



Universitetet
i Stavanger

Tegg Westbrook
Associate Professor,
Department of Safety,
Economics, and Planning
tegg.westbrook@uis.no

What is Proportional Security? Changing perceptions over the last decade

October 2021

Theme of the Conference

"How do security incidents effect the way we approach and work with security and risk."

Perspective over the last decade.



Contents of Presentation

- What does 'good' security look like? Ensuring that our values do not change, and that security trade-offs are measured and balanced.
- Threat: how has it changed?
- Vulnerability: how has it changed?
- Impact: How does this influence our decisions?

Proportionality

- How much risk should we tolerate? How can we protect cities without overdoing it?
- We will not stop terrorism, but we can reduce its impact in a proportional way.

What does 'good' and 'bad' security look like?

- “[Security contributes to a] a state of mind that gives confidence that the risks ahead are being managed to a point where everyday life – and investment in the future – can continue.” – David Omand.
- ...”there can be no simple trade-off between freedom and security because freedom is not attainable without security” – Paul Martin



What is Proportionality?

What constitutes proportionate design for counter-terrorism (CT)?

- Legislation in relation to duties of care
- Incentives to protect
- The societal benefits of protecting

What can affect proportionate design for ?

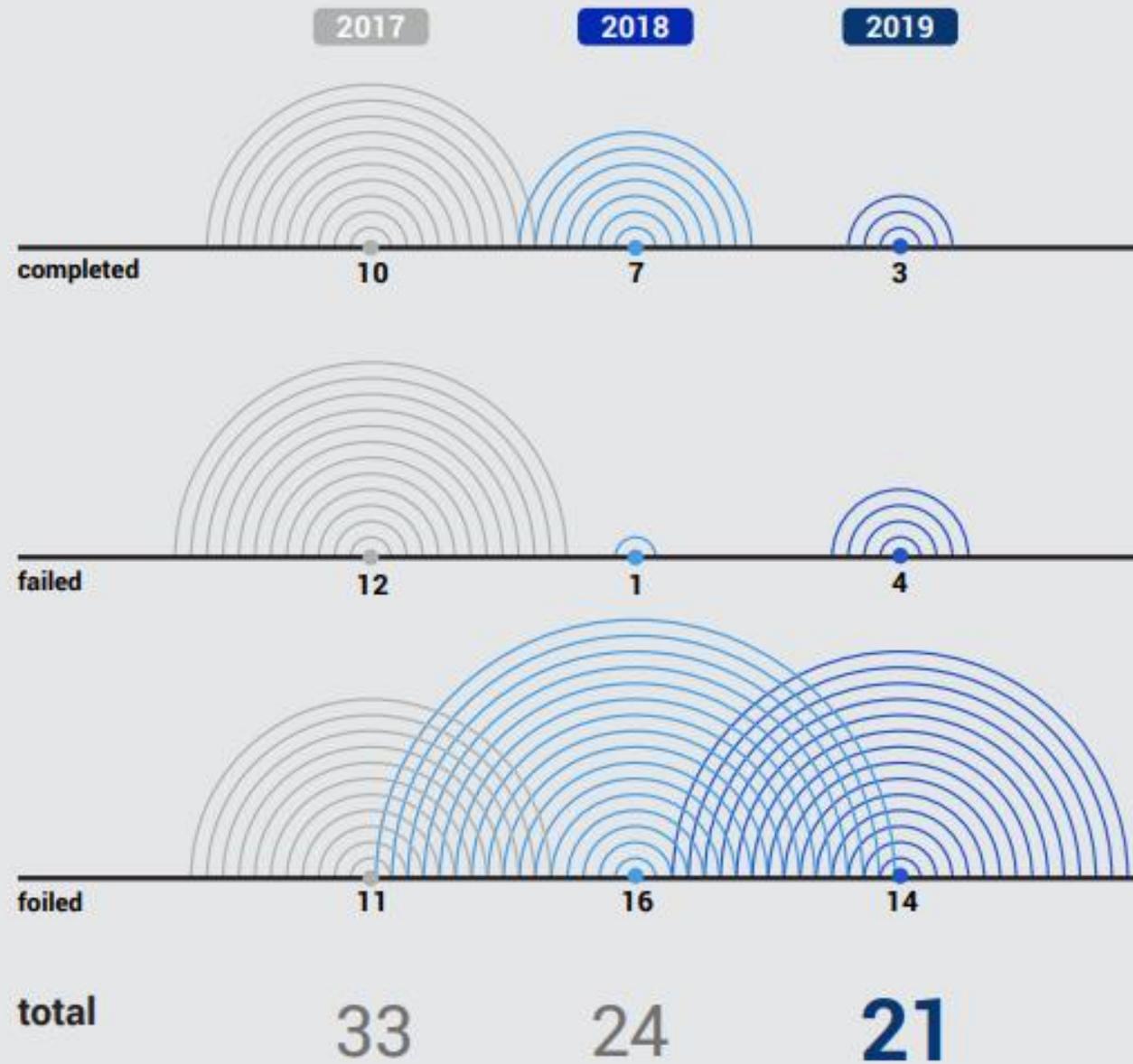
- (Dis)proportionate feelings of fear. Underestimating the threat.
- “It’s what you don’t do, as much as what you do do...”
- Security culture and mentality
- Risk assessments: “theory vs reality”

