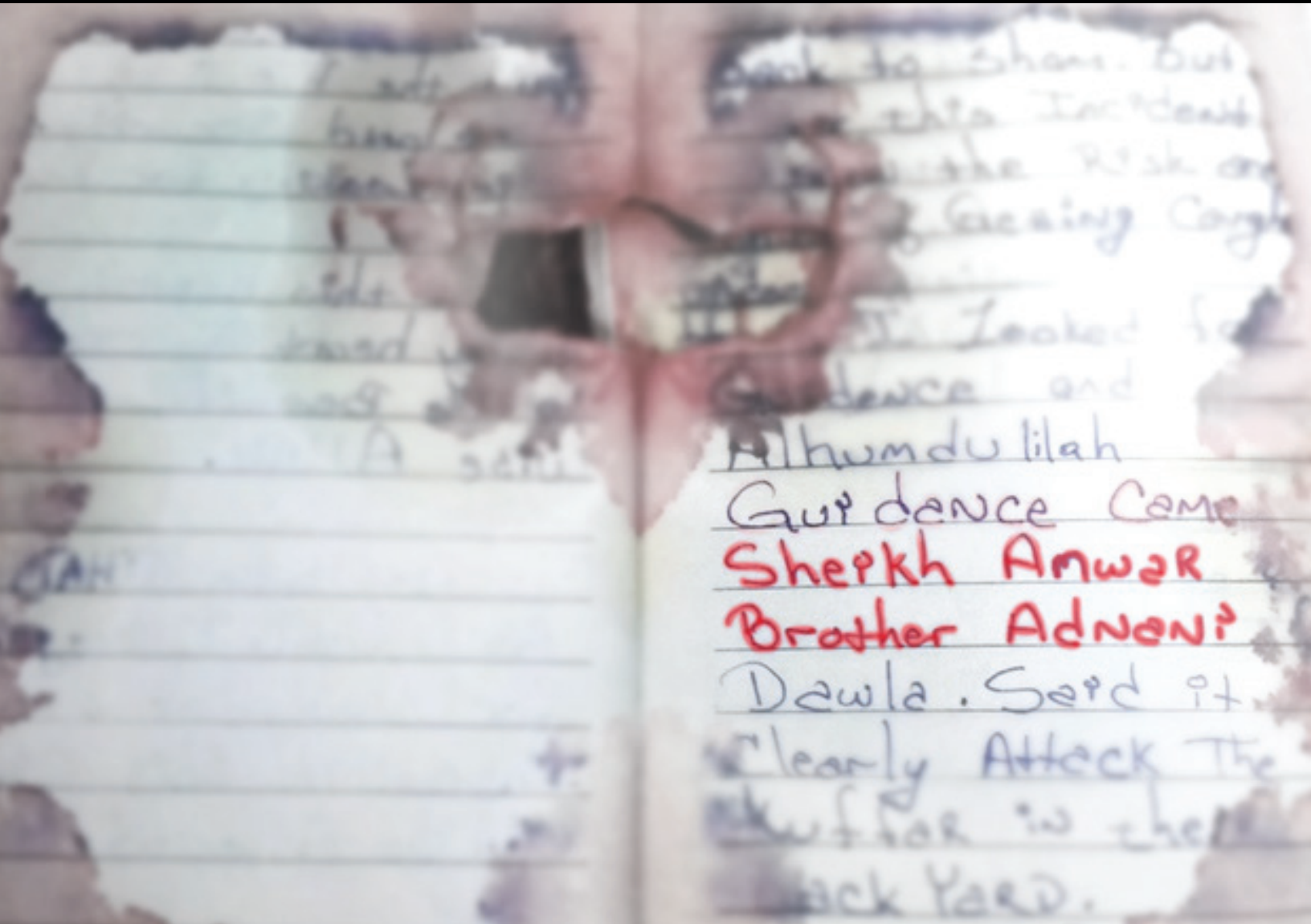


NOT JUST THE CALIPHATE

Non-Islamic State-Related
Jihadist Terrorism
in America



BY **Sarah Gilkes**

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

NOT JUST THE CALIPHATE

Non-Islamic State-Related
Jihadist Terrorism in America

BY
Sarah Gilkes

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover photo: pages from the journal of Ahmad Khan Rahimi

© 2016 by Program on Extremism

Program on Extremism
2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 2210
Washington, DC 20006
www.cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments and About the Author	· v
Executive Summary	· vii
Introduction	· 1
The History of Jihadism in the U.S.	· 3
Methodology	· 5
Non-IS American Jihadists	· 7
Conclusion: Moving Forward	· 13
Appendix I: Individuals	· 15
Appendix II: Coding Scheme	· 17
Appendix III: Characteristics of IS and Non-IS Cases	· 19

The Program on Extremism

The Program on Extremism at George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. The Program aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was made possible by the dedicated work of the Program on Extremism's staff, including Lorenzo Vidino, Seamus Hughes, Alexander Hitchens, and Audrey Alexander; and the Program's team of Research Assistants: Bennett Clifford, Adib Milani, Paige Pascarelli, and Prachi Vyas. Thank you to Larisa Baste for her assistance in formatting the report.

