

Policy Brief: Canadian Recidivism Study

*Based on the Canadian Recidivism Study Report.
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Top Line Overview

The Canadian Recidivism Study (CRS) provides the first assessment of recidivism among individuals convicted of terrorism-related offences in Canada. Examining 76 cases from 2001-2025, the study found that post-release terrorist recidivism is relatively low, with 10.8% of released individuals engaging in recidivism. Most incidents involved violations of release conditions, although these parole violations commonly demonstrated terrorist reengagement or intent.

Key Findings Summary

The CRS tracks recidivism outcomes using open-source data from individuals convicted of terrorism offences between 2001 and 2025. The analytical sample included 76 convicted individuals (after excluding ongoing cases, deportations, deaths, and other cases unsuitable for follow-up).

- The typical terrorist offender in this sample was male (89%), 28 years old on average, did not have a previous criminal record, was affiliated with a terrorist group (71%), and served an average sentence of 8.4 years.
- Five released individuals (10.8% of 46 released offenders) reoffended in the community, all within a year or less of being released. Three of these individuals' offences indicated direct terrorist reengagement (possessing terrorist materials, threatening to harm others, and attempting to travel to join a terrorist group). The other two offenders engaged in violations that may indirectly reflect criminal intentions (possession of a cellular phone, failure to wear monitoring equipment).

Results indicate that individuals convicted of terrorism related offenses have a low probability of reengaging in criminal activity upon release, and offenses in the community are primarily violations of conditions of release. However, many of these violations signal extremist engagement or intent. Individuals in the CRS have recidivated at lower rates than general Canadian federal offenders. Similarly, international research has also found that terrorist offenders often reoffend at substantially lower rates than the general offending population.

Background

Since the enactment of Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act in 2001, 115 individuals have been charged with terrorism-related offences (as of November 2025). To date, there has been no research examining post-release offending among convicted terrorists in Canada. The CRS addresses this gap by tracking recidivism outcomes using open-source data from individuals convicted of terrorism offences in Canada.

Considerations

Low overall recidivism does not eliminate public safety concerns. Terrorist reoffending appears relatively low compared to conventional offending, but terrorist offending carries potentially severe consequences, meaning even infrequent cases warrant sustained attention. While no released offender who re-offended successfully carried out a violent crime or terrorist attack, several behaviours indicated ongoing terrorist intent and mobilization towards violence (e.g. attempting to travel abroad to join a terrorist group, threatening violence, or possessing a device with bomb-making information).

Canada's recidivism rates appear slightly higher than those reported in other countries, although still low overall. It is important to note, though, that study results will differ based on selected case inclusion and the definition of recidivism used. This emphasizes a need to better understand differences in international terrorism recidivism rates, but also the need to better understand the population of terrorism-related offenders in Canada.

Policy Recommendations

- 1. Maintain enhanced post-release supervision.** Continue providing enhanced post-release supervision for individuals convicted of terrorism offences. Although most post-release offences were breaches of parole conditions, these parole violations were often extremism-related or demonstrated potential criminal intent.
- 2. Sustain tailored reintegration programming.** Current supervision and monitoring efforts may have contributed to the early detection of concerning behaviours, but continued programming and tailored reintegration supports remain essential to this unique group of offenders, both while incarcerated and within the community. This need is further highlighted as these offenders all reoffended within a year or less following their release, indicating potential difficulties related to re-entry.
- 3. Support longitudinal studies, data collection, and comparative research.** Results highlight the Canadian terrorist recidivism is often ideologically driven, which differs from other nations. Therefore, a closer examination of the nature and intent of terrorist recidivism in Canada, as well as international comparisons are warranted.