

## **Violence, Extremism and Transformation**

This study challenges widespread assumptions and stereotypes about the character of contemporary political violence. It reminds us that religious extremism, while on the rise, accounts for only a small fracture of armed conflict in the world. Moreover, the preoccupation in Western countries with transnational terrorism is misleading as most political violence has been and remains local in its origin and its area of activity.

Study results call for a sober and more differentiated assessment of the threats posed by militants and extremists. If political violence and terrorism are still predominantly home-grown, the multitude of local causes, such as socioeconomic grievances or state weakness, should receive more attention. In any comprehensive approach, political institutions will play the pivotal role in fostering stability.

An overview of the four main results:

1. In 119 countries surveyed by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006, the total number of inter- and intrastate conflicts increased, while the number of extremely violent conflicts declined. A crisis belt of three areas, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South and Southeast Asia, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) accounts for most intrastate conflicts and for more than 80 percent of all terrorist incidents. Most affected are Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia and Thailand.
2. The global magnitude of ethno-nationalist conflicts over autonomy and secession has waned; repression and discrimination of ethnic minorities has diminished in both scope and intensity. The reach and tenor of religious extremism and terrorism has deepened, especially in South and Southeast Asia and MENA. However, political extremism in many of these countries is more prosaic than believed, and religious terrorism still only accounts for a third of all militant groups worldwide.
3. Generally, armed conflict in harsh and moderate autocracies is more violent than in defective democracies. Democracy and armed violence thus have an inverse relationship: the less democratic a regime, the higher the risk of armed violence.

However, BTI 2006 findings challenge the view that democratization resolves internal violent conflict. Only fully institutionalized liberal democracies are predisposed to peace. Defective democracies with deficiencies in stateness, participation or rule of law are more prone to terrorist attacks.

4. BTI study findings show that political extremism and violence are not caused by any single factor. In addition to a combination of social, political and economic factors, study findings also show that a state's institutional settings are particularly relevant in addressing extremism. Power-sharing systems of governance, proportional representation and federalism are in most cases better suited to managing conflict in deeply divided societies than other (particularly majoritarian) institutional settings.

Political violence and particularly terrorism confront liberal democracies with normative, political and practical challenges. In many countries, the only solution to fight insurgency and terrorism combines short-term measures of prevention and deterrence with a long-term approach in which political, cultural and economic root causes are addressed.

There are positive examples of externally imposed post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization measures, but lessons drawn from other cases underscore some key limits of external engagement. The prospects for externally supervised or imposed democratization are especially dim. While the international community can and must provide assistance, responsibility for conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction ultimately lies with domestic actors, particularly political and social elites.

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This analysis was made in conjunction with the broader results of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006, which highlights the major democratic deficiencies in 119 development and transformation countries (at [www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de](http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de)). The BTI is the first fully transparent and comprehensive index offering self-collected data on the quality of political leadership in international comparison.

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