The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author, and not necessarily those of the George Washington University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Gilkes is a master's candidate in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University, concentrating in terrorism and sub-state violence. Prior to pursuing her master's, Gilkes worked as a Research Associate at the Program on Extremism. She holds a B.A. in Religion from Colgate University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The jihadist threat to America goes far beyond the Islamic State (IS). While there has been a relative surge in the number of U.S. persons radicalized and recruited by the group in the last five years, other jihadist organizations, primarily al-Qaeda, remain popular and active. This suggests that, while group affiliation matters, the draw of the wider Salafi-jihadist ideology that al-Qaeda, IS, and other like-minded groups adhere to is equally important when analyzing the jihadist threat to America. Many American recruits are driven by a broad counter-cultural idealism, and are less tangled up in the minutiae of the power plays that divide such groups abroad. Indeed, in many cases they are influenced by a blend of ideas and messages from various, often rival, jihadist groups.

Analysis of the current threat of homegrown jihadist terrorism therefore requires an examination of the appeal of Salafi-jihadist ideology in the U.S. as a whole, regardless of group affiliation. Drawing upon a wide array of legal documents, media reporting, and, in select cases, interviews with law enforcement, journalists, and family members, this study examines all cases of U.S. persons charged with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unrelated to IS. The findings include:

- During the study's sample period, from the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 to July 31, 2016, 178 people were charged in America with jihadist-inspired terrorist offenses. Of these cases, 79 were charged with offenses unrelated to IS.
- Twenty-six (33%) of those charged with non-IS-related terrorism offenses were arrested in 2011. In the years since, the annual number of non-IS terrorism-related arrests has fallen, with twelve arrests in 2015 and three since the beginning of 2016 and the end of the sample period.
- In 38% of the non-IS-related cases, the individuals involved attempted to or successfully traveled abroad. Destinations included Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. This compares to 46% among IS-related cases in the same period.
- 52 of the 79 individuals charged with non-IS-related jihadist terrorism offenses are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Four are refugees, two were in the country illegally when arrested, and one was in the U.S. on a student visa.

Groups other than IS remain popular and active in radicalizing and recruiting inside America.

44% of jihadist-inspired terrorism charges since March 2011 have been **unrelated to the Islamic State.**

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of September 17, 2016, as thousands of runners prepared to begin the Semper Five Marine Corps Charity 5K race, a pipe bomb exploded in a garbage can in Seaside Heights, New Jersey. Later that evening, a pressure cooker bomb exploded in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City. Law enforcement officials later located two additional improvised explosive devices—one in New York City and another in New Jersey.¹ Hours after the Chelsea explosion, the FBI named Ahmad Khan Rahimi, a 28-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen and New Jersey resident, as their primary suspect.² After a two-day investigation and a gunfight with police, Rahimi was arrested and charged with, among other things, the attempted murder of police officers and using a weapon of mass destruction.³

Since his arrest, analysts, policymakers, and law enforcement officials alike have attempted to understand what led Rahimi to carry out the attacks. Though damaged during his arrest, a journal Rahimi carried with him provides insight into his motivations. On one page, Rahimi exclaims, “I pray to the beautiful wise ALLAH. To not take Jihad away from. I beg..for shahadat [martyrdom].”⁴ On another, he writes “Inshallah [God willing] the sounds of the bombs will be heard in the streets. Gun shots to your police. Death to your OPPRESSION.”⁵ But perhaps most telling are his references to jihadist figures, as shown on the cover of this report: “I looked for guidance and Alhumdulillah [praise be to God] guidance came from Sheikh Anwar [al-Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki]” and “brother Adnani [Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani].”⁶ While some may be inclined

to associate Rahimi and his attacks with a specific terrorist organization, naming both Awlaki and Adnani suggests that his actions defy such an easy categorization. Drawing inspiration from leadership figures within both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) suggests that Rahimi was driven by a Salafi-jihadist ideology that drives both groups, rather than by his allegiance to a specific terrorist organization.

Over the last few years, both policymakers and the general public have concentrated much of their attention on IS. This focus is understandable given the group’s military achievements in Syria and Iraq, and its proclivity for eye-catching terrorist tactics. However, IS alone does not capture the full spectrum of jihadist threats globally, as other groups remain very much active. This is also true in the United States, where the number of individuals charged with Islamic State-related activities is comparable to that of those charged as a result of their affiliation with other jihadist organizations.

This suggests that group affiliation is perhaps less important than identification, albeit to varying degrees, with the central tenets of Salafi-jihadist ideology. Of course, group membership is significant when probing operational connections or assessing the resonance of a group’s propaganda. But in many cases, it is apparent that Americans who radicalize are attracted to Salafi-jihadist ideology at large, and often care little about the philosophical or tactical differences among jihadist organizations. Which organization they identify with is often a function of circumstance, opportunity, and serendipity.

The Islamic State alone does not capture the full spectrum of jihadist threats.

1. *United States of America v. Ahmed Khan Rahami*, Criminal Complaint (September 20, 2016).
2. Eyder Peralta and Bill Chappell, “Police Arrest Suspect Ahmad Khan Rahami Over Bombs in New York Area,” NPR, September 19, 2016.
3. Marc Santora, William K. Rashbaum, Al Baker, and Adam Goldman, “Ahmad Khan Rahami is Arrested in Manhattan and New Jersey Bombings,” *The New York Times*, September 19, 2016.
4. *USA v. Rahimi*, Criminal Complaint, 11.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Thomas Joscelyn, “Nine Pages for Ahmad Rahami’s Journal,” *The Long War Journal*, September 21, 2016.

