The Positioning of Terrorism Issues in the Contemporary World and Its Perception from the Perspective of Czech Republic Citizens

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Abstract

This study examines public perceptions of terrorism within the Czech Republic, focusing on the complexities of terrorist threats and the efficacy of counter-terrorism strategies. It highlights a significant disparity in the public's understanding of terrorism, with many relying on the internet and mass media which often fail to provide comprehensive and high-quality information. This superficial understanding is coupled with a low perceived personal threat, leading to insufficient coverage in local media and educational programs. The findings emphasize the need for public discourse and targeted information campaigns that not only improve understanding but also actively involve the public in educational initiatives. The study advocates for the integration of terrorism education into broader security training programs, underscoring the importance of historical and political contexts to fully grasp the multifaceted nature of terrorism. Recommendations include enhancing public awareness through community-based educational programs and public campaigns that encourage active participation and critical evaluation of information. By acknowledging terrorism as a global issue with local implications, this research underscores the urgent need for a societal approach to prevention and education, which can significantly bolster societal resilience against terrorism through increased public engagement and cooperation.

KEY WORDS: *terrorism, combating terrorism, security, international cooperation, Czech Republic*

1. Introduction

In an era marked by rapid technological progress and globalization, terrorism stands out as a significant global threat. Its adaptability to new technologies and extensive reach makes it an unpredictable force that commands attention at both national and international levels. Terrorism not only impacts direct security but also reflects broader social and political dynamics that shape its evolution.

Historically, terrorism has adapted to different eras, indicating it is not merely a modern phenomenon. The Czech Republic (CR) perceives terrorism primarily through the lens of global events, despite facing a lower risk of direct attacks. This perspective influences local policy responses and public attitudes towards security, human rights, and civil liberties. Media portrayal, which often focuses on international terrorism, shapes the Czech public's understanding, possibly overshadowing local nuances. The advent of the internet and social media has transformed how terrorism and counterterrorism operate, facilitating the spread of ideologies and counteractive measures. However, unchecked online information can foster misconceptions about terrorism's nature and appropriate responses.

The post-September 11 era has intensified the dimensions of terrorism, with subsequent radicalizations and new terrorist organizations emerging. Recent global events, like attacks on Israel, underscore the persistent and evolving nature of terrorism. This introduction lays the groundwork for a deeper exploration of terrorism's perception and management in the CR, emphasizing a comprehensive approach that combines historical insight, technological advancements, and public engagement to enhance security and resilience.

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113

2. Impacts of terrorism

Terrorism inflicts extensive damages across various facets of society, categorized into two distinct levels by Foltin and Řehák (2006): primary and secondary effects [1].

Primary impacts of terrorism

Primary impacts directly result from terrorist activities, including psychological trauma, and significant political, economic, and social repercussions. These impacts often align with the terrorists' objectives, disrupting daily life and instigating long-term trauma among survivors.

Politically, they can destabilize governments and lead to military responses, such as Israel's lengthy "Operation Wrath of God" following the Munich massacre in 1972. Economically, attacks like 9/11 had profound effects, severely affecting markets, and prompting expensive, long-term military engagements [2].

Secondary impacts of terrorism

Secondary impacts include media coverage that can unintentionally spread terrorists' messages and environmental or infrastructural damages. These effects can be categorized as immediate, like casualties or service disruptions, or later impacts, which evolve over time and affect political, economic, and societal structures.

Broader societal impacts

State structures: Government responses to terrorism are proportional to the attack's severity, involving significant political decisions that affect national security and civil liberties.

Economic sphere: Terrorism causes direct infrastructure damage and long-term impacts on market stability and investor confidence. Countries reliant on tourism face severe economic downturns due to terrorism.

Human psyche: Terrorism causes widespread fear and anxiety, leading to changes in social behaviour and an increase in mental health disorders.

Infrastructure and environment: Attacks cause significant environmental damage, affecting biodiversity and ecosystems.

Tourism and travel: This sector, crucial for some national economies, suffers long-term declines in tourist numbers after attacks.

Understanding the varied impacts of terrorism and crafting responses involves emergency preparedness, long-term security planning, economic resilience strategies, and mental health support. International cooperation is crucial in shared intelligence, coordinated security measures, and unified aid strategies, highlighting the need for a proactive and comprehensive approach to counterterrorism [3].

3. Current state of terrorism as of 2023

Since 2013, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), crafted by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) using data from Terrorism Tracker and other sources, has provided an annual comprehensive overview of global terrorism trends. The GTI tracks nearly 66,000 terrorist incidents from 2007 through 2022, offering a detailed analysis of the patterns and shifts over the last decade. In 2022, the GTI reported a 9% decrease in terrorism-related deaths, totalling 6,701, marking a 38% decline from the peak in 2015. This reduction is reflected in a nearly 28% decrease in the number of attacks, down from 5,463 in 2021 to 3,955 in 2022. Excluding Afghanistan, which remains the most affected country for the fourth consecutive year, the global death toll would increase by 4%.

The deadliest terrorist groups in 2022 included the Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates, al-Shabaab, the Baluchistan Liberation Army, and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wall Muslimeen, with IS being the most lethal for the eighth consecutive year. In 2022, IS was responsible for the highest number of attacks and deaths among all groups. Despite significant decreases in terrorism between 2015 and 2019, the number of countries experiencing deaths remained relatively stable from 2020 through 2022, ranging from 43 to 42 countries. This represents a decline from 2015, when 56 countries reported terrorism-related deaths.

The number of countries with increasing and decreasing terrorism-related deaths in 2022 was roughly equal, with 25 countries reporting fewer deaths and 24 reporting increases. Terrorism dynamics have shown minimal overall change in recent years, but significant fluctuations have occurred in specific regions like Niger, Myanmar, and Iraq. Notably, the lethality of terrorist attacks increased in 2022, with an average of 1.7 deaths per attack, up from 1.3 in 2021.

