

THE INPUT: PATHWAYS TO JIHAD

A Thematic Analysis of 310 Cases

National Security Programme



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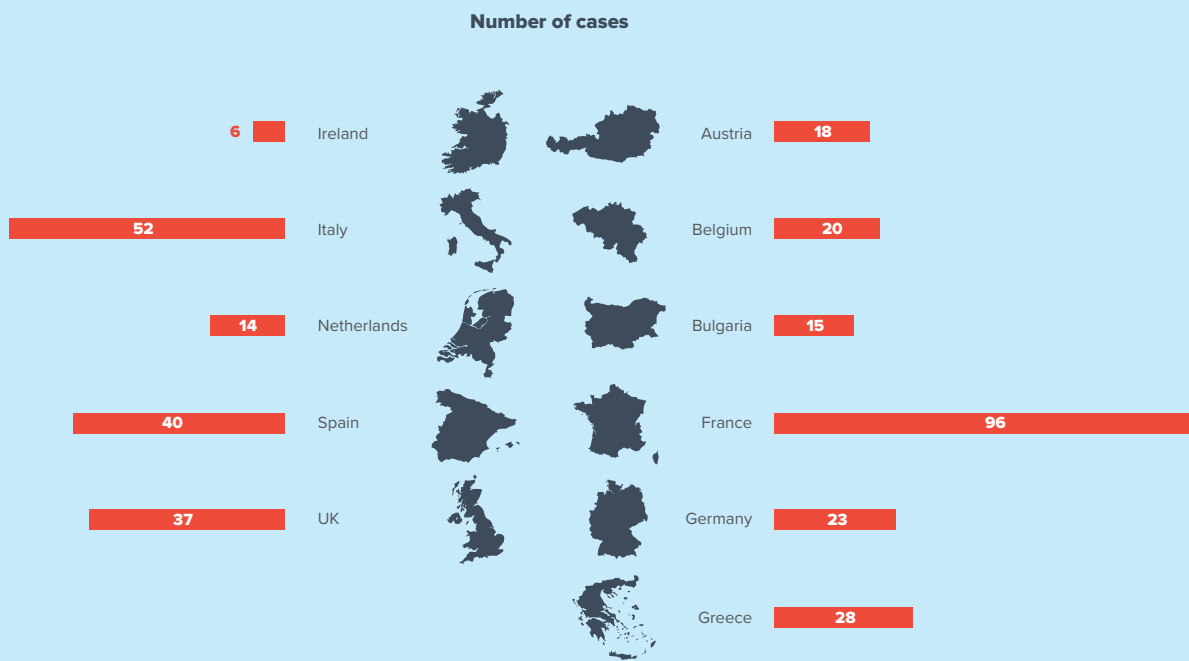
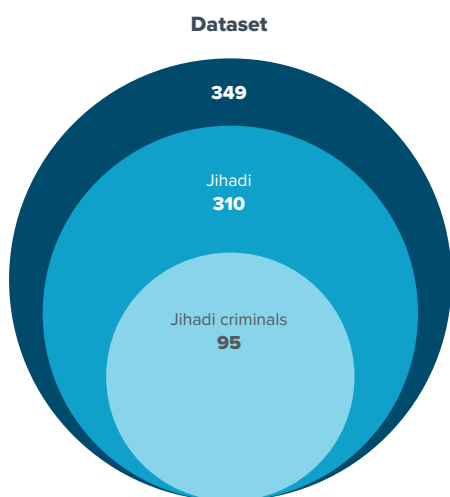
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INTRODUCTION

For the last year and a half, GLOBSEC has been studying the phenomenon of a crime-terror nexus in Europe.¹ Its research team has built up a dataset of 348 individuals arrested for terrorism offences, expelled for alleged terrorist connections, or who died while staging terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015, the peak year of European jihadism. The dataset covers the 11 European countries, all within the EU, who reported the highest number of terrorism arrestees to EUROPOL (European Police Office).²

The work has been geared towards establishing whether the nexus exists and if so, then researching its nature and strength.³ The researchers deployed 11 experienced national teams who worked on available data (open source, official documents, personal interviews with stakeholders) to map out the European crime-terror nexus. The main research tool is a 120+ variable codebook deployed to analyse each case of a terrorist included in our dataset.

As a result, the research team was able to establish that out of the 310 jihadists⁴ included in the database, 95, or 31%, had a previous criminal past, indicated by a pre-2015 arrest for any offence, with the French subset recording the most criminals (44 of the individuals, or 46%, have a criminal past preceding their terrorist involvement). Data show it is a male phenomenon, comprising 264, or 88%, of the individuals in our database. The European jihadists are not youngsters, as their average age is 34 (average male: 29; average female: 34; average “criminal turned terrorist”: 34), nor are they very well educated (the research team only knows of 72 who “had some high school” experience, and hardly any attended university). More than 53% had been unemployed in 2015 (with this figure rising up to 70% in the “criminals turned terrorists” subset).



1 See more: <https://www.globsec.org/projects/criminals-terrorists-back/>

2 See EUROPOL's 2016 for data on the threat of terrorism to Europe: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/europol_tesat_2016.pdf

3 See more on this in GLOBSEC's midterm report from the project at hand: https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis.pdf

4 Another 40 terrorists were affiliated with non-jihadist organisations in Europe (e.g., the Greek far left, the Irish dissident republicans or the PKK). These cases effectively formed the project's control group.



European jihad is

male.



about travelling to and returning from a foreign conflict.

young but not teenage or adolescent.



slow to mature as radicalization fueling it often takes years.

homegrown and naturalised, but also coming from outside of Europe.



a family affair + a team effort.

criminal but not “petty” criminal.



unemployed.

financed by a variety of different, and predominantly, legal means.

