syrian towns besieged by violent Islamists as well as the targets of counter-extremism operations. Civilians bore the brunt of the violence throughout 2017, accounting for 11,741 deaths. Half of all civilian fatalities recorded globally were documented in Syria.

Figure 2.3: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Syria, 2017



Airstrikes and ground offensives supported by airstrikes resulted in the deaths of 5,199 extremists. Many of these militants had planted themselves in Syria's towns and villages. The GEM also documented 97 incidents at refugee camps, including clashes with security personnel and extremist attacks aimed at inhabitants. Eight targeted attacks on these camps resulted in 214 civilian deaths.

In early 2018, reports put the number of ISIS fighters remaining in Iraq and Syria at between 1,000 and 2,000, but the group may still have up to 10,000 loyalists.<sup>5</sup> It has also been reported that many loyalists in and around Abu Kamal and Deir ez-Zor are Iraqis who fled across the border to support ISIS after the collapse of the group's core operations in Iraq. A plethora of Islamist extremist groups with varied long- and short-term objectives continue to operate in Syria's war.

<sup>5</sup> Vivian Salama and Courtney Kube, "ISIS still has up to 10,000 loyalists in Syria and Iraq, warn experts", NBC News, 20 January 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/isis-still-has-10-000-loyalists-syria-iraq-warn-experts-n838051>.



## 2. IRAQ

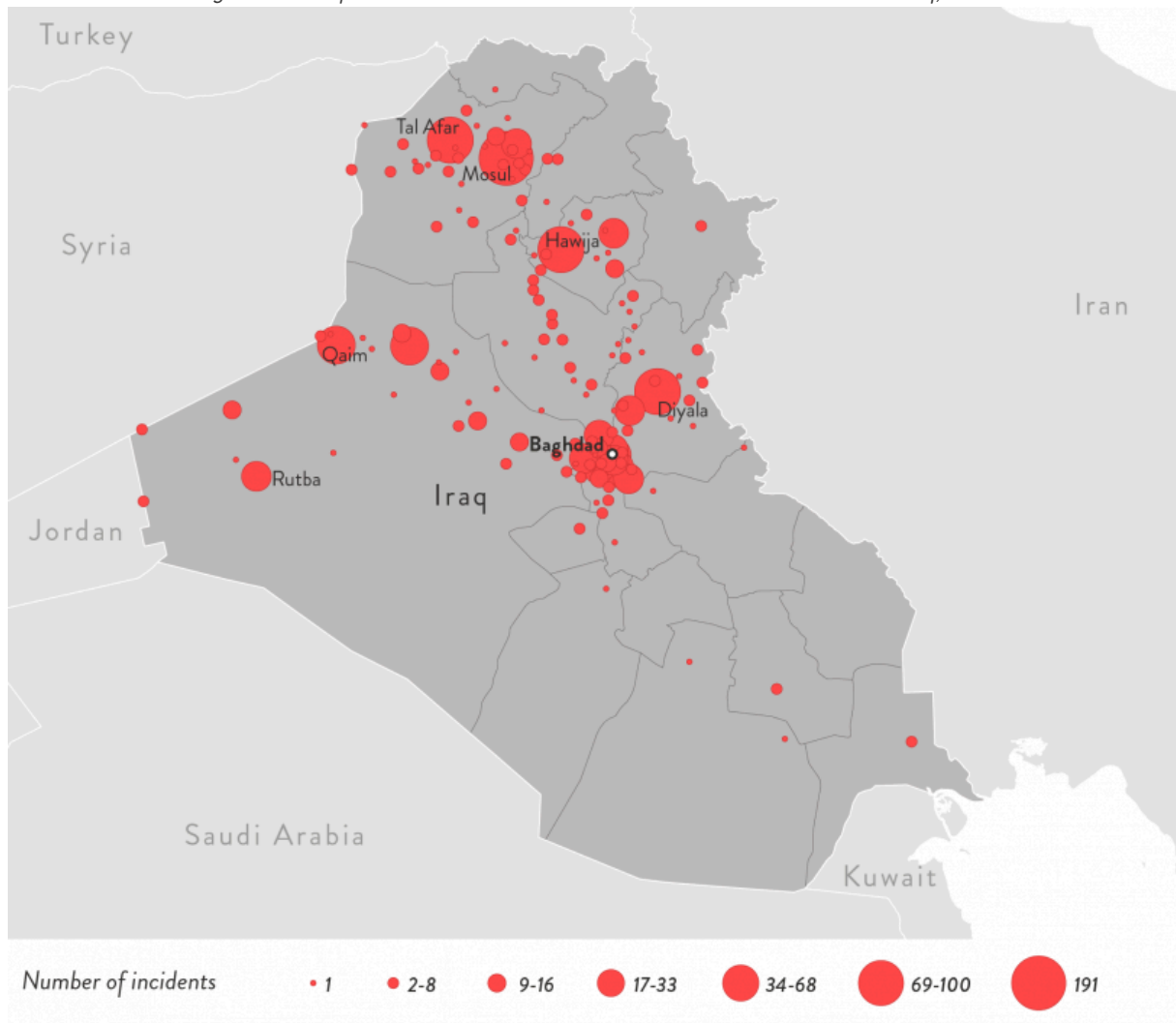
In a year that saw efforts to remove ISIS from its remaining territorial strongholds in Iraq, the GEM recorded 17,033 deaths in the country in 2017 as a result of Islamist violence and counter-measures (see figures 2.4–2.6). The GEM found that 12,361 ISIS members were killed during the year. Although the Iraqi army declared ISIS militarily defeated in December, the group began to reconstitute itself as a violent insurgency in 2018.<sup>6</sup>

By exploring the devastating consequences the conflict has inflicted on Iraq's citizens and the efforts taken to eradicate the group, the GEM has highlighted the risks that remain if measures against ISIS are relaxed and the group is given fertile ground to evolve. Monitoring the level of attacks after the liberation of Mosul, the capital of the northern province of Nineveh, in July 2017 has also shown the limitations of military strategies in tackling groups with violent ideologies. The number of deaths despite significant territorial gains against ISIS highlights the need to establish efforts to tackle the violent worldviews that existed before ISIS.

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Levenson, "Iraq is 'fully liberated' from ISIS, its military says", CNN, 9 December 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/09/middleeast/iraq-isis-military-liberated/index.html>.

Figure 2.4: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Iraq, 2017



In 2017, ISIS launched 1,238 attacks and was active in 16 of Iraq's 19 provinces. The group comprises a network of factions and brigades through which it conducts its operations across the country. Counter-terrorism efforts in 2017 focused on ISIS's northern territories and on securing the liberation of Mosul. Over half of all state and nonstate activity was recorded in this province, with 78 per cent in Mosul. The Popular Mobilisation Forces, led by the Iraqi army and with support from the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, spearheaded efforts to purge ISIS from its ideological bastion, resulting in the deaths of 3,493 ISIS militants and 684 civilians in Mosul and the areas surrounding it, according to the GEM.

Airstrikes and joint ground and air efforts led to the deaths of 64 per cent of the extremists who were killed in the year. The urban

nature of the conflict and ISIS's exploitation of civilians as human shields meant that 718 civilians died during these counter-terrorism actions in Iraq. A total of 3,878 civilians were killed in 2017 due to the activities of ISIS and efforts to combat it, including action by the state, nonstate militias and international coalition efforts.

*Table 2.5: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Iraq, 2017*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Tal Afar, Nineveh	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	200 detained Turkmen were executed for attempting to flee Mosul
2	Al-Shira, Nineveh	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	163 civilians were shot dead for trying to flee Mosul
3	Al-Zanjili, Nineveh	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	74 civilians were killed for attempting to flee
4	Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	Militants in military uniforms opened fire in a restaurant, killing 70 civilians
5	Al-Jamanouh, Anbar	ISIS in Iraq and Syria	Militants overran positions of the Popular Mobilisation Forces, killing 68

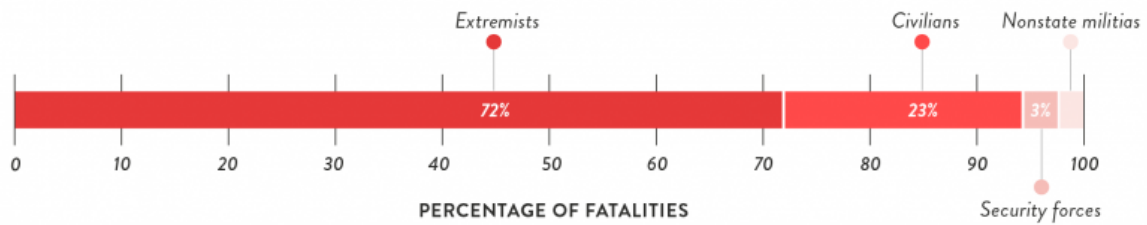
The GEM found that civilians were targeted in 417 individual attacks across the country. Over 60 per cent of these attacks occurred in the country's capital. Baghdad was the deadliest capital city in the world for violent Islamist extremism, and the GEM recorded an attack every other day in the city. Baghdad suffered more than 70 per cent of all sectarian attacks in Iraq targeting the country's Shia majority.

ISIS frequently targeted public hotspots and large religious gatherings, using a distorted version of Islam to justify the killing of civilians and fellow Muslims.<sup>7</sup> The GEM documented six targeted attacks on Shia and Sunni mosques in 2017. ISIS launched 119

<sup>7</sup> For analysis of components of Salafi-jihadi ideology, see El-Badawy, Comerford and Welby, *Inside the Jihadi Mind*.

assaults on markets during the year, killing at least two people per attack.

Figure 2.6: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Iraq, 2017



One in every five attacks launched by ISIS involved suicide bombers, in events that killed 771 people. More than 74 per cent of all suicide attacks occurred in the first half of the year, coinciding with an intensification of the battle to liberate Mosul. During this period, ISIS deployed most of the 595 suicide bombers recorded by the GEM for the group in Iraq throughout the year. Thirty-four incidents involved suicide bombers coordinating efforts with armed gunmen, while seven involved female bombers attacking armed and unarmed targets.