The Sahel region of Sub-Saharan Africa has become a new epicentre of terrorism, accounting for more deaths than South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa combined in 2022. Over the last 15 years, terrorism in the Sahel has increased by over 2000%, with 43% of global terrorism-related deaths occurring there in 2022, compared to just 1% in 2007. The

political volatility in the Sahel, marked by multiple coups since 2021, has exacerbated this trend. Contributing factors include water mismanagement, food scarcity, ethnic polarization, rapid population growth, foreign interventions, geopolitical competition, pastoral conflicts, the rise of Salafist ideology, and weak governance. Burkina Faso and Mali were particularly concerning, accounting for 73% of the Sahel's terrorism-related deaths and 52% of all such deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2022. Both countries saw significant increases in terrorism, with deaths in Burkina Faso rising by 50% to 1,135 and in Mali by 56% to 944. The violence in Burkina Faso also spread to neighbouring countries, with Togo and Benin experiencing their worst GTI scores to date (see Fig. 1).
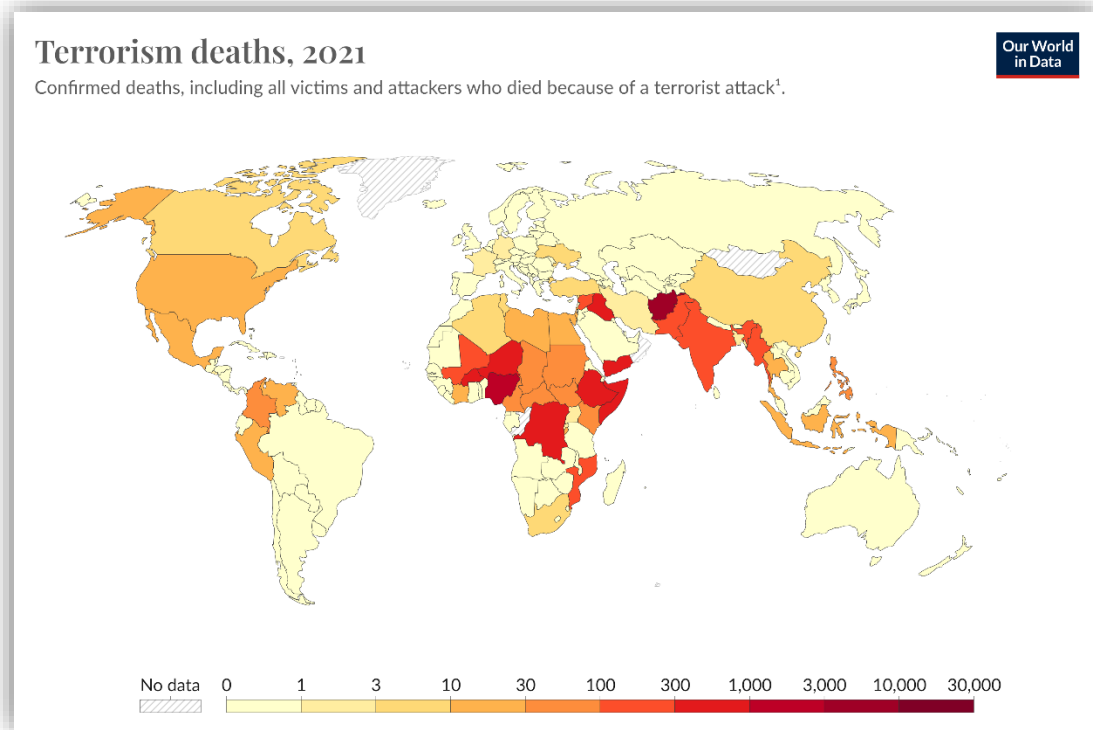

Fig. 1. Terrorism deaths in 2021 [5]

North America showed the most significant regional improvement in the GTI score, while Sub-Saharan Africa saw the greatest deterioration. North America consists of the USA and Canada, neither of which has a high GTI score, yet it is the only region where no country has a zero GTI score.

In the West, the number of attacks has been declining since 2017, with 40 attacks recorded in 2022, a 27% decrease from 55 in 2021. However, the number of deaths doubled from nine in 2021 to 19 in 2022, with 11 occurring in the USA. This increase marks the first rise in Western terrorism-related deaths since 2019. In Europe, Islamist extremists carried out two attacks in 2022. The USA recorded just eight attacks, none attributed to any known terrorist group. The UK reported only four attacks and no deaths, marking the first year without terrorism-related deaths since 2014. Germany recorded its lowest number of attacks since 2015.

The use of drones in terrorism is an emerging trend, with groups like IS, Boko Haram, and Houthi rebels utilizing this technology. Currently, 65 non-state actors can deploy drones that can travel up to 1,500 kilometres, potentially carrying out targeted assassinations or holding biological weapons. Drones require minimal training and are highly accessible, representing a significant shift in how conflicts are conducted [4].

4. Combatting Terrorism

Terrorism is a complex, pervasive threat that transcends borders, cultures, and religions, posing a significant challenge to global security and international stability. Nations worldwide respond to this threat by employing a variety of methods and resources aimed at eliminating terrorism through rigorous, well-coordinated efforts both domestically and internationally [6].

One of the cornerstone strategies in the fight against terrorism involves the use of intelligence services. These agencies play a crucial role in the pre-emptive identification and disruption of terrorist plots. Operating largely out of the public eye, intelligence services collect and analyse vast amounts of data on potential threats. Their effectiveness is evident from the substantial decrease in successful terrorist attacks since the intensified intelligence activities following September 11, 2001. Reports indicate that numerous major attacks have been thwarted due to enhanced intelligence cooperation globally [7].