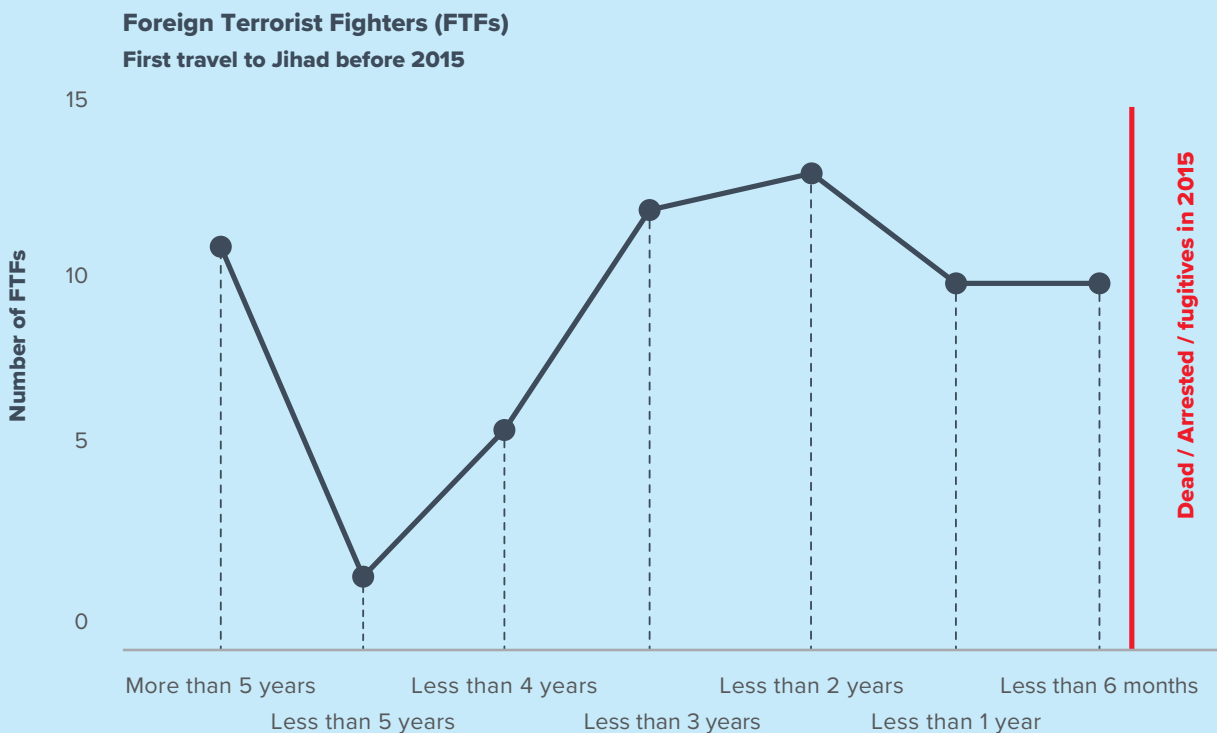


uneducated.

INPUT AND OUTPUT

The research team was able to establish a lot of facts and paint a macro picture of European jihad. At the same time, however, the research did not systematically cover the issues as to why and how these individuals went from being, in most cases, impressionable and troubled young men to a few years later, emerging in the jihadist ranks either in Europe or in the Middle East. On one hand, it is possible to say that the patterns and profiles do not exist, are hard to establish, or difficult to come by, but on the other, there is the ability to at least **map out the “pathways”** of progression. Consequently, it is more than useful to look for patterns amongst these progressions and on the basis of this exercise, suggest ways in which the West could address the **“input” side of European jihadism**, i.e., the motivations for joining global jihad while living in Europe.

GLOBSEC crime-terror nexus dataset, one subset of 80 foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) offers the most vivid representation of this “output”, as some of these individuals had been at the proverbial tip of the spear of European jihad while plotting, preparing, and executing high-profile ISIL terrorist attacks in Europe. This is especially relevant in the context of U.S. President Donald Trump’s call for European Allies “to take back over 800 ISIL fighters that we [the US] captured in Syria and put them on trial”.⁵ The majority of these 80 fighters are EU citizens and their fates are very diverse. At least 19 FTFs died abroad, mostly in drone strikes or while committing a suicide attack. More than a third (28) are returnees—individuals who were born in or at least spent most of their lives in an EU country before going abroad to join a terrorist organisation and arrested upon their return. Some of the arrested cannot be described



A lot already is known about the **“output”**, i.e., the actions and words of European jihadists when they complete the process of radicalisation and join the ranks of a given terrorist entity. In the case of the

as returnees since they were caught between their home countries and the war zone—for attempting to enter Syria again, not returning to Europe. Not all of the FTFs were successful in travelling to the conflict

⁵ B. Britton, “Trump tells Europe to take back ISIS fighters, warns they could be released,” *CNN*, 22February 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/17/politics/donald-trump-isis-fighters-europe-intl/index.html>

zone on their first attempt. In addition to the 80 fighters who journeyed to Syria or Iraq at least once, the database has 17 men and women who failed on their first attempt. They were arrested in one of the following three countries: Turkey, Bulgaria, or the UK.

Concerning their group affiliation, ISIL was by far the most popular choice. ISIL-affiliated individuals comprise 50% of the database, compared to 5% of fighters for Al-Shabaab and 10% for Al Qaeda-affiliated groups. In acquiring travel knowledge, the individuals mostly relied on veteran foreign fighters, family members, friends, or the connections they were able to establish in mosques or prisons. Our database has 11 veterans who started travelling to fight abroad before 2010. As expected, since the break out of the Syrian war the numbers of these fighters have grown significantly. Such intense travelling results in the fact that almost half of the FTFs (34) in our database can be described as seasoned fighters because they made multiple trips to different conflict zones, with 9 of them having travelled more than 5 times before 2015.

Moving between various organisations is not at all uncommon. In fact, a quarter shifted allegiances between at least two groups, usually away from Jabhat al-Nusra towards ISIL. The roles they played in these terrorist organisations vary from drivers and logisticians to mid-level commanders. Interestingly, the 9 highest-ranking individuals had previous criminal careers in Europe. Their offences ranged from petty crime, such as theft, to fraud and attempted murder. Moreover, three had been arrested for terrorism offences at least once before 2015. One, apart from being a former French army soldier, was also involved in smuggling cocaine, and then rose to a senior position in ISIL.

This paper, produced by GLOBSEC but within the scope of a new project developed in cooperation with the Counter Extremism Project (CEP), is our first step in the process of studying the “input” side. It is a thematic analysis of the pathways towards jihadism by 310 individuals included in the dataset, which will be followed by a more detailed study of 60 jihadists from 5 European countries. What follows is the introductory section, in which the authors lay out the issue at hand and describe their methodology. This is then followed by the analysis of themes that emerged from their reading of the data on 310 jihadists in the crime-terror nexus database. The recommendations section forms the last part of this paper.

THE WHY?

There is ample literature, and opinion, on “why” people join terrorist organisations. John Horgan identified the following “risk factors for involvement in terrorism”: emotional vulnerability, dissatisfaction with the current reality, identification with victims whom one later wants to avenge, perception of violence as a useful and not an immoral tool, reward-seeking, and kinship and social ties to individuals involved in political violence.⁶

Marc Sageman dispelled myths in which terrorists are said to be poor, brainwashed, naïve, or frustrated, and it is these social realities or features of their character that propel them towards involvement in political violence.⁷ In his view, terrorist involvement happens when living in a diaspora and moral outrage related to the violence the West perpetrates “against Islam/Muslims” is internalised and, consequently, externalised via interaction with a radicalising “bunch of guys”, i.e., peers/colleagues/friends of the given future jihadi.⁸

Gilles Kepel, writing more recently, agreed with Sageman while studying the history of jihadism in France: “lost young people, both searching in different ways for an absolute, were hooked by Salafism online. It offered them [...] the warmth of a peer group that ended their loneliness, a preliminary condition for the exaltation of an ideal destined to ‘change their lives’”.⁹ This change happens through involvement in political violence but “not for personal motives but for group motives [...] It is not conformity, compliance, or obedience. It is a normal, natural, automatic, and direct consequence of the everyday process of categorising oneself as a member of a group: within this context, one’s identity is the group identity”.¹⁰ The group could be formed and meet almost anywhere—Kepel mentioned a particular prison as an “incubator” of jihadism in France¹¹—and have been influenced by external, if not foreign events, i.e., in the case of France, the Algerian civil war or the arrival of Saudi or Saudi-educated Salafi preachers in the country.¹² Mix that with “marginalisation”, “alienation”, and a keenness to try something “new”, have an “adventure”, obtain