Analysis of the current threat of homegrown jihadist terrorism therefore requires an examination of the appeal of this ideology in the U.S. as a whole, regardless of group affiliation. In order to assist in this endeavor, this report presents an exploration of non-IS-affiliated jihadism in America. Building upon the Program on Extremism's December 2015 report, *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa*, and subsequent monthly updates, this study examines all cases of U.S. persons charged with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unrelated to IS.

The report consists of three parts. The first section summarizes the history of jihadism in the U.S. The second discusses the guiding methodology of the study. The final section examines the 79 cases of individuals charged in the U.S. with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unconnected to IS, from the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 to July 31, 2016. This section draws upon a wide range of legal documents, media reporting, and, in select cases, interviews with law enforcement, journalists, and family members. A comparative analysis of the demographics of the 178 individuals—79 non-IS and 99 IS-related—charged with terrorism offenses in the U.S. during this period can be found in Appendix III.

A Brief Note on Salafi-Jihadism and the Global Jihadist Movement

Salafism is an ideological movement whose various strains—while pursuing different goals and adopting different methods—believe in a highly literalist interpretation of Islam and the emulation of the prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors. Salafi-jihadism is a subset of Salafism that advocates violent jihad as the primary method for achieving the goal of establishing an Islamic state ruled by a strict interpretation of Islamic law. For Salafi-jihadists, it is incumbent upon all Muslims to participate in jihad in order to remove local regimes or foreign occupiers of Muslim lands and replace them with an Islamic order.⁷

The term 'global jihadist movement' refers to a collection of disparate groups that adhere to various iterations of Salafi-jihadist ideology. Al-Qaeda is widely recognized as the original spearhead of this movement and it is largely responsible for its spread in the years immediately before and after the September 11, 2001, attacks.⁸ In recent years, IS has, to some degree, taken on this mantle.

7. For a more detailed treatment of Salafi-Jihadism, see Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst, 2016)

8. Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

THE HISTORY OF JIHADISM IN THE U.S.

Jihadist radicalization is not a new phenomenon in the U.S. Over the previous three decades, many Americans have taken on a variety of roles in their efforts to support the movement. Some have attempted to travel or have successfully traveled abroad to join terrorist organizations. As early as the 1980s, Americans are known to have joined the Afghan *mujahideen* in their fight against the Soviets.⁹ In the decades that followed, Americans took part in jihadist conflicts around the globe, including those in Bosnia, Chechnya, Yemen, and Somalia.¹⁰ In the past five years, however, Syria and Iraq have emerged as the destinations of choice for aspiring American jihadists.¹¹ While significant, the number of Americans to have participated in any of these conflicts is notably lower than that of their counterparts in other Western nations, in particular, those in Europe.

Some American jihadists have chosen to concentrate their efforts domestically. Many have become fundraisers for terrorist organizations, financing the purchase of weapons and military equipment, plane tickets for those wishing to travel abroad, and other resources, such as cars, phone cards, and medical care. Others have acted primarily as recruiters, among them Anwar al-Awlaki and his propagandist sidekick, Samir Khan, who produced

al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's English language magazine *Inspire*. Still others have plotted domestic terrorist attacks, the majority of which authorities have thwarted. However, some attacks have been successful, namely the Boston Marathon bombing (2013) and the shootings in Chattanooga (2015), San Bernardino (2015), and Orlando (2016).

Additionally, while a handful of individuals radicalized independently as so-called 'lone wolves,' others were part of a network of people inspired by jihadist ideology. Perhaps the most well-known recruitment clusters were centered in Minnesota's Twin Cities, where a significant number of men and women radicalized in support of the Somali jihadist organization, al-Shabaab and, in recent years, IS. Other clusters include the Lackawanna Six, the Fort Dix Five, and the Portland Seven.¹²

It is apparent that the U.S. is home to a small but active number of individuals inspired by the global jihadist movement, regardless of group affiliation.¹³ But the scale of the recent mobilization of U.S. citizens and residents in the cause of the movement is unprecedented.¹⁴ Perhaps the most telling statistic related to the current threat landscape was provided in October 2015 by FBI Director James Comey, who

-
9. Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," Program on Extremism, December 2015.
 10. Lorenzo Vidino, "Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 1 (January 2009): 1-17; *United States of America v. Saynab Abdirashid Hussein*, Wavier of Indictment, Common Appendix II (August 29, 2013).
 11. Testimony of James B. Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Threats to the Homeland*, October 8, 2015.
 12. Eric J. Dahl, "The Plots that Failed: Intelligence Lessons Learned from Unsuccessful Terrorist Attacks Against the United States," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 34:8 (2011), pp. 621-648
 13. Vidino and Hughes, "ISIS in America," 5.
 14. Charles Kurzman, "Muslim-America Terrorism Since 9/11: An Accounting," Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 2, 2011; Charles Kurzman, "Muslim-American Terrorism in 2013," Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 5, 2014, 2; Charles Kurzman, David Schanzer, and Ebrahim Moosa, "Muslim American Terrorism Since 9/11: Why So Rare?" *The Muslim World*, September 2011; Testimony of Michael B. Steinbach, Assistant Director of the FBI, House Homeland Security Committee, *Terrorism Gone Viral: The Attack in Garland, Texas and Beyond*, June 3, 2015; Barbara Starr, "A Few Dozen Americans' in ISIS Ranks," CNN, July 15, 2015.

revealed that the FBI had 900 active investigations into homegrown violent extremists across the U.S.¹⁵

Testifying before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs in October 2015, Nicholas Rasmussen, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, stated, “The tremendous efforts being made to counter the [IS] threat are absolutely warranted, but I want to stress that we still view al-Qa’ida and the various al-Qa’ida affiliates and nodes as being a principal counterterrorism priority.”¹⁶ The results of this study underscore Rasmussen’s call for continued focus on the

threat posed by jihadist groups without connections to IS.