Counterterrorism units within various nations specialize in direct action against terrorists. These highly trained tactical teams engage in both preventive and responsive actions to mitigate terrorist threats. Their activities include hostage rescue, assault operations on terrorist hideouts, and neutralization of imminent threats. The units are equipped for rapid deployment and are skilled in close-quarter combat, ensuring they can respond swiftly and efficiently to terrorism incidents, minimizing casualties and maximizing the safety of civilians and infrastructure [8].

The broader strategy also includes legal and political measures such as prosecuting terrorists, isolating states that sponsor terrorism, and applying international pressure to reduce support for terrorist activities. These efforts are supplemented by promoting robust international cooperation among countries through various treaties and alliances to enhance collective security measures against terrorism [6].

An essential aspect of counterterrorism is the need for cooperation among international intelligence communities. Effective sharing of intelligence is crucial but often hampered by concerns over the security and political implications of disseminating sensitive information. The international community continuously works towards improving mechanisms for sharing intelligence without compromising the operational security of nations involved.

Furthermore, the fight against terrorism is supported by specialized research and analytical work provided by think tanks and research institutions. These organizations, such as the RAND Corporation and the International Centre for Counterterrorism, conduct in-depth studies on terrorism trends, terrorist psychology, and effective countermeasures. Their research helps refine counterterrorism strategies and policies, ensuring they are based on accurate, up-to-date information and tailored to the evolving nature of global terrorism [9].

Military involvement in counterterrorism is complex and often controversial. While the military's role is traditionally focused on external threats, their capabilities in logistics, heavy weaponry, and strategic operations make them an invaluable asset in countering severe terrorist threats. Countries vary in their use of military forces in domestic counterterrorism roles, with some incorporating specialized military counterterrorism units into their national security framework [10].
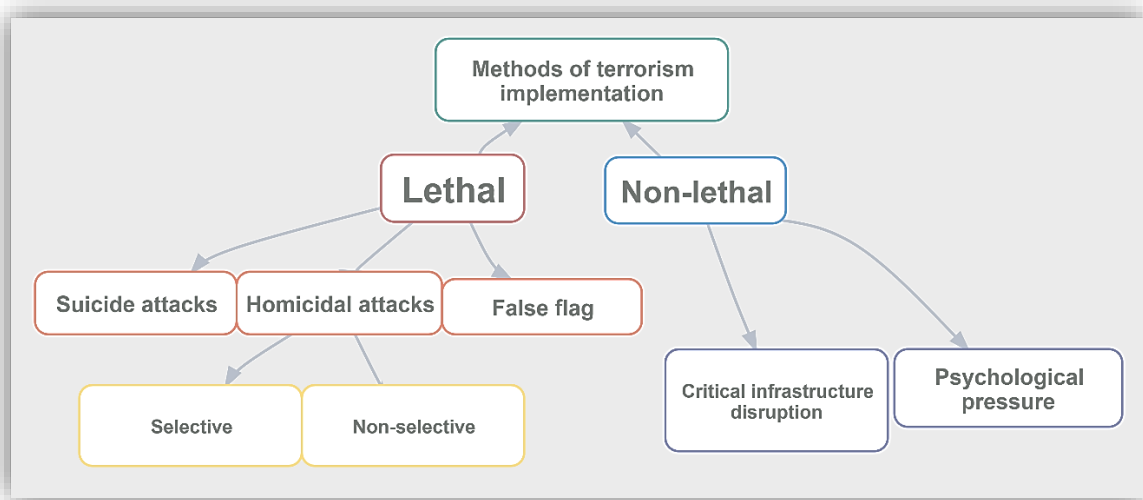

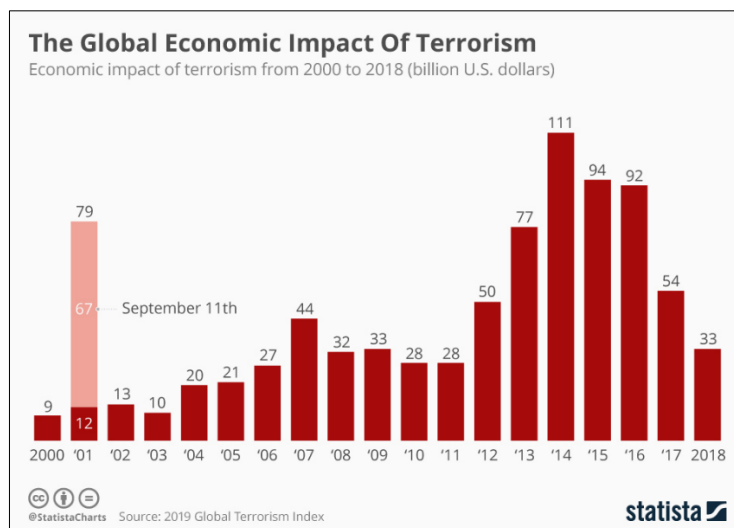Fig. 2. Methods of terrorism implementation [1] [fig. source: own]

Fig. 3. Economic impact of terrorism between the years 2000 and 2018 [12].

5. Description of the research investigation

The quantitative study initiated in 2023 with a thorough examination of academic literature and online resources on terrorism, laying a solid theoretical groundwork and providing a comprehensive summary of current knowledge in the field. Following this theoretical groundwork, a detailed and systematic questionnaire focusing on terrorism's critical aspects was crafted. Data gathering was executed via a standardized online survey using Survio.com, streamlining the collection process from a broad respondent base. This phase spanned 50 days, with 198 participants. The online method was chosen for its quick distribution, anonymity for participants, and immediate data processing capabilities, emphasizing sample diversity to enhance result representativeness. The statistical software R was employed for data analysis, facilitating the examination of categorical variables through contingency tables and the χ2 independence test. This approach, conducted in 2023, yielded a quantitative evaluation of variable relationships, identifying statistically significant patterns. The findings provided a nuanced understanding of terrorism and its perception within the study's demographic, condensing the research process and insights into a focused examination of terrorism's multifaceted impact and public perception.

