

A Homegrown Threat: Islamist Extremist Plots in the United States



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KEY FINDINGS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

- In 2017, 29 individuals living in the United States and motivated by Islamist extremist ideology were arrested for providing material support to terror organizations abroad, or for plotting attacks in the United States.

- 83 percent, or 24 of the 29 individuals, claim they were inspired by ISIS. The remaining five say they were inspired by other Islamist extremist groups, including the former al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and Hezbollah.
- Nine murders in the U.S. in 2017 were linked to Islamist extremist ideology.
- Eight of the 29 individuals were plotting attacks (eight separate plots), and three of these plots turned into attacks, yielding nine deaths and 16 injuries.
- Attackers continue to use non-conventional weapons such as knives, cars, and homemade bombs to target soft targets – generally low-security, crowded public spaces. This strategy is not limited to attacks motivated by Islamist extremist ideology; white supremacist James Fields used a vehicle in the 2017 Charlottesville ramming murder of Heather Heyer.
- Apprehended terror suspects motivated by Islamist extremist ideology tend to be men who are about 30 years old.
- The number of murders in the U.S. in 2017 motivated by Islamist extremist ideology (nine) fell by approximately 82 percent from the 2016 total of 49.
- In 2017, 59 percent – or 20 – of the 34 domestic extremist-related killings in the United States were related to right-wing extremism, while nine (26 percent) were attributed to Islamist extremist ideology.
- Since 2002, 127 individuals have been involved in 98 domestic plots or attacks motivated by Islamist extremist ideology, 90 percent of whom were either United States citizens, lawful permanent or temporary residents, or in the United States with documentation at the time of their arrest.^[1] Of the 90 percent, 52 percent were U.S. born. In the same time frame, 161 individuals motivated by right-wing extremism were involved in 94 plots or attacks. While approximately seven percent – or seven – of the Islamist extremist

attacks were lethal, roughly 23 percent of the right-wing extremist attacks – or 22 – were deadly. Both Islamist and right-wing extremist attacks have become more lethal over time.

- Since 2014, the majority of plots have focused on soft targets, rather than symbolic targets. Many ISIS-inspired attacks in the United States have targeted universities, shopping malls, nightclubs, bike paths and public transportation.
- Islamist extremists are increasingly acting alone, rather than in groups. This is due, in part, to increased use of social media and encrypted messaging applications, which allow prospective attackers to use private chatrooms to access propaganda, bomb-making manuals and other sources of inspiration or instruction.

Executive Summary

On October 31, 2017, according to police reports, Sayfullo Saipov drove a rented pickup truck into a crowded bike path in lower Manhattan, killing eight and injuring 12 others in what would later be pronounced the fifth deadliest act of violence ever committed by a U.S. domestic extremist and the deadliest in New York since September 11th, 2001.

The attack was one of 2017's eight Islamist extremist-inspired plots. Eight individuals plotted eight separate attacks, many of which never came to fruition. This is in line with a recent trend of Islamist extremists planning and carrying out attacks on their own, finding inspiration from terrorist propaganda posted on encrypted networks.

This report will first discuss 2017 plots and Islamist extremist-related arrests, highlighting wider methodological and demographic trends, including the lone actors and targets they are increasingly choosing. It will then contextualize these findings by analyzing Islamist extremist plots dating back to 2002, tracing the evolution of Islamist extremist plots in the United States, revealing that more than

half of all domestic U.S. Islamist extremists were born in the United States. In fact, 90 percent of the 127 individuals involved in Islamist extremist plots in the United States since 2002 were U.S. citizens or living in the United States with documentation. The biggest threat, then, does not come from individuals residing outside U.S. borders; instead, the terrorism tends to be homegrown, increasingly influenced by the pervasive propaganda flowing from virtual terrorist networks.

The report will also explore ways in which propaganda from prominent foreign terror organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda is directly impacting these U.S.-based individuals, as prospective attackers are interacting with terrorist materials on encrypted networks and planning their attacks with strategies recommended by these groups.

DOMESTIC ISLAMIST EXTREMISM IN 2017

Introduction

In 2017, 29 individuals living in the United States and motivated by Islamist extremist ideology were arrested for providing material support to foreign terror organizations abroad, or plotting attacks in the United States.^[2] The 29 arrests were linked to 28 separate incidents.

Of the individuals linked to Islamist extremism in the U.S. in 2017, 83 percent, or 24 of the 29 individuals, claim they were inspired by ISIS – a rare indicator of relevance for the group, which lost significant territory in Iraq and Syria throughout 2017. After ISIS lost stronghold cities like Mosul and Raqqa, its adherents retreated to the sparsely populated borderlands between Iraq and Syria. Despite setbacks, ISIS continued to operate online and encourage followers to plan attacks in their home countries.

While al-Qaeda did not play an explicit role in 2017 plots, two individuals were arrested for attempting to travel to Syria to join their former affiliate organization, Jabhat al-Nusra.^[3] Additionally, two individuals were arrested for providing material support to Hezbollah by conducting surveillance on Israeli Defense

Forces members and U.S. infrastructure in New York in order to advance potential plots.