“a sense of belonging”,¹³ or “missionary” zeal and one might stumble upon a possible candidate for a jihadist.¹⁴

All of the above should be well known amongst terrorism experts and stakeholders involved in countering terrorism. However, this does not solve the puzzle as to “who becomes a terrorist”, as **there still does not exist a “profile”**. Thus, decades of inaccurate generalisations led to an establishment of some other “conventional wisdom”, which effectively states there should be no further generalisations. Nonetheless, as stressed by John Horgan, the profile(s) might not exist but **“it is possible to understand some pathways for individuals.”**¹⁵ This approach guided the authors in their quest to map out why and how the individuals included in their dataset ended up arrested for terrorism offences or staging terrorist attacks during the peak year of European jihadism.

The authors encountered the reasons cited by the aforementioned Horgan, Sageman, or Kepel as to “why” individuals gravitate towards jihadist terrorism while collating data for the crime-terror nexus dataset. The codebook they utilised for data collection included variables and provided space for elaborations on behalf of the local research teams related to the issue at hand, namely:

- ▶ Connections to other individuals involved in the jihadist movement, be they veterans, ideologues, or arrestees, including family members.
- ▶ Place of origin of a given individual plus its connection to the map of national/European/global jihadism.
- ▶ Individual issues, such as an experience of discrimination or broadly defined “oppression”, that could have contributed to one’s evolution towards jihadism.

6 See: J. Horgan, “From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 618, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 84-5.

7 M. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad. Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 47-8.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

9 G. Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 109.

10 M. Sageman, *Misunderstanding terrorism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p. 115.

11 Kepel, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

13 R. Verkaik, *Jihadi John: The Making of a Terrorist*, Oneworld Publications, 2016, loc. 3673 (ebook edition).

14 M. Weiss, H. Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, New York: Regan Arts, 2016, pp. 167-8.

15 J. Stern, J. M. Berger, “ISIS and the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon,” *The Atlantic*, 8 March 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/isis-and-the-foreign-fighter-problem/387166/>.

- ▶ History of personal problems that might have turned a given individual into a prime target for experienced jihadist recruiters.
- ▶ Links with the criminal world (crime-terror nexus) and one's willingness to redeem themselves via their embrace of jihadism.
- ▶ Offline vs online element of one's radicalisation—which was dominant?

These six pillars, of which especially 1, 3, 4, correspond with the most well-known explanations as to “why” people get involved with terrorist groups, organizations or networks, forms the bedrock of our future analysis of the issue of potential pathways. The data collected within the scope of these six sets of variables has been thematically analysed by the GLOBSEC research team for the totality of the 310 jihadists included in the existing dataset. **The reading of the data and the subsequent identifying existing data patterns allowed the authors to identify the following themes of key importance to the issue of pathways of European jihadists.**¹⁶ These are the following:

- 1. Dissatisfaction and outrage as the source of recruitment into global jihad.**
- 2. Radicalism or “thuggish” nihilism as an antechamber into global jihad.**
- 3. Previous criminal involvement as a springboard into the global jihad.**
- 4. Prison as a key but understudied and misunderstood recruitment hub for European jihadists.**
- 5. “Glocal” nature of jihadism.**
- 6. Role of the family in the process of radicalisation.**
- 7. The ongoing inflammatory character of certain places of worship as hubs of recruitment into global jihad.**
- 8. European jihadism functioning as a conveyor belt sending fighters towards conflict zones in the broader MENA region.**

On their own and at first look, these might not seem significantly novel but, as will be shown, the individual trajectories of given jihadists within these pathways are less straightforward than previously

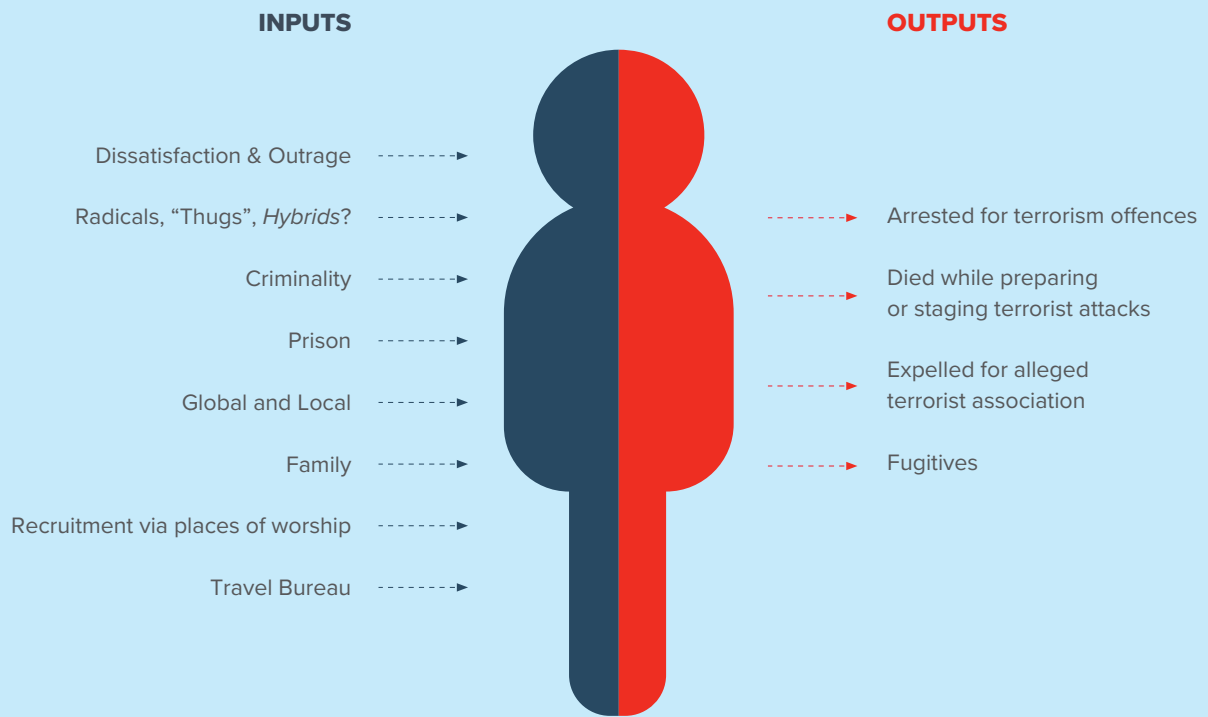
thought.¹⁷ **In fact, there is a variety of subpathways which challenge some of the orthodoxies on the phenomenon of European jihad.** Moreover, and this time in line with the orthodox view of terrorism, no single profile-like pathway exists for any jihadists as these are intertwined during their radicalization processes. Interestingly, the intertwining of the pathways can sometimes take years as 80%+ of the individuals included in our dataset have had their first exposure to jihadism at least more than a year before their 2015 terrorism arrest or death in a terrorist attack. This effectively means that radicalisation in Europe is the work of longstanding networks, connecting individuals with illustrious careers in religious radicalism. Djamel Beghal, imprisoned in France since 2001 and widely seen as an influence on the 2015 Charlie Hebdo Hypercacher attackers, is a case in point. He may not have led a network but connects different waves of French jihadism. Sharia4Belgium, one of the two recruitment rings feeding global jihad that are active in Belgium, itself inspired by a British creation under a similar name, might seem relatively new (founded in 2010) but it predates the 2013-2014 ISIL wave and thus can be seen also as an interconnector. Other cross-generational connections exist in the French subset—there are at least 11 cases in which a given 2015 terrorist arrestee or a 2015 terrorist attacker had had a track record of involvement with Al-Qaeda-centred networks and, e.g., fought for the group in Iraq, but during the Syrian civil war switched to ISIL. This means that European jihad also contains individuals who have been “in the field” for long periods of time, sometimes shifting between countries and conflicts.