6. Discussion of Results

In the framework of the survey, 26 distinct questions were formulated. However, for the purposes of the article, we have elected not to include all the findings but to focus more closely on those that we subjectively perceive as the most significant or those that most distinctly delineate the positioning of terrorism issues in the contemporary world and its perception from the perspective of Czech Republic citizens.

In the initial part of the survey, respondents were asked if they had ever encountered the term "terrorism". A very positive finding is that 99% of all respondents have at some point in their lives come across the issue of terrorism, although the specific level of awareness and the quality of information acquired can only be estimated. A total of 122 respondents were able to capture the fundamental essence of terrorism at least partially in their responses, indicating a certain degree of understanding of the issue. The introductory set of questions also included a prompt for respondents to identify the general definition of terrorism from provided options. A total of 171 were able to determine the correct version, which confirms that despite the lack of a comprehensive overview of terrorism issues, perhaps in formal education, the public is familiar with the basic connections that assist in estimating the correct definition, comprising a list of what terrorism truly entails. This positive result may also be influenced by the current highly publicized situation in Israel and Gaza, which indirectly encourages the public to seek more information.
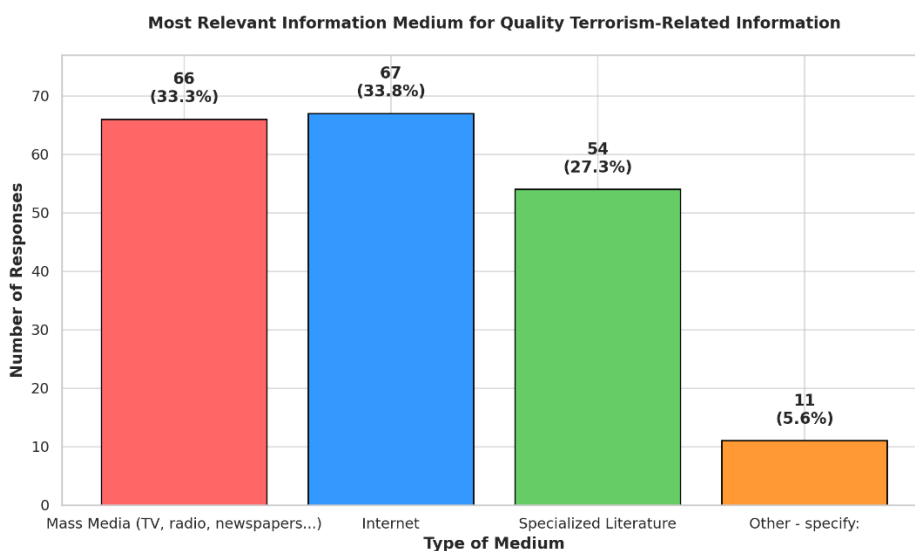

Fig. 4. Preferred sources for quality terrorism-related information [source: own]

Most respondents tended to search for suitable and relevant information through mass media or the internet, with scholarly literature ranking third. This shift to the virtual environment is understandable given the broader trend towards digitization of information. However, from my own literature review, I observed a significant difficulty in finding sufficient current domestic book resources on terrorism, as well as appropriate studies discussing current trends. Sources created before the events of September 11, 2001, often depict terrorism differently than the more numerous sources from several years after. Over time, the frequency of new publications has decreased, possibly due to the low incidence of terrorism in our area, which might foster a societal view questioning the necessity of engaging with this topic. Foreign authors discuss terrorism more extensively, and their works are more accessible online, which is beneficial as these sources are also readily available to the public on the internet.
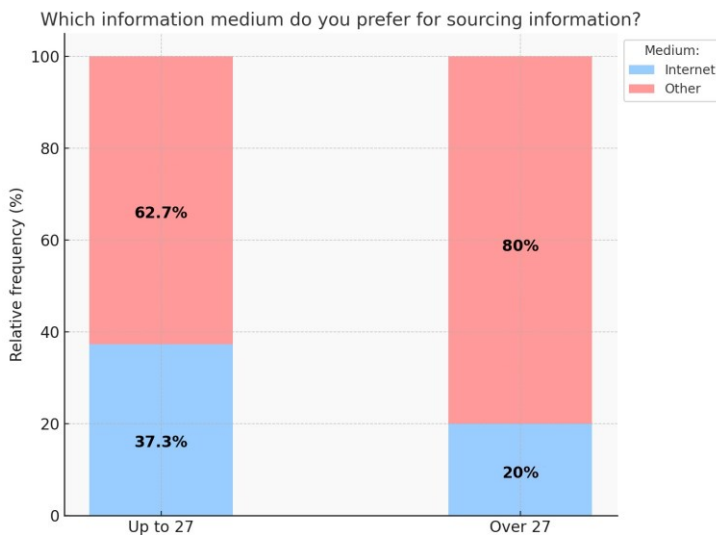
Fig. 5. Information medium preference by age for sourcing information [source: own]

