

## Summary

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All terrorist groups eventually end. But how do they end? Answers to this question have enormous implications for counterterrorism efforts. The evidence since 1968 indicates that most groups have ended because (1) they joined the political process or (2) local police and intelligence agencies arrested or killed key members. Military force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups, and few groups within this time frame achieved victory. This has significant implications for dealing with al Qaeda and suggests fundamentally rethinking post–September 11 U.S. counterterrorism strategy.

The ending of most terrorist groups requires a range of policy instruments, such as careful police and intelligence work, military force, political negotiations, and economic sanctions. Yet policymakers need to understand where to prioritize their efforts with limited resources and attention. Following an examination of 648 terrorist groups that existed between 1968 and 2006, we found that a transition to the political process is the most common way in which terrorist groups ended (43 percent). The possibility of a political solution is inversely linked to the breadth of terrorist goals. Most terrorist groups that end because of politics seek narrow policy goals. The narrower the goals of a terrorist organization, the more likely it can achieve them without violent action—and the more likely the government and terrorist group may be able to reach a negotiated settlement.

Against terrorist groups that cannot or will not make a transition to nonviolence, policing is likely to be the most effective strategy (40 percent). Police and intelligence services have better training and