Eight of the 29 individuals linked to Islamist extremism in 2017 were plotting eight discrete attacks. Three of these plots were successfully carried out, while the remaining five were thwarted by law enforcement at various stages of development.

The three “successful” attacks resulted in nine deaths and 16 injuries. Eight deaths and 12 injuries stemmed from the October 31 ramming attack in lower Manhattan, which was the deadliest terrorist attack in New York City since September 11th, 2001.

The number of murders in the U.S. in 2017 motivated by Islamist extremist ideology (nine) fell by approximately 82 percent from the 2016 total of 49, all of which were attributed to the Pulse nightclub shooting.

Right-wing extremism was responsible for far more murders in 2017 – a full 59 percent – than any other form of extremism. Nine of the 34 extremist-related killings in 2017 were committed by Islamist extremists, and 20 of the total 34 were carried out by right-wing extremists.

2017 Plots

In 2017, 28 percent of individuals arrested for Islamist extremist-related activity (a total of eight people) were plotting eight discrete attacks, two of which occurred in New York City. Both the October 31 ramming and December 11 failed pipe bomb attack were inspired by the Islamic State, per the assailants, who both professed their allegiances to the group. Sayfullo Saipov did so via a written note, and Akayed Ullah expressed his loyalties in post-attack interviews with law enforcement.

Likewise, Joshua Cummings, who shot and killed a security officer in Denver, Colorado, on January 31, 2017, called himself a “soldier of the Islamic State,” during a jailhouse interview, insisting that his actions were for “the pleasure of Allah,” however, he later denied that he’d acted on ISIS’s behalf. Months before the shooting, local mosques reported concerns about Cummings. On December 24, 2016, a mosque leader emailed the Department of Homeland Security saying

Cummings made worrisome statements about “fighting to establish ‘the rule of Islam’” (CBS) and that Cummings seemed “pretty advanced in his path of radicalization” (Yahoo).

Cummings also expressed his views on Islam on Twitter, criticizing law enforcement and the United States.

 Joshua Cummings Twitter post on USA

 Joshua Cummings Twitter post on Police

Twitter post from Cummings’ account, @Bjj_Joshua, which has not been deactivated.

2017 Foiled Plots

Although some plots resulted in action, many more would-be attacks were prevented by arrests, undercover investigations and a variety of other factors. Indeed, five of the eight plots were prevented from coming to fruition. Here are the three most noteworthy:

- **Gregory Lepsky**, a 20-year-old New Jersey resident, was arrested on February 21, 2017 and charged with attempting to provide material support to ISIS. Lepsky allegedly planned to detonate a pressure cooker and gunpowder in a crowded area in Manhattan. Officials also uncovered content on Lepsky’s personal computer revealing his alleged intention to commit violent acts on ISIS’s behalf, including an image of the ISIS flag, anti-Semitic cartoons, several images of semi-automatic rifles, and an article from AQAP’s Inspire magazine.
- **Vicente Adolfo Solano**, a 53-year-old Honduran citizen with temporary legal status, was arrested on October 20, 2017 and charged with attempting to detonate an explosive device in the food court of the Dolphin Mall, west of Miami. Court records indicate that Solano discussed his plot with an

informant he believed to be an ISIS operative. Solano purchased bomb-making materials and met two undercover FBI agents at a nearby hotel to assemble what he thought was a workable weapon.

- **Everitt Aaron Jameson**, a 26-year-old California native, was arrested on December 22, 2017 for allegedly planning an attack on San Francisco's Pier 39. While plotting his attack, Jameson reportedly told an undercover informant he wanted to use a vehicle and firearms in his attack. Agents seized firearms and ammunition, in addition to a handwritten letter signed by Abdallah Abu Everitt Ibn Gordon al-Amriki. Jameson, much like Saipov, ended his note with "Long live Isil, Long Live Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Allahu Akbar!"

2017 Attack Targets

Six individuals chose soft targets – densely populated public spaces with little to no security.

- Everitt Aaron Jameson planned to target San Francisco's Pier 39.
 - Akayed Ullah targeted the underground pathway connecting the Port Authority and Times Square subway stations.
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- Sayfullo Saipov targeted a bike path in lower Manhattan.
- Vicente Solano planned to target a mall food court in a local Miami mall.
- Gregory Lepsky planned to detonate his pressure cooker in a crowded area in Manhattan.

Only two of the eight plots targeted symbolic infrastructure; Joshua Cummings targeted an armed transit security officer, and Ali Kourani targeted Israel Defense Forces living in New York, as well as New-York-based U.S. military infrastructure.

Since 2014, the exploitation of soft targets has increased dramatically. In their propaganda, ISIS and al-Qaeda repeatedly encourage aspiring attackers to cause harm in whatever ways they can, focusing more on the mere act of killing, rather than the high-casualty impact of the plot. To do this, their propaganda advises readers to look towards soft targets, which typically have less security and are more accessible than symbolic targets.