Interestingly, statistics show that the younger generation, particularly those under 27, more frequently uses the internet to find relevant sources. This not only underscores the significant role of the online environment as a primary information source but also presents an opportunity to specifically target this younger demographic through their preferred medium. This tailored approach could enhance the dissemination of information and education on terrorism, ensuring that younger individuals have access to accurate and insightful content about this critical global issue.
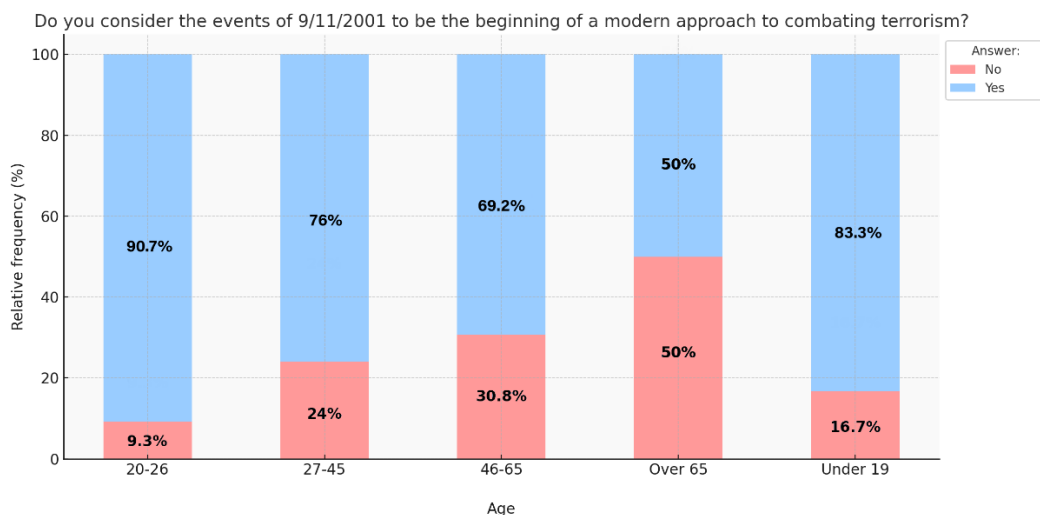

Fig. 6. Perceptions of 9/11 as the start of a modern approach to combating terrorism by age group [source: own]

The survey highlighted significant awareness of specific terrorist attacks among respondents. The events of September 11, 2001, stood out prominently, recognized by 92.4% of the participants, underscoring its lasting impact on public consciousness. Following this, the 2015 bomb attacks in France were acknowledged by 83.8% of respondents, reflecting the recency and prominence of these events in the media. Interestingly, the hijacking of a Boeing 747 in 1985 was also well-remembered, mentioned by 51.5% of respondents, demonstrating its enduring recognition in discussions on terrorism.

A particularly insightful aspect of the findings was the correlation between respondents' ages and their perceptions of terrorism. Younger respondents, especially those aged 20-26, were the most likely to view the September 11 attacks as a pivotal moment that marked the beginning of a contemporary approach to counterterrorism, with 90.7% affirming this view. This agreement noticeably declined in older age groups. This trend suggests that younger individuals, who may not have lived through earlier significant terrorist events, perceive the influence and consequences of such incidents differently than older generations, possibly due to the different contexts in which they were educated about these events.

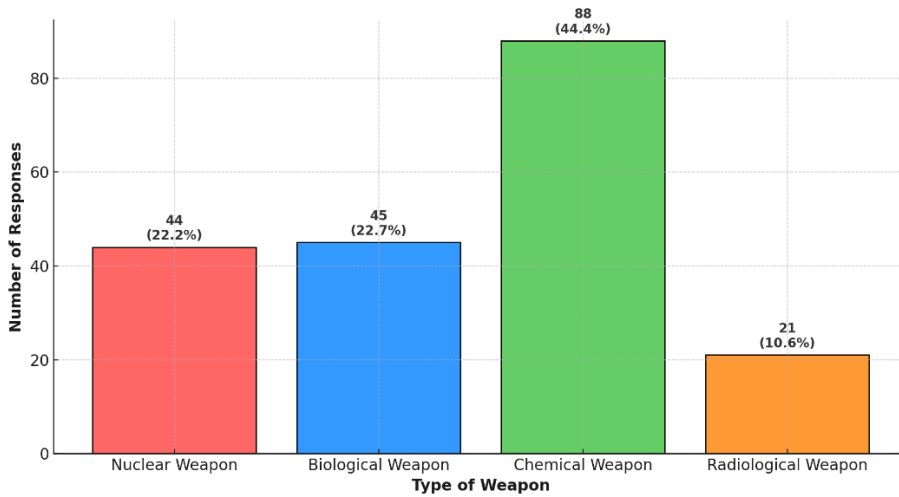**Likelihood of Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction for a Terrorist Act**

Fig. 7. Perceived risks of WMD use in terrorism by weapon type [source: own]

The most alarming scenario in terrorism involves the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), with a survey revealing that chemical weapons are perceived as the most probable type, chosen by 44.4% of respondents. Closely following are nuclear and biological weapons, which nearly match chemical weapons in perceived likelihood. Radiological weapons, on the other hand, are considered the least likely by respondents, possibly due to their lower impact compared to other types.

Chemical and biological weapons are particularly concerning because they require only a small amount to inflict massive casualties, combining high fatality rates with significant psychological impacts. Despite the complex nature of manufacturing these weapons, the presence of a black market and available expertise make it feasible for well-supported terrorist groups to acquire and deploy them.

Nuclear weapons, while representing the pinnacle of WMD in terms of potential damage, are seen as less accessible to terrorist groups due to the substantial financial, technological, and material hurdles involved. This perspective is echoed in the academic debates and studies about the feasibility of nuclear terrorism. For instance, Matthew Bunn in 2006 estimated a 29% probability of a nuclear terrorist attack occurring over the following decade. His model highlighted the serious but manageable risk, although, fortunately, no nuclear terrorist attacks have materialized to date [12].