Threat

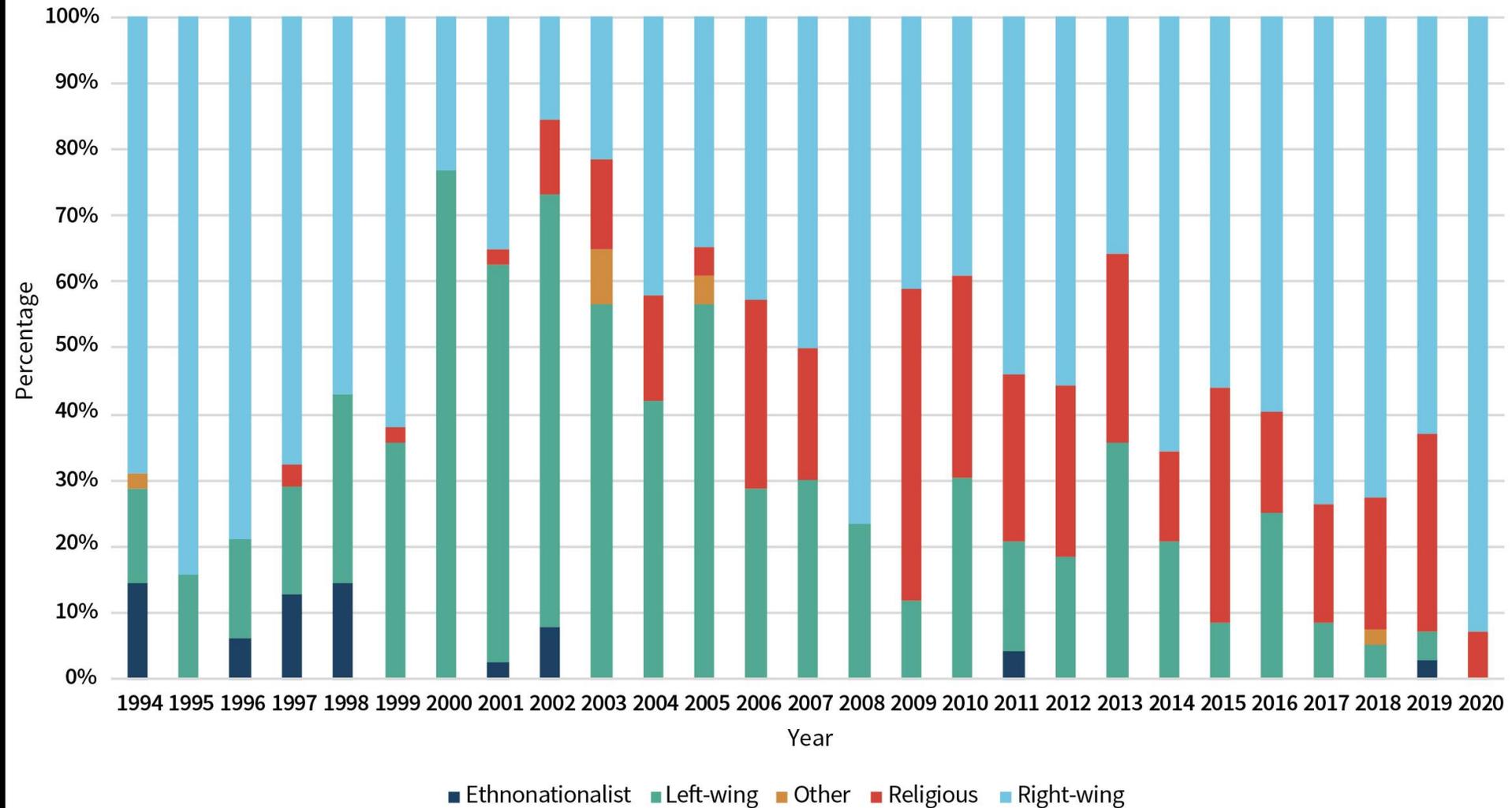
- Has the threat has been displaced? - no
- Has the capabilities of actors changed? – harder to make explosives?
- Has the practical means of carrying out attacks changed? – no
- Has their desire to cause harm changed? – no, many foiled plots
- Have the goals and intentions of the threat actors changed? – to an extent, yes. The Islamist threat has remained constant. Right-wing extremism is getting more potent.