This report will help to provide a more wide-ranging analysis of the Americans drawn to jihadist-inspired terrorist organizations. In doing so, it will illuminate the roles those charged with non-IS-related offenses play within the larger American Salafi-jihadist scene. It will also offer a comparison between these individuals and those Americans inspired by IS, and provide some initial thoughts on what this recent surge in radicalization and recruitment of Americans tells us about the future of the jihadist terrorist threat in the U.S.

15. Kevin Johnson, “Comey: Feds have Roughly 900 Domestic Probes about Islamic State Operatives,” USA Today, October 23, 2015.

16. Testimony of Nicholas Rasmussen, Director, National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Threats to the Homeland*, October 8, 2015.

METHODOLOGY

Program on Extremism researchers compiled a database of all cases of U.S. persons charged, arrested, or indicted on jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unconnected to IS. For comparative purposes, cases were only included in the database if the individual was charged between March 1, 2011, when the beginning of the Syrian conflict triggered an increase in radicalization and mobilization worldwide, and July 31, 2016.

To be included in the database, an individual needed to be a U.S. person or have been located in the U.S. for the majority of his or her alleged terrorist activity. Additionally, while a number of U.S. persons were charged with offenses related to Shi'a militant groups designated by the U.S. government as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs)—including Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' al-Quds Force—only those inspired by and sympathetic to Salafi-jihadism were added to the database.

The study only includes individuals who have been publicly charged in the U.S. legal system. It therefore excludes, for example, those individuals who traveled abroad to join an FTO but were not publicly charged, as well as those killed while attempting to carry out or carrying out a terrorist attack. For this reason, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is included in the database, but his brother Tamerlan Tsarnaev

is not, as the latter died before he could be charged for his role in the Boston Marathon bombings. Additionally, individuals such as Moner Abu Salha—the 22-year-old Floridan foreign fighter, and the first American known to have died in a suicide attack in Syria on behalf of Jabhat al-Nusra—are excluded from this study unless they were charged with terrorism offenses prior to their departure from the U.S. and/or death abroad.

In order to collect information, researchers used legal documents, media reports, and, in some cases, interviews with journalists, individuals included in the database, and their family members. Each data point corresponds to a distinct demographic factor or arrest characteristic. The twelve data points are: age, gender, time frame, location, legal status, convert, use of informants/sting, travel abroad, domestic terror plot, group affiliation, the legal status of each case, and, if sentenced, the length of each individual's sentence.

Data collection was, in large part, limited to publicly available information. As such, researchers faced barriers in data collection due to varied disclosure of demographic information in court documents and inconsistent media reporting. In some rare instances, if reliable sources for some individual data points could not be found, the data point was coded as "Unclear."

NON-IS AMERICAN JIHADISTS

In the same way that there is no profile of an ‘average’ American IS supporter, the backgrounds of those charged with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unrelated to IS are similarly diverse.¹⁷ All those charged are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Group Affiliation

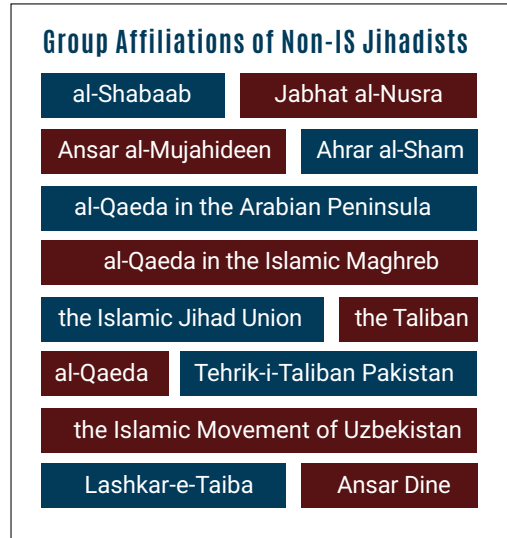
At least thirteen designated FTOs are represented in the sample. Information regarding group affiliation was not available in approximately one-quarter of the cases.

The data suggest that group affiliation is much more fluid and overlapping than strict categories allow. A number of individuals allegedly supported or took steps to materially support multiple FTOs, some of which were actively engaged in combat against one another during the relevant period or have significant ideological differences. In fact, three individuals—Basit Javid Sheikh, Mahin Khan, and Ameer Abu-Hammad—reportedly sympathized with one of the above FTOs and IS. These cases underscore the unifying character of Salafi-jihadist ideology.

Anecdotally, the most common groups individuals allegedly supported were al-Shabaab, AQAP, and the Taliban. Additionally, while a select few individuals allegedly have operational ties to an FTO, the vast majority of those charged have no formal links to FTOs.

