

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TERRORIST ATTACKS TARGETING HEALTHCARE IN NORTH AMERICA VS EUROPE

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Introduction

Healthcare is generally considered an essential human right, yet; it can be described as a "soft target" for terrorism due to its accessibility and often limited security.

Learning from those incidents and comparing them across continents, we can better understand the motives and methods used by attackers with the goal of establishing better security and response systems.

This study sought to compare terrorist attacks targeting healthcare facilities and personnel in two different geographical areas that are economically and culturally similar: North America and Europe.

Methods

The Global Terrorism Database was searched to identify terrorist attacks against healthcare facilities and personnel using healthcare-related keywords. This resulted in 311 and 150 healthcare-related entries in North America and Europe, respectively. Those entries were selected on the following basis:

All 3 of the following attributes must be present:

- The incident must have been intentional.
- The incident must entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence.
- Perpetrators of the incident must be subnational actors.

And 2 of the 3 criteria must be present:

- The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal.
- There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience than the immediate victims.
- The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.

Results

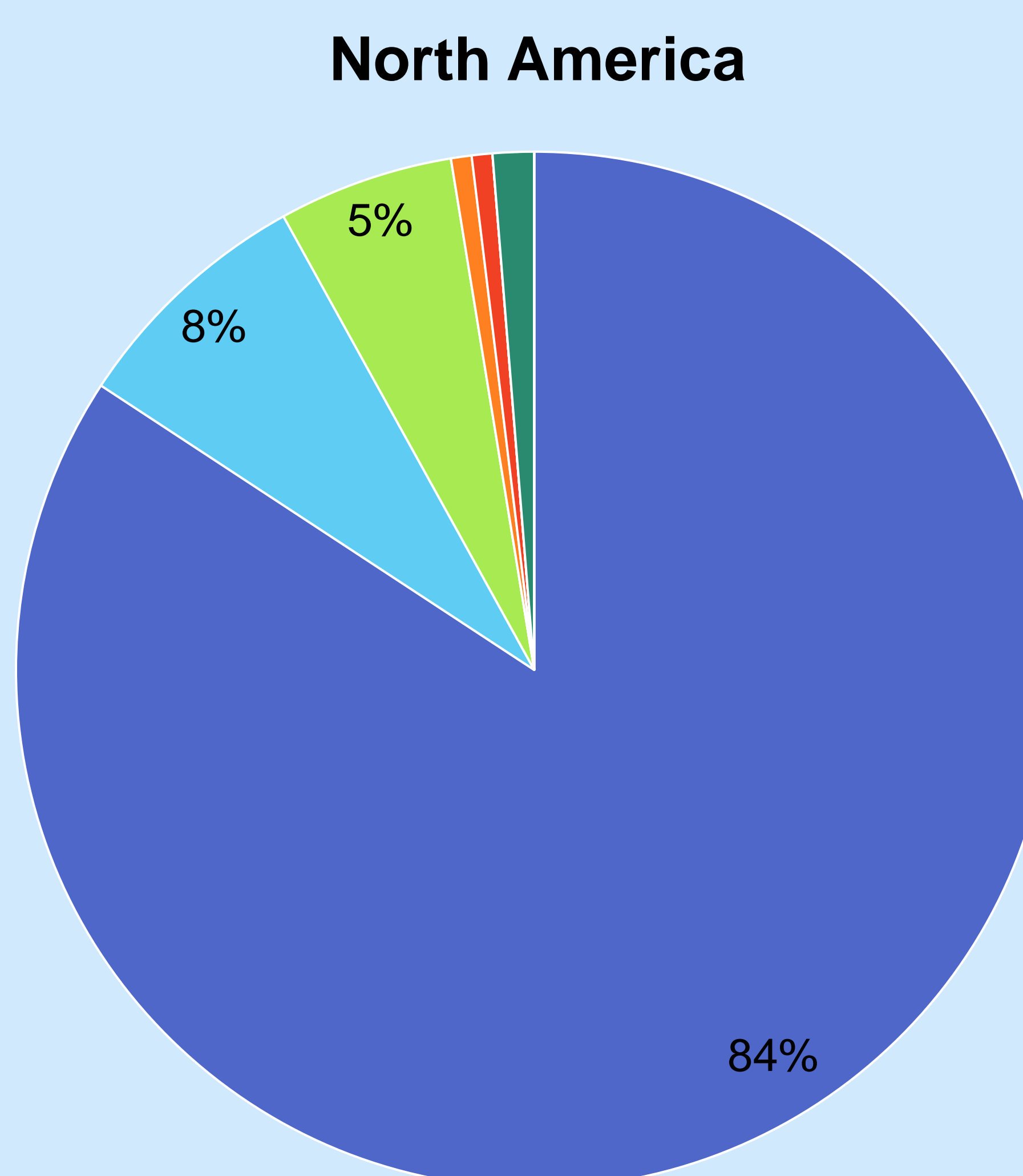
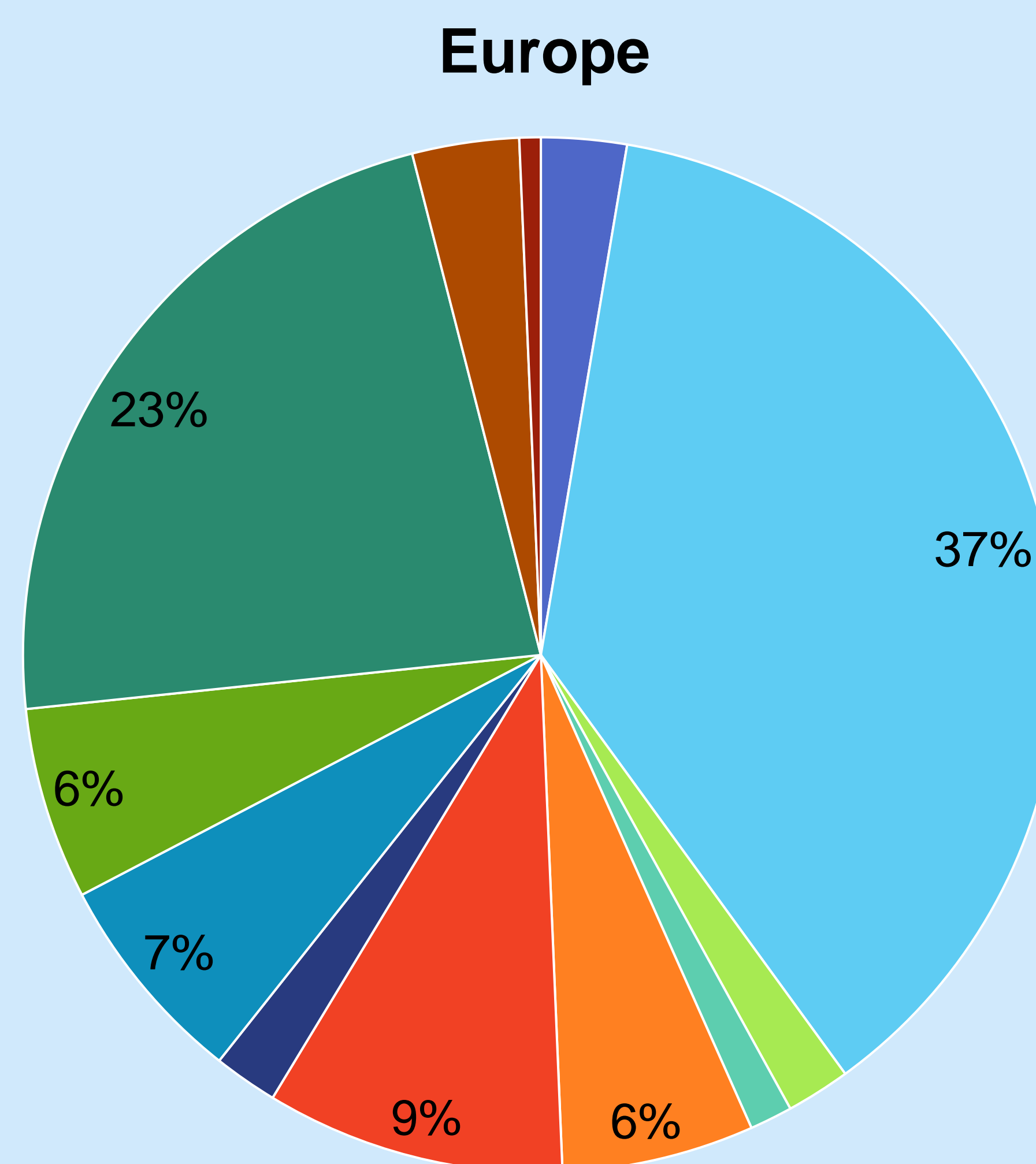
Table 1. Number of attacks for each major target types in Europe and North America.

