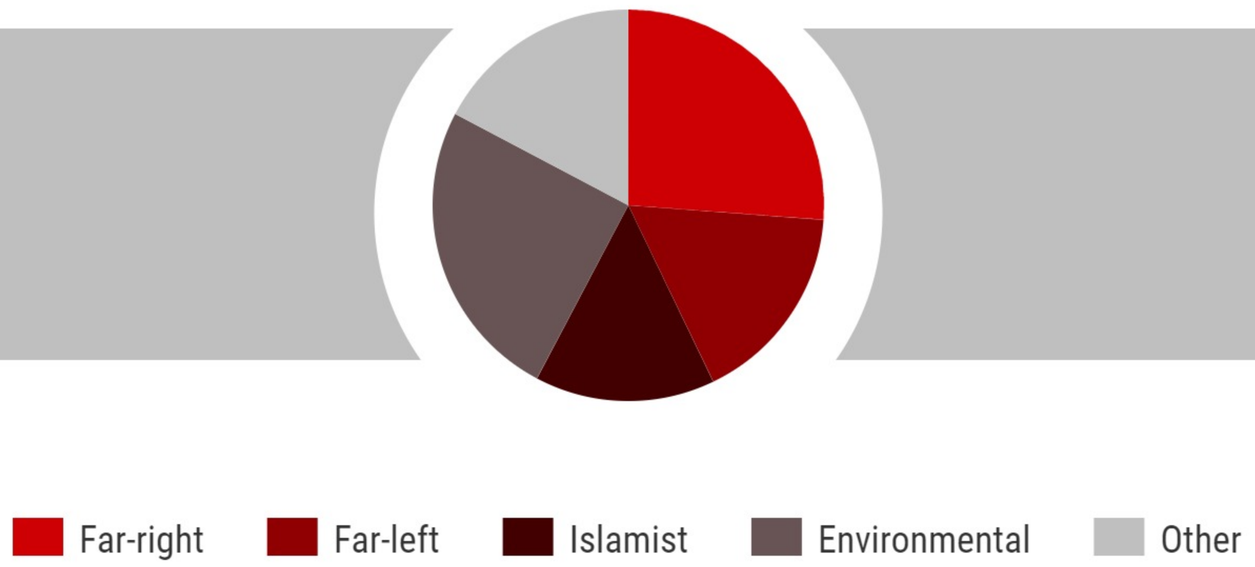
START

NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
LED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

TEMPORAL SEQUENCING, INCIDENT SOPHISTICATION, AND TERRORIST OUTCOMES

Extremist Plot Type



Analysis was conducted on 504 terrorism plots in the United States from 1980-2015.

This research examines the impact the length of the planning process, the number of participants, and the volume of precursor activity has on the success or failure of terrorist plots in the United States. Data is drawn from the American Terrorism Study.

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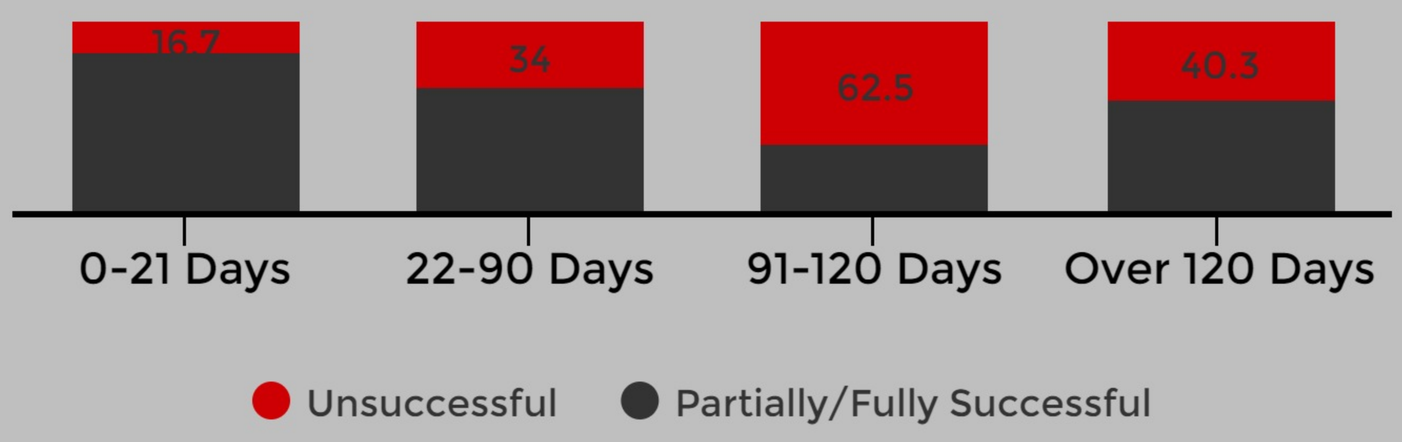
Length of Planning Process