Age

On average, individuals charged with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unrelated to IS were 29 years old at the time of arrest. However, the ages of those charged varied widely from case to case. The youngest of those charged—Mohammad Hassan Khalid and an unnamed minor from Florida—were 17 at the time of their arrests. The oldest



17-76

Age range of those charged with non-Islamic State-related offenses

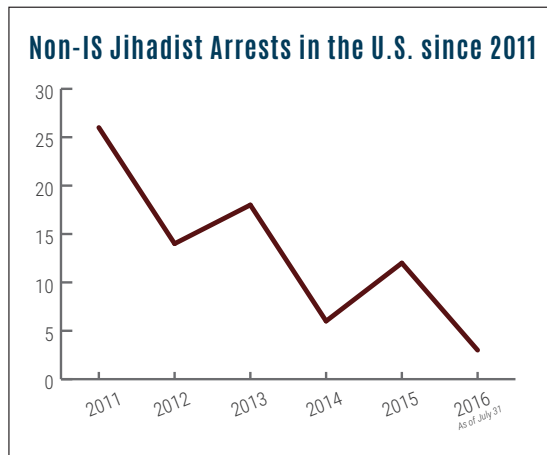
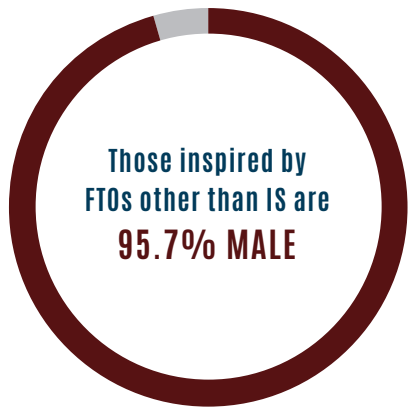
was Hafiz Muhammad Sher Ali Khan, who was 76 at the time of his arrest in 2011. Fifty percent of those in the database were 25 or older at the time of arrest. Only two were minors when arrested.

The average age of those charged with IS-related offenses is 26, approximately three years younger than those charged with non-IS-related offenses.¹⁸ A number of researchers have addressed this discrepancy, but there is no universally accepted theory explaining this trend, and assessing causal factors is outside the purview of this study.¹⁹

17. Vidino and Hughes, “ISIS in America.”

18. Program on Extremism, “GW Extremism Tracker: ISIS in America,” July 2016.

19. Among these pieces are Vidino and Hughes, “ISIS in America”; Charles Kurzman, “Muslim-American Involvement with Violent Extremism, 2015,” Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 2, 2016.



Gender

The vast majority of individuals in the dataset (95.7%) are male.

Time Frame

Thirty-three percent of those charged with non-IS-related terrorism offenses were arrested in 2011. In the years that followed, the annual number of non-IS terrorism arrests has fluctuated. While 2015 saw 12 arrests, only three individuals were arrested for jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses unconnected to IS between January 1, 2016, and July 31, 2016.

The number of individuals charged with non-IS-related offenses has declined since 2011. However, they have not tapered off altogether. Rather, people have continued to be charged with non-IS terrorism offenses since IS cut ties with al-Qaeda, declared the creation of its so-called caliphate, and welcomed the establishment of affiliates around the world. Six individuals were charged in 2014, 12 in 2015, and, at the time of writing, three in 2016.

While the largest number of non-IS-related arrests occurred in 2011 (26), IS-related arrests peaked in 2015 (63).²⁰ In both cases, the rate at which individuals have been arrested—when analyzed on both a monthly and an annual basis—has varied.²¹ The first IS-related arrest occurred in March 2014;²² there were a total of 12 by the end

20. This number is drawn from the Program on Extremism’s database on U.S. persons arrested on IS-related charges.
21. Such variation is not unique to the time frame studied in this report. A number of studies—both those focused on the decade following 9/11 and more recent periods—have documented this variation. See, for example, Charles Kurzman, “Terrorism Cases Involving Muslim-Americans, 2014,” Terrorism Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 9, 2015; Jerome P. Bjelopera and Marl A. Randol, “American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat,” Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, December 7, 2010; Risa A. Brooks, “Muslim ‘Homegrown’ Terrorism in the United States: How Serious Is the Threat?” *International Security*, 26 (no. 2), pp. 7-47; Peter Bergen and Dr. Bruce Hoffman, “Assessing the Terrorist Threat: A Report of the Bipartisan Policy Center’s National Security Preparedness Group,” Bipartisan Policy Center, September 10, 2010; Brian Michael Jenkins, “Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States since September 11, 2001,” RAND Corporation, 2010.
22. Vidino and Hughes, “ISIS in America.”; Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan (also known by his *nom de guerre* ‘Mujahid Miski’) was charged with terrorism-related offenses in 2010 in connection with his alleged travel to Somalia to join al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab. He is included in the IS dataset because of his alleged extensive connections to IS-related terrorism plots in the U.S. as well as his alleged connection to individuals from a number of states that traveled from the U.S. to Syria and Iraq to join IS.

of that year. As of July 31, there have been 21 IS-related arrests in 2016.²³

Location

The activities of those charged were located in 22 states. New York saw the highest number of cases (11), followed closely by California (9). Four individuals—Muhanad Moahmoud Al Farekh, Sohiel Omar Kabir, Gufran Ahmed Kauser Mohammed, and Eric Harroun—were outside of the U.S. at the time of the relevant offense(s).

Legal Status

The overwhelming majority of those charged are U.S. citizens (52) or legal permanent residents (13), highlighting the truly homegrown nature of the jihadist threat in America. Four of those charged are refugees, two were in the U.S. illegally, and one was in the U.S. on a student visa. Researchers were unable to determine the legal status of seven individuals.