Moreover, the dataset also features members of terrorist structures resembling those functioning in their countries more than a decade or more ago. Italy might not have suffered from jihadist violence as much as some of its Western European neighbours and allies but it has seen its share of jihadist cells and networks. These have been led by foreigners who settled in Italy and were connected to jihadist activity in the Western Balkans and North Africa. Interestingly, members of one such cell (i.e., animated by events in another country riven by jihadist violence, oriented towards facilitation of terrorism abroad and not staging terrorist attacks “at home”), this time of Pakistani origin, are also featured in the dataset. Their career in jihadism might not have been as long as some of their terrorist peers but their mode of operation copies activities from the 1990s, resembling the activities of stalwarts of European jihadism from before 9/11.

¹⁶ These themes will be quantitatively assessed with a smaller subset of 60 jihadists from five European countries in this project's second paper, which will be launched at the GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum in June 2019.

¹⁷ See: R. English, *Does Terrorism Work? A History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 1-42 for a discussion on reasons why people engage in terrorism and its efficiency as a mean of projecting political change.

Pathways to Jihad



1. DISSATISFACTION AND OUTRAGE PATHWAY

While analysing Horgan’s “risk factors” and Sageman’s “individual characteristics” or more recent attempt to account for the pathways of ISIL recruits,¹⁸ one common theme stands out— either referred to as “dissatisfaction with current reality”, “moral outrage” or simply being affected by feelings of injustice and oppression. Of course, a mere sense of disappointment or rage, or instances of discrimination, is not enough to induce one’s progress on a pathway to terrorism. However, as Sageman points out, if mixed with the development of a view that the West is “at war with Islam” and consequently inserted into a personal context (“the West is at war with me”), and supported by individuals (friends, family members) as points of contacts for entry into the world of global jihad, it could then lead to one’s recruitment into the cause of jihadism.¹⁹

Some of the individuals in the dataset have a track record of expressing dissatisfaction and outrage, often fuelled by personal stories of discrimination. Some of the French terrorists justified their later action by underscoring the unjust and illegal nature of the U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003. These individuals had had long track records of functioning within the broader jihadist milieu in France and **2015 was only the culmination of their dedication/ involvement.** Others openly legitimised the killing of French citizens based on their perception of France and the West as guilty of crimes “against Muslims” in the MENA region. Interestingly, **the number of such expressions related to the West allegedly being “at war with Islam” in the GLOBSEC dataset is dwarfed by more personal stories of “the system” oppressing the future terrorists** (unfair rejections from jobs- like the French Foreign Legion on the basis of past recreational use of drugs, or expulsions from high schools or butcher and mason apprenticeships). These, to some extent, might have been produced retrospectively, unlike indications that some of the studied individuals simply had been going through difficult periods in their lives when recruited into the global jihad (parents divorcing,

close family member passing away, unsuccessful relationships), suffered personal or professional failures (becoming homeless, being put into foster care), or developed psychological and/or psychiatric issues (schizophrenia, depression developed while suffering from a loss of a close family member or possibly due to irreconcilable differences with one of the parents). In isolation, all of the aforementioned concerns and failures would not have led them towards jihadism but, as indicated above, mixed with the right personal connections, and backdrop of international events (war in Iraq, civil wars in Syria, Yemen, Somalia), induced recruitment of some troubled individuals into global jihad.

Belgium offers a significant case as far as the terrorists’ motivation is concerned: it is a previous criminality ridden subset, which includes individuals convicted of petty theft, attempted robbery, and carjacking to dealing drugs and involuntary manslaughter. It is also a very networked subset, with individuals coming into the ranks of global jihad via existing and wide-ranging structures, be they organisations or networks. Interestingly, very few of them have spoken of their attempt to redeem themselves, as discussed by Rajan Basra, Peter Neumann and Claudia Brunner,²⁰ or would stress their motivation as fuelled by the “anti-Islam” activities of the broader West. Nonetheless, they seem more like Sageman’s “bunch of guys” who collectively moved from one milieu, criminality, to another—jihadism. This is not to suggest that redemption plays no role in terrorists’ conversion towards jihadism, an example of this is the group of individuals included in the German subset, of whom one-fifth had been involved in the drug scenes in different parts of Germany, including Bonn. Such scenes had been their first exposure to illegality and continued while liaising with members of jihadist networks in Germany.

The British terrorist subset analysed for this study stands out in this respect as its members have been the most successful in linking the feeling of moral,

¹⁸ See: e.g. note 9 and O. Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

¹⁹ Sageman discusses two pathways for joining global jihad: “bunch of guys” with a group of people radicalising at the same time and place, making a collective and not an individual decision to opt in (Hamburg cell, which then participated in the 9/11 attacks) or “childhood friends”, i.e., a situation in which “a former friend is part of a terrorist group, [then] a latecomer will start to socialize with him, and soon his entire social circle will be people involved in terrorism.” See: Sageman, *Leaderless...*, pp. 66-7. This paper also discusses other models, or emerging models, of friendship/kinship-included recruitment into global jihad.

²⁰ R. Basra, P. R. Neumann, C. Brunner, *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*, ICSR, 2016, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ICSR-Report-Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures-European-Jihadists-and-the-New-Crime-Terror-Nexus.pdf>.

individual outrage with the narrative of the West “at war with Islam.” This could have been far easier for them, as the UK has widely been seen as the second-strongest Western power involved in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, its individual policy decisions in the Global War on Terror, intervention in Libya, and the backtracking from readiness to militarily confront the Assad regime in Syria, provided plenty of anti-UK ammunition for individuals who were later arrested for terrorism offences. Interestingly, the linking of the personal and the global came in two forms: 1. Some of the individuals included in the dataset were generally frustrated—albeit quite remotely as they had no personal connection to the issue at hand—with UK foreign policy in the MENA region. This policy, in their view, saw the UK actively contributing to the oppression against the Muslim masses (especially children) by the dictatorial regimes of the countries of the MENA; 2. Others had a personal connection, e.g., an individual whose father was convicted for sending equipment to insurgents fighting British troops on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border; a married couple whose family member (wife’s brother) died while fighting in the ranks of ISIL in Syria—they later financed terrorist activity and attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIL; another individual who lived through the Iraq civil war and upon coming to the UK encountered Somalis with similar experience, and later attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIL.

