

The Terrorism Statistics Every American Needs to Hear

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Calm Down ... You Are Much More Likely to Be Killed By Boring, Mundane Things than Terrorism

McClatchy [reported](#) in 2010:

There were just 25 U.S. noncombatant fatalities from terrorism worldwide. (The US government definition of terrorism excludes attacks on U.S. military personnel). While we don't have the figures at hand, undoubtedly more American citizens died overseas from traffic accidents or intestinal illnesses than from terrorism.

The March, 2011, *Harper's Index* [noted](#):

Number of American civilians who died worldwide in terrorist attacks last year:
8 — Minimum number who died after being struck by lightning: 29.

Indeed, the leading cause of deaths for Americans traveling abroad is *not* terrorism, or murder ... or even crime of any type.

It's [car crashes](#).

[In fact](#):

With the exception of the Philippines, more Americans died from road crashes in all of the 160 countries surveyed than from homicides.

The U.S. Department of State reports that only [17](#) U.S. citizens were killed *worldwide* as a result of terrorism in 2011. That figure *includes* deaths in Afghanistan, Iraq and all other theaters of war.

In contrast, the American agency which tracks health-related issues – the U.S. Centers for Disease Control – [rounds up](#) the most prevalent causes of death in the United States:



Comparing the CDC numbers to terrorism deaths means (keep in mind that – from here to the end of the piece – we are consistently and substantially *understating* the risk of other causes of death as compared to terrorism, because we are comparing deaths from various causes *within the United States* against deaths from terrorism *worldwide*):

- You are [35,079](#) times more likely to die from heart disease than from a terrorist attack
- You are [33,842](#) times more likely to die from cancer than from a terrorist attack

Wikipedia [notes](#) that obesity is a contributing factor in 100,000–400,000 deaths in the United States per year. That makes obesity [5,882](#) to times [23,528](#) more likely to kill you than a terrorist.

The annual number of deaths in the U.S. due to avoidable medical errors is as high as [100,000](#). Indeed, one of the world’s leading medical journals – Lancet – [reported](#) in 2011:

A November, 2010, document from the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services reported that, when in hospital, one in seven beneficiaries of Medicare (the government-sponsored health-care programme for those aged 65 years and older) have complications from medical errors, which contribute to about 180 000 deaths of patients per year.

That’s just Medicare beneficiaries, not the entire American public. Scientific American [noted](#) in 2009:

Preventable medical mistakes and infections are responsible for about 200,000 deaths in the U.S. each year, according to an investigation by the Hearst media corporation.

And a new [study](#) published in the Journal of Patient Safety says the numbers may be up to [440,000](#) each year.

But let’s use the lower – 100,000 – figure. That still means that you are [5,882](#) times more likely to die from medical error than terrorism.

The CDC says that some [80,000](#) deaths each year are attributable to excessive alcohol use. So you’re [4,706](#) times more likely to drink yourself to death than die from terrorism.

Wikipedia notes that there were [32,367](#) automobile accidents in 2011, which means that you are [1,904](#) times more likely to die from a car accident than from a terrorist attack. As CNN reporter Fareed Zakaria [wrote](#) last year:

“Since 9/11, foreign-inspired terrorism has claimed about two dozen lives in the United States. (Meanwhile, more than 100,000 have been killed in gun homicides and more than 400,000 in motor-vehicle accidents.) “

President Obama [agreed](#).

According to a 2011 CDC report, poisoning from prescription drugs is even [more likely to kill you](#) than a car crash. Indeed, the CDC stated in 2011 that – in the majority of states – [your prescription meds are more likely to kill you](#) than *any other source of injury*. So your meds are *thousands of times* more likely to kill you than Al Qaeda.

The number of deaths by suicide has [also surpassed car crashes](#), and many connect the increase in suicides [to the downturn in the economy](#). Around [35,000](#) Americans kill themselves each year (and more American soldiers [die by suicide than combat](#); the number of veterans committing suicide is astronomical and [under-reported](#)). So you're [2,059](#) times more likely to kill yourself than die at the hand of a terrorist.