Converts

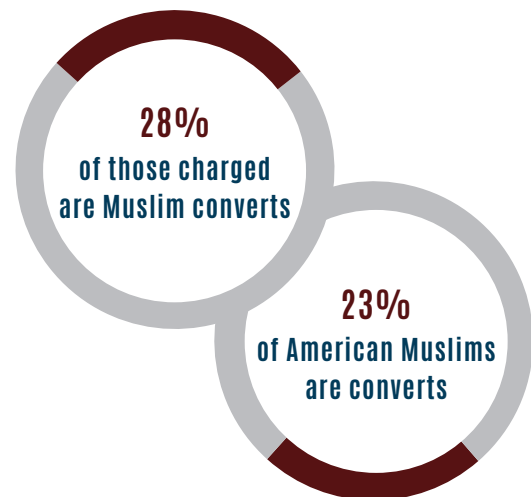
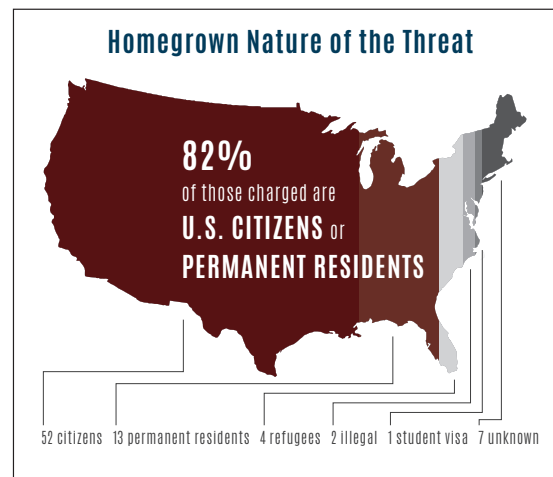
Twenty-two, or approximately 28%, of those charged are converts to Islam. This figure is only slightly higher than the estimated 23% of the American Muslim population who are converts.²⁴

Use of Informants/Stings

Just over half (50.6%) of the individuals charged were arrested following an investigation involving an informant or undercover official. In such cases, an undercover employee (UCE) or confidential informant (CI) becomes involved with a suspected radicalized individual and facilitates their pre-existing desire to commit a terrorism-related felony.

Eighty-five percent of those apprehended as a result of a sting operation have pleaded or been found guilty, and, of those who have been sentenced, the average length

Charges have been filed
against non-IS jihadists in
22 states



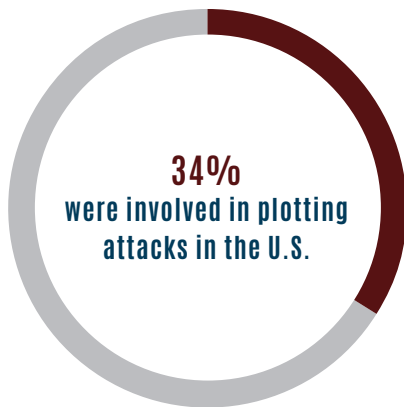
23. Three individuals charged with IS-related offenses remain at large and have not yet been arrested. They are: Abdi Nur, Yusra Ismail, and Reza Niknejad.

24. Pew Research Center, “Converts to Islam,” July 21, 2007.



38%
of those inspired by FTOs other than
IS traveled or tried to travel abroad.

The travel rate of those charged
with IS-related offenses:
46%



of sentence is 18.76 years.²⁵ Of the remaining six individuals who have neither pleaded nor been found guilty, four were arrested in the twelve months prior to July 31, 2016, one was found incompetent to stand trial, and one is awaiting trial.

In relation to the dataset, it is important to note that, in some cases, a target individual might display an allegiance to Salafi-jihadism more generally, without expressing sympathy for any specific group. In these cases, the UCE or CI who makes the subsequent approach may encourage allegiance to a specific group, and therefore may influence what organization the target individual aligns with before being charged. However, UCEs and CIs likely tailor their approach based on the leanings of the target. Thus, if the target previously displayed support for al-Qaeda, the UCE or CI would most likely encourage support for the group, rather than attempt to shift their allegiances.

Travel Abroad

Over one-third of individuals in the dataset allegedly attempted to travel (20%) or successfully traveled (18%) abroad. Destinations included Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

46% of those charged with IS-related offenses were accused of attempting to travel abroad or successfully traveling abroad, compared to 38% among those charged with non-IS offenses.²⁶ The higher percentage among IS-related cases is likely due in part to the organization's successes on the ground and IS's formation of a self-proclaimed caliphate in June 2014.²⁷ The latter pull factor is undeniably unique to the Islamic State, and more than likely influenced American IS sympathizers to attempt to travel abroad at a greater rate than their non-IS-affiliated peers.

Domestic Terror Plot

Approximately one-third (34%) of the individuals charged were involved in plotting terrorist attacks in the U.S.

25. This figure does not account for three individuals: one sentenced to life imprisonment, one who has been deported, and one whose sentence is unclear.

26. Program on Extremism, "GW Extremism Tracker: ISIS in America," July 2016.

27. Sylvia Westall, "After Iraq Gains, Qaeda Offshoot Claims Islamic 'Caliphate,'" *Reuters*, June 29, 2014.

Their targets included religious institutions of other faiths, government buildings, banks, bars, and universities. Only one of those charged—Dzhokhar Tsarnaev—successfully carried out a domestic attack.

Case Status

As of July 31, 2016, 75% have pleaded or been found guilty. While a number of those charged are awaiting trial or sentencing, others are currently serving prison sentences, and a small number were deported following the completion of their prison terms.

Length of Sentence

On average, individuals who have pleaded or been found guilty have been sentenced to 16 years in prison. This figure does not account for those sentenced to time served, life imprisonment, and death (a total of five individuals), as these sentences cannot be quantified.