2. RADICAL PATHWAY VS “THUGGISH” PATHWAY—STILL A VALID DEBATE?

After 2015, as Europe was trying to come to terms with the reasons behind the outbreak of jihadism on the continent, a debate on the motivations of European jihadists became public. Two French scholars, Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy, symbolised two different interpretations of this process. The former underscored religious radicalism of European jihadists, arguing it had led them towards the path of political violence, whereas the latter saw, e.g., in the perpetrators of the Paris-Brussels terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016, criminals/thugs/gangsters first and radicals later.²¹

GLOBSEC’s dataset includes individuals who seem emblematic of either Kepel’s or Roy’s approach. On the one hand, each national subset features terrorists whom Petter Nesser would call **“entrepreneurs” of jihad**, i.e., organisers, role models, propaganda disseminators, radicalisers who either led terrorist cells/structures or, e.g., played key roles in facilitating the travel of wannabe FTFs to Syria.²² These people would rarely, if at all, later plead guilty in court or indicate any remorse, either during or after their trial (Spanish 2015 “entrepreneurial” arrestees). Many had personal connections to the jihadist organisations operating in the MENA or South Asia (cases of French terrorism arrestees from 2015) or were intent on developing them while travelling to these regions and returning later to Europe (Dutch terrorism arrestee from 2015). Some, like the leader of the alleged terrorist structure in Bulgaria, were undoubtedly charismatic and functioned as an obvious reference point for their impressionable young followers—such a pattern repeats itself in our dataset, with the “entrepreneur” encountering future jihadists while they were all imprisoned (the Spanish and French cases in particular). Interestingly, one “entrepreneur”, a Spaniard, who, though charismatic, had a limited understanding of jihadism and had more in common with **Roy’s “thug” turned radical**. Moreover, he had first dabbled in far-left politics and even tried to join the Spanish terrorist group GRAPO—the First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups.

If, as in the case with some Italian cells based around immigrants residing in the country, these “entrepreneurs” functioned in closely knit, family-based terrorist structures, then the chances of their disciples fitting Kepel’s idea visibly increased. In short, this meant that they had a better chance of undergoing a more thorough radicalisation process in which the “entrepreneur” literally devotes more time to grooming them.

Two national subsets clearly stand out here, and it is no surprise—the Belgian and the French. To some extent, they offer a microcosm of the issue at hand and **include significant numbers of individuals who belong to both camps** and, which is the most interesting category, a hybridised minority with a foot in each camp.²³ The majority of the Belgian subset was affiliated with longstanding and radical entities (the so-called Zerkani Network and Sharia4Belgium), some had FTF experience while others actively spread jihadist propaganda or recruited other people into jihad (such as one who targeted his 13-year-old brother, who was later alleged to be “the world’s youngest jihadist”). They actively plotted terrorist attacks in Europe or participated in their execution, e.g., by providing their apartments as safe houses. At the same time, however, many had had previous criminal experience and fit more into Roy’s picture of “radicalised criminals” than Kepel’s turbocharged radicals. Moreover, the latter group seemed not to have turned towards jihad out of remorse for their past sins. **This had been more of a new calling, an exciting challenge in which they could apply their anti-social and anti-state approach and mentality, nihilism, and zeal towards new goals.** Whether they fully comprehended these goals is a completely different matter.

²¹ See: note 18.

²² See: P. Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, London: Hurst Publishers, London: 2015.

²³ See: J. F. Gayraud, *Théorie des Hybrides. Terrorisme et crime organisé*, Paris: Cnrs, 2017 and P. Colomina, O. de France, D. Saverot, *The In-Betweeners? Links Between Crime and Terror in France*, GLOBSEC, 2018, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/From-Criminals-to-Terrorists-and-Back-Quarterly-Report-2018-France.pdf>

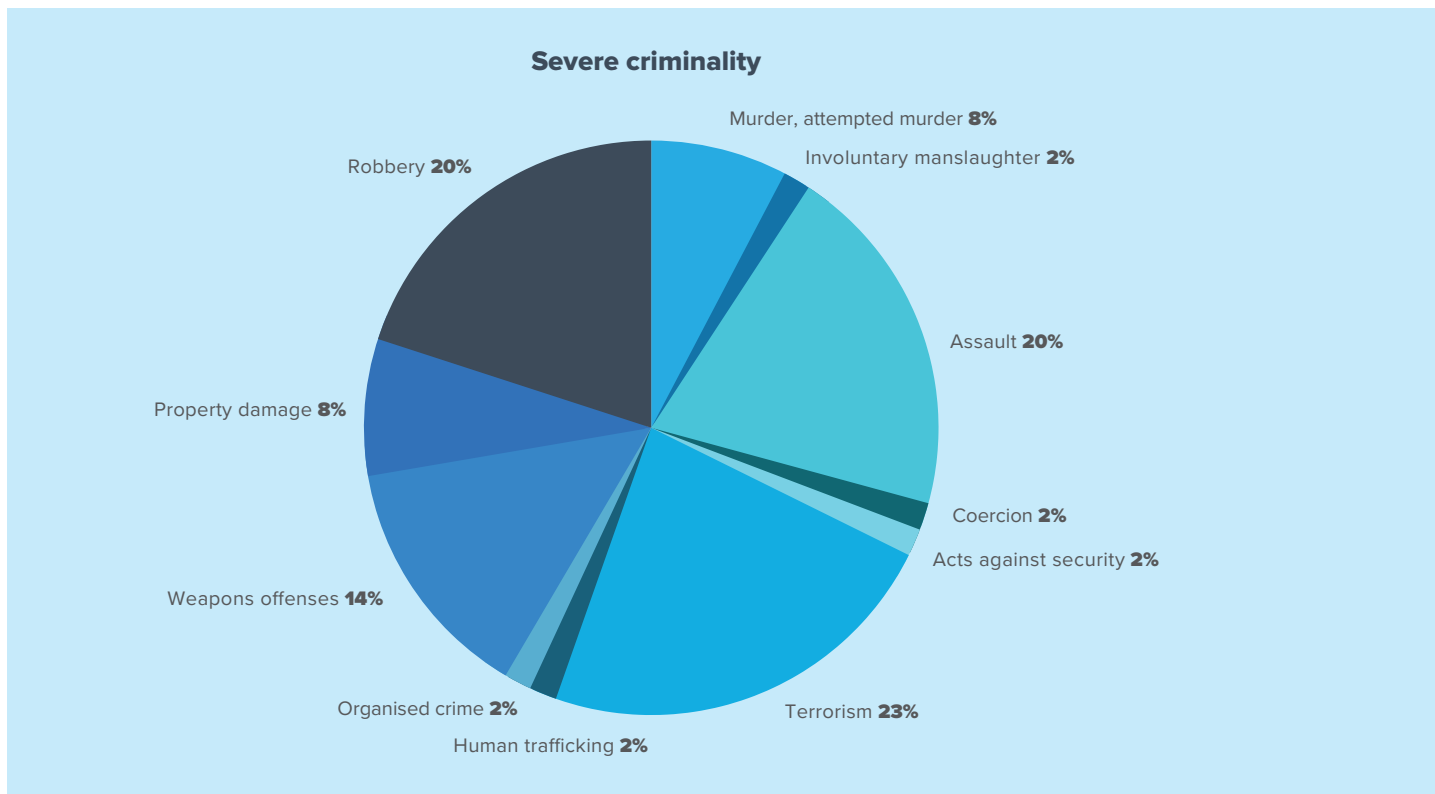
The French subset is no less challenging. It includes a string of “entrepreneurs”—recruiters, charismatic preachers, facilitators, lecturers, and leaders of cells/networks, individuals who featured in Dabiq, the ISIL magazine, featured in ISIL videos, and were relatively short-lived stars of social networks. Of the French terrorism arrestees in the subset, 80%+ did not express any remorse for their terrorist activities, which suggests a higher degree of dedication to jihadist goals. At the same time, **half of all the French terrorists included in the dataset could hardly be counted as “entrepreneurs” or even, as Nesser calls them, “proteges”, i.e., individuals closely groomed by leaders of terrorist cells/networks. They appear to be more like Nesser’s “drifters” or “misfits”²⁴**—many later indicated that their embrace of jihadism came in response to a string of personal or mental issues (perceived discrimination at work or school, psychological and psychiatric problems, traumatic family experiences). In short, they might not have been Roy’s “radicalised criminals” but neither were they Kepel’s radicals.