Attack Methodology

Of the eight plots that took place in 2017, two involved vehicles, four involved homemade bombs, and two involved guns. Overall, attack methodology has been consistent with strategies recommended by mainstream terrorist propaganda like ISIS's Rumiya magazine, and Inspire magazine, published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

These magazines provide readers with instructions for orchestrating high-casualty attacks that are easy to plan (and often evade detection by law enforcement) because they involve non-traditional weapons like knives and vehicles.

These manuals are accessible online and can be downloaded discreetly on encrypted platforms.

Other Western Terror Attacks in 2017 — How Do They Compare?

Given that the West is a priority target for international terror groups, it is important to compare plots and attacks in the United States with attacks in other Western countries. Many of them resembled the U.S. plots, involving both non-conventional weapons and soft targets:

- March 2017 Westminster Bridge Ramming and Stabbing (United Kingdom)
- April 2017 Saint Petersburg Metro Bombing (Russia)
- April 2017 Stockholm Ramming (Sweden)
- May 2017 Manchester Bombing (United Kingdom)
- June 2017 London Bridge Ramming and Stabbing (United Kingdom)
- June 2017 Champs-Elysees Ramming (France)
- August 2017 Levallois-Perret Ramming (France)
- August 2017 Barcelona Ramming (Spain)
- September 2017 Edmonton Ramming and Stabbing (Canada)

Both the Saint Petersburg Metro and Manchester Arena attacks involved homemade bombs constructed with accessible, everyday materials, just like the one Akayed Ullah detonated in New York's Port Authority subway station.

This limited list of 2017 attacks is further proof that non-conventional weapons and soft targets are increasingly used by groups like Islamic State to inflict terror around the globe.

The Role of Propaganda in 2017 Plots

Although Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have taken steps to rid their platforms of extremist propaganda, official ISIS and al-Qaeda materials continue to inspire plots in the United States. Terrorists are moving off Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and onto encrypted platforms like [Telegram](#), where they are able to distribute information more freely. Five of the eight individuals involved in 2017

plots engaged with ISIS or al-Qaeda propaganda, including Robert Lorenzo Hester, Gregory Lepsky, Sayfullo Saipov, Akayed Ullah and Everitt Aaron Jameson.

Make a bomb in the kitchen of your Mom

There are two types of explosions:

First: Chemical explosion. This explosion causes great pressure that would kill living beings within a certain radius. Examples are all the military grade explosives such as TNT, C4 and RDX.

Second: Mechanical explosion. This results from the burning of an inflammable material within a confined space. An example is putting gunpowder inside an iron pipe with a small opening enough only for a fuse. When the gunpowder is ignited, great pressure results from the gunpowder turning into gases and which result in the exploding of the iron pipe, turning it into shrapnel flying at high speed.

I. Preparation of the explosive device:



1. Inflammable substance
2. Decoration lamp (what is normally used for Christmas trees)
3. Iron pipe

A. Preparation of the inflammable substance:

This substance is a mixture of two ingredients:

- The substance found in heads of matches
- Sugar

B. How to extract the inflammable substance:



1. Strike the head of the match softly with anything (here, we used a tube) to break up the inflammable substance.
2. Grind the substance and filter it to obtain a fine powder.
3. In the picture you will see the fine powder and you add to it sugar equivalent to 1/4 its quantity.
4. Mix the two substances until they become uniform in color.