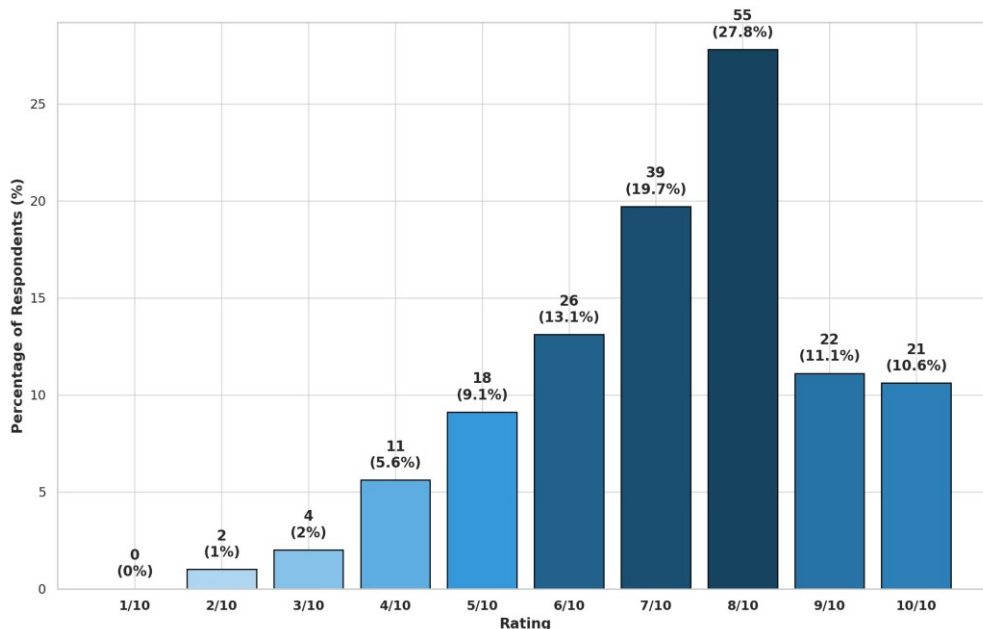**Interest and Relevance of Terrorism Issues (Scale 1-10)**

Fig. 8. Public interest and concern for terrorism issues on a 1 to 10 scale [source: own]

The survey explored how respondents perceive terrorism as an interesting and current topic. None of the respondents considered the topic to be uninteresting or outdated; instead, 21 respondents (10.6%) rated terrorism as very current and interesting. To simplify the analysis, the data were aggregated into three categories:

- 1-3 for 'Not Relevant',

- 4-7 for 'Relevant',
- 8-10 for 'Highly Relevant'.

Although respondents concurrently viewed the threat of terrorism as unlikely in the Czech Republic, this finding is positive in the sense that citizens do not underestimate the threat. It is important to note that this score may have been influenced by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine at the time of the survey. Given that the research was conducted just before significant events in Israel and Gaza, it is plausible that the score might be even higher today, likely falling into the 'Highly Relevant 'category.
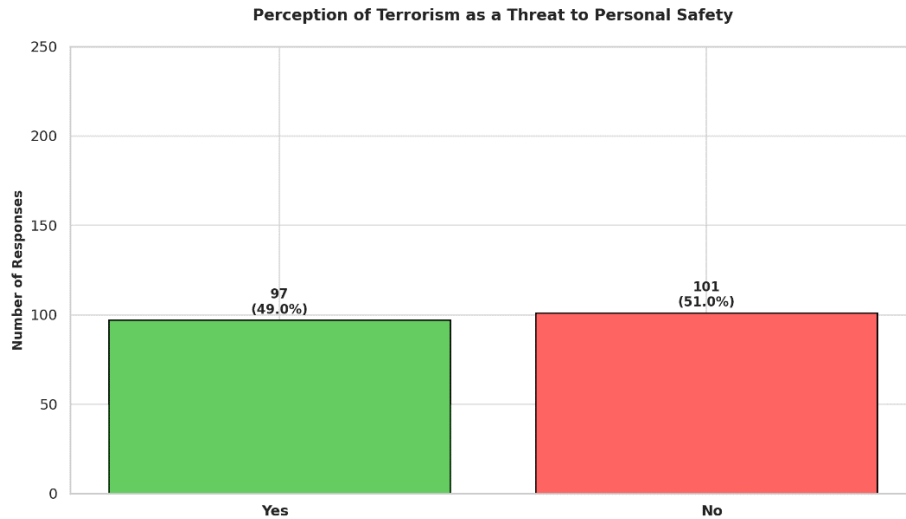

Fig. 9. Public opinion on terrorism as a personal safety threat [source: own]