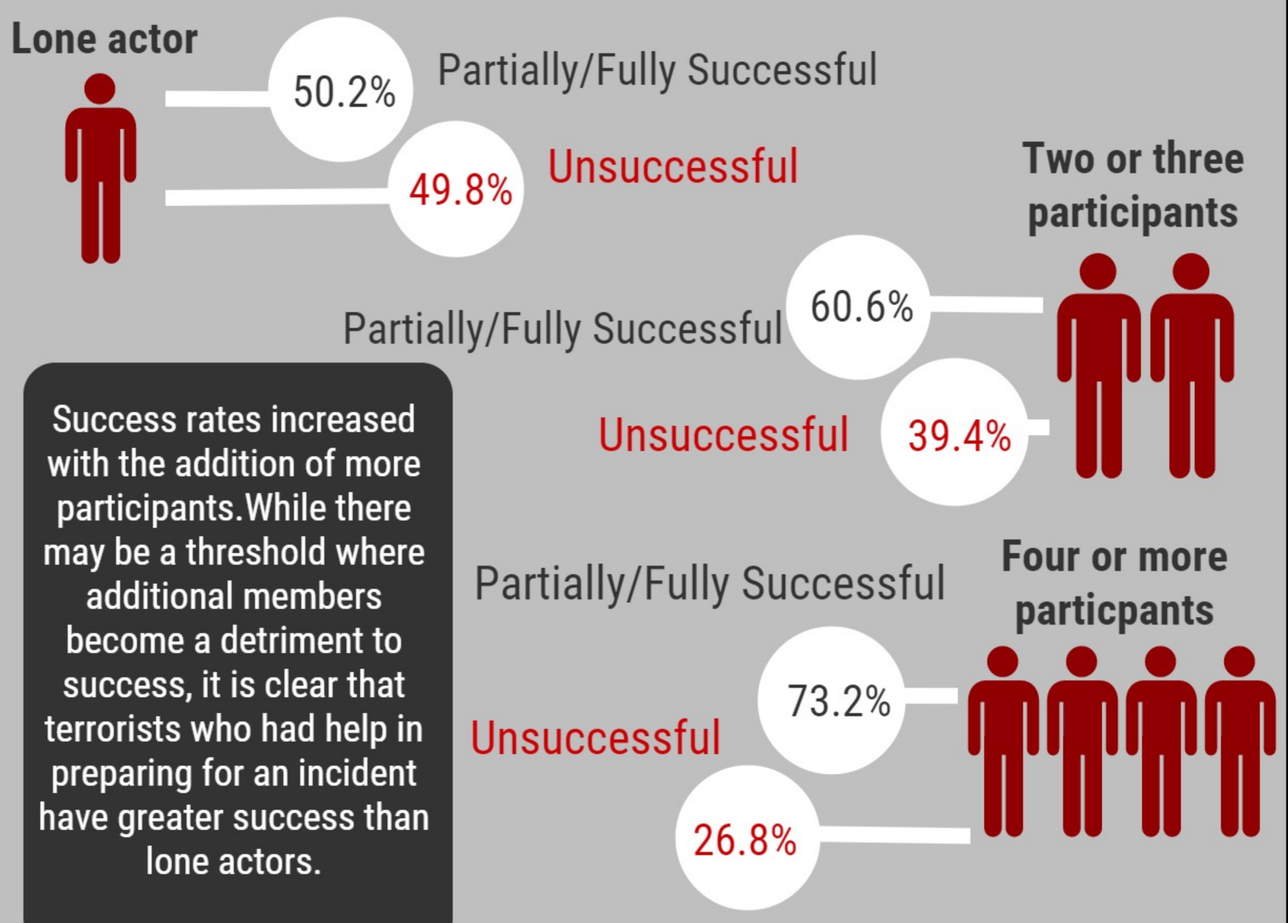
Each plot was evaluated to determine whether it was successfully carried out, partially successful or was foiled or failed. For this analysis, "successful" and "partially successful" plots were compared to those that were foiled or failed. Incidents were coded as "unsuccessful" when activity on the intended target was prevented or failed to occur due to plot cancellation, complete device failure or human intervention.

