

Survey on terrorism in Poland and directions of its development

Expert commentary

Lorenzo Vidino

Seen from an external viewpoint, the survey conducted among 94 local terrorism experts and practitioners sheds an important light on the perceptions of key Polish stakeholders¹. Some of the results are arguably in line with those one would reach when interviewing counterparts in other European countries. This is true, for example, when it comes to identifying Daesh and Al-Qaeda - in that specific order - as the two organizations posing the greatest security threat to both the EU and Poland; or concerns about the misuse of various technologies for terrorism purposes or likely terrorist targets.

At the same time, a couple of results do stand out as arguably reflecting a more peculiar Polish perspective. The first is the concern about the actions of Russian special services, an element not likely to receive the same kind of attention in Western Europe but that understandably worries a substantial portion of the Polish security establishment (and, one could guess, also before the Russian invasion of Ukraine).

¹ The results of the study were published in: "Terrorism - studies, analyses, prevention" 2022, no. 2, pp. 335-363.

A second result that appears noteworthy are the somewhat limited concerns expressed in relation to extreme right wing terrorism. While results might be different if questions had been phrased not by asking to identify a single organization but, rather, an ideological movement, the fact that only one right wing extremist organizations (Atomwaffen) is identified as a major threat and only by a substantially inferior number of respondents compared to those that pointed to Daesh and Al-Qaeda is indicative of a certain gap with Western Europe. While dynamics change from country to country, over the last three/four years the security establishments of most Western European countries have increasingly identified right wing extremism as equally as if not more dangerous than jihadism.

Finally, it is particularly striking that a substantial percentage of respondents believe that Poland is likely to become an attractive country for terrorist. While there are only limited indications that the country has been so in recent years, the belief that things will change for the worse in the near future seems quite widespread. Some of the answers seem to indicate that these concerns are at least partially related to threats emanating from Russia.

Overall, the results of the survey are very interesting and provide a good sense of “the pulse” of the Polish counterterrorism community. It is a commendable exercise and one that should be replicated in other countries.

Prof. Lorenzo Vidino

Expert on Islamism in Europe and North America, Director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University in Washington, DC. For the past 20 years, he has conducted research on the dynamics of jihadist network mobilisation in the West, government counter-radicalisation policies and the activities of Muslim Brotherhood-inspired organisations in the West.