The survey also probed whether individuals perceive terrorism as a threat to their personal safety. The responses were nearly split, with a slight majority, 51%, indicating they do not see terrorism as a threat, compared to 49% who do. This finding suggests a notable divergence in public perception, which may be influenced by the nearly absent direct experience with terrorism within the Czech Republic. Many citizens might view terrorism as a distant issue, occurring beyond their national borders and not affecting their immediate environment. Despite this local sentiment, an overwhelming 86.9% of respondents acknowledged terrorism as a global issue, implying an understanding of its potential impact on an international scale. Additionally, the prevalent view of terrorism as a remote problem might reflect a certain underestimation of the issue. The absence of traditional attacks on Czech soil does not eliminate the need for vigilance and preventive measures, underscoring the importance of maintaining awareness and preparedness even in perceived low-threat environments.
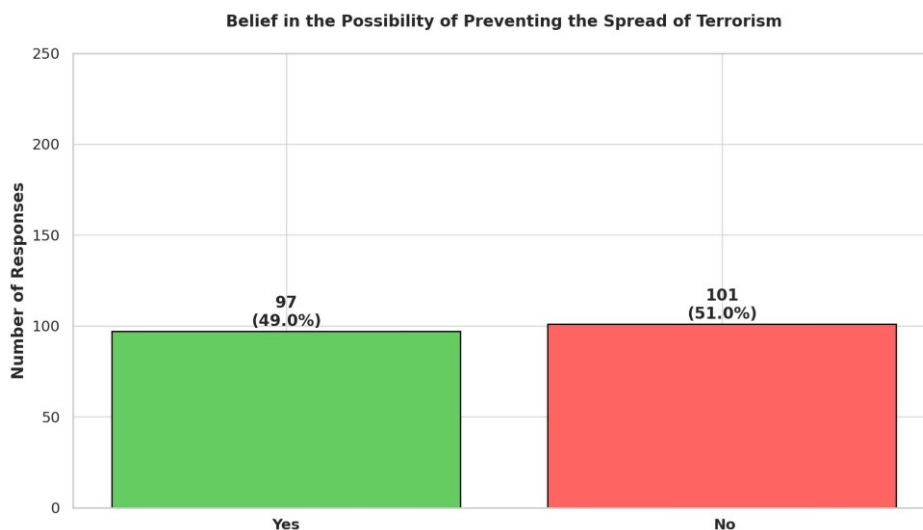

Fig. 10. Survey responses on the feasibility of preventing terrorism spread [source: own]

The issue of terrorism spread and its potential financing by individual states has been relevant for several decades. Over half of the respondents (51%) believe that the spread of terrorism cannot be prevented, and 77.3% perceive that there are states that support terrorism. Those respondents acknowledging the existence of such states more frequently held the view that it is impossible to prevent the spread of terrorism. Eradicating the threat of terrorism is not feasible soon if there are entities intentionally supporting terrorism.

A significant 77.3% of all respondents agreed on the existence of states that deliberately support terrorism. Countries most frequently identified by respondents as supporters of terrorism included Russia, the USA, Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and China. Russia resonated the most among respondents, which can be attributed particularly to a relatively recent resolution passed by European Parliament members, designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism due to deliberate attacks by the Russian military on civilian targets in Ukraine. Countries like Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan have a long history associated with the occurrence and support of terrorism, which is why they are often listed on official state sponsors of terrorism lists. This historical context contributes to their frequent identification by respondents as states that support terrorism.
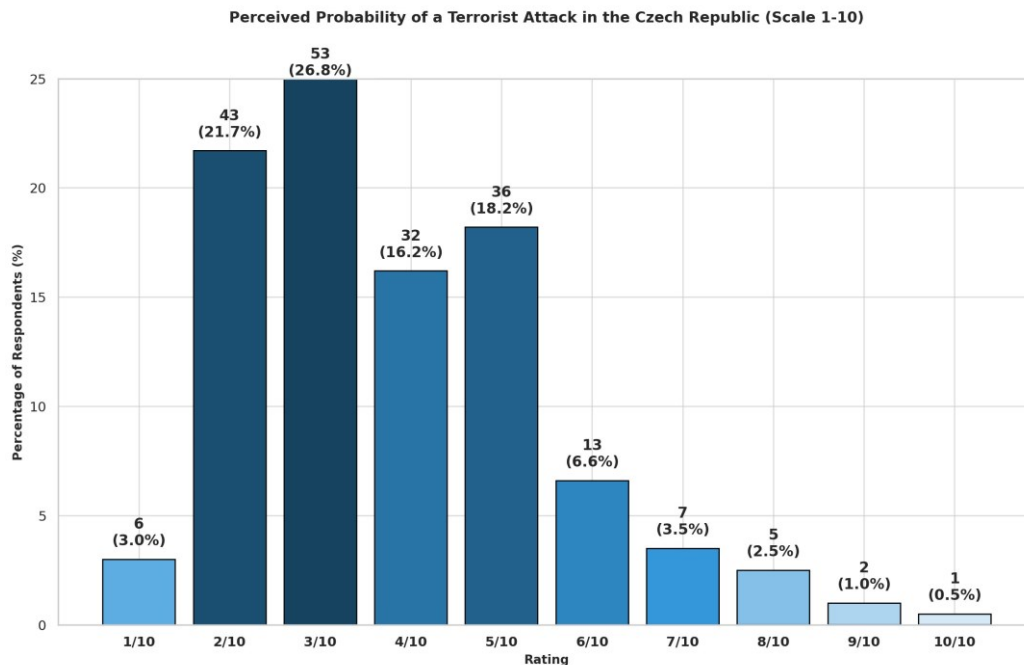

Fig. 11. Perceived risk levels of a terrorist attack in the Czech Republic (Scale 1-10) [source: own]