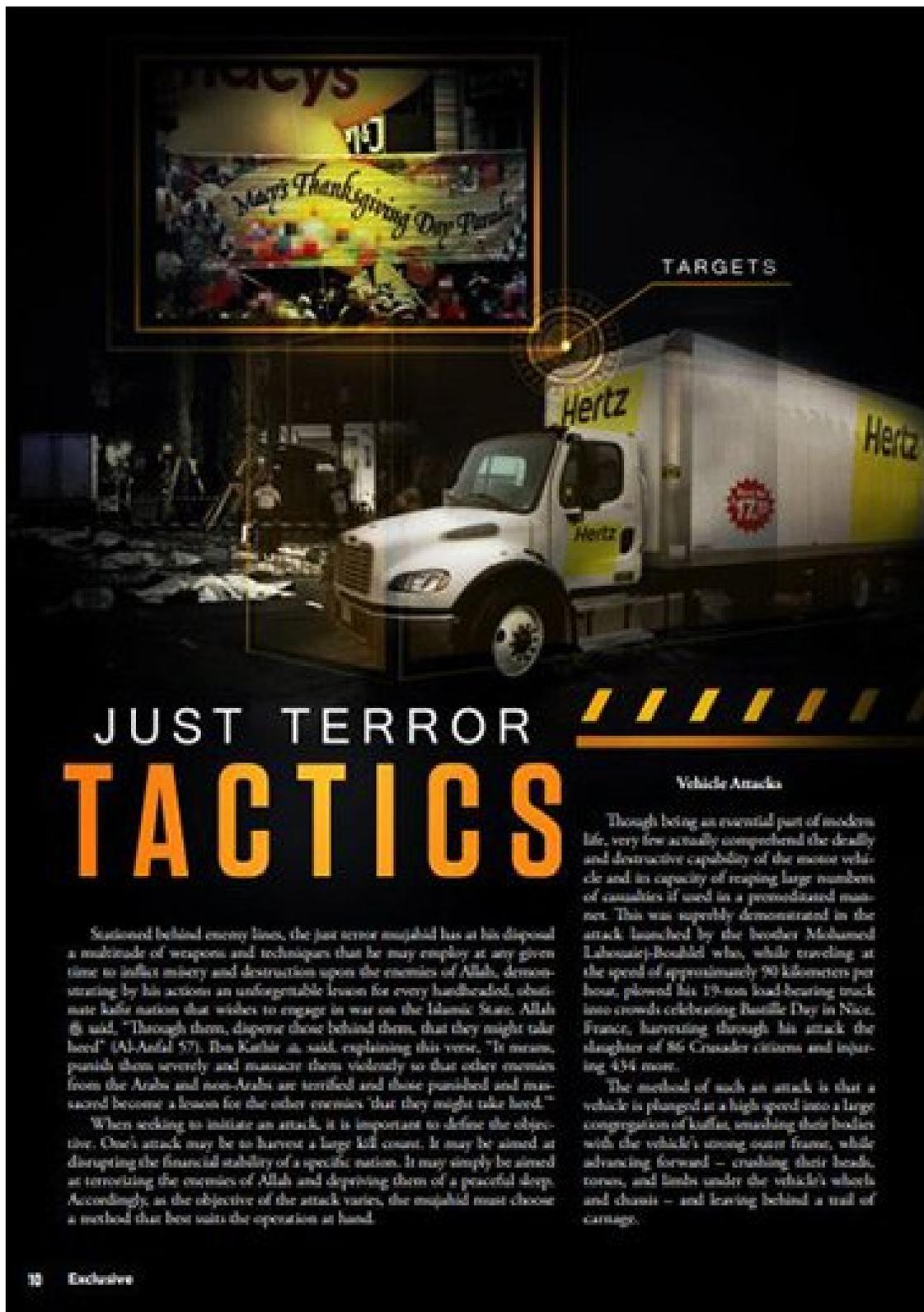
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“Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom,” Inspire Magazine Issue #1

This propaganda is not new. In 2010, under the direction of Yemeni-American citizen Anwar Awlaki, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released its first issue of

Inspire magazine, featuring a bomb-making resource manual, "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom," which offers step-by-step instructions for constructing an explosive device with easily obtainable materials.

- **Akayed Ullah's** pipe bomb, which he attempted to detonate on the morning of December 11th, 2017 in a subway station near the New York Port Authority bus terminal, matched the Inspire recipe precisely, including its recommendation for using Christmas tree lights as the electricity source to cause the explosion. Ullah failed to detonate the device properly and only injured himself in addition to lightly wounding three others.
- After discovering a newly constructed pressure cooker bomb in **Gregory Lepsky's** bedroom closet, the FBI found the same recipe on Lepsky's cell phone.



JUST TERROR TACTICS

Stationed behind enemy lines, the just terror mujahid has at his disposal a multitude of weapons and techniques that he may employ at any given time to inflict misery and destruction upon the enemies of Allah, demonstrating by his actions an undying lesson for every handicapped, obstinate kuffar nation that wishes to engage in war on the Islamic State. Allah ﷻ said, "Through them, dispense those behind them, that they might take heed" (Al-Anfal 57). Ibn Kathir ra, said, explaining this verse, "It means, punish them severely and massacre them violently so that other enemies from the Arabs and non-Arabs are terrified and those punished and massacred become a lesson for the other enemies that they might take heed."

When seeking to initiate an attack, it is important to define the objective. One's attack may be to harvest a large kill count, it may be aimed at disrupting the financial stability of a specific nation. It may simply be aimed at terrorizing the enemies of Allah and depriving them of a peaceful sleep. Accordingly, as the objective of the attack varies, the mujahid must choose a method that best suits the operation at hand.

TARGETS

Vehicle Attacks

Though being an essential part of modern life, very few actually comprehended the deadly and destructive capability of the motor vehicle and its capacity of reaping large numbers of casualties if used in a premeditated manner. This was superbly demonstrated in the attack launched by the brother Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel who, while traveling at the speed of approximately 90 kilometers per hour, plowed his 19-ton load-bearing truck into crowds celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, France, harvesting through his attack the slaughter of 86 Crusader citizens and injuring 434 more.

The method of such an attack is that a vehicle is plunged at a high speed into a large congregation of kuffar, smashing their bodies with the vehicle's strong outer frame, while advancing forward – crushing their heads, torsos, and limbs under the vehicle's wheels and chassis – and leaving behind a trail of carnage.

Page from "Just Terror Tactics" in Rumiya [Rome] Issue #3

ISIS has also proved itself to be a skillful propagandist. In November 2016, ISIS released the third issue of its propaganda magazine, Rumiya, which details instructions for readers considering conducting a vehicular ramming attack in an article titled, "Just Terror Tactics." Using the July 2016 ramming attack in Nice,

France, as an example, it provides detailed instructions for prospective attackers, from the type of vehicle they recommend using, to what should be written in the post-attack note. Investigators found that **Sayfullo Saipov** used this article as a guide for his attack on the bike path in lower Manhattan on October 31.