24 See: note 22.

3. CRIMINAL PATHWAY

Our dataset includes 95 Roy’s “criminals turned terrorists,” i.e., individuals who had been arrested at least once prior to their 2015 terrorism arrests, their expulsion from a given country because of presumed terrorist activities, or death while staging a terrorist attack in that year. This means that **about 30% of all the jihadists our research team has studied so far have had criminal pasts before embarking on terrorist careers. Such a result is a strong indicator of the so-called crime-terror nexus**, a reality in which individuals drift between the two phenomena, and the latter depends on representatives of the former for their illegally obtained means and skills. Despite the preponderance of former criminality in the dataset, however, the team has not been able to establish clear-cut pathways that led the 95 individuals towards terrorist involvement. In short, **there is no single type of crime that makes an individual more prone to joining a terrorist cell, network, or organisation because the dataset includes former petty criminals who later emerged as hardened ISIL fighters, or violent criminals who later had no chance to utilise their “skills” for their new “employers.”**

Unsurprisingly, the most “criminally infested” terrorism contingent in the dataset is related to France—to some extent, “ground zero” of modern European jihad. The French subset includes groups of “individuals from the same localities jointly involved in illegal, i.e., either ordinary criminal or terrorist activities. In some cases, the individuals included in the dataset hail from localities with a high proportion of population living under the poverty line, where a significant number of individuals often rotate in and out of prison. This effectively normalises the prison experience for many of the future jihadi alumni and their social circles. Such individuals could then become **crime-terror hybrids**. Hardly any of them later become organised-crime kingpins, although some are involved in what effectively could be described as micro-criminal organisations, marked by loose and flexible structures.”²⁵ This French experience, however, is not repeated in other countries, whose jihadists are far less “ordinary” criminal than their French counterparts. Belgium, with its prominent radicalisation rings and interconnections with France, stands as the only major example, with the Zerkani network openly

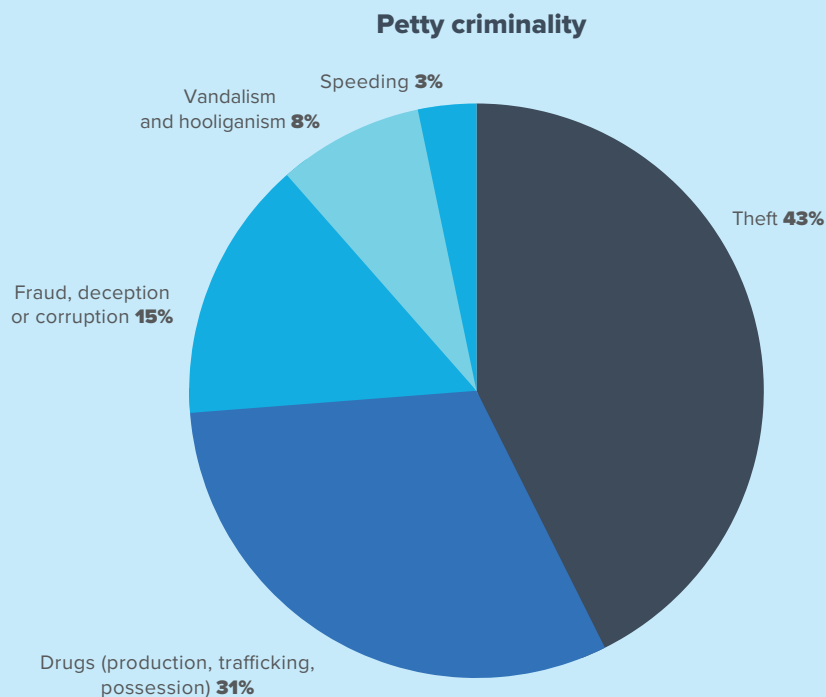


This figure is based on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) classification of criminal offences developed in the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes. See https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/ICCS/ICCS_English_2016_web.pdf

25 See: note 3, pp. 30-31.

espousing the merits of committing crimes against the “infidels” for the sake of preparing for jihad. **At the same time, Europe is confronted with the existence of cells oriented towards a variety of terrorist goals, e.g., attack preparation and facilitation of FTF travel, which are simultaneously involved in criminal activities geared towards financing the former** (the dataset includes an Italy-based cell of

that nature). This means that the two phenomena can and do converge in one structure but it does not account for the overrepresentation of criminals in the ranks of the European jihadists. In short, other factors are at play if one is to successfully complete their journey towards political violence.



This figure is based on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) classification of criminal offences developed in the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes. See https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/ICCS/ICCS_English_2016_web.pdf

4. PATHWAY THROUGH PRISON – OVERRATED OR SIMPLY UNKNOWN?

“Criminal turned terrorist” career does not necessarily end with a death in a terrorist attack. It often leads a given terrorist to prison. Prisons are then consequently often mentioned as radicalisation hubs, e.g., Fleury Merogis in France between 1996 and 2012, i.e., a period in which there were no successful jihadist attacks in France.²⁶ This very prison, alongside Fresnes, Toulon-La Farlede, Osny, Le Mans-Les Croisettes, Châlons-en-Champagne, and La Santé, still feature in GLOBSEC dataset, which focuses on later years, as far as radicalization behind bars is concerned.

