



## Canadians are concerned refugees pose a terror threat. Should they be worried?

Andrew Russell and Ryan Rocca

July 6, 2017

Amid a string of terror attacks in the U.K., many Canadians say they are concerned about the threat of terrorists posing as refugees entering the country to cause violence, but does that fear have any basis in reality?

An analysis by Global News of major terror attacks against Western countries from 2010 to 2017 suggests most suspects involved in the attacks were born in the country where the attack occurred.

A new Ipsos poll, conducted exclusively for Global News, showed that 51 per cent of Canadians said they agree that there are “terrorists pretending to be refugees who will enter Canada to cause violence and destruction.” Thirty-two per cent said they disagreed with the statement, while 18 per cent said they don’t know.

“The findings are dark, but they’re also mixed,” said Sean Simpson, vice-president of Ipsos Public Affairs. “It’s a divisive issue, there’s the government policy of inclusion and wanting to help as much as we can and then there’s the personal conflict with that policy.”

With the recent bombings and vehicle attacks in Great Britain, many politicians or political groups have blamed migrants and refugees for the attacks.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s revised travel bantargeting six Muslim-majority countries also went into effect last week barring visitors from Syria, Sudan, Iran, Yemen, Libya and Somalia from getting U.S. visas, with some exceptions. Trump had promised during the 2016 election a “total and complete shutdown” of Muslims entering the United States “until our country’s representatives” can rethink their approach to terrorism prevention.

But how real is the threat posed by refugees or foreign-born terrorists?

Global News analyzed 55 major attacks in Western countries from 2010-2017 — where at least one person was killed — using data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and media reports for incidents in 2016-2017.

Global News defined a terror attack as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.”

This captured recent attacks in Europe while also including shootings and stabbings in the U.S. like the Dallas police ambush and the fatal knife attack in Portland.

Of the 55 attacks, including four in Canada, 42 suspects were born in the country where the attack occurred, 29 attacks involved a majority of suspects who were foreign born. Some incidents involved multiple attackers who were both foreign-born and domestic.

“What’s interesting about the data is that it shows what most counter-terrorism experts would agree upon which is that increasingly the threat to Western democratic societies is not from the outside,” said Stephanie Carvin, an assistant professor of international affairs at Carleton University, who reviewed Global’s research.

“There’s still this idea that terrorism ... comes to attack our societies, but, in reality, the threat is increasingly homegrown, radicalized extremism,” she said.

Carvin said there is a “misperception” around the threat of terrorism in North America that is driven by “unfortunate political rhetoric.”

“The fact is that really starting in the 2000s and going to today that most of the violent extremists that we have in North America tend to be from North America or tend to have migrated when they were children. So, in other words, they were radicalized here,” she said.

Global’s research also found that only four attacks, all in Europe, involved people born in countries listed under Trump’s travel ban.

A separate report conducted by the CATO Institute in the U.S. found that from 1975 to the end of 2015, people born in the countries listed on Trump’s travel ban haven’t killed any Americans in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. The report also found that 20 refugees have been convicted of terrorism on U.S. soil. During the 1970s three Americans were killed in attacks committed by refugees.

James Ellis, a research associate at the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society, said a majority of terrorism cases are domestic in nature where the attacker was born in that country or was living there as a citizen.

“Very rarely are refugees or refugee claimants involved in terrorist incidents,” Ellis said. “But it doesn’t mean that it never happens.”

“Refugees are usually trying to get away from a conflict and they are not trying to bring that into another country.”

However, Ellis said that in the past Canada has seen cases where diaspora communities have brought conflicts here from overseas.

“The Air India bombing is a perfect example,” he said referencing Canada’s deadliest terror attack that occurred in 1985. “The primary target was not Canada, but India, and it just happened to use planes leaving Canada as a vehicle.”

Carvin said it’s important to separate what’s happening in Canada from Europe where more attacks have been carried out by second-generation residents.

“Canadian migrants tend to be far better integrated into our economy,” she said, adding Canada has stringent screening measures in place. “The reasons for that have to do with the way we bring immigrants over to Canada, the fact that we have oceans separating us from some of the conflict zones.”

Indeed, the new polling data showed that 59 per cent of respondents said they believe refugees who come to Canada will “successfully integrate with Canada.”

Carvin added that Trump’s travel ban could undermine confidence in the kind of trust that’s necessary in order to engage in good counter-terrorism policing.

“If we don’t have information on the ground because people don’t want to come forward because they think they’re going to be swept up in a Muslim ban, then that actually makes everyone less safe,” she said.