- The article explicitly recommends renting a “load-bearing truck...large in size, keeping in mind its controllability.” Saipov rented a pick-up truck from Home Depot.
- The article suggests targeting “pedestrian-congested streets” that offer “the ability to accelerate to a high speed.” Saipov chose the bike path in lower Manhattan, just off the Westside Highway.
- In preparation for the attack, the article reminds the reader to survey “the route for obstacles...doing the surveillance in an inconspicuous manner.” Saipov drove the route multiple times in the days before the attack.
- The article instructs the reader to remain inside the vehicle until the attack is over, and to have a “secondary weapon, such as a gun or knife” on hand. Saipov ended the attack after crashing his truck into a school bus. In a hurry, he left the knives he’d purchased in the vehicle and exited, brandishing a paintball and pellet gun.
- Lastly, the article outlines specifics for pledging allegiance to ISIS—“simply writing on dozens of sheets of paper ‘The Islamic State will remain!’ or ‘I am a soldier of the Islamic State!’ prior [to the attack].” Saipov’s note, which officials found near his vehicle, read: “No God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet...It [ISIS] will endure.”

When **Everitt Aaron Jameson** was arrested for planning a December 2017 attack on San Francisco’s Pier 39, law enforcement found that he had interacted with ISIS-affiliated propaganda that specifically encouraged attacks during the Christmas season. Below are some examples of images that were circulating on ISIS-sympathizer Telegram channels during that time.

From ISIS-Sympathizer Telegram Channel, December 6th, 2017: "SOON WE WILL HEART BREAKING NEWS ... CHRISTMAS"

From ISIS-Sympathizer Telegram Channel, December 19th, 2017: "Soon in your holidays (translated from Arabic) ... SOON IN CHRISTMAS ... what you see is not what you hear (translated from Arabic)"

From ISIS-Sympathizer Telegram Channel, December 14th, 2017: "WAIT FOR US ...we meet at christmas[sic] in newyork[sic] soon ... wait for us (translated from Arabic)"

From ISIS-Sympathizer Telegram Channel, December 8th, 2017: "SOON AT YOUR CHRISTMAS"

2017 Islamist Extremist Demographics

After analyzing the age and gender of arrested individuals, the Anti-Defamation League found that involved individuals were, on average, men older than 30.

I. Age — Older

In 2017, the average age of individuals linked to domestic terrorist activity inspired by Islamist extremist ideology was 30.3 years old. The average age has increased almost every year since 2012, and the 2017 average suggests that trend continues. Nearly half of those arrested were at least 30 years old, the oldest being 53. There were no minors arrested for domestic activity linked to Islamist extremism in 2016 or 2017.

The youngest individuals arrested in 2017 were two 18-year-olds: Zakaryia Abdin of Ladson, South Carolina, who tried to join ISIS overseas less than a year after he was granted parole in another terror-related case, and Kaan Sercan Damlarkaya, from Houston, Texas, who tried to join ISIS in Syria and shared detailed bomb-making instructions online.

The oldest individual, 53-year-old Vicente Adolfo Solano of Miami, Florida, planned to blow up the food court at a local mall during Black Friday sales.

II. Gender — Decreasing Female Involvement

Of the 29 individuals arrested in 2017 for domestic terrorist activity inspired by Islamist extremist ideology, only two – less than seven percent – were women. In 2014, that number was 40 percent, and just nine percent in 2015. Women made up only four percent of domestic Islamist extremists arrested in 2016 and seven percent in 2017.

- On January 16, 2017, authorities arrested 30-year-old U.S. citizen **Noor Salman** of Fort Pierce, Florida, on charges of aiding and abetting her husband, Pulse nightclub shooter Omar Mateen, and providing material support to the Islamic State. Salman was found not guilty on both charges on March 30, 2018; she could have faced life in prison had she been convicted.
- On December 13, 2017, 27-year-old U.S. citizen **Zoobia Shahnaz** was arrested for sending \$85,000 to ISIS using Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. If convicted, Shahnaz faces a maximum sentence of 30 years for bank fraud and 20 years for each count of money laundering.

ISLAMIST EXTREMIST PLOTS 2001-2017

Methodology

The Anti-Defamation League has analyzed publicly accessible court documents dating from 2002 for arrests and charges concerning crimes in the U.S. motivated by Islamist extremist ideology.

In this section, we include plots that satisfy the following criteria: a plot that turned into an attack, or, in the case of foiled plots, an aspiring attacker who took concrete steps to advance the plot prior to being arrested by obtaining weapons, conducting target surveillance, or discussing plans with a co-conspirator or undercover informant. We do not include verbal or written threats in our tabulations of plots, unless actionable steps were taken to advance that threatening language.

