

GLOBAL SECURITY SENSEMAKING

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I am conducting a research effort to quantify the threat/risk perceptions of country security experts. This project grew out of my PhD research on intelligence failure and threat perception at the Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. I am asking security experts to rate from 0-100 their perception of four key security issues (terrorism, crime, protest, and the overall risk of being a traveller) on a quarterly basis. This method will utilize the benefits of the "wisdom of crowds" but limited only to those who have data/observations through their professional work to base their judgements on. The results of these questions will be averaged and posted on the website, glossrating.org.

This project will cover the following 20 countries, primarily drawn from rankings of top emerging market countries: Bahrain, Brazil, China, Columbia, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Rep of Korea, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, UAE. The country experts, better described as observers, are being drawn primarily from security/travel risk consultancies, corporate security departments, and individuals in government/academic/non-profit organizations who observe security conditions regularly in the course of their daily work. I am asking the participants to quantify their perceptions by rating from 0 to 100 in response to the following four questions:

What is the likelihood of a terrorist attack in country x (taking external and internal factors into consideration) during the next three months putting a foreign traveller at risk? Rate 0 to 100 (any number).

- 1-5%: Almost No Chance, Remote
- 5-20%: Very Unlikely; Highly Improbable

- 20-45%: Unlikely, Improbable
- 45-55%: Roughly Even Chance
- 55-80%: Likely, Probable
- 80-95%: Very Likely, Highly Probable
- 95-99%: Almost Certainly

How do you rate the risk of “backpacking” (style of travel) across this country? 25 it is safe while using normal travel precautions, 75 it is very dangerous, take special security precautions. Rate 0 to 100 (any number). (Including all elements of safety and security)

- 1-5%: Almost non-existent
- 5-20%: Very low
- 20-45%: Low-medium
- 45-55%: Roughly Even Chance
- 55-80%: Medium-High
- 80-99%: Very High

What is the likelihood of a visitor to country x witnessing group/street level protest activity? Rate 0 to 100 (any number). (Assuming a one week stay)

- 1-5%: Almost No Chance, Remote
- 5-20%: Very Unlikely; Highly Improbable
- 20-45%: Unlikely, Improbable
- 45-55%: Roughly Even Chance
- 55-80%: Likely, Probable
- 80-95%: Very Likely, Highly Probable
- 95-99%: Almost Certainly

How do you rate the risk of violent crime in the capital city of country x? 25 it is safe while using normal security precautions, 75 it is very dangerous take special security precautions. Rate 0 to 100 (any number).

- 1-5%: Almost non-existent
- 5-20%: Very low
- 20-45%: Low-medium
- 45-55%: Roughly Even Chance

55-80%: Medium-High
80-99%: Very High

The political/security risk field is generally qualitative by nature. Efforts to quantify security risk are usually based on historical data. At the same time, efforts to forecast more than a short time period into the future confront extremely difficult challenges due to the complexity of the international system and the large number of variables that affect constantly evolving threat conditions. My research effort limits the estimates to how things are perceived now, and only gives a short three month projection when it comes to the likelihood of a terrorist attack and observing protest activity.

Observers are affected by their cultural lenses and perhaps subjectively by the interests of the organizations they represent. Additionally, no single observer has access to all the data necessary to take into account all the factors involved in creating risk. Taking the combined perceptions of a large group of observers will mitigate this to an extent. Even more important than the actual number, will be the change in a rating between quarterly surveys. I expect these ratings will give decision-makers (from travellers, security departments, to investors) a concise measure to base decisions on.

It is hard to account for all the different security risks that exist in a country. In many countries the risk/threat can change significantly between urban/rural areas, and include wide ranging issues such as traffic safety and kidnapping. In order to account for the varying issues beyond terrorism, crime and protests generally, I included the question about the risk of “backpacking” across a particular country.

I have given this project the name, Global Security Sensemaking (GLOSS). I expect it will lead to an interesting discussion about how threats are viewed. How do people inside a country rate it compared to people outside? How are the ratings affected by different variables such as elections, economic data, and other events in the news and social media? If data is shared between analysts as a result of this effort the ratings can improve in their accuracy. Through this effort I hope to make progress in understanding better the current security risks we confront in the world and provide a solid metric to base decisions on. **Brian King: sso@glossrating.org**