Jihadist terrorism



Percentage of Terrorist Attacks and Plots by Perpetrator Orientation, 1994-2020



Source: Data compiled by CSIS Transnational Threats Project.

Vulnerability

- Where are the gaps and weaknesses in our security defences? – society is still ‘open.’ The state has not overstepped its powers and undermined public trust – terrorists have ‘lost’ this battle.
- Nevertheless, the openness is still a vulnerability that is being exploited by terrorists.
- Vulnerability has, however, changed and will always change because criminals/terrorist threats will change, and their methods will always adapt – an increase in low-sophistication attacks using vehicles, knives and firearms.



Impact

- What are the consequences of a successful attack? We now know the consequences of attacks are harmful, but they do not create 'earthquakes'.
- What are the consequences if we do nothing to mitigate it? We know that if plots have not been foiled by the intelligence services we would probably have seen 4, 10, 20 Breiviks? We thus maintain the status-quo.
- By focusing on mass causality attacks, we can minimize the impacts to acceptable, albeit still problematic, levels of harm to society/economy.
- Impact is a 'multi-dimensional' issue, some obvious, others materialise over years, even decades!
 - At the policy/government level, it is about managing this impact so that it does not spiral into anarchy. This makes terrorism 'lose'.
 - Urban planners, architects, risk managers have a huge part to play in this.

How to maintain the status quo?

- We will not eliminate terrorism in the foreseeable future. So we have to reduce the likelihood of 'high impact' attacks from being successful
 - But how to you measure impact? We are still feeling the effects of Breivik's actions today...
- How much risk should we tolerate? How can we protect cities without overdoing it?
- Reducing the threat, vulnerability and impact in cities – a balanced, holistic approach.
- Proportionality... not overstepping the line between freedom and security.



Proportionality – what has changed?

- All measures to reduce risk of mass causality attacks will be ‘proportional.’
- It is hard to decipher whether current measures in the built environment have removed some threats or just displaced them..
- Fundamentally, proportionality for counterterrorism will remain constantly concerned with the main threats:
 - Explosions
 - Firearms
 - Low-sophisticated, unconventional attacks

Proportionality

Education

- Bachelor in Byplanlegging og samfunnssikkerhet
- Master course in “Resilient Cities.”



Practice

Incorporating ‘proportionality’ into risk assessments and urban planning



Urban Security and Counterterrorism: An Approach to Proportionality

A tool in which practitioners can use to make more

proportional security decisions by:

1. Reducing the threat
2. Reducing the vulnerability
3. Reducing the impact
4. Measuring risk more accurately
5. Measuring security measures to make terrorist attacks less likely to be successful



We need feedback. Please try it!



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