Additionally, we limited our analyses to plots motivated by foreign terror organizations like al-Qaeda or Islamic State, or by the Salafi-jihadist ideology that many of these groups espouse.^[4] It is worth noting that some attackers' motivations were difficult to assess based on the available information. As investigations develop, our assessments may change.

While analyzing the data, we encountered plots that only partially met the requirements. We have listed these exclusions in an appendix at the end of the report, which also includes the 127 individuals whose actions met our criteria, along with brief descriptions of their plots.

Lastly, with few exceptions like the shootings at Fort Hood (2009) and Garland, Texas (2015), the plots described here were inspired by foreign terror organizations, not explicitly directed by a specific terror group or member of its leadership. All plots targeted locations in the United States.

Analyses

Since 2002, 127 individuals in the United States have been implicated for their involvement in 98 plots or attacks motivated by Islamist extremist ideology. During that same timeframe, 94 incidents of right-wing-related terror plots or attacks in the United States resulted in 161 individual arrests – approximately 1.7 people arrested per incident. This demonstrates that right-wing terror plots or attacks have involved more people, on average, than Islamist extremist plots or attacks, which have increasingly been carried out by lone actors.

Additionally, while only seven percent – or 7 – of the Islamist extremist attacks were lethal, 23 percent of the right-wing extremist attacks – or 22 – were deadly. However, since 2009, the lethality of both Islamist and right-wing attacks has increased dramatically – there were no lethal Islamist extremist attacks prior to 2009, and 17 of the 22 lethal right-wing attacks occurred between 2009 and 2017. This is, in part, because extremists are resorting to simpler methods and simpler targets; on the other hand, historical factors also explain upticks in both categories of extremist attacks.

Demographics

Of the 127 individuals involved in Islamist extremist-inspired plots since 2002, 66 were born in the United States – approximately 52 percent of the total. Twenty-

five of those individuals, or roughly 20 percent, were naturalized citizens, and 23 were lawful permanent or temporary residents – approximately 18 percent. Five of the individuals were foreign citizens, and eight were in the United States without documentation. This means that 90 percent of the individuals involved in plots were U.S. citizens, lawful permanent or temporary residents, or in the United States with documentation.

Plot Locations

Most of the plots targeted specific individuals or places. Of the 83 specified targets, 22 were located in New York, and 20 specifically targeted New York City. Florida saw the second highest number with seven plots, Texas had six, and California and Washington D.C. each had five plots.

When broken down per capita (one plot per every 100,000 people), Washington, D.C., saw the highest number of plots, followed by New York, Kansas, Massachusetts, Washington and North Carolina.

The remaining 15 plots involved targets spread across multiple states, or unspecified locations like an unnamed stadium or U.S.-based shopping mall.

Plot Targets

After categorizing the 83 plots into either symbolic (military, government, religious, financial infrastructure) or soft targets (transportation, shopping malls, public squares, universities, nightclubs/bars, other tourist attractions), we found that the focus on soft targets has increased significantly since 2014.

Symbolic targets shared the stage with soft targets between 2001 and 2008, but were most common from 2008 to 2014.

Since 2014, the majority of plots have focused on soft targets. In September 2014, the late ISIS spokesman and senior leader, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, released a speech titled, "Indeed, Your Lord Is Ever Watchful," calling on ISIS supporters to kill non-believers in Western countries "in any manner or way however it may be." Since then, ISIS-inspired attacks have targeted U.S. universities, shopping malls, nightclubs, bike paths and public transportation.

Based on these trends, it seems likely that future Islamist extremist-inspired plots will focus on soft targets rather than symbolic targets.

Evolution since 2001:

Terrorism in the past 17 years has evolved in tandem with major global developments, including technological advancements, wars, civil unrest, and an ever-shifting political economy. When analyzing terror plots in the U.S., it's important to understand historical context.

2001-2014

Immediately following the attacks of September 11th 2001, al-Qaeda became a much-cited inspiration for terror plots.

Between 2002 and 2008, 33 individuals were involved in 16 plots, meaning at least two individuals on average were involved in each plot. This is likely because people were radicalizing through physical networks at the time, such as family, friends, colleagues, fellow inmates, etc.

- **2004 Herald Square bomb plot:** Friends Shahawar Matin Siraj and James Elshafay were arrested in August 2004 for plotting to bomb the Herald Square subway station in midtown Manhattan and possibly other locations around the city.
- **2005 Los Angeles bomb plot:** In August 2005, four men were indicted on terrorism charges for conspiring to attack military facilities in Los Angeles. The men were ex-convicts and formed the group, *Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh*.
- **Liberty City 7:** In June 2006, seven men were indicted for plotting to blow up the Sears Tower in Chicago and the Miami FBI building.
- **Fort Dix Six:** In May 2007, six men were arrested for plotting to attack Fort Dix, New Jersey on al-Qaeda's behalf.
- **2007 JFK Airport bomb plot:** In June 2007, four men were charged with conspiring to attack JFK International Airport and blow up its jet fuel supply tanks and pipeline. The group met through the Trinidad-based organization *Jammat al-Muslimeen*.