### 3. AFGHANISTAN

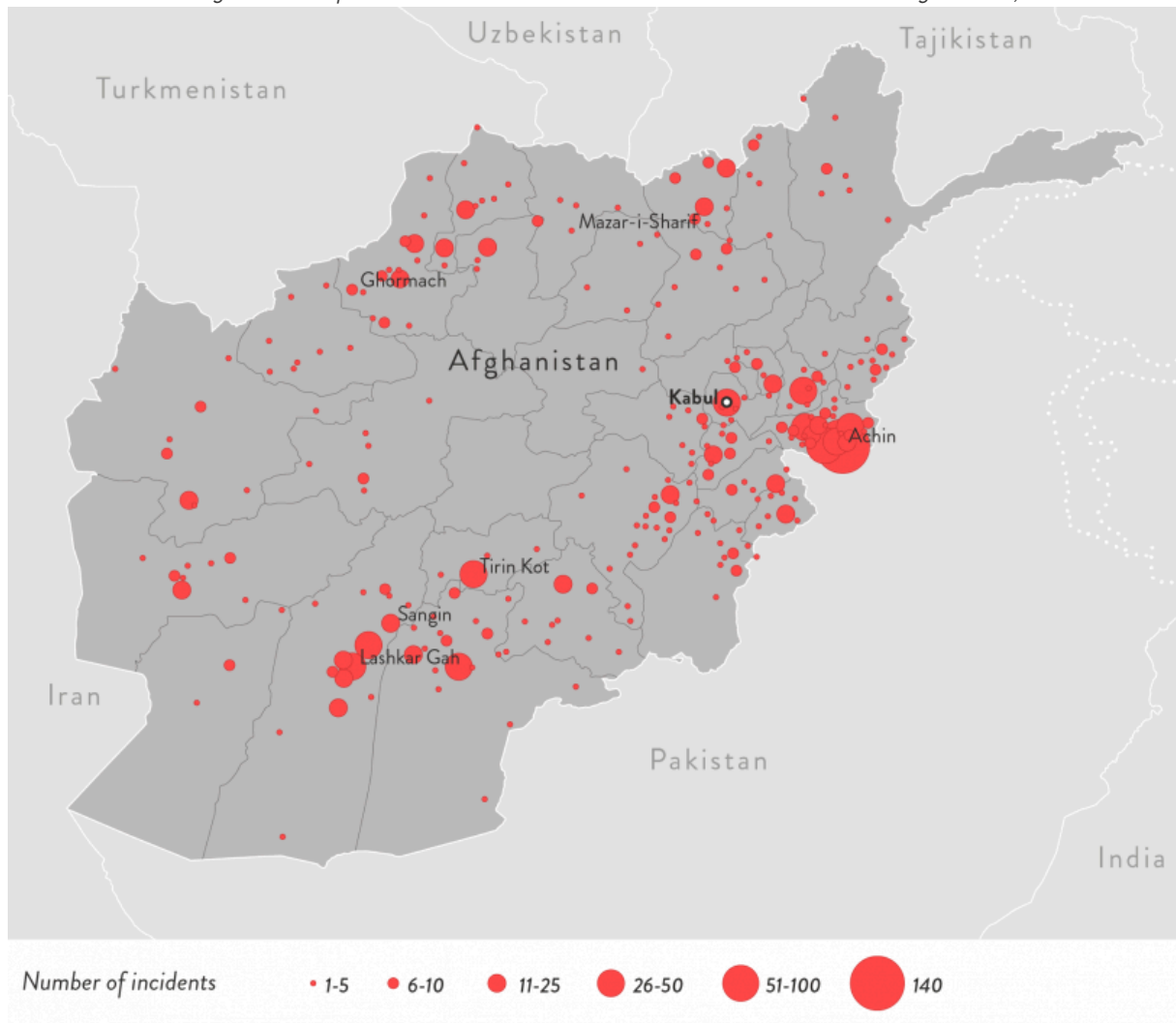
In Afghanistan, 14,885 people died in 2017 from the actions of violent Islamist extremists and efforts to combat the problem, which has plagued the country for 40 years. In 2017, US President Donald Trump outlined a fresh strategy that shifted from nation building to squarely addressing the country's terrorist threat.<sup>8</sup> Despite increasing military efforts, extremist organisations including the Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan continue to prove resilient (see figures 2.7–2.9).

In 2017, the GEM recorded the deaths of 5,784 members of the Taliban resulting from the actions of the Afghan military, US forces and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The GEM also recorded 23 incidents of group infighting, some involving Taliban splinter factions, which resulted in at least 173 militant deaths. The Taliban appears to be in a state of disarray but has managed to remain an imperious force in Afghanistan.

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<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Shabad, "Trump outlines new US strategy in Afghanistan", CBS News, 21 August 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-addresses-nation-on-new-afghanistan-strategy-live-updates/>.

Figure 2.7: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Afghanistan, 2017



The year saw airstrikes in 29 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, with 55 per cent occurring in Helmand and Nangarhar. The former is the largest of Afghanistan's provinces, and its opium reserves have been a source of funds for the Taliban. Twenty-one per cent of the group's documented violent activities were in these provinces, although the GEM also recorded a further 590 Taliban-instigated incidents stretching from the western Farah province to Paktia in the east.

The Taliban has frequently targeted urban centres to undermine the Afghan government. The GEM recorded 23 attacks on the country's central and local governments and financial services in 2017. The group was responsible for the deaths of 2,115 security officials and civilians. Over 76 per cent of its attacks occurred in the

five months after the start of the Taliban's spring offensive in April, when it said it would target foreign forces and focus on developing the areas "cleansed from the enemy".<sup>9</sup>

*Table 2.8: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Afghanistan, 2017*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1=	Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh	Taliban	Suicide soldiers disguised as army personnel attacked a military base, killing 150 soldiers
1=	Kabul City, Kabul	Haqqani Network	A car bomb killed 150 after detonating near diplomatic facilities
3	Kabul City, Kabul	ISIS-Khorasan	A suicide bombing at a Shia mosque killed 56 civilians
4	Sangin, Helmand	Taliban	A coordinated assault against the military killed 50
5	Kabul City, Kabul	Taliban	A suicide bombing at the National Assembly killed 46

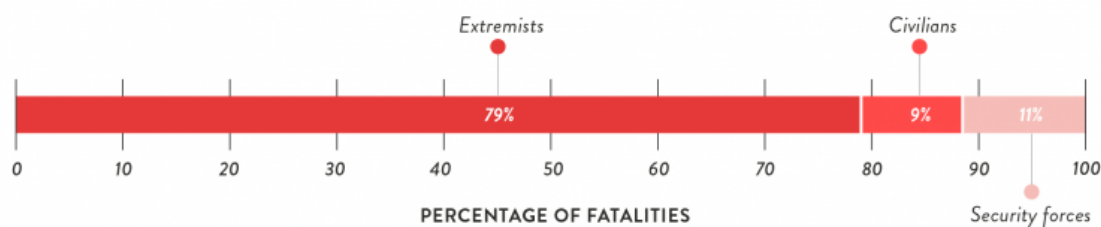
ISIS-Khorasan wages a very different insurgency from the more established Taliban. Although Afghanistan does not have the deep sectarian divides that characterise Iraq and Syria, ISIS-Khorasan's 17 deliberate attacks on Afghanistan's Shia population, which left 238 civilians dead, show a determination by ISIS to exploit opportunities to entrench religious conflict to win local support and enforce a sectarian narrative. Twenty-six per cent of all ISIS-Khorasan activity in Afghanistan was sectarian, and 60 per cent of all its attacks targeted civilians.

The GEM highlights how ISIS-Khorasan is engaged in a campaign against Afghan civilians, as the group seeks to add another piece to ISIS's global vision of a so-called caliphate that encompasses the

<sup>9</sup> "Afghan Taliban announce spring offensive", BBC, 28 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-39742802>.

ummah, or entire Muslim community. In a manifestation of ISIS-Khorasan's intolerant view of Muslims who fail to espouse its ideology, the group was responsible for 11 attacks on Sunni and Shia mosques in Afghanistan in 2017.

Figure 2.9: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Afghanistan, 2017



Meanwhile, the Taliban targeted the military and police in 79 per cent of its attacks. According to the GEM, ISIS-Khorasan and the Taliban targeted NATO and the US military some 30 times in 2017, killing at least 15 US soldiers. Five civilians were killed in a suspected Taliban suicide blast that targeted the Danish military in September, while ISIS-Khorasan shot dead six employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross in February.

The Taliban deployed suicide bombers in less than one-sixth of its attacks, while 39 per cent of ISIS-Khorasan's attacks in Afghanistan were suicide assaults. The use of this tactic by ISIS-Khorasan is emblematic of its Salafi-jihadi tenets. The group's martyrdom attacks are not only militarily effective against an enemy but also demonstrate a fixation on life after death.

