



ISSUE BRIEF

The shooting at the
Strasbourg Christmas
market in perspective
(update 1)

Teun van Dongen

Twitter: @TeunvanDongen

E-mail: info@teunvandongen.com

Introduction

On 11 December 2018, 29-year old French national Chérif Chekatt committed a terrorist attack with a firearm on a Christmas market in Strasbourg. This Issue Brief will show that *this attack was in most respects a typical jihadist shooting, even though it was in some respects an exception as well*. The attack relates to the larger patterns in jihadist terrorist attacks in the following ways:

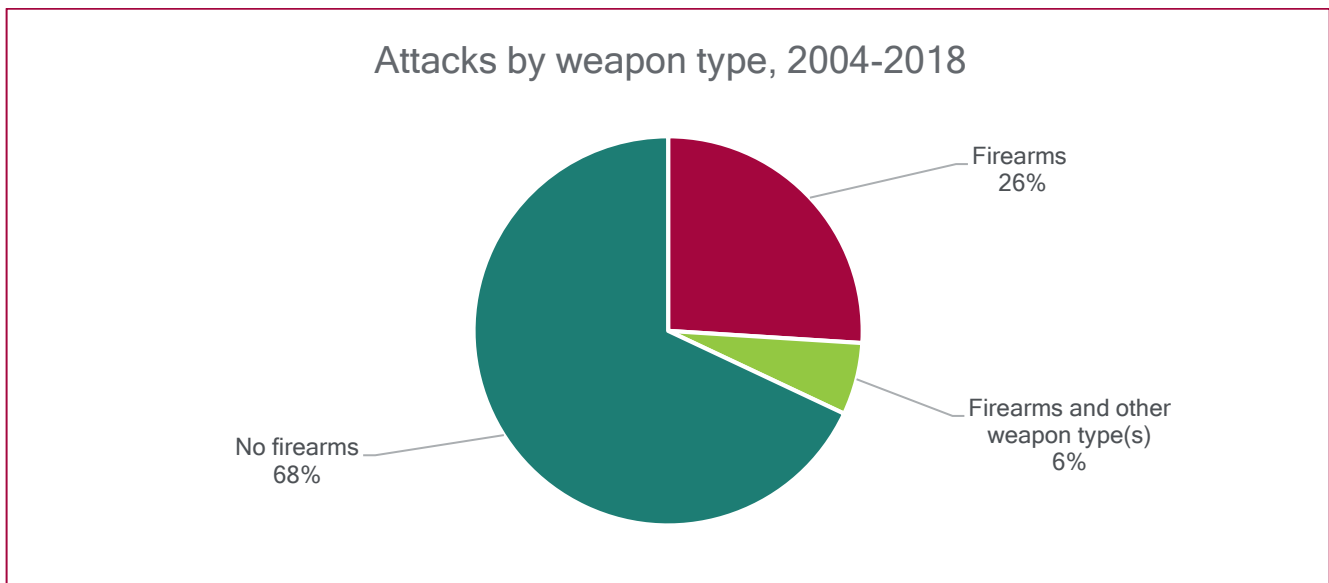
- **Frequency:** firearms are well-known jihadist weapons, but Chekatt's attack did break with a trend towards attacks without firearms.
- **Geography:** France is one of the countries with the highest number of jihadist shootings.
- **Lethality:** the number of deadly victims in the shooting at the Christmas market is typical of attacks carried out exclusively with firearms, but the number of wounded was unusually high.
- **Escape:** like most perpetrators who commit attacks with firearms, Chekatt tried to flee the scene after the attack.

All data in this Issue Brief have been drawn from Teun van Dongen's personal database of jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe, Canada and the US from 2004 to the present. This database can contribute to terrorist threat assessments by identifying trends and patterns in the way jihadist terrorists commit attacks. More specifically, it can provide fact-based analyses that can help police and emergency services decide how to prepare for terrorist incidents.