Terrorists who engaged in the shortest planning cycle had the highest rates of success. Plots where known preparatory behaviors were limited to the three-week period prior to the incident were very likely to be successfully completed (83.3%).



Number of Participants and Success

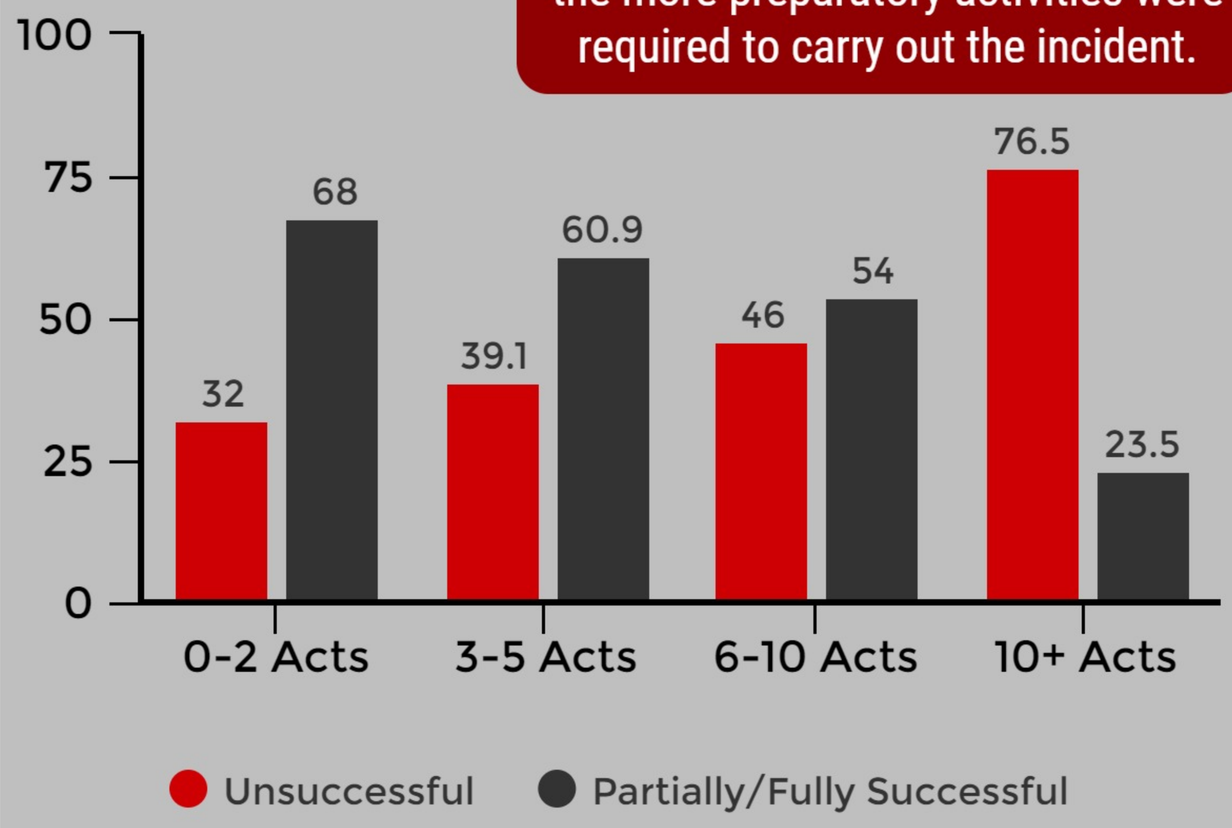
The total number of participants involved in the terrorism plot includes not only those indicted for committing the terrorist act, but also those involved in any planning or preparatory act associated with the plot. Unindicted co-conspirators are included.



Success rates increased with the addition of more participants.While there may be a threshold where additional members become a detriment to success, it is clear that terrorists who had help in preparing for an incident have greater success than lone actors.

Number of Preparatory Behaviors and Success

Success rates consistently declined the more preparatory activities were required to carry out the incident.



The total number of known activities related to the planning or preparation of the planned incident (e.g., meetings, purchase or theft of weapons, etc.) includes only confirmed preparatory activities; other "antecedent" activities (such as meetings in which the specific plot was not discussed) were excluded.