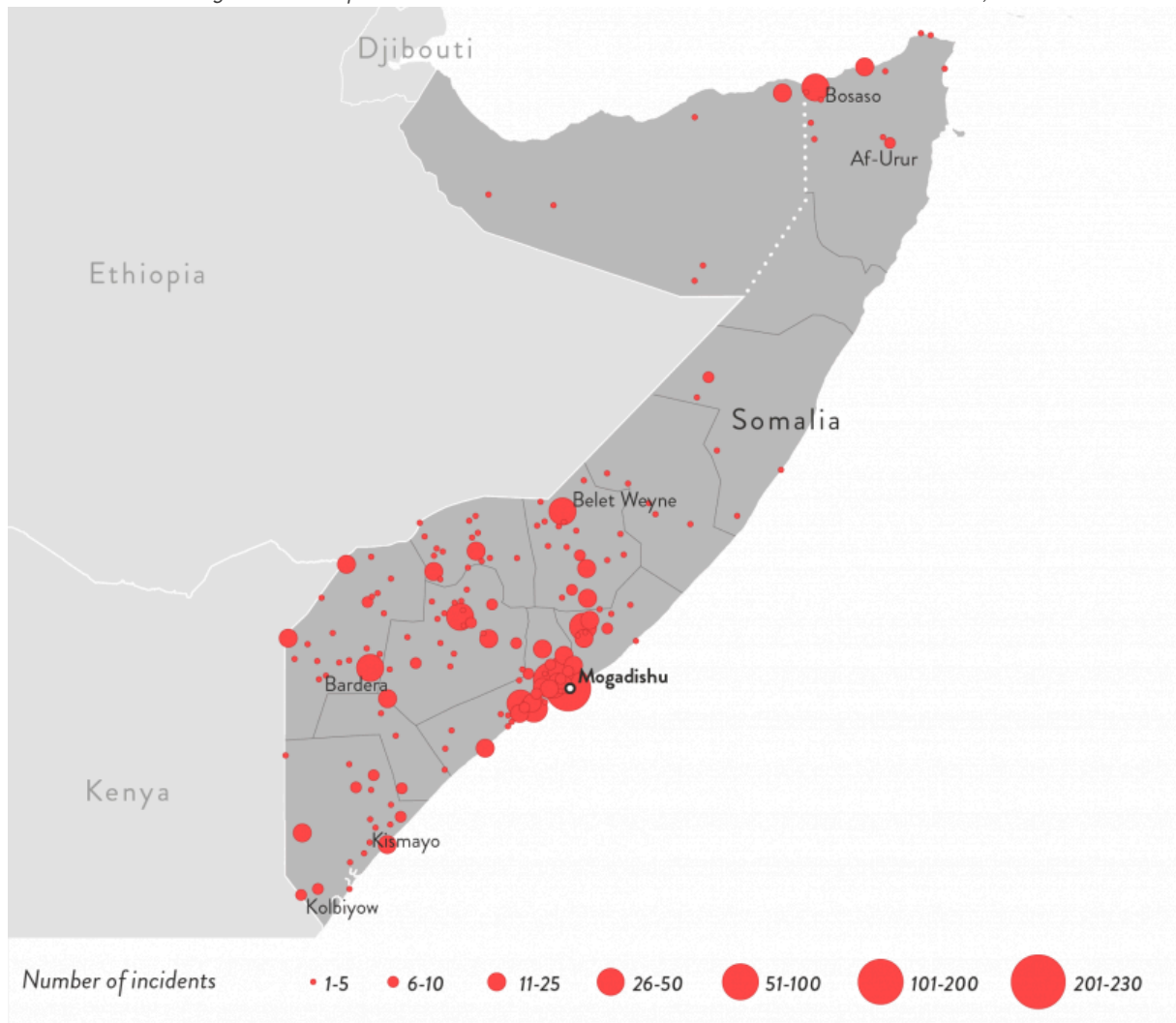


## 4. SOMALIA

Somalia was the African country most affected by violent Islamist extremism in 2017. The GEM recorded the deaths of 4,306 people due to the actions of the militant jihadi organisation al-Shabaab and the multilateral efforts to counter it (see figures 2.10–2.12). The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the US and Kenyan militaries led the international effort against al-Shabaab in the country.

In 2010, four years after it had splintered from the Islamic Courts Union, the group was designated a terrorist organisation by six countries, including the UK, Australia and the US. In 2017 the group launched 982 attacks, making it one of the deadliest groups in the world and impeding international counter-efforts.

Figure 2.10: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Somalia, 2017



Al-Shabaab wages a localised and focused war in Somalia. More than 70 per cent of the group's attacks in 2017 targeted the country's military and police. Over half of the 190 documented incidents in the public space were aimed at Somali professionals, local clan leaders and government officials, killing 749 people. Sixty-one of these attacks were assassinations, which al-Shabaab undertook at a greater rate than any other extremist group documented by the GEM.

In October, al-Shabaab militants carried out a truck bombing in Mogadishu targeting a government building. The killing of 587 people, most of them civilians, was one of the deadliest acts of terrorism in recorded history. Frequent attacks against Somalia's political symbols are emblematic of al-Shabaab's operations.

Seventy-two per cent of attacks on government targets and local clan leaders occurred during six months of political sensitivity between February and August, when Somalia and neighbouring Kenya were in the process of electing their presidents.

*Table 2.11: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Somalia, 2017*

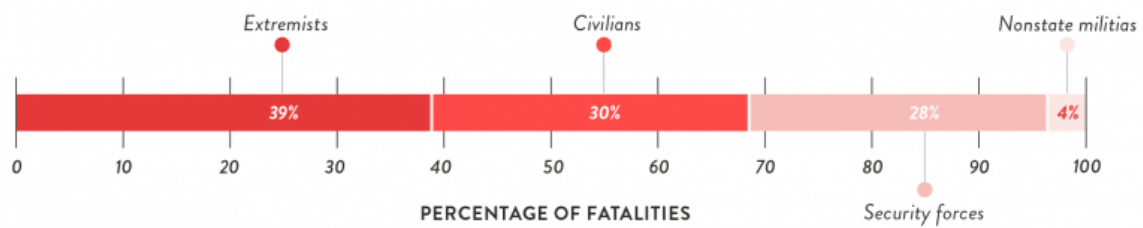
	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Mogadishu, Banaadir	Al-Shabaab	Militants carried out a car bomb and gun attack near government buildings, killing 587 civilians
2=	Af Urur, Bari	Al-Shabaab	Militants attacked a military base of Puntland forces, resulting in fighting that killed 50 force members
2=	Kolbiyow, Lower Juba	Al-Shabaab	An attack on a Kenyan military base in Somalia killed 50
4	Medina, Banaadir	Al-Shabaab	A car bombing at a market killed at least 39 civilians
5	Barire, Bari	Al-Shabaab	Militants stormed a military base and killed 30 soldiers

Al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, deliberately and consistently struck at the heart of Somali society throughout 2017, killing 2,420 people in attacks, according to the GEM. The group's ability to eliminate people in key positions, against a backdrop of strong military measures, deep clannism and complex tribal structures, exposes just how much of a foothold the group continues to have in the country. Al-Shabaab uses a harsh, intolerant interpretation of Islam to justify the killings of those who oppose its vision of an Islamic state in Somalia.

The group lost just 379 militants in these offensives and is among the most resilient of the large-scale extremist organisations documented by the GEM. Somalia's conflict is symptomatic of the resilience al-Shabaab has maintained over the years, despite

increased counter-terrorism measures. In 2017, the group launched 270 large-scale coordinated offensives against armed actors, targeting checkpoints and military bases 231 times.

Figure 2.12: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Somalia, 2017



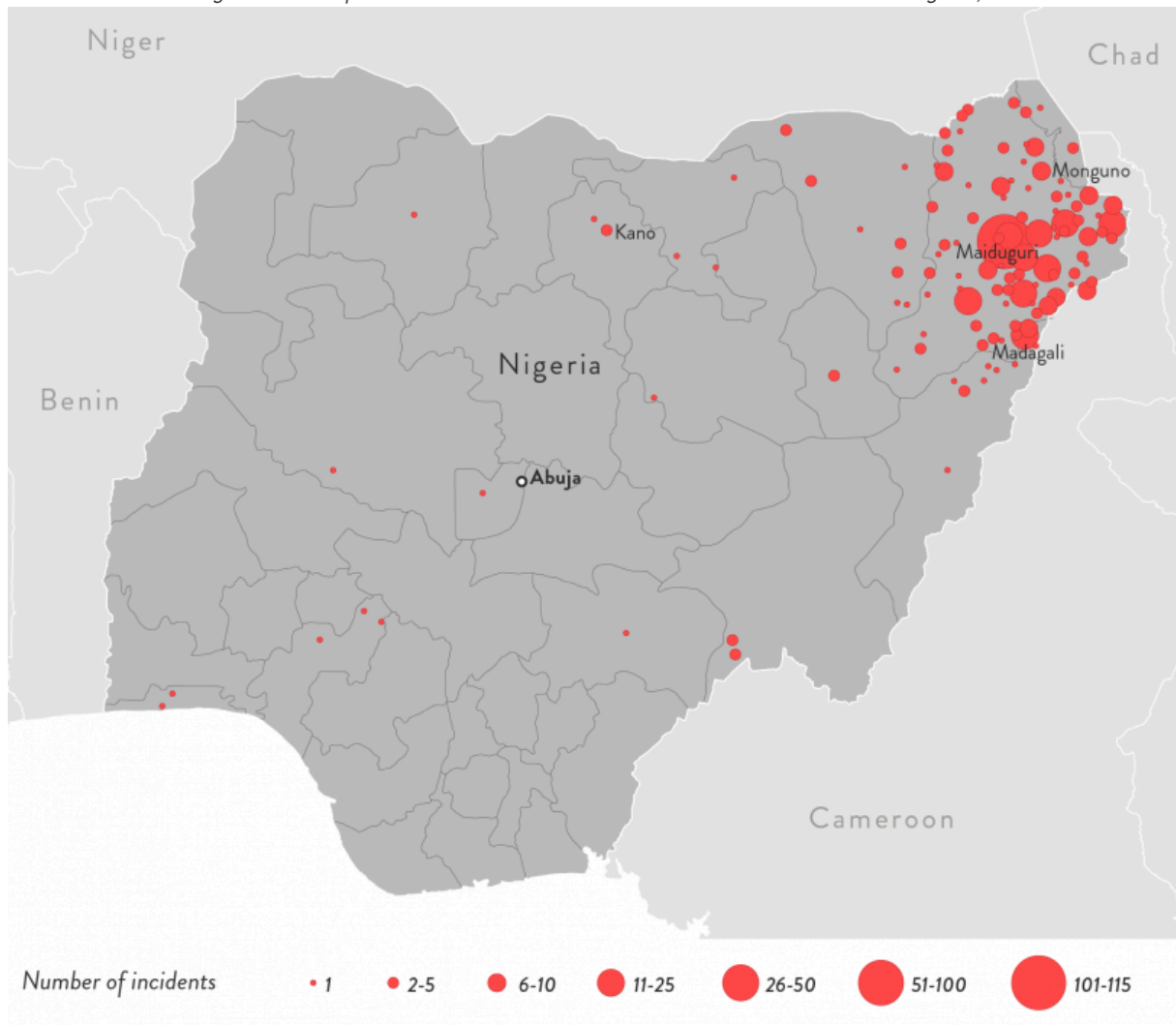
The GEM found that more than one-fifth of al-Shabaab's attacks against militaries were aimed at AMISOM. The year 2017 marked a decade since AMISOM began its operations to purge Somalia of its Islamist threat, but al-Shabaab has not changed course. The GEM found the group active in all 18 of Somalia's administrative divisions. The GEM documented 268 attacks in Mogadishu during 2017, again exposing the group's strategy to undermine those in office.