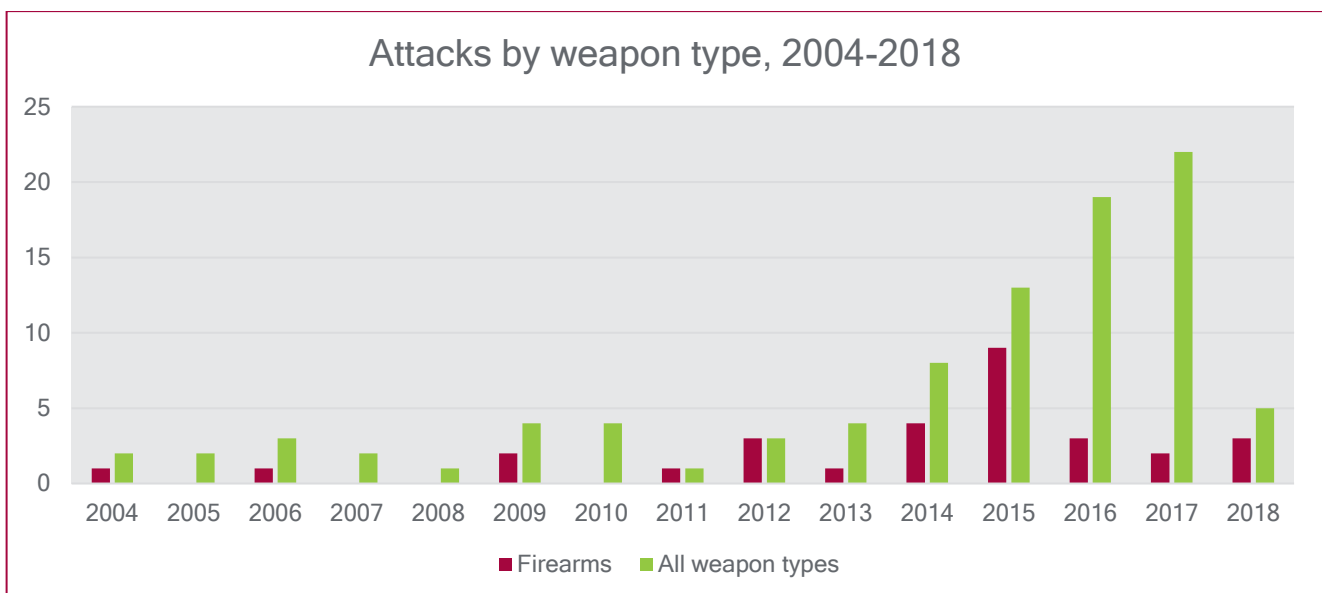
This Issue Brief has been updated on 16 December to reflect the right number of deadly and wounded victims.

FREQUENCY

As is well known, firearms are an established part of the jihadist modus operandi. Attacks with firearms account for 32% (30 out of 93) of all jihadist terrorist attacks in the West. Attacks carried out exclusively with firearms account for 26% (24 out of 93) of all attacks. There have been six attacks (6%) in which the perpetrators used firearms and at least one other weapon type.



Interestingly though, the number of jihadist shootings did not keep pace with the increase in the overall number of jihadist terrorist attacks after 2012. The number of shootings peaked in 2015 and then fell back to a handful per year, even as the overall numbers of attacks kept increasing in 2016 and 2017. Thus, Chekatt chose a modus operandi that became rarer after 2015.