The CDC notes that there were [7,638](#) deaths from HIV and [45](#) from syphilis, so you're [452](#) times more likely to die from risky sexual behavior than terrorism.

The National Safety Council reports that more than [6,000](#) Americans die a year from falls ... most of them involve people falling off their roof or ladder trying to clean their gutters, put up Christmas lights and the like. That means that you're [353](#) times more likely to fall to your death doing something idiotic than die in a terrorist attack.

The agency in charge of workplace safety – the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration – reports that [4,609](#) workers were killed on the job in 2011 within the U.S. homeland. In other words, you are [271](#) times more likely to die from a workplace accident than terrorism.

The CDC notes that [3,177](#) people died of “nutritional deficiencies” in 2011, which means you are [187](#) times more likely to starve to death in American than be killed by terrorism.

Scientific American [notes](#):

You might have toxoplasmosis, an infection caused by the microscopic parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which the CDC estimates has infected about 22.5 percent of Americans older than 12 years old

Toxoplasmosis is a brain-parasite. The CDC reports that more than [375](#) Americans die annually due to toxoplasmosis. In addition, [3](#) Americans died in 2011 after being exposed to a brain-eating amoeba. So you're about [22](#) times more likely to die from a brain-eating zombie parasite than a terrorist.

There were at least [155](#) Americans killed by police officers in the United States in 2011. That means that you were more than [9](#) times more likely to be killed by a law enforcement officer than by a terrorist.

The 2011 Report on Terrorism from the National Counter Terrorism Center notes that Americans are [just as likely](#) to be “crushed to death by their televisions or furniture each year” as they are to be killed by terrorists.

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control show that Americans [are 110 times more likely to die](#) from contaminated food than terrorism. And see [this](#) and [this](#).

The Jewish Daily Forward noted last year that – even including the people killed in the

Boston bombing – [you are more likely to be killed by a toddler than a terrorist](#). And see [these statistics](#) from CNN.

Reason [notes](#):

[The risk of being killed by terrorism] [compares annual risk of dying](#) in a car accident of 1 in 19,000; drowning in a bathtub at 1 in 800,000; dying in a building fire at 1 in 99,000; or being struck by lightning at 1 in 5,500,000. In other words, in the last five years you were four times more likely to be struck by lightning than killed by a terrorist.

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) has just published, [Background Report: 9/11, Ten Years Later](#) [PDF]. The report notes, excluding the 9/11 atrocities, that fewer than 500 people died in the U.S. from terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2010.

Scientific American [reported](#) in 2011:

John Mueller, a political scientist at Ohio State University, and Mark Stewart, a civil engineer and authority on risk assessment at University of Newcastle in Australia ... contended, “a great deal of money appears to have been misspent and would have been far more productive—saved far more lives—if it had been expended in other ways.”

✖ Mueller and Stewart noted that, in general, government regulators around the world view fatality risks—say, from nuclear power, industrial toxins or commercial aviation—above one person per million per year as “acceptable.” Between 1970 and 2007 Mueller and Stewart asserted in a separate paper published last year in [Foreign Affairs](#) that a total of 3,292 Americans (not counting those in war zones) were killed by terrorists resulting in an annual risk of one in 3.5 million. Americans were more likely to die in an accident involving a bathtub (one in 950,000), a home appliance (one in 1.5 million), a deer (one in two million) or on a commercial airliner (one in 2.9 million).

The global mortality rate of death by terrorism is even lower. Worldwide, terrorism killed 13,971 people between 1975 and 2003, an annual rate of one in 12.5 million. Since 9/11 acts of terrorism carried out by Muslim militants outside of war zones have killed about 300 people per year worldwide. This tally includes attacks not only by al Qaeda but also by “imitators, enthusiasts, look-alikes and wannabes,” according to Mueller and Stewart.