## 5. NIGERIA

The GEM documented 3,399 deaths in Nigeria as Boko Haram's violent insurgency continued throughout 2017 (see figures 2.13–2.15). The country remains one of the deadliest in sub-Saharan Africa for extremist violence. The GEM recorded four deaths per extremist attack in the country, with an attack occurring on average once every four days. The frequency of assaults exposes the perpetual threat Boko Haram poses, despite the Nigerian government repeatedly claiming to have defeated the group.

In 2017, 1,840 extremists were killed, over one-third as a result of airstrikes conducted by the Nigerian military. More than 30 per cent of these incidents targeted Boko Haram's stronghold in the Sambisa Forest. The area lies in a strategic triangle for the group, straddling the Mandara Mountains and Lake Chad. This base allows the group to reconstitute when its insurgency is severely damaged; but more importantly, it gives the group an operational environment from which to launch attacks outside Nigeria. During 2017, the GEM documented 158 Boko Haram attacks in neighbouring Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

Figure 2.13: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Nigeria, 2017



Boko Haram's expansionist vision is underpinned by a Salafi-jihadi ideology that it uses to justify attempts to overthrow the Nigerian government and implement its version of sharia law. The brutal tenets espoused by the group validate its violent tactics against the Nigerian population. Seventy-one per cent of the group's attacks in the Lake Chad Basin targeted civilians in a campaign that was more focused on civilian targets than that of any other extremist group in 2017. Boko Haram launched attacks against civilians in four of Nigeria's 36 states.

The GEM recorded Boko Haram activity in 14 states, demonstrating the expanse of its insurgency in the country. More than 80 per cent of the group's documented attacks were in the northeastern Borno state. Its capital, Maiduguri, suffered 76 attacks

during the year, 84 per cent of which directly targeted civilians. The University of Maiduguri was targeted 12 times in attacks that reinforced the group's ideological mantra that Western education (boko) is forbidden (haram).

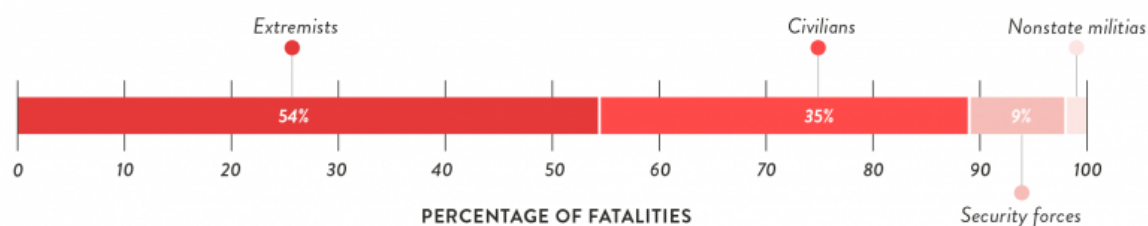
*Table 2.14: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Nigeria, 2017*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Magumeri, Borno	Boko Haram	Militants attacked academic staff being escorted by military personnel, killing at least 69
2	Kuna Araha, Adamawa	Boko Haram	A teenage militant conducted a suicide attack on a mosque, killing 50 civilians
3	Mafa, Borno	Boko Haram	Militants attacked a village and killed 46 civilians
4	Maiduguri, Borno	Boko Haram	42 farmers were killed after travelling to Borno state
5	Damboa, Borno	Boko Haram	Militants attacked Civilian Joint Task Force members, killing 40 fighters

Boko Haram deployed suicide bombers at a greater rate per attack than any other extremist organisation identified by the GEM in 2017. Over two-fifths of all assaults launched by the group involved suicide attackers. The GEM identified 240 individual suicide bombers throughout the year in Nigeria alone. More than 57 per cent of these were female. The intense use of suicide bombers, and the unprecedented deployment of female attackers, exposes the shifting dynamics of Boko Haram's insurgency. The group's unpredictable nature and use of tactics of evasion have enabled a resurgence in the group's violence and fight for an Islamic state in Nigeria.

In 2017, the GEM documented 17 assaults on refugee camps that led to the deaths of 79 people. Suicide bombers were involved in 14 of these operations, again showing how the group deploys its preferred mode of attack against soft targets.

Figure 2.15: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Nigeria, 2017



The incidents recorded by the GEM take place against a backdrop of intercommunal and sectarian violence in Nigeria, where roughly half the population is Muslim and roughly half is Christian. The clash between Muslim herders and Christian farmers mainly in north-central Nigeria claimed more than 500 lives in 2017, according to Amnesty International.<sup>10</sup> This conflict, which is triggered largely by competition for scarce land and water resources and exacerbated by climate change, risks escalating further because it is increasingly framed along the country's ethno-religious fault lines.

<sup>10</sup> "Nigeria: Dozens Killed After Military Air Attacks on Villages Following Deadly Clashes", Amnesty International, 29 January 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/nigeria-dozens-killed-after-military-air-attacks-villages-following-deadly-clashes>.



## 6. YEMEN

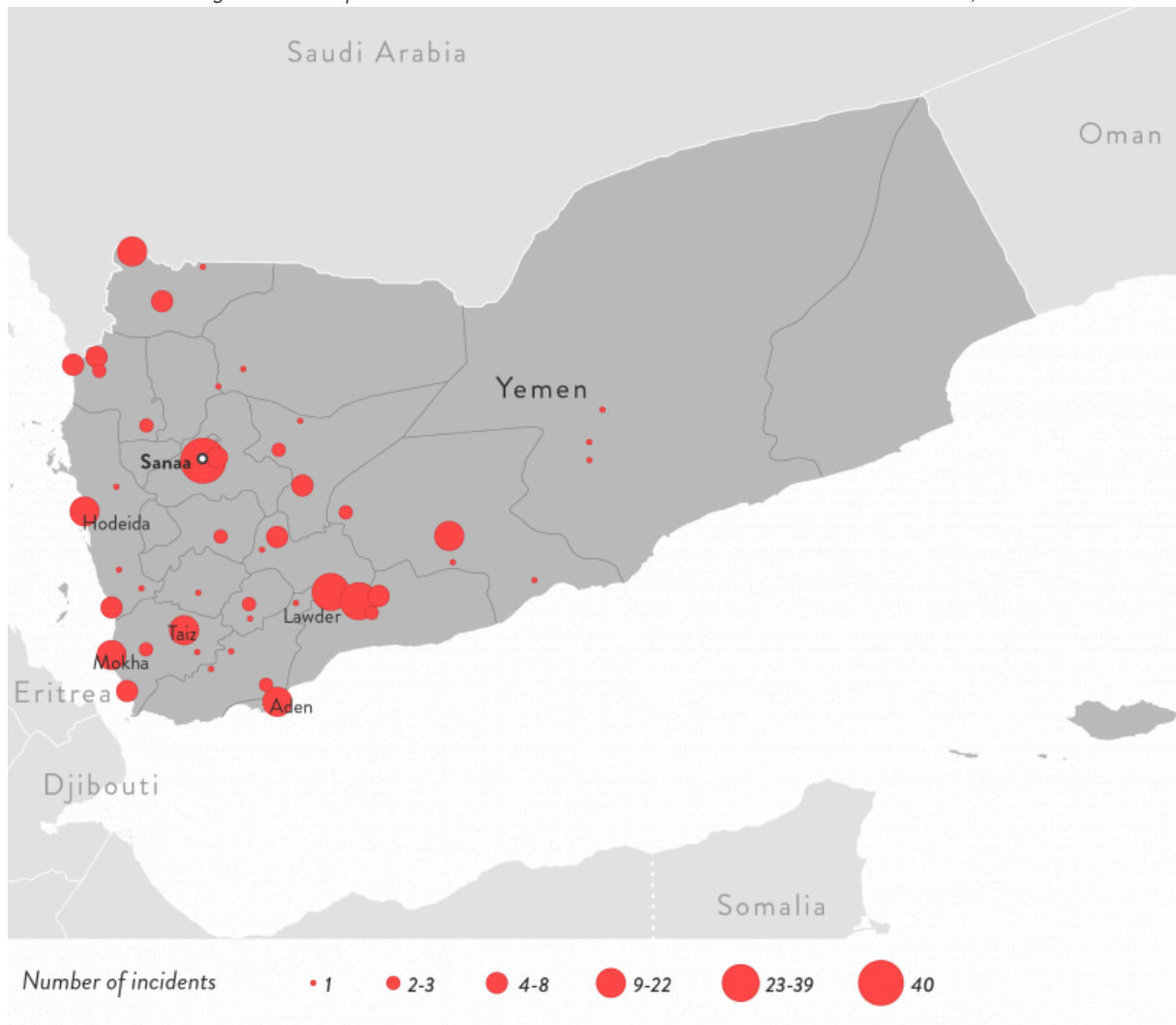
Three years since the insurgency against the Yemeni government, extremist militancy is entrenched in the country (see figures 2.16–2.18). According to the GEM, at least 2,497 people were killed in 2017 in incidents involving three violent actors: the Shia Zaidi revivalist movement the Houthis, ISIS in Yemen and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The distinctions in their overall objectives, against a backdrop of tribalism, make for a complex and dire situation, which the UN secretary general has declared the world's worst humanitarian crisis.<sup>11</sup>

The Houthis are the most violent Islamist faction in Yemen. The group, which is backed by Iran, was active in at least 18 of the country's 21 provinces in 2017. Nearly two-thirds of all violent Islamist attacks were perpetrated by the movement, which draws support from the many tribes active in the north of the country. The Houthis seek the implementation of Zaidi religious law via the overthrow of the current Yemeni government, and they employ violent tactics that have impeded international efforts to alleviate the country's besieged population.