Beginning in 2008, individuals began to plot attacks independently, rather than through networks. By 2010, the number of individuals almost equaled the total number of plots for that year, between 2014 and 2017, 51 people were involved in 47 plots. In both 2016 and 2017, the number of plots matched the number of individuals involved.

Self-radicalized lone actor attackers pose a particular threat to law enforcement. They are harder to trace, and they do not operate under the direction of any designated terror group, which means their motivations tend to be less clear, and their actions less predictable.

Eight of the ten plots in 2008 and 2009 were inspired by al-Qaeda, a trend that coincides with the group's April 2008 offensive in Iraq, during which the group urged fighters to attack U.S. forces wherever possible.

These plots against U.S. military infrastructure reflected that goal:

- **May 2009:** Four men – James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams and Laguerre Payen – plotted to shoot down military planes flying out of an Air National Guard base in Newburgh, New York, and blow up two synagogues in Riverdale, New York.
- **June 2009:** Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad opened fire on soldiers in front of a United States military recruiting office in Little Rock, Arkansas. He killed Private William Long and injured Private Quinton Ezeagwula.
- **July 2009:** Daniel Boyd, the ringleader of an alleged Raleigh-based terror cell, was arrested for plotting to attack the Marine base at Quantico. Boyd reviewed maps and collected a weapon he intended to use during the attack, as well as ammunition.
- **November 2009:** Under the influence of the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula leader, Anwar al-Awlaki, Nidal Hassan shot 13 people and injured more than 30 at Fort Hood, Texas.

For years, U.S. foreign policy strategies prioritized al-Qaeda targets and significantly weakened the group by eliminating its core leadership, including Osama bin Laden. Al-Qaeda became increasingly decentralized, which may have contributed to the decrease in domestic plots between 2011 and 2014.

Even amidst these structural losses, al-Qaeda maintained a strong online presence through its English-language magazine, Inspire.

As al-Qaeda weakened, Islamic State rose from its ashes in Iraq, and in 2011, began to spread into Syria at the start of that country's civil war.

2014-Present

After taking Mosul in June 2014, Islamic State made international headlines and gained notoriety as both a local insurgency and international terror group.

Unsurprisingly, ISIS was cited as the inspiration for 20 of the 21 domestic terror attack plots in the United States in 2015, including the Garland Texas shooting, the San Bernardino shooting, the Chattanooga shooting and the UC Merced stabbing attack.

The sharp rise in plots from 2014 to 2015 illustrates ISIS's profound influence on people living in the United States. Twenty of the 25 individuals involved in 2015 plots were United States citizens. The remaining five were either lawful permanent or temporary residents or naturalized citizens.

To date, the Garland, Texas shooting is the only domestic attack the Islamic State helped coordinate.

Conclusion: Lone Actors and Encryption

Telegram has emerged as the platform of choice for groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, eliminating the need for recruits to receive training abroad, or through virtual middlemen. Instead, individuals looking to carry out attacks can find incentive, bomb-making manuals and suggested targets on a single Telegram channel.

The post below, from a popular private Telegram channel, "LM [Lone Mujahid] Worldwide," illustrates how ISIS and its sympathizers inspire followers citing battles over former ISIS territories. If fighters are unable to travel, the post

suggests they remain local and attack using a car, knife, or Molotov cocktail. Lastly, it implies that followers cannot sit idly while their brothers suffer the coalition “bombing, killing and destruction” abroad; rather, they must take revenge on the ‘crusaders’ and ‘apostates’ in the West.^[5]



!!!

■ TO MY BROTHERS EVERYWHERE! The supporters of the Islamic State!

Everything you need to take revenge/defend your religion, the Mujahideen & the Muslims of Mousl, Raqqa, Marawi & elsewhere around the globe is in this channel and others like it.

🔴 WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR TO TAKE ACTION??

Put your trust in Allah and STRIKE!

If you can't make a bomb because family, freinds spies etc. are watching or suspect you.

THEN 📌

Take a KNIFE

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

SOUND BOMBS

CAR at night and attack the disbelievers, tourists, crusaders, jews, police, soldiers of taghut, embassies of the disbelievers & the enemies of Allah in whatever country you are in!

This is the time my brothers, for our leader Ameerul Mu'mineen >عظمه الله< said in his recent speech:

"O Muslims! You shouldn't let the crusaders and the apostates live in peace and happiness in their homeland while your brothers suffer the bombing, killing and destruction."

SO 📌

■ PUT YOUR TRUST IN ALLAH!

■ PREPARE YOUR WEAPONS!

■ MAKE A PLAN!

■ SELECT YOUR TARGET!

■ DONT TALK TO NO ONE!