The Jihadist Scene in America: March 2011 to July 2016

While important, studying non-IS cases in isolation offers an incomplete portrait of the larger Salafi-jihadist scene in America. As such, it is worth placing these individuals within the larger population of American jihadist sympathizers in an effort to analyze the global jihadist movement as a whole.

Between March 2011 and July 31, 2016, a total of 178 U.S. persons were charged with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses. Of those, just under half (44%) were inspired by FTOs other than IS. This near-equal distribution of cases underscores the fact that analysis of the jihadist threat in America should avoid too heavy a focus on a single terrorist organization.



16 YEARS

Average sentence of those who have pleaded or been found guilty.

Finally, when compared annually, the number of individuals charged with non-IS offenses is lower than those charged with IS-related offenses. While an unprecedented number of Americans have radicalized in support of IS in the last five years, sustained terrorism arrests unrelated to IS indicate that other terrorist organizations within the global jihadist movement continue to appeal to Americans. Coupled with three decades of Americans radicalizing in support of the movement, this sustained interest suggests that, despite American jihadists' recent preference for IS, the wider global jihadist movement will continue to present a threat to the U.S. in the years to come.

CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD

As evidenced by this study, IS is not the only player in the American jihadist scene.

Between the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011 and July 31, 2016, 178 U.S. persons have been charged with jihadist-inspired terrorism offenses. These individuals defy a singular profile: they are young and old, converts and those born into the faith, foreign fighters and domestic plotters, and alleged supporters of al-Qaeda and IS. But, despite these and other differences, these men and women are united by their alleged affinity for Salafi-jihadism.

The diversity of jihadist groups that Americans have radicalized in support of since the start of the Syrian uprising underscores the need to take the ongoing appeal of Salafi-jihadist ideology seriously. Approaching and understanding the threat in this way will help policymakers and law enforcement as they try to develop effective and nuanced responses.

Because of the variation among those drawn to this ideology, no single policy will counter the allure of the global jihadist movement. Understanding this complexity is essential for policymakers, law enforcement officials, and community leaders involved in devising solutions.

Therefore, countering the ideology shared by each of these 178 individuals should be a central component of policies and programs designed to prevent terrorist radicalization and recruitment. Creating counter-messaging campaigns and policies that address the counter-cultural and revolutionary appeal of the global jihadist movement is key to

degrading the resonance of the ideology. For this reason, it is imperative that those involved in crafting effective solutions engage with the narratives undergirding Salafi-jihadism and the means in which this ideology is propagated. This is not a novel idea, nor are its goals easily met.²⁸ However, the need to address the ideological underpinnings of the global jihad movement is further underscored by the

recent surge in terrorism-related arrests in the U.S., as well as this report's finding that American jihadists have a sustained interest in various terrorist organizations despite IS's rise.

While targeting the appeal of specific organizations can be effective, prioritizing a single terrorist group may risk ignoring the threat posed by the wider global jihadist movement. As such, organization-specific

campaigns should be used to augment messaging and policies centered on countering the appeal of Salafi-jihadism. Implementing a two-pronged strategy has a greater chance of resonating with potential recruits than applying either approach in isolation.

The data presented in this report suggests that the draw of the global jihadist movement is more about identification with the core tenets of Salafi-jihadism than group affiliation. The movement has successfully formulated a simplified and easily accessible version of this ideology, tailored specifically for a Western audience. While, in recent years, IS has assumed leadership of this movement, this study cautions policymakers, law enforcement officials, and community leaders against group-specific solutions. To effectively counter the draw of Salafi-jihadism, the central tenets of the ideology itself must be addressed head on.

Prioritizing a single terrorist group may risk ignoring the threat posed by the wider global jihadist movement.

28. J. Scott Carpenter, Matthew Levitt, Steven Simon, and Juan Zarate, "Fighting the Ideological Battle: The Missing Link to U.S. Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2010; RAND Corporation, "U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy Must Address Ideology and Political Factors at the Global and Local Levels," Research Brief, RAND Project Air Force, 2006; Rohan Gunaratna, "Ideology in Terrorism and Counter Terrorism: Lessons from Combating Al Qaeda and Al Jemaah Al Islamiyah in Southeast Asia," Defence Academy of the United Kingdom CSRC Discussion Paper, September 19, 2005.

APPENDIX I: INDIVIDUALS

This list contains the names of the 79 individuals charged with jihadist-related offenses unconnected to IS between March 1, 2011, and July 31, 2016, including individuals whose criminal actions, some of which were not directly related to terrorism, were nonetheless undeniably inspired by some form of support for jihadist ideology.