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Nikbakht and Sheena McKenzie, "The Yemen war is the world's worst humanitarian crisis, UN says", CNN, 3 April 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/03/middleeast/yemen-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis-un-intl/index.html>.

Figure 2.16: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Yemen, 2017



At least 55 per cent of the group's violence was aimed at Yemeni troops, the Saudi military (which maintained a presence in the country throughout 2017) and US counter-extremism measures. The GEM also documented two major incidents involving the raiding and looting of banks, one major attack on the media, and the kidnapping of 12 employees of the Norwegian Refugee Council in the port town of Hodeida. The Houthis' tactics are far from indiscriminate, as Hodeida is not only an entry point for international aid but also a route for the group's supporters to deliver weapons and infantry.

In June 2018, Hadi government forces, with support from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, entered the city of Hodeida, in an effort to dislodge Houthi forces. Both countries

suffered attacks from the violent actions of the Houthis. The group targeted Saudi Arabia 27 times in 2017, including 18 cross-border missile and rocket attacks that struck major areas such as the port town of Jizan and the Saudi capital, Riyadh. In December the Houthis fired their first non-test missile at the UAE, targeting a nuclear plant under construction.

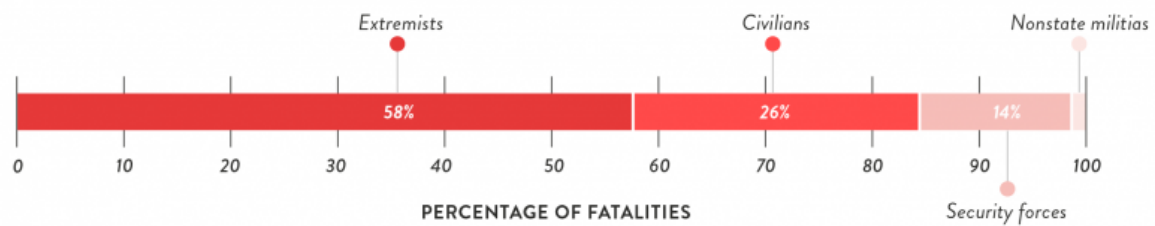
*Table 2.17: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Yemen, 2017*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Khor Maksar, Aden	ISIS in Yemen	Suicide bombers killed 69 after storming a Yemeni security headquarters
2	Sanaa, Sanaa	Houthis	Militants launched an offensive against forces loyal to former President Saleh, killing 24
3	Taiz, Taiz	Houthis	Militants killed 20 soldiers in an attack on a Yemeni military base
4	Qaataba, Dhale	AQAP	A roadside bomb hit a civilian car, killing 12
5	Benghazi, Benghazi	BRSC	A car bomb outside a mosque killed five civilians

Former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who declared his support for the Houthis in May 2015, sided with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in December. He was subsequently accused of treason and killed by a Houthi sniper in the same month.

The GEM recorded the deaths of 960 Houthi extremists from counter-extremism actions in 2017. This figure represents 83 per cent of all Islamist militants killed in counter-extremism operations in Yemen.

Figure 2.18: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Yemen, 2017



AQAP and ISIS in Yemen have leveraged the chaos created by the Houthis. AQAP has been labelled al-Qaeda's most dangerous branch. On average the group killed four people per attack and dedicated nearly one-third of its violent activity in 2017 to suicide bombings. Despite targeting the Yemeni military in over 78 per cent of its attacks, AQAP leader Qassim al-Raymi issued a statement in 2017 declaring its opposition to the Houthis and vowing to fight the movement.

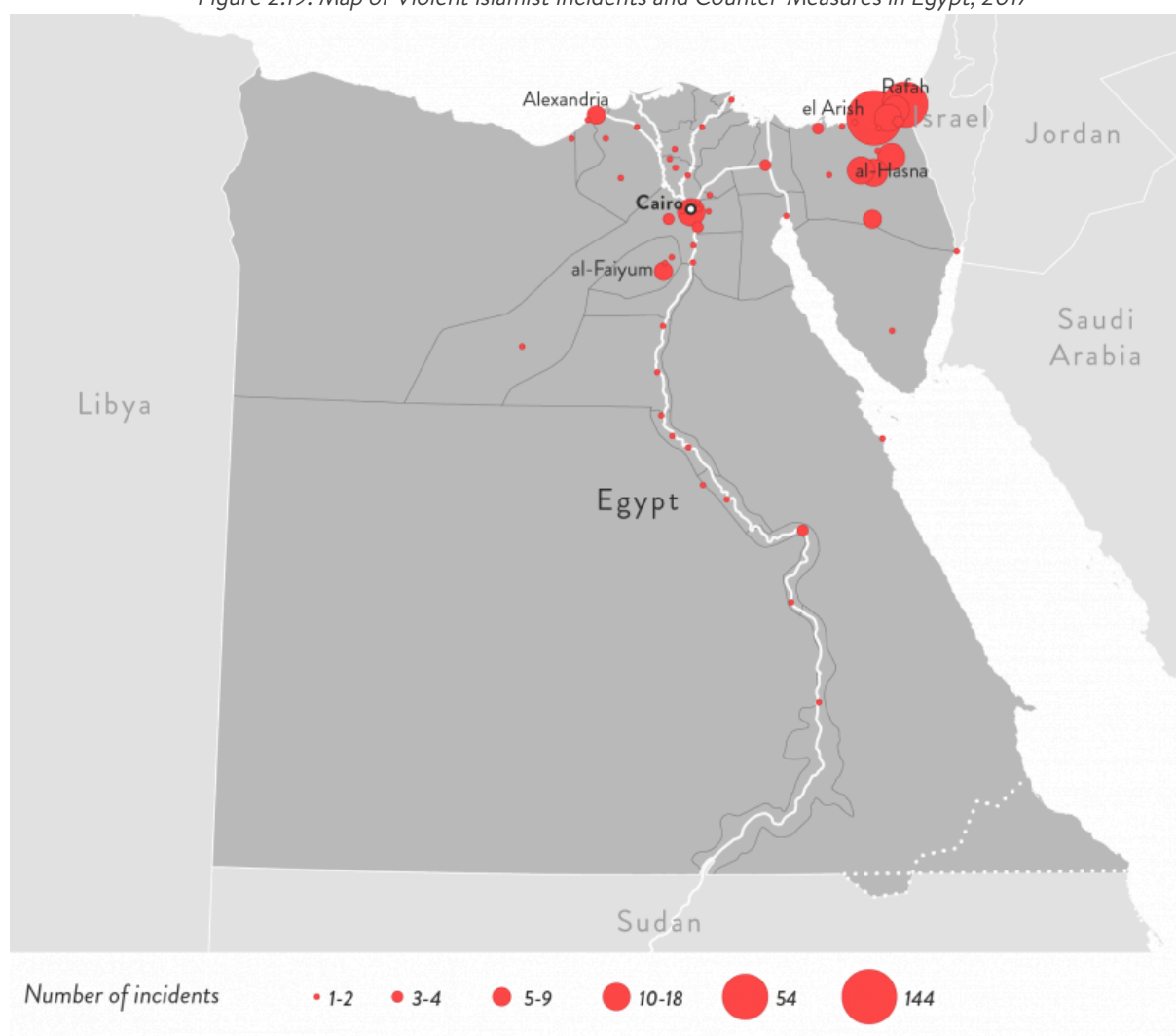
ISIS launched significantly fewer attacks overall, but four of its six attacks involved suicide bombers. In November, ISIS conducted a coordinated assault on a security post in Aden, killing 69 members of the armed forces. The scale and complexity of this incident demonstrate the lethality ISIS can generate in its guerrilla-style attacks, despite maintaining a low profile in a country where other extremist groups are markedly more active. With ISIS operations eroding in Syria and Iraq, Yemen presents fertile territory for battle-hardened militants to perpetuate ISIS's expansionist ideals.

## 7. EGYPT

Islamist extremism has plagued Egypt for over 70 years. It continues to be the main issue that disturbs the fabric of Egyptian society and limits the country's potential to strike a balance between modernity and conservatism. The violent aspects of Egypt's extremism problem have intensified recently, and 1,546 people died in 2017 because of it, according to the GEM (see figures 2.19–2.21).

Seventy-four per cent of the deaths were recorded in the Sinai Peninsula. This desolate terrain has become a breeding ground for militants, and much violence in the Middle East and North Africa can be traced back to this area.

Figure 2.19: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Egypt, 2017



The GEM recorded the deaths of 683 militants in 2017, with 71 per cent in Sinai. Ground operations conducted by the Egyptian military killed more than two-fifths of these militants in Egypt. Extremists were also targeted by the Egyptian Air Force and the Israeli military in attacks that killed 98 militants, including members of ISIS in Sinai and of al-Qaeda's new front group Jamaar Ansar al-Islam. Despite measures to eradicate the threat of extremism in the country, deaths of security personnel and civilians outnumbered those of militants.

In 2017, 209 violent Islamist attacks resulted in the deaths of 809 people. ISIS in Sinai was responsible for 90 per cent of these. ISIS in Sinai is the deadliest extremist faction operating in Egypt. This formidable branch of ISIS has exploited social discord in the peninsula to recruit disenfranchised locals and breathe new life into the region's myriad Islamist extremist cells by bringing them under one umbrella.

