

Study finds ideology as important an inspiration to American jihadists as affiliation with Islamic state group

December 7 2016

A new study from the George Washington University's Program on Extremism found that American jihadists continue to draw inspiration from a variety of groups other than the Islamic State group (IS). Many are influenced by a blend of ideas and messages from different, often rival, organizations. These findings suggest that, in the West, identification with Salafi-jihadism, the ideology that advocates for violent jihad to establish an Islamic state, is equally as important as affiliation with a specific terrorist organization.

The report, "Not Just the Caliphate: Non-Islamic State-Related Jihadist Terrorism in America," found that of the 178 people charged in America with jihadist-inspired terrorist offenses, 79 were unrelated to the Islamic State [group](#) and were primarily committed to al-Shabaab, Al Qaida and the Taliban. The study is the most comprehensive and up-to-date of its kind.

"While IS is undoubtedly the most popular group among American jihadists, it is by no means the only game in town," said Sarah Gilkes, author of the paper who conducted the research while a fellow at the GW Program on Extremism. "No matter which group they are inspired by, they all espouse a form of Salafi-jihadist ideology."

Using legal documents, media reports and interviews with journalists and people affiliated with those who were charged, Ms. Gilkes found that the

overwhelming majority of individuals in the U.S. with non-Islamic State-related charges, 82 percent, are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Additional demographic information on the subset includes:

- The average age of individuals is 29 (compared to 26 for IS-related charges)
- Nearly 96 percent are male
- Activities of those charged were located in 22 states
- 28 percent converted to Islam

The report recommends that law enforcement and policymakers create counter-messaging campaigns and policies that address the appeal of the global jihadist movement in order to more successfully counter [violent extremism](#) in the U.S.

"Most aspiring militants at the grassroots level in the West care little about the divisions between the Islamic State and al Qaida, they just want to fight jihad" said Lorenzo Vidino, director of the GW Program on Extremism. "What attracts them is a common ideology, a blend that takes from all jihadists groups and ideologues without much distinction."

The research suggests that Americans who radicalize may care little about the philosophy or tactical differences among jihadists' organizations and their affiliation is often based on circumstance, opportunity and serendipity. Because of this, focusing on a single terrorist group may risk misunderstanding the full threat posed by the global jihadist movement.

More information: "Not Just the Caliphate: Non-Islamic State-Related Jihadist Terrorism in America," [cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu.../files/downloads/Not%20Just%20The%20Caliphate_0.pdf](https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Not%20Just%20The%20Caliphate_0.pdf)

Provided by George Washington University

Citation: Study finds ideology as important an inspiration to American jihadists as affiliation with Islamic state group (2016, December 7) retrieved 20 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-12-ideology-important-american-jihadists-affiliation.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.