	Europe	North America
Attacks	150	311
Fatalities	51	3
Fatalities per Attacks	0.34	0.01

As demonstrated in table 1, there is a significant difference in the number of fatalities relative to the number of attacks between Europe and North America.

Results (contd.)

Figures 1. Proportion of each target type in Europe and North America, respectively.



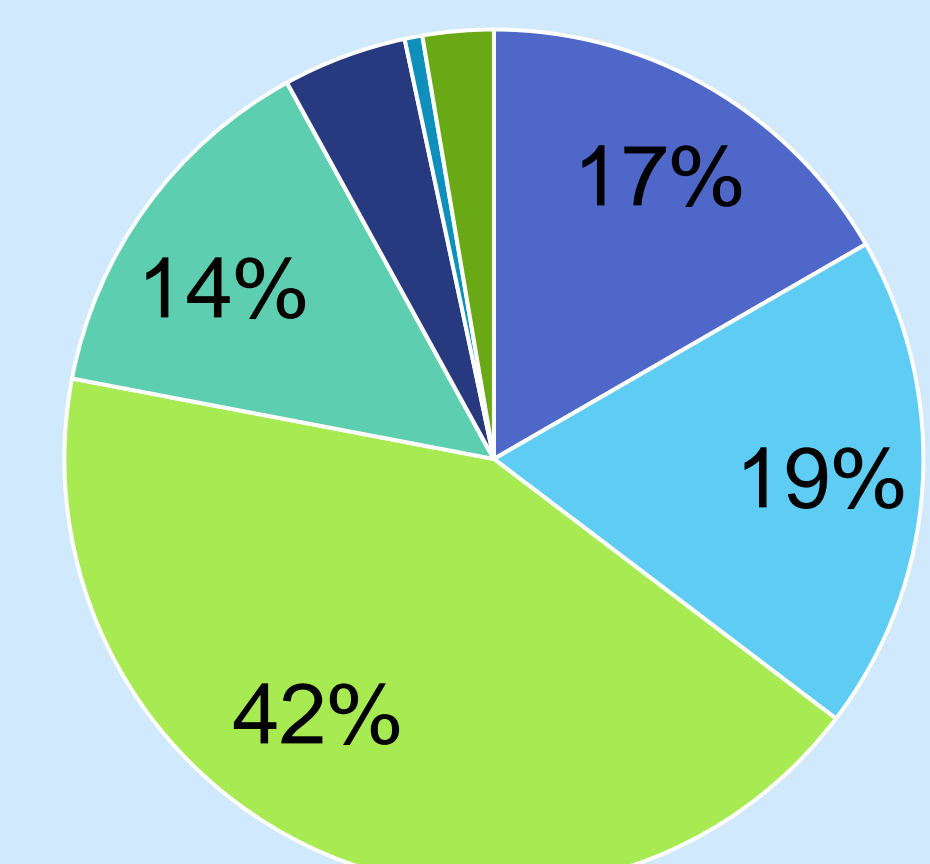
- Abortion Related
- Business
- Educational Institution
- Government (Diplomatic)
- Government (General)
- Military
- NGO
- Other
- Police
- Private Citizens & Property
- Telecommunication
- Tourists

- The primary targets of attacks in North America are abortion related (84%).
- The primary targets in Europe are Businesses and Private Citizens and Property (60%).