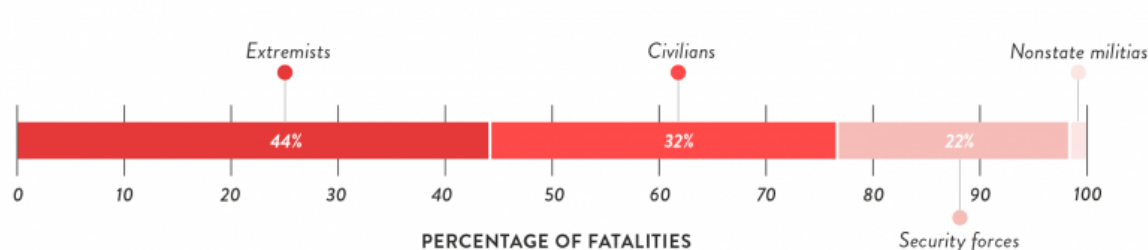
*Table 2.20: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Egypt, 2017*

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Bir al-Abed, North Sinai	ISIS in Sinai	A suicide bomber and gunmen attacked worshippers at a Sufi mosque, killing 311 civilians
2	Al-Wahat al-Bahariya, Giza	ISIS in Sinai	Militants ambushed security forces conducting a counter-terrorism operation, killing 54
3	Tanta, Gharbia	ISIS in Sinai	A suicide bomber attacked and killed 29 Coptic Christians at a church
4	Maghagha, Minya	ISIS in Sinai	Gunmen attacked and killed 28 Coptic Christians on a coach
5	Al-Barth, North Sinai	ISIS in Sinai	A suicide car bomber and gunmen attacked a military outpost, killing 23

The group's resilience and ability to recruit within Egypt's borders means it can pursue a broad agenda against civilians and the state until its vision of an Islamic state is realised. In November, 40 militants attacked a Sufi mosque in North Sinai. The attack killed 311 people, injured 122 and was the deadliest attack in Egypt's history. It was one of two assaults targeting Sufis in 2017.

ISIS's actions against the country's Coptic Christian community were among the deadliest acts of religious persecution documented by the GEM globally. Fifty-three per cent of ISIS attacks against the public in 2017 were aimed at the Coptic community.

Figure 2.21: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Egypt, 2017



ISIS in Sinai and ISIS in Egypt—the organisation's affiliate that is active in the rest of the country—killed 97 Copts in 18 attacks. The GEM recorded 13 assassinations of Coptic Christians and attacks on four churches. ISIS previously described Coptic Christians as its “favourite prey” and threatened to eliminate all “worshippers of the cross”.<sup>12</sup>

The Sinai insurgency and ISIS's presence across Egypt have impeded the state's efforts to bring people together and find common ideological ground between them. Yet there are more layers to Egypt's Islamist problem than ISIS alone. The country suffered attacks by four other violent Islamist groups in 2017: Jund al-Islam, Lewaa al-Thawra, the Hasm Movement and Jamaar Ansar al-Islam. Aside from Jund al-Islam, which claimed an assault on an ISIS unit in October, these groups targeted security and governmental apparatus in all of their violent activities.

<sup>12</sup> Sofia Petkar, “‘God gave orders to kill every infidel’ ISIS vows to massacre Christians in chilling video”, Express, 21 February 2017, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/770216/ISIS-Christians-massacre-video-released-Egypt>.

## 8. PAKISTAN

Pakistan's extremist groups are a destructive force in the region. In a country where Islam is practised by over 95 per cent of the population, groups that claim to fight in the name of the religion killed over 1,489 people in 2017 (see figures 2.22–2.24).<sup>13</sup> The nation is host to multiple violent Islamist groups that seek to undermine the Pakistani state and target the foundations of non-Sunni minorities. The World Bank has labelled the country “fertile ground for terrorism” because of its reputation for harbouring militants in the region.<sup>14</sup>

Twelve violent Islamist groups were active in the country in 2017, with seven of them launching attacks. The Pakistani Taliban was the deadliest, killing 173 people, including civilians, governmental figures and those working in the state media. At the same time, the group maintained a focus on eroding the nation's security, targeting the Pakistani military and police in three out of four attacks. Composed mainly of ethnic Pashtuns, the group seeks to topple Pakistan's government and set up an Islamic state in its place.

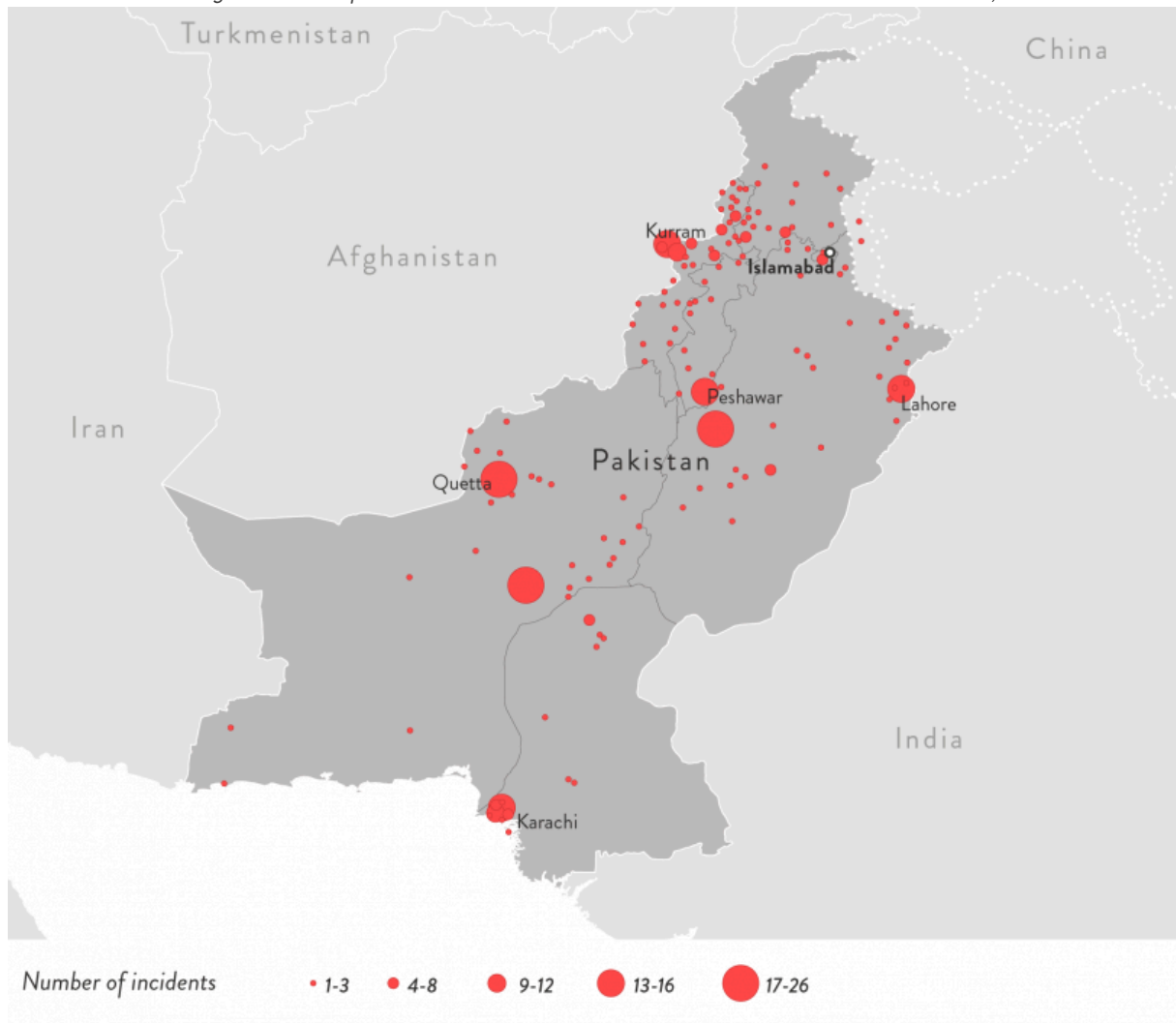
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13 Pamela Constable, “Pakistan is making concessions to religious extremists. What's the cost?” Washington Post, 3 December 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/pakistan-is-making-concessions-to-religious-extremists-whats-the-cost/2017/12/01/ce5f7122-d3b8-11e7-9ad9-ca0619edfa05\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistan-is-making-concessions-to-religious-extremists-whats-the-cost/2017/12/01/ce5f7122-d3b8-11e7-9ad9-ca0619edfa05_story.html).

14 Eric Rosenbach and Aki J. Peritz, “Confrontation or Collaboration? Terrorist Safehavens and the Intelligence Community”, Belfer Center, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/terrorist-safe-havens.pdf>.



Figure 2.22: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Pakistan, 2017



The group was responsible for attacks on a government college and two girls' schools in 2017, having previously claimed it was targeting the nation's education system in response to state actions against the "families and females" of militants.<sup>15</sup> The group enjoys a symbiotic relationship with many violent jihadi actors in the region and in January claimed responsibility for an IED explosion that killed 25 civilians in retaliation for the state's killing of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi chief Asif Chotu.

The Pakistani Taliban's association with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi reflects the complexities of the country's extremism problem. Such

<sup>15</sup> The Editorial Board, "The Taliban's Massacre of Innocents in Pakistan", New York Times, 16 December 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/17/opinion/the-talibans-massacre-of-innocents-in-pakistan.html>.

alliances allow the Taliban to exploit the many networks these violent jihadi actors have created in urban areas and to launch its own attacks. Although the Pakistani Taliban is focused on its antistate agenda, the activities of groups including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Jamaat ul-Ahrar have inflamed sectarian tensions.