In fact, however, **very little is known as to what actually happens behind the prison walls and how the radicalisation process is conducted.** On one hand, cases like that of Amedy Coulibaly, the Hypercacher supermarket attacker from January 2015, stand out. While imprisoned for a non-terrorist offence, he met Djamel Beghal, a jihadist legend and an allegedly prolific recruiter for the cause,²⁷ who was said to have played a key role in Coulibaly’s radicalisation. Similarly, Spain offers another landmark case in which a 2015 terrorism arrestee had previously shared a prison cell with a renowned jihadist recruiter who is said to have radicalised more than 20 individuals in prison before helping to radicalise his younger brother and friends into committing a terrorist offence (involvement in a terrorist organisation).

At the same time, “only” 13 of the 48 French individuals who spent time in prison and are included in our dataset were said to have undergone radicalisation behind bars. **This means that for a solid majority—69.5%—who had never been arrested, their radicalisation experience had less to do with prison directly but could have and did include situations in which former inmates, be it in European or Northern African or Middle Eastern prisons, were involved in the process at mosques, during private meetings, or online.** Moreover, the dataset also includes French cases in which their radicalisation might have been happening **in prison but was literally imported from the outside**, as it was a given future terrorist’s cousin who used his

prison visits to foster the inmate’s radicalisation. A similar process developed in the Netherlands where an imam visiting an individual who was spending time in a youth detention centre played a role in the radicalisation of one of the country’s 2015 terrorism arrestees.

²⁶ See: note 9.

²⁷ See: S. Sayare, *Letters from a French Jihadi*, Harper’s, January/February 2016.

5. “GLOCAL” PATHWAY

It would not be incorrect to state that European jihad is largely a homegrown phenomenon fuelled by events happening outside or in the vicinity of Europe, i.e., in North Africa or the broader Middle East. **Some European jihadists, however, display an almost “entrepreneurial” tendency to look for jihadist connections beyond the more obvious conflict zones** of, e.g., Afghanistan, or especially Syria. **Yemen** is a standout case, as it concerns the Charlie Hebdo attackers from January 2015. However, it is not the only exception to the Syrian rule, as our dataset includes individuals of **Somali and Iraqi** origin who jointly plotted an attack together years after coming to the UK as refugees/migrants and ended up being arrested for their attempts to join ISIL. Another example could be the **Pakistani** but Italy-based (Sardinia) “family business”, which was only involved in facilitating FTF travel but also in organised crime, namely smuggling of people, illegal money transfers, and last but not least, planning of terrorist attacks. The group did not have a connection to ISIL but it did have links to Taliban and Al-Qaeda since a few of its members grew up in provinces where these groups had considerable support. Similarly, traces of foreign or external influence could be seen in our dataset amongst Austrian jihadists who are two-thirds Russian (read: North Caucasian, mostly Chechen)—an unusually high share of such refugees/immigrants in the jihadist subset as the **Chechen** diaspora only constitutes 0.4% of the inhabitants of Austria. This could be interpreted as a mere coincidence, but given the highly familial nature of the jihadist milieu in the country (more on this in the “Family” subchapter), it is our conviction that the fact that such individuals were born in the land of another “jihad” could have played a role in their future radicalisation trajectories. Lastly, echoes of such an approach could also be found in France where jihadists, while speaking of their motivations for political violence, often espouse the situation in **Algeria** and France’s support for its dictatorship during the civil war in the 1990s and during its aftermath or the Western involvement in Iraq after 2003.

As was shown, European jihadism is a phenomenon with international, if not global, links. At the same time, it is also **very local, as it thrives thanks to social interactions happening in cities and towns around Europe**. Sometimes, all it takes for a jihadist networked structure to appear is a charismatic preacher in a newly built, private mosque, such

as the case of the Bulgarian town of Pazardzhik, where recruitment to jihadism happened in the neighbourhood around this place of worship. To some extent, the same tactic, but on a much larger scale, was applied in Belgium, where two simultaneously operating radicalisation/recruitment rings based on two charismatic leaders—Fouad Belkacem and Khalid Zerkani—operated out of the cities of Antwerp and Brussels respectively. Thus, the main radicalising ground in Belgium was 45 km or a 35 min train ride axis from Brussels to Antwerp.

No such single axis exists in the case of France, the biggest national subset in our dataset, in which **traces of jihadist activity are scattered** from Roubaix in the northeast, through Vannes and Redon in the west, to Toulouse in the south, and Albertville together with Montpellier and Nice in the southeast. Interestingly, as can be gleaned from this shortlist, these are not always France’s biggest urban centres. What is more, just like in the case of Belgium, the development of cells in these locations is once again connected to the activities of “entrepreneurial” individuals (like Olivier Corel, Djamel Beghal or more recently – Fabien Clain) who led their cohorts into illegal activities.

The phenomenon is equally scattered in the UK, with longstanding suburban parts of London, Birmingham, Bradford, and Walsall comprising jihadist hubs in the project’s dataset. In addition, the map of localities from our data encompasses other smaller areas, including Mold, Burton upon Trent, Lancashire, Stoke on Trent, that have seen the presence of ad hoc individually-inspired cells, rather than larger radical groups. In effect, British jihadism stretches from England’s northwest into Birmingham and then towards London, forming almost a straight line that cuts through western England.

No such visually appealing presentation of the discussed phenomenon is possible in Spain, where it is far less scattered, with the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla and the autonomous community of Catalonia as the proverbial hotbeds of jihadism in this country.²⁸

28 M. Daou, “Why Barcelona, a tourist paradise, is a ‘Salafist city,’” *France 24*, 21 August 2017, <https://www.france24.com/en/20170821-spain-barcelona-catalonia-salafist-jihad>

6. DIFFERENT FAMILY PATHWAYS

GLOBSEC's previous work on the crime-terror nexus in Europe stressed that European jihadism is effectively a "family affair", i.e., people are induced into terrorist networks via members of their immediate or extended families. In September 2018, the GLOBSEC team was able to indicate that in "26% [...] of all the cases in the dataset, radicalisation was instigated by individuals close to the 2015 terrorism arrestees, either family or friends" (as the dataset expands, it now stands at 21%). Moreover, in 49% of the "cases[,] members of the family had knowledge of, or were themselves involved in, radical [but not essentially terrorist in nature] activities (currently at 40%)." ²⁹ Interestingly, this statistic, while shaped by the bigger national subsets of European terrorists (French, British, Spanish, Italian, German), was also reflected, e.g., amongst the Austrian subset, which consisted of just 18 people with 8 (44%) having family members involved in terrorism.