GEOGRAPHY

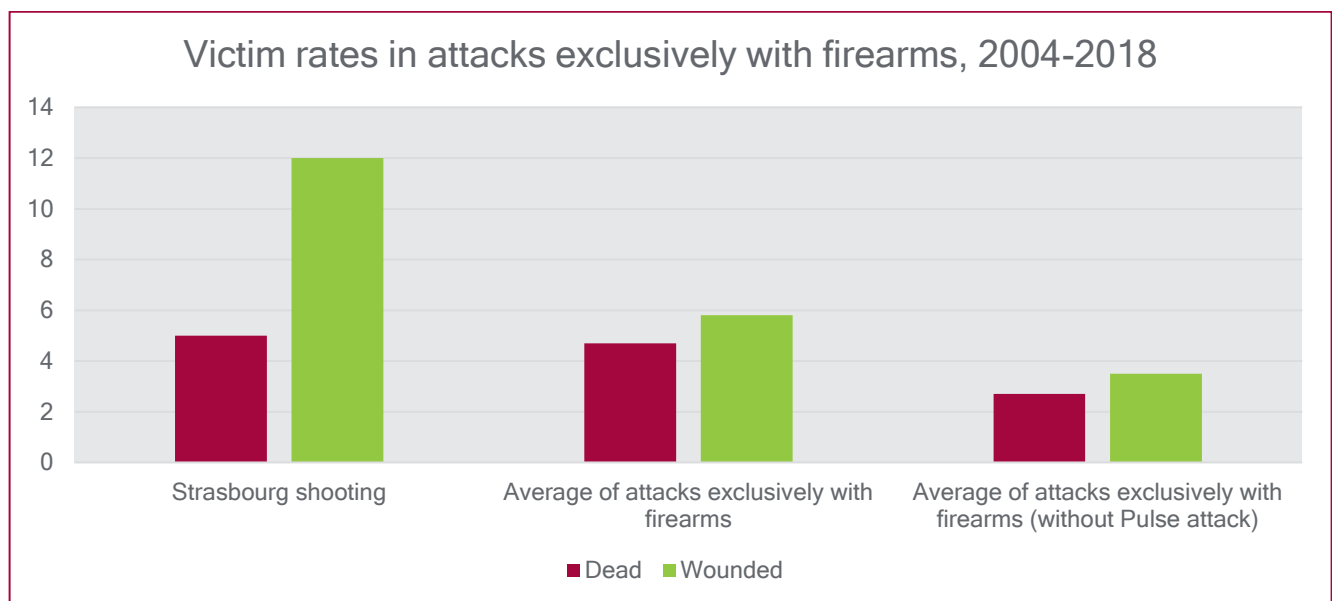
It should come as no surprise that Chekatt used a firearm, as the firearm is clearly one of the weapons of choice among French jihadist terrorists. Slightly less than half of all attacks in France (12 out of 26) involved the use of firearms. This ratio is roughly similar in the US, where 11 out of 23 attacks were committed with firearms, but much lower in the UK and Germany. Of the eight attacks in Germany, only one involved the use of firearms. So far, there have been no attacks with firearms in the UK.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Attacks with firearms</i>	<i>Attacks without firearms</i>	<i>Total</i>
France	12 (46%)	14 (53%)	26
US	11 (48%)	12 (52%)	23
Germany	1 (13%)	7 (87%)	8
UK	0 (0%)	14 (100%)	14

LETHALITY

At the time of writing, Chekatt's attack had killed five people. This is a typical number, as the average number of deadly victims in attacks carried out exclusively with firearms is 4.7. The number of people wounded in Chekatt's attack, was fairly high. Chekatt wounded twelve people, whereas the average number of wounded in attacks carried out exclusively with firearms is 5.8.