The following individuals were not included in our 2002-2017 data for reasons listed below:

- **Hesham Mohamed Hadayet** was posthumously implicated for firing at and killing two people at the El Al ticket counter at the Los Angeles airport on July 4, 2002. He was not included in our data because he was likely politically motivated and did not express an explicit Islamist extremist ideology.
- **Ronald Allen Grecula** was arrested in May 2005 for trying to build a bomb for al-Qaeda in exchange for custody of his children by having the undercover informant kill his wife, or plant drugs near her home. Grecula was excluded from our data because his motivations stemmed from his hatred for the United States and his desperation to regain custody of his children.
- **Naveed Afzal Haq** shot at six women and killed one at the Jewish Federation building in downtown Seattle in July 2006. Because authorities labeled the attack as a hate crime, and Haq's actions were not linked to an international terror group, we excluded him from the data.
- **Zale Thompson** attacked four police officers in Queens, New York, in October 2014, leaving one critically injured. Police shot and killed Thompson, who expressed anti-white, anti-Christian and pro-Islamist extremist sentiments on social media. Because Thompson's attack did not appear to be solely motivated by Islamist extremist ideology, we did not include him in the data.
- **Joshua Ryne Goldberg** distributed bomb-making techniques online and posed as an Australian ISIS member using the online persona "Australi Witness" in September 2015. Because he was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and adopted many contradictory personas, posing as feminists and white supremacists as well as ISIS members, we did not include him in the data.
- **Clark Calloway** expressed pro-ISIS views on Facebook, while also expressing his desire to attack police and start a race war. He was arrested in May 2017, but because authorities did not charge him with terrorism offenses, and his

race-war plot was not solely motivated by an Islamist extremist ideology, or by an allegiance to a foreign terror organization, he was excluded from our data.

- **Amour Ftouhi** stabbed a police officer at Bishop International Airport in Flint, Michigan, in June 2017. At the time of the attack, Ftouhi expressed anger over the deaths of people in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, but law enforcement did not link his motivations to a particular foreign terror organization. In March 2018, federal prosecutors added a terrorism charge to Ftouhi's case after he declared his support for al-Qaeda and its late leader, Osama bin-Laden. His case will be included in future analyses of 2017 plots and attacks.
- **Mahad Abdiaziz Abdiraham** stabbed two people inside the Mall of America in November 2017. No motive was determined at the time of the stabbing; however, during his plea hearing in January 2018, he declared he had planned the attack on ISIS's behalf. His case will be included in future analyses of 2017 plots and attacks.

The 127 individuals included in our 2002-2017 data analysis are available below:

NOTE: The Anti-Defamation League acknowledges that the following individuals are in different stages of the legal process, if they were not killed carrying out an attack. Each individual, unless explicitly proven guilty, must be assumed to be an alleged suspect in the plots detailed below.

FOOTNOTES

NOTE: ADL has shifted from using the term "Islamic Extremism" to "Islamist Extremism." "Islamic" is generally understood to refer the religion of Islam as a whole, including scripture, tradition, religious practice and culture. Previously, ADL took the position that "Islamic" adequately encompassed the full spectrum of motivations that energized groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, etc., particularly in light of how those groups manipulate scripture and tradition in their stated objectives.

Our thinking has since evolved. We have chosen to use the term “Islamism” and “Islamist” to refer to the specific belief that “Islamic law or Islamic values should play a central role in public life ... [that] Islam has things to say about how politics should be conducted, how the law should be applied, and how other people – not just themselves – should conduct themselves morally.” [Source] Some Islamists, but not all, are militant or violent extremists. Our report focuses specifically on Islamist extremists, whose goal is power. We strongly condemn the means these groups use in their attempts to gain power, and we will continue to call out their extremism. We will do so by terming it “Islamist Extremism” to more accurately characterize their ultimate objective – political power – and to set them apart from the vast majority of the world’s Muslims.

Source cited: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

[1] We referenced the immigration statuses provided by the Department of Justice to categorize each of the 127 individuals.

[2] According to the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) passed in 1996, material support includes: weapons, safe houses, training, communications equipment, financial services, and training to groups formally designated as a foreign terror organization by the Secretary of State with the concurrence of the Attorney General and Secretary of the Treasury (Kraft, Michael B. and Edward Marks. U.S. Counterterrorism: From Nixon to Trump: Key Challenges, Issues, and Responses. Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. Page 33).

[3] As of July 2016, Jabhat al-Nusra formally broke all ties with al-Qaeda and renamed itself Hayat Tahrir al-Sham after merging with other jihadist groups.

[4] Salafi jihadism strives to conserve Islamic laws and values as they were in the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Unlike affiliated political and puritanical organizations, Salafi jihadists encourage the use of violence to implement their beliefs and establish an Islamic State. Christians, Jews and the West are the

common enemy. Salafi jihadists also justify violence against other Muslims (including civilians) if they are takfir [declared impure].

[5] The term 'apostate' is a Qur'anic term describing Muslims who have renounced the Islamic faith, while 'Crusader' is generally used by Salafi jihadists to refer to dominating 'Crusader powers,' like the United States and many European countries, or the 7th-century prophecy detailing the destruction of 'Roman Crusaders' (a modern front for Jews and Christians) in Dabiq, Syria. Indeed, many Salafi-jihadist groups repeatedly refer to this prophecy in their propaganda. ISIS, in particular, maintains that the struggle portrayed in this prophecy has not stopped and continues into modern day.