Defenders of U.S. counterterrorism efforts might argue that they have kept casualties low by thwarting attacks. But investigations by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies suggest that 9/11 may have been an outlier—an aberration—rather than a harbinger of future attacks. Muslim terrorists are for the most part “short on know-how, prone to make mistakes, poor at planning” and small in number, Mueller and Stewart stated. Although still potentially dangerous, terrorists hardly represent an “existential” threat on a par with those posed by Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union.

In fact, Mueller and Stewart suggested in Homeland Security Affairs, U.S. counterterrorism procedures may indirectly imperil more lives than they preserve: “Increased delays and added costs at U.S. airports due to new security procedures provide incentive for many short-haul passengers to drive to their destination rather than flying, and, since driving is far riskier than air travel, the extra automobile traffic generated has been estimated to result in 500 or more extra road fatalities per year.”

The funds that the U.S. spends on counterterrorism should perhaps be diverted to other more significant perils, such as industrial accidents (one in 53,000), violent crime (one in 22,000), automobile accidents (one in 8,000) and cancer (one in 540). “Overall,” Mueller and Stewart wrote, “vastly more lives could have been saved if counterterrorism funds had instead been spent on combating hazards that present unacceptable risks.” In an e-mail to me, Mueller elaborated:

“The key question, never asked of course, is what would the likelihood be if the added security measures had not been put in place? And, if the chances without the security measures might have been, say, one in 2.5 million per year, were the trillions of dollars in investment (including overseas policing which may have played a major role) worth that gain in security—to move from being unbelievably safe to being unbelievably unbelievably safe? Given that al Qaeda and al Qaeda types have managed to kill some 200 to 400 people throughout the entire world each year outside of war zones since 9/11—including in areas that are far less secure than the U.S.—there is no reason to anticipate that the measures have deterred, foiled or protected against massive casualties in the United States. If the domestic (we leave out overseas) enhanced security measures put into place after 9/11 have saved 100 lives per year in the United States, they would have done so at a cost of \$1 billion per saved life. That same money, if invested in a measure that saves lives at a cost of \$1 million each—like passive restraints for buses and trucks—would have saved 1,000 times more lives.”

Mueller and Stewart’s analysis is conservative, because it excludes the most lethal and expensive U.S. responses to 9/11. Al Qaeda’s attacks also provoked the U.S. into invading and occupying two countries, at an estimated cost of several trillion dollars. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in the deaths of more than 6,000 Americans so far—more than twice as many as were killed on September 11, 2001—as well as tens of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans.

In 2007 New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said that people are more likely to be killed by lightning than terrorism. “You can’t sit there and worry about everything,” Bloomberg exclaimed. “Get a life. Actually, according to Mueller and Stewart, Americans’ annual risk of dying from lightning, at one in seven million is only half the risk from terrorism.

Indeed, the Senior Research Scientist for the Space Science Institute (Alan W. Harris) estimates that the odds of being killed by a terrorist attack is about the same as being hit [by an asteroid](#) (and [see this](#)).

Terrorism pushes our emotional buttons. And politicians and the media tend to blow the risk of terrorism out of proportion. But as the figures above show, terrorism is a very unlikely cause of death.

Indeed, our [spending](#) on anti-terrorism measures is [way out of whack](#) ... especially because [most of the money has been wasted](#). And see [this article](#), and this 3-minute video by professor Mueller:

Indeed, mission creep in the name of countering terrorism actually makes us [more vulnerable to terrorist attacks](#).

Note: The U.S. is [supporting the most extreme and violent types of Muslims](#). Indeed, the U.S.

has [waived the prohibitions of arming terrorist groups](#) in order to topple the Syrian government ... even though the *head* of the Syrian rebels has [called for Al Qaeda to carry out new attacks on America](#).

Indeed – as counter-intuitive as it may sound- stupid government policy may be [more dangerous](#) than terrorism.

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