

Study finds American ISIS fighters likely to be U.S. born, engaged in society

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A new study from the Chicago Project on Security and Threats at the University of Chicago and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Counter-Terrorism Policy Center finds striking patterns among individuals in the United States considered ISIS supporters, including that a large number are U.S.-born citizens and engaged in society.

"The American Face of ISIS" challenges widely held assumptions that ISIS supporters are uneducated, isolated and unemployed, while finding almost no refugees among the group studied. The report focuses on 112 people who perpetrated offenses or were indicted by federal authorities for ISIS-related offenses.

Produced by CPOST, a leading U.S.-based research center on international terrorism, and ASPI, a non-partisan Australian think tank, the report is one of the most comprehensive non-governmental studies of such individuals conducted.

"The terrorist threat to America is changing. New data show how the threat comes almost exclusively from American citizens already within our borders, not refugees or foreign nationals," said Robert Pape, director of CPOST and a professor of political science at the University.

His co-authors on the report include Jean Decety, the Irving B. Harris Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at UChicago, and Keven Ruby, CPOST senior research associate.

The research looked in detail at 104 individuals who were indicted by the U.S. Department of Justice for ISIS-related crimes between March 2014 and August 2016 and eight individuals who died either perpetrating a domestic attack on behalf of ISIS or fighting for ISIS in Syria.

The report findings include:

- As a group, the individuals mirror average Americans more than people think. The common perception of a terrorist as a young, single, unemployed, disenfranchised male is wrong: The average age of the 112 individuals is 27 years old, with almost a third over 30; more than 40 percent were in a relationship, with a third being married; while nearly two-thirds had been to college.

- Three-quarters had jobs or were in school—figures similar to the U.S. population as a whole.
- The vast majority of the 112 individuals are U.S. citizens. Nearly two-thirds were born in the United States, and nearly 20 percent were naturalized citizens. This is in sharp contrast to individuals who had been indicted for al Qaeda-related offenses between 1997 and 2011; only 55 percent of those were U.S. citizens.
- Even more striking, almost none of the individuals is a refugee. Out of 112, only three had refugee status—two from Bosnia and one from Iraq. The latter came to the U.S. as a refugee in 2009 and was radicalized sometime thereafter.
- A significant proportion includes converts from outside established Muslim communities. About 30 percent of the [individuals](#) are converts to Islam, including 43 percent of U.S.-born indictees.

ISIS propaganda videos played a central role in the radicalization of indictees, with 83 percent having watched them, including execution videos and lectures by terrorist leaders.

For policymakers, Pape said the report shows shutting the U.S. borders to refugees and visitors from Islamic countries won't prevent support for ISIS and could blind authorities to real threats. Officials need to understand ISIS's propaganda strategy in the U.S. and target its methods for driving recruitment and radicalization, he added.

"Above all, we must not play into their hands by confirming their twisted narratives," Pape said.

More information: The American face of ISIS: Analysis of ISIS-related terrorism in the US March 2014–August 2016.

[www.aspi.org.au/publications/t ... arch-2014august-2016](http://www.aspi.org.au/publications/t...arch-2014august-2016)

Provided by University of Chicago

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