

# Finger on the pulse of terror

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An organized terror attack will have greater impact in a country like Norway than in a country like Israel. This has been shown in a new study at the University of Bergen.

New research at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen shows that risk judgments regarding terror are influenced both by the frequency of terror attacks and by whether the attack is committed by an isolated perpetrator or by an organization.

“This means that countries where terror attacks are frequent and committed by an organization are regarded as the most risky, countries with few and unorganized attacks are judged as the least risky, and countries with terror that is either frequent or organized take an intermediate position” says researcher Katharina Wolff at the Department of Psychosocial Science.

“However, the effect of a terror attack, as the change in perceived risk, is largest when organized terrorism hits a country where terrorism is seldom.”

The study is published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*.

## **The relative gain is most important**

Wolff explains this effect with the so-called Weber’s law, which indicates that it is the relative increase in risk that matters, not the absolute increase.

In a place with frequent terror attacks, yet another attack does not constitute much of a difference, however in a place with little to no terror an attack will be noticed and can increase risk perceptions.

“This is what we see in Europe at the moment, where organized terror hits countries that have been relatively terrorism free. Nevertheless, European countries are judged to be less risky than countries with frequent and organised terrorism,” Wolff says.

## **The 22nd of July-terror had opposite effect**

In some cases, terrorism can have paradoxical effects. If unorganised terror hits a country where terrorism is infrequent, some people believe that this decreases the risk for terrorism in the near future.

“If an attack is committed by an isolated and captured perpetrator in a country with little terrorism, people may fall into what is known as the Gamblers fallacy, which is a sort of “Lightning-never-strikes-same-place-twice”-reasoning,” Katharina Wolff explains.

This might explain the decrease in perceived risk that was observed for Norway after the 22nd of July, which has been reported [in an earlier study](#) [5] by Wolff and colleagues.

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 [In a country with frequent terror attacks, a new attack will not have a great impact on peoples risk perceptions. However, in countries with little terrorism, an attack may well have an effect. Photo: Colourbox](#) [6]

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[Wolff, K. and Larsen, S. A Taxonomy of Terror - About the Effect of Different Kinds of Terror on Risk Perceptions. Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism](#) [12]

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