Respondents were asked about their perception of the likelihood of terrorism occurring within our territory. Extremes were rarely chosen; only six participants believed it completely improbable, and a single respondent (0.5%) saw it as extremely likely. This could reflect the Czech Republic's history of never being the target of a traditional terrorist attack. While many incidents in history might display characteristics of terrorism, they are often confused with actual terrorist attacks. To date, the Czech Republic is one of the few European countries that has not experienced a verified terrorist attack, influencing the public's belief that terrorism is not likely to happen locally. The average response rated the likelihood at 3.8/10, which would be possible to categorize as "unlikely". It would also be interesting to map perceptions over a longer period after the outbreak of the war conflict in Israel and Gaza, to determine whether increased global tensions could influence a higher concern score.
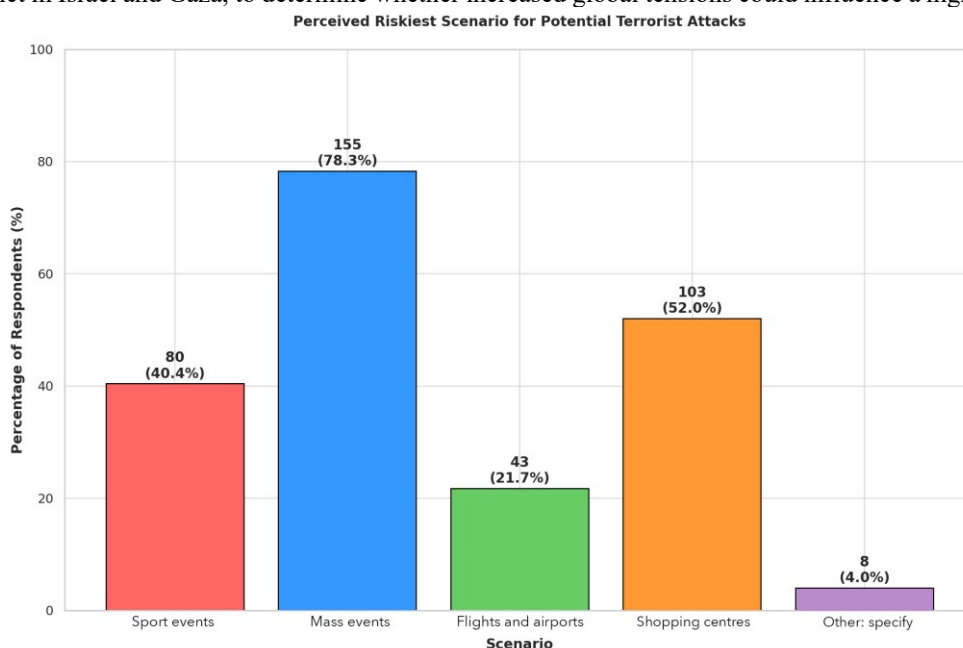

121

Fig. 12. Public perception of the most vulnerable settings for terrorist attacks [source: own]

Terrorism as a topic not only influences people's thinking but also serves as a determinant in their decision-making processes. Many respondents indicated that the presence of terrorism significantly influences their choices of travel destinations abroad; 60.1% of responses reflected this concern. Additionally, respondents identified mass events in squares (78.3%), shopping centres (52%), and sports matches (40.4%) as locations with the highest perceived risk of terrorist attacks. Such events require considerable respect and appropriate enhancement of security measures to mitigate the potential occurrence of terrorism.

Furthermore, it was observed that those who perceive terrorism as a threat to their personal security are also more likely to consider the risk of terrorism when planning their travels abroad. This correlation suggests that the perceived threat of terrorism significantly shapes individual attitudes towards safety in public spaces and international travel decisions.
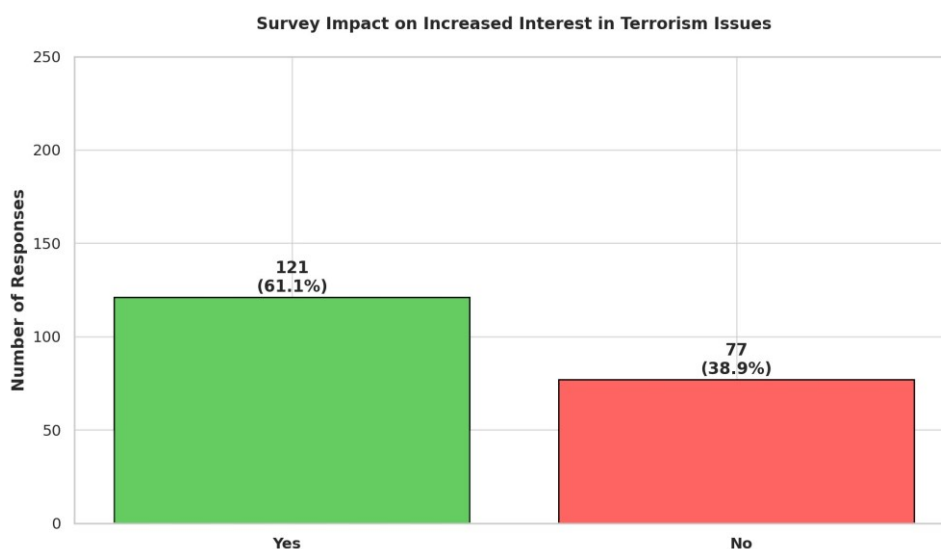

Fig. 13. Effect of survey participation on interest in terrorism topics [source: own]

We firmly believe that awareness and understanding of terrorism, especially its comprehensive treatment within educational systems, is insufficient. For example, terrorism is not adequately addressed in schools. Consequently, we also hoped that participating in the survey would at least partially increase respondents' interest in terrorism issues. It was very encouraging to find that, according to the final, twenty-sixth question of the survey, 121 respondents (61.6%) indicated that completing the questionnaire could enhance their interest in terrorism.

Thus, it can be modestly suggested that encouraging respondents to complete the questionnaire not only provides them with basic information but also fosters a deeper interest in the topic and greater engagement in seeking out quality, verified information.

8. Conclusions

Based on the obtained results, the implementation of extensive awareness programs and educational initiatives is recommended to inform the public about the risks, prevention, and protective measures associated with BW. It is imperative to enhance media coverage of the BW topic, support the integration of relevant information into school curricula, and develop targeted media campaigns aimed at expanding public awareness. Furthermore, strengthening international cooperation and transparency within control mechanisms is proposed to increase public trust in the effectiveness of international agreements. The creation of a unified online platform providing access to verified information and resources on BW could significantly contribute to demystifying the topic and increasing public awareness. Additionally, it is crucial to incorporate this issue into awareness and educational programs within the broader context of weapons of mass destruction. This approach can significantly contribute to overall public awareness of risks and protective strategies in the current security situation.

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