*Table 2.23: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Pakistan, 2017*

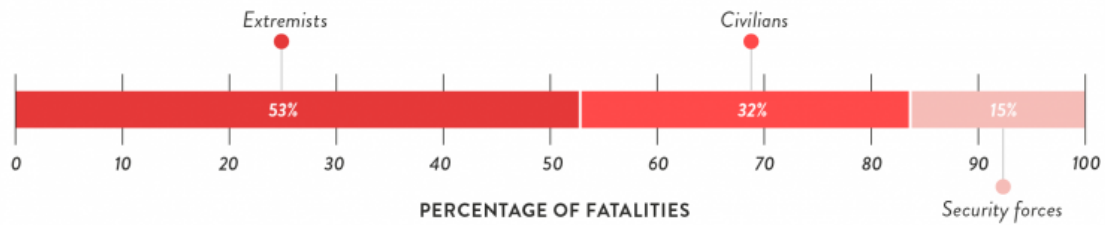
	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Sehwan, Sindh	ISIS-Khorasan	A suicide bomber attacked a Sufi mosque, killing at least 90 civilians
2	Turi Bazaar, KP	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami	Militants targeted Shia civilians in twin bombings, killing 67
3	Lahore, Punjab	Pakistani Taliban	A suicide assault killed 26 civilians
4	Parachinar, KP	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi	At least 25 were killed after a bomb detonated at a market
5	Parachinar, KP	Jamaat ul-Ahrar	A car bomb targeted a Shia mosque, killing 22 civilians

In 2017, 247 civilians were killed in sectarian violence perpetrated by four distinct groups. Pakistan's Shia population bore the brunt of the violence, and the GEM documented the deaths of 136 people. Over 36 per cent of these attacks took place in Balochistan province, where Shias constitute 20 per cent of the population. Fifty-seven people were killed in three separate attacks by Jamaat ul-Ahrar and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's al-Alami faction was also violently active in 2017, launching one of the deadliest attacks during the year that killed 67 civilians. This faction has previously confirmed an alliance with ISIS based on a shared sectarian agenda, further demonstrating the hazardous fluidity among Pakistan's extremist actors. Aligning operations with ISIS and its extremely intolerant worldview paints a disturbing picture of the measures extremist organisations in Pakistan are willing to take to maintain a sectarian agenda. Sectarian

violence made up one-quarter of ISIS-Khorasan's violent activities in Pakistan, a similar level to Afghanistan. The group killed 164 people in 2017, most of them civilians.

Figure 2.24: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Pakistan, 2017



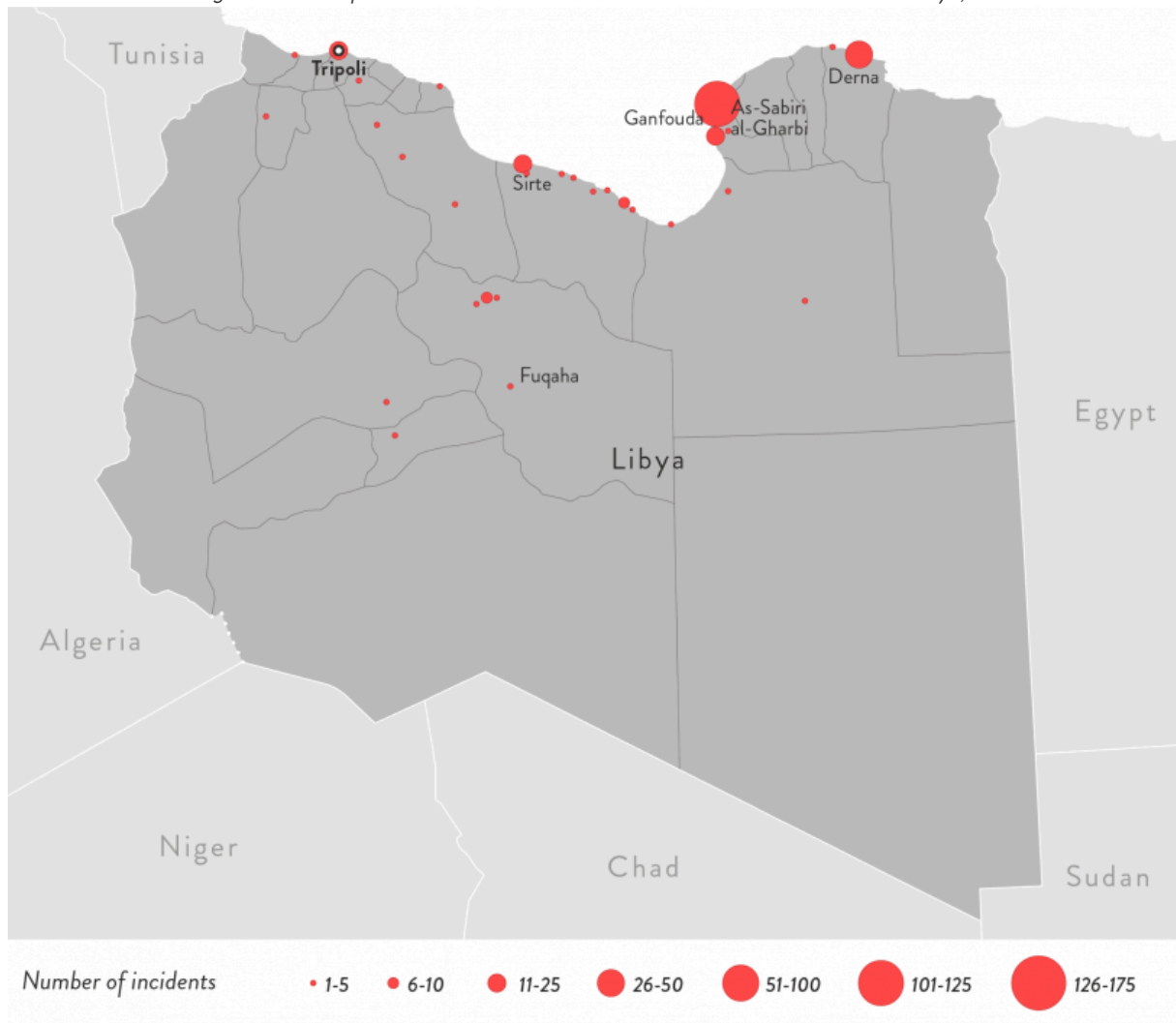
While groups such as ISIS, the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi are at the core of Pakistan's extremist violence, mob movements contribute to daily sectarian violent incidents in the country. These local Islamists do not generate as much impact as more organised groups, but they serve as a platform for violent Islamist organisations to consistently terrorise Pakistan's non-Sunni population.

## 9. LIBYA

Since the ouster of the country's strongman leader Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, Libya's array of violent Islamist groups has impeded efforts to de-escalate the fighting and transformed the country's political and social landscape. According to the GEM, 1,058 people died in 2017 as a direct result of Libya's violent Islamist quagmire (see figures 2.25–2.27). The current conflict involves a myriad of Islamist actors that span the ideological spectrum. Against a backdrop of nationwide fragmentation, 11 groups actively sought a system of governance based on sharia law. Islamist groups in Libya also play a key role in Europe's ongoing migration and refugee crisis.

The most violent extremist element in Libya is the jihadi alliance of Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC). Composed of al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Sharia and with close ties to one of Libya's strongest armed militias, the alliance launched 59 per cent of the Islamist attacks recorded in 2017. These incidents were concentrated in and around the coastal city of Benghazi. Over 91 per cent targeted the Libyan National Army (LNA), which has been engaged in a long-term campaign against local violent Islamist groups. Although the LNA was engaged in war across the country against four distinct violent Islamist groups, 36 per cent of LNA deaths in 2017 were at the hands of the BRSC.

Figure 2.25: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Libya, 2017



Twenty-eight per cent of the LNA's counter-terrorism operations against the group involved airstrikes, demonstrating the BRSC's resilience. The group justifies its violence on the basis of an ultraconservative strand of Islam and exploits local grievances to garner support. The BRSC was largely defeated in July, but it was alleged to have left behind landmines and IEDs in areas it had controlled. According to the GEM, 88 per cent of incidents involving landmines occurred after the BRSC's defeat. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya has said that the presence of landmines, IEDs and unexploded ordnance hinders the safe return of internally displaced people (IDPs) and threatens access for humanitarian workers.<sup>16</sup>

ISIS in Libya exhibits disparities with other violent Islamist actors operating in the country. While nine of the groups launched attacks in no more than two Libyan provinces in 2017, ISIS pursued its agenda of aggressive expansionism by attacking ten provinces. ISIS in Libya regrouped after losing territory in the country at the end of 2016. The fall of Mosul in Iraq and of Raqqa in Syria also meant ISIS channelled its efforts towards countries such as Libya.

*Table 2.26: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Libya, 2017*

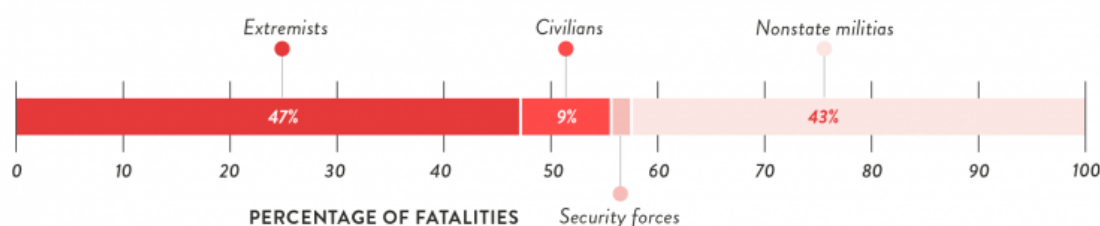
	<b>Location</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	As-Sabiri al-Gharbi, Benghazi	BRSC	Militants clashed with LNA fighters, killing 17 members
2	Fuqaha, Jufra	ISIS in Libya	Militants killed 14 after attacking LNA fighters
3=	As-Sabiri al-Gharbi, Benghazi	ISIS in Libya	Militants ambushed and clashed with LNA fighters, killing 11
3=	Fuqaha, Jufra	ISIS in Libya	Militants beheaded LNA fighters and civilians at a checkpoint, killing 11
5	Ganfouda, Benghazi	ISIS in Libya	Militants clashed with LNA fighters and killed ten members

The GEM recorded attacks by ISIS in Libya on checkpoints, mosques, courthouses and embassies. Thirty-six per cent of the group's attacks were against civilians. These violent activities are emblematic of the transnational organisation and show how the group thrives in countries such as Libya where political instability and social marginalisation are pervasive. In February, it was reported that ISIS in Libya was paying smugglers of child refugees in an attempt to coerce new recruits. In early 2017, Quilliam estimated that 88,300 unaccompanied children were at risk of being radicalised.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Jamal Jawhar, "Lives and Limbs Shattered by Libya Mines", Asharq Al-Awsat, 4 April 2018, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1227916/lives-and-limbs-shattered-libya-mines>.

