

Definitions of Terrorism

While there is no single, universally accepted, definition of terrorism, Scholars, the United States government, and most government agencies have published definitions.

Below, you will find some of these definitions.

1. Randall D. Law, Ph.D., an international scholar in the field of history and terrorism defines terrorism as an act of tactical, symbolic, provocative violence which is the result of rational and conscious decision-making. Terrorist acts are designed to communicate with and influence the behavior of a targeted audience. Targets of terrorism are purposefully chosen to provoke extreme reaction and fear. Terrorists utilize the media to publicize their actions, and both provoke and instill fear in a targeted audience (3).

Law, R. D. (2009). *Terrorism: A history*. Polity Press.

2. The United States Code of Federal Regulations defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”

(28 C.F.R. Section 0.85).

3. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) defines terrorism in two ways: domestic terrorism and international terrorism.

“International terrorism: Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored).

Domestic terrorism: Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”

<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>

4. While there is no clear international definition of terrorism, the United Nations has broadly defined terrorism as including two elements:

“(a) **An objective element:** which is a “crime” of definable size and scale (this is considered to be the most uncontroversial element of the definition)

(b) **A subjective element:** which reflects a certain motivation or intention on the part of the perpetrators (this is an element that can be found in almost all definitions of terrorism used in national laws). Resolution 1566 singles out three major motivations namely: the will to create a state of terror; the will to intimidate a population; the will to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.”

24th session of the Advisory Committee. OHCHR. (n.d.). Retrieved October 20, 2021, from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/AdvisoryCommittee/Session24/Pages/Index.aspx>.