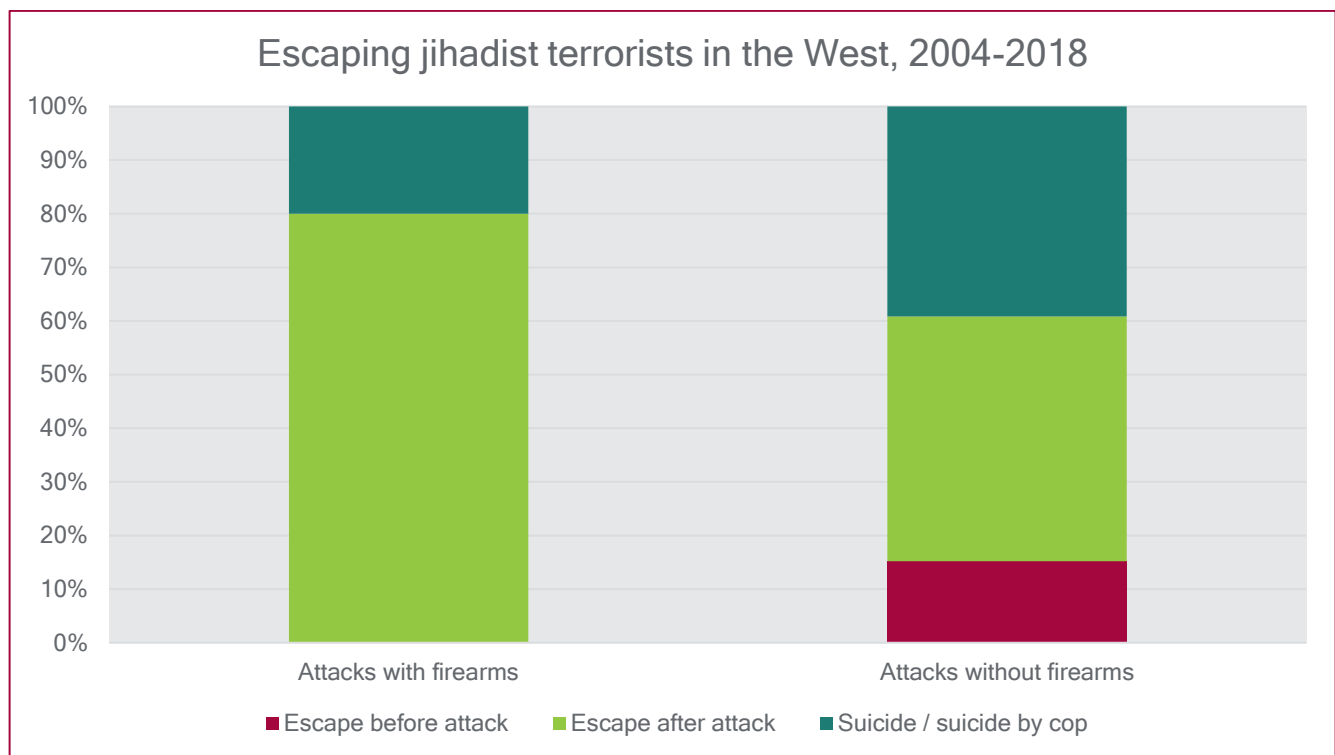
It should be noted, though, that the average numbers are driven up by the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016. Excluding this attack from the set puts Chekatt's victim rates in a somewhat different perspective.



ESCAPE

One of the most salient aspects of Chekatt's modus operandi was his escape attempt. He ordered a taxi driver to drive him to safety, which made him part of the relatively large group of jihadist shooters who did not kill themselves or commit 'suicide by cop' at the scene of the attack. Five jihadist shooters were killed or apprehended before it was clear whether they wanted to escape, but of the remaining 25 shooters, 20 (or 80%) tried to escape.

Jihadists who don't use firearms flee as well, but less often, and sometimes before the attack rather than after (when they place explosives that will detonate later). In seventeen attacks without firearms the perpetrators were killed or apprehended before it was clear whether they wanted to escape. In 15% (7 out of 46) of the remaining attacks the perpetrators placed explosives and left, and in 46% (21 out of 46) of the attacks the perpetrators escaped after the attack. In 39% (18 out of 46) of the perpetrators committed suicide or 'suicide by cop'.



Admittedly, given the high number of attacks in which the perpetrators were killed or apprehended before it was clear whether they wanted to escape (22 out of 93, or 24%), these numbers have to be read with some caution.