Libya serves as a gateway to Europe for migrants and refugees escaping conflict and destitution in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In December 2017, 621,706 migrants from 40 countries reportedly made their way into the country.<sup>18</sup> Two years earlier, ISIS had threatened to “flood Europe” with half a million refugees through Libya.<sup>19</sup> The group’s radicalisation of refugees in the country’s many IDP camps adds credence to the threat and could be a hint at attacks to come by people radicalised in Libya.

Figure 2.27: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Libya, 2017



17 Mark Townsend, “ISIS paying smugglers’ fees in recruitment drive among child refugees”, Guardian, 5 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/05/isis-recruitment-drive-child-refugees>.

18 “Libya’s Migrant Report”, UN Migration Agency, 16 December 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20Libya%20DTM%20Round%202016%20Migrant%20Report%20December%20Final.pdf>.

19 “ISIS threatens to send 500,000 migrants to Europe as a ‘psychological weapon’ in chilling echo of Gaddafi’s prophecy that the Mediterranean ‘will become a sea of chaos’”, Daily Mail, 18 February 2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2958517/The-Mediterranean-sea-chaos-Gaddafi-s-chilling-prophecy-interview-ISIS-threatens-send-500-000-migrants-Europe-psychological-weapon-bombed.html>.

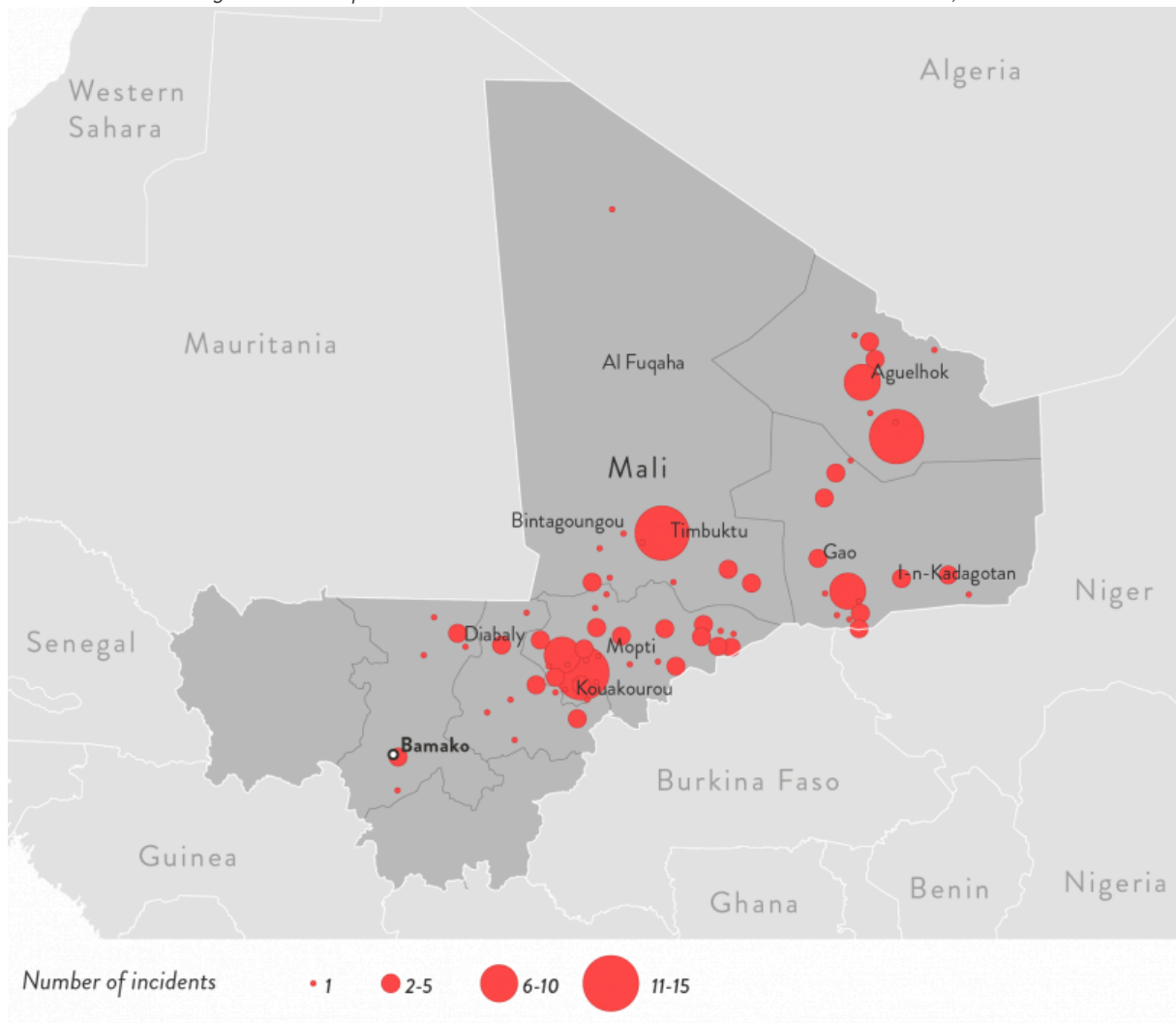
## 10. MALI

Against a backdrop of famine and social and political grievances, the spread of radical Islamist groups has devastated many lives in the Sahel. Controlling the violence in Mali is integral to the region's prospects for peace and security. The country suffered at least 493 deaths as a result of extremist violence and efforts to counter it in 2017. Al-Qaeda's monopoly in the Sahel instigated much of that violence. Since 2012, violence in Mali has tended to be confined to the north, but GEM data show that activity in central Mali was just as acute last year (see figures 2.28–2.30).

The GEM documented 156 incidents of Islamist violence across Mali, with seven provinces affected: Mopti, Ségou, Tombouctou, Gao, Kidal, Koulikoro and Bamako. Mopti suffered one-third of all of Mali's attacks in 2017. Security forces and armed militias were targeted in 86 per cent of attacks in these areas. The GEM also documented assaults on educational institutions, local leaders and the government, revealing similarities to the attacks that have plagued northern Mali since the outbreak of civil war in 2012.



Figure 2.28: Map of Violent Islamist Incidents and Counter-Measures in Mali, 2017



State efforts to eradicate militant elements have been supported by the French military and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali. These two international actors were responsible for 61 per cent of extremists deaths in the country in 2017. International missions have helped efforts to counter extremism, and although there has been a geographical shift in the dynamics of the problem—as recognised by the French, who targeted the central province of Mopti in 44 per cent of their operations—northern Mali is still a breeding ground for militants active across the Sahel. In response, extremists targeted the UN mission in Mali at least 37 times in 2017, killing 36 people including military guards and peacekeepers.

In March 2017, the Salafi-jihadi alliance of Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) was formed. This group was responsible for 71 per cent of all violent extremist attacks in Mali that year, according to the GEM. JNIM comprises elements of Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, al-Mourabitoun and the official Saharan branch of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—groups that had previously entrenched themselves in Mali’s north. In 2017, however, 45 per cent of JNIM’s attacks occurred in the central provinces of Mopti, Ségou, Koulikoro and Bamako, suggesting the alliance is diversifying its objectives beyond the north.

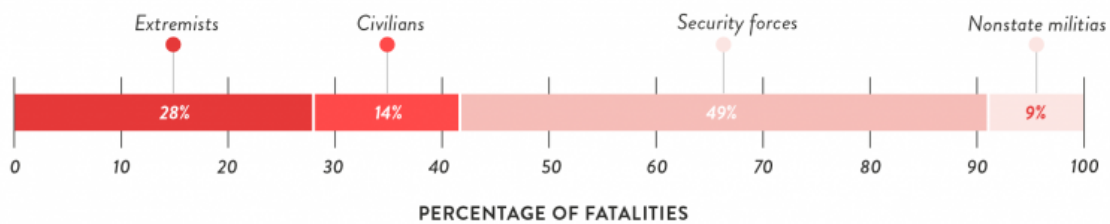
*Table 2.29: The Five Deadliest Islamist Extremist Incidents in Mali, 2017*

	Location	Perpetrator	Description
1	Gao, Gao	AQIM	A suicide car bombing struck a military base, killing 77
2	Bintagoungou, Tombouctou	JNIM	A coordinated attack on a military checkpoint killed 12 soldiers
3=	Mopti, Mopti	Ansarul Islam	Militants attacked an army position and killed 11 security officials
3=	I-n-Kadagotan, Gao	JNIM	At least 11 soldiers were killed after a Malian military convoy was ambushed
5	Diabaly, Ségou	JNIM	Militants ambushed an army convoy, killing nine soldiers

JNIM is the latest incarnation of violent Islamism in Mali, and its activities expose the methods by which it seeks to erode the Malian state. During the year, the group was responsible for attacks on 11 major checkpoints, nine military convoys and one border crossing, in incidents that left 53 dead. There were attacks on nine military bases, including the French army and the UN. The group launched an average of ten assaults each month in 2017, including attacks and hostage takings, and killed a total of 163 people. JNIM also attacked Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Niger, revealing the group’s vision for an Islamic state not only in Mali but across the Sahel.

JNIM does not display the tribalism that characterised AQIM's early iterations, in which Algerian Arabs were the preferred recruits. It allows al-Qaeda to cast itself as a pan-Islamic movement. Despite Mali suffering attacks from ISIS in the Greater Sahara in 2017, JNIM is the strongest violent jihadi faction in the Sahel and a franchise that has effectively executed al-Qaeda's strategy of building localised offshoots. With Mali's long-running conflict now spilling over from the north, the extremist threat to the region is more severe than ever.

Figure 2.30: Fatalities From Islamist Violence and Counter-Measures in Mali, 2017



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This second part of the Global Extremism Monitor 2017 examines the ten countries that suffered the most fatalities from violent Islamism in 2017. Together these states experienced 97 per cent of all fatalities globally, according to our data.

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