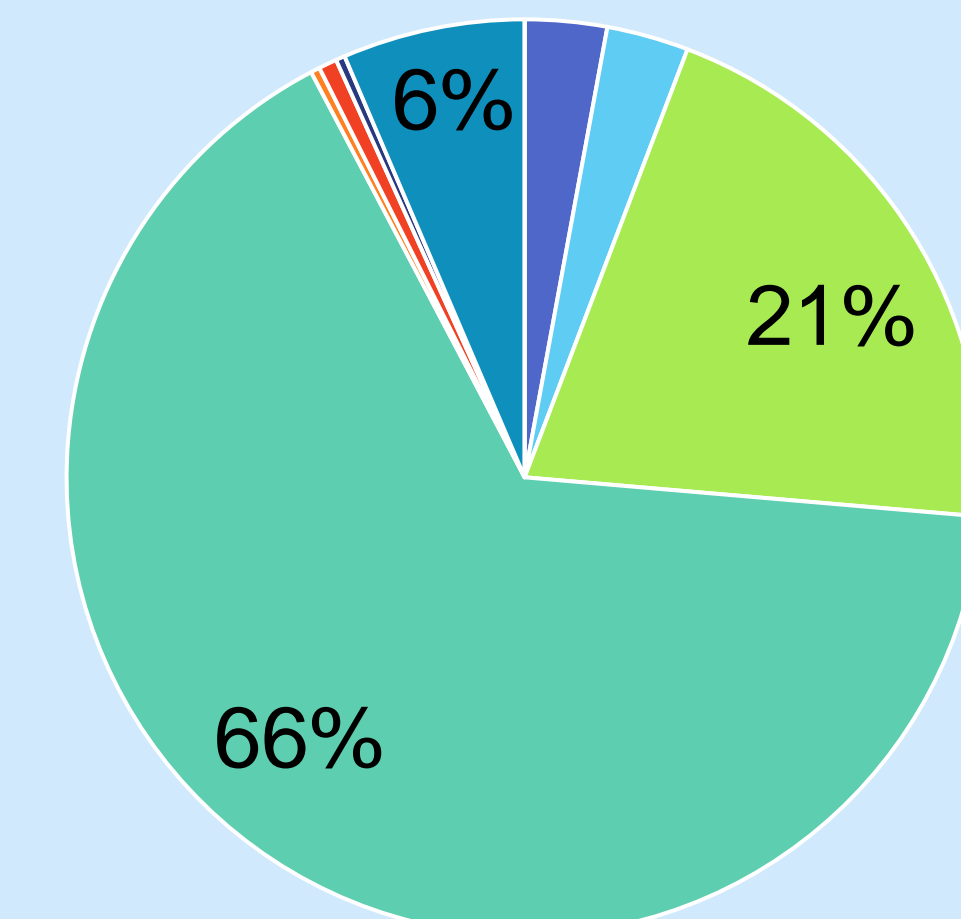
Results (contd.)

Figures 2. Proportion of each attack method used in Europe and North America, respectively.

Europe



North America



- Armed Assault
- Assassination
- Bombing/Explosion
- Facility/Infrastructure Attack
- Hijacking
- Hostage Taking (Barricade Incident)
- Hostage Taking (Kidnapping)
- Unarmed Assault
- Unknown

Discussion

- Considering ideology and dogmatism is critical when discussing terrorist attacks on healthcare, especially in America. This is likely in part due to Americans being more expressive relative to subjects of religion.
 - Religious assemblies and/or wearing symbols of religion in public are limited in European nations that are secular states (e.g. France).
- Despite Europe generally having a more collectivist approach, the targeting method used in Europe appears to be more based on attacks targeting individuals, either on the individual or their property.
- In North America, it is more likely that those who think differently will be tolerated, particularly opinions/ideas related to religion.
 - Europe has a long history of different groups or religions being persecuted by the people and/or the state.
- North America has been a melting pot for all nations and religions since its creation.
 - This works less in European countries, where parallel societies are created, which can often be hostile to the "receiving" community. (e.g. Sweden)

Conclusion

Even though there were significantly more attacks in North America, there were far fewer total fatalities compared to Europe.

Attacks in North America appear to be ideological, targeting infrastructure to send a message. Whereas, in Europe, the targets and methods used are more targeted towards the individual and their property.

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