Abdella Ahmad Tounisi	Mahdi Furreh
Abdinassir Mohamud Ibrahim	Mahin Khan
Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud	Marcos Alonso Zea
Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif	Matthew Aaron Llana
Adam Shafi	Michael Dale McCright
Adel Daoud	Miguel Alejandro Santana Vidriales
Agron Hasbajrami	Mohamed Mamdouh
Ahmed Ferhani	Mohammad Abdul Rahman Abukhdair
Ahmed Hussein Mahamud	Mohammad Hassan Khalid
Ameer Abu-Hammad	Mohanad Shareef Hammadi
Amin al-Baroudi	Muhanad Mahmoud Al Farekh
Amina Mohamud Esse	Muna Osman Jama
Amine El Khalifi	Naser Jason Abdo
Arifeen David Gojali	Oytun Ayse Mihalik
Asif Ahmed Salim	Quazi Mohammad Rezwani Ahsan Nafis
Bakhtiyor Jumaev	Raees Alam Qazi
Basit Javed Sheikh	Rahatul Ashikim Khan
Craig Benedict Baxam	Ralph Kenneth Deleon
Dzhokhar Tsarnaev	Randy (Rasheed) Wilson
Emerson Begolly	Reaz Qadir Khan
Enrique Marquez, Jr.	Reed Stanley Berry
Eric Harroun	Rezwani Ferdous
Erwin Antonio Rios	Sami Osmakac
Fazliddin Kurbanov	Samy Mohamed Hamzeh
Gufran Ahmed Kauser Mohammed	Saynab Abdirashid Hussein
Hafiz Muhammad Sher Ali Khan	Sharmarke Mohamed Duale
Hinda Osman Dhirane	Sheheryar Qazi
Humayoun Ghoulani Nabi	Shelton Thomas Bell
Ibrahim Zubair Mohammad	Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen
Ismail Alsarabbi	Sohiel Omar Kabir
James Gonzalo Medina	Sultane Roome Salim
Jamshid Muhtorov	Terry Lee Loewen
Jesse Morton	Ulugbek Kodirov
Jonathan Paul Jimenez	Unnamed minor (Florida)
Jose Pimentel	Waad Ramadan Alwan
Joseph Jeffrey Brice	Walli Mujahid
Jubair Ahmad	Yahya Farooq Mohammad
Justin Kaliebe	Yonathan Melaku
Liban Haji Mohamed	Yusef Mohamid Al-Khattab
Maalik Alim Jones	

APPENDIX II: CODING SCHEME

While a number of data points gathered are fairly straightforward (age, gender, and legal status, for example), others require explanation. Researchers used the following guidelines while coding for group affiliation, location, travel abroad, and domestic terror plot:

Group Affiliation

Information on group affiliation was drawn solely from legal documents. An individual was coded as having an “affiliation” with a given designated foreign terrorist organization (FTO) if he or she was either charged with conspiring, attempting to provide, or providing material support to a stated FTO, or quoted in court records as making statements in support of a given FTO. Each FTO an individual allegedly affiliated or sympathized with was annotated. When information regarding group affiliation was not provided, group affiliation was coded as “Unspecified.”

Location

Each individual’s location was coded according to the state or, if outside the U.S., the country in which he or she was active for the duration of the relevant offense(s). If the individual was active in multiple states or countries, his or her location was coded as the state or country he or she was active in for the majority of the duration of the activity relevant to the offense(s).

Travel Abroad

Individuals were coded as having traveled abroad if he or she successfully reached his or her target destination. All of those who left the U.S., but never reached their ultimate destination, were coded as attempting to travel abroad. Those coded as having attempted to travel abroad took steps to further their plans, from booking and/or purchasing airfare, to attempting to board a plane, to applying for or acquiring travel documents (both fraudulent and legitimate). Those who discussed or aspired to travel abroad to join a jihadist terrorist organization but failed to take concrete steps to further their plans were coded as not attempting to travel abroad.

Domestic Terror Plot

Individuals were coded as having plotted a domestic terrorist attack if he or she attempted, planned, or successfully carried out a domestic plot, with or without the assistance of an undercover FBI agent or confidential informant. Those who expressed an interest in plotting a domestic terror attack, but did not advance to the stage of choosing a target, picking a date, or acquiring weapons, were coded as not plotting a domestic attack.

APPENDIX III: CHARACTERISTICS OF IS AND NON-IS CASES

Comprehensive statistics regarding demographic and arrest characteristics of the 178 individuals charged with jihadist terrorism–related offenses in the U.S. between March 1, 2011, and July 31, 2016 (includes both IS and non-IS-related cases):

Group Affiliation

Of the 178 individuals charged with jihadist terrorism offenses, just over half (56%) were charged with IS-related offenses.

Age

On average, individuals were 27.4 years old at the time they were charged. Six individuals were minors when charged.

Gender

The overwhelming majority of those charged (91%) are male.

Time Frame

With the exception of a surge in 2015, a relatively steady number of individuals have been arrested on jihadist terrorism-related charges each year since March 1, 2011: 26 in 2011; 14 in 2012; 18 in both 2013 and 2014; and 75 in 2015. As of July 31, 24 individuals have been charged in 2016. Only three individuals—all of whom have been charged with IS-related offenses—remain at large.

Location

The activities of those charged were located in 29 states. New York saw the highest number of arrests (29), followed

by Minnesota (18), California (15), and Virginia (15). The activities of 5 individuals were located outside of the U.S.

Legal Status

The vast majority of those charged (85%) are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. The legal status of 16 individuals could not be determined.

Converts

Approximately 31% of those charged are converts to Islam.

Use of Informants/Stings

In just over half of the cases (55%), individuals were arrested following an investigation involving an informant or undercover official.

Travel Abroad

Less than half (43%) of those charged attempted to travel or successfully traveled abroad.

Domestic Terror Plot

Over two thirds of those charged (68%) were not involved in plotting a domestic terror attack.

Case Status

Fifty-nine percent of those charged have pleaded or been found guilty.

Length of Sentence

On average, individuals were sentenced to 14.2 years in prison.

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue · Washington D.C., 20006
cchs.gwu.edu/program-extremism · [@gwupoe](https://twitter.com/gwupoe)