When discussing the family aspect of European jihadism, one needs to bear in mind a key feature of this phenomenon, i.e., **the multitude of forms in which the involvement of the next of kin materialises itself**. The culprit, the radicaliser, the "entrepreneur" could be one's **brother-in-law** enticing his sister-in-law to follow him to Syria or one's **uncle** whose radicalisation was sparked by fiery sermons by a radical preacher. Moreover, **married couples** could jointly plot terrorist attacks, with the wives acting as domestic jihadist "entrepreneurs", urging their husbands to follow them in their jihadist pursuits (all of the aforementioned cases concern terrorists from the UK). Brothers could also join forces in a jihadist network and then jointly carry out a terrorist attack (Belgium, France) or, more surprisingly, one's mother could earn the title "mother of jihad" while recruiting as many as four of her children into the ranks of ISIL (Belgium). The French subset of terrorists in the GLOBSEC dataset also includes individuals whose **brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers** had also been involved in terrorist activities.

In addition to the aforementioned cases, the GLOBSEC dataset features whole **terrorism-oriented families**, with links to terrorist entities abroad. The first among them is the case of an Albanian family residing in Italy that developed links to ISIL. Their modus operandi was mostly arranging marriages and sending the couples to Syria. Moreover, they also managed to radicalise and attempt to send to Syria a whole family of Italian Catholics. Another case of a radicalised family active in the facilitation of travel of FTFs is the case of a Moroccan family that had moved to Italy. The eldest son died in Iraq as a member of ISIL while his younger sibling was apprehended with a whole cell comprised of friends and a married couple from another town. This Varese-Lecco cluster was planning to strike Vatican City under a direct order from ISIL.³⁰ Finally, a Moroccan family who moved to Spain in 2006 saw its son go to Syria and join one of the Al-Qaeda-associated groups. After his death, and perhaps in memoriam to their late son, his mother and, later, his younger twin brothers radicalised and ended up being arrested for terrorism-related activities (collaboration with a terrorist organisation and attempt to travel to a combat zone with the goal of joining a terrorist organisation). To complicate matters further, the family's **neighbour**—though there is no data on to what extent he influenced the family—also had a spell as a foreign fighter in Syria and Iraq.

As was showcased above, in most cases, the individuals included in the GLOBSEC dataset were radicalised jihadist "entrepreneurs", supported by others involved in a given cell or network which would later, e.g., prepare terrorist attacks or send its members to join ISIL in Syria. However, the dataset also includes cases of individuals, e.g., from France, **whose radicalisation was more private in nature**, i.e., within the walls of a family home, which was converted into a prayer room and which acted as a force multiplier for the radicalisation capabilities of the given terrorist cell. The case of a Spanish family in which the eldest son's travel to Syria spurred the radicalisation of three other family members, is another example of this phenomenon. **Such "home-grown" radicalization is more focused and intense** because family members reinforce each other's views in everyday, seemingly regular situations. What is more, such radicalisation also has

²⁹ See: note 27.

³⁰ L. Romano, "I volti dell'Isis in Lombardia e Piemonte," *Il Giornale*, 28 April, 2016.

another dimension—the online sphere. The dataset includes very few cases (two individuals for whom the research team was not able to establish other jihadist connections and these could be treated as potential solo actors) in which one could hazard the guess that a given individual’s radicalisation was purely online but includes an individual from the Spanish subset who, while at home, actively used social media to recruit people into global jihad. His actions led to a string of arrests of his “disciples”, whom he had encouraged to disseminate jihadist propaganda.

7. MOSQUE PATHWAY RETURNS?

Certain mosques, such as al-Quds in Hamburg, Finsbury Park in London, or the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan, played a prominent role in the history of European jihadism. These functioned as venues for meetings, plotting, and organisation of jihadist activities in and beyond Europe. Some saw them as hubs or “suicide factories” of future terrorists.³¹ As the police forces and security services of the likes of the UK, Italy, or Germany moved in to arrest the suspects or even temporarily close these facilities, **the conventional wisdom seemed to suggest that the jihadist networks and “entrepreneurs” would move away from meeting, and especially recruiting, in well-known places of worship or, respectively, cultural centres.**³² In short, they were to go private, if not completely underground, in order to avoid the suspicious eyes of the authorities.

The GLOBSEC dataset does not necessarily support such a view because in some of the countries covered by our research, certain mosques continued to play prominent roles in the development of the jihadist network. This is, of course, not to suggest that its custodians or the daily worshippers are to blame for this, rather it is more of a situation in which the mosque is the point of first contact between jihadist recruiters and their potential prey, effectively a scouting ground for a new pool of talent. This largely happens regardless of the mosque’s profile vis-à-vis Islamism or the view of the other attendants of prayers. Such developments occurred in mosques in **Spain (Terrassa in Catalonia), France (Abou Bakr mosque in Roubaix, Adda’wa mosque in Paris, Bellefontaine Mosque in Toulouse), Germany (mosques in Berlin and Bonn), and Bulgaria (mosque in Pazardzhik).** In some, though not all, of these cases, the mosque quite rapidly lost its status as a meeting point for the “entrepreneurs” and their recruits as these future terrorists moved their meetings to other locations in the same city or town, sometimes to private homes. This was then followed by a more tailored and private radicalisation process that saw the impressionable young individuals sit through the likes of “jihad nights” hosted by a given “entrepreneur”, consisting of group consumption of jihadist propaganda.

Interestingly, other types of localities, not only mosques, are also worth mentioning when analysing the “where” of jihadist pathways in Europe. Here, the case of the UK stands out as the dataset includes individuals whose first jihadist encounters came to fruition because of another individual whom they had met while attending the same **paintball centre or working at the same charity oriented towards sending aid to war-torn Syria.** Similarly, **gyms** played a role as first points of contact for some of the French jihadist recruits. At the same time, and contrary to the popular perception, e.g., past cases from the UK,³³ the dataset includes relatively **few individuals who have gravitated towards terrorism through more overt forms of radical Islamist activity, such as proselytization in the streets of European cities and towns.** To some extent, clusters of jihadists from Belgium (Sharia4 Belgium), France (participation in a public protest against the ban on veils in public, anti-Iraq War demonstrations) Germany and the UK had performed such activities along their paths of radicalization. Many of their peers, however, never escalated their involvement in a similar manner. Thus, one could hazard the theory that Europe’s jihadists are not like political activists supporting other radical ideologies who could gradually progress towards political violence. Theirs was a more private education in radicalism, imparted under the watchful eyes of the “entrepreneurs”, who often displayed a high level of security consciousness and refrained from outing their proteges in front of the world.

31 See: S. O’Neill, *The Suicide Factory: Abu Hamza and the Finsbury Park Mosque*, London: Harper Perennial, 2010.

32 Al-Quds mosque in Hamburg seemed to contradict this expectation as it was reported in 2010 that some of Germany’s jihadists “came from the same Hamburg mosque as the 9/11 hijackers.” See: <https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/credible-specific-threat-terrorist-attack/story?id=11750454>

33 S. Maher, “From Portsmouth to Kobane: the British jihadis fighting for Isis,” *New Statesman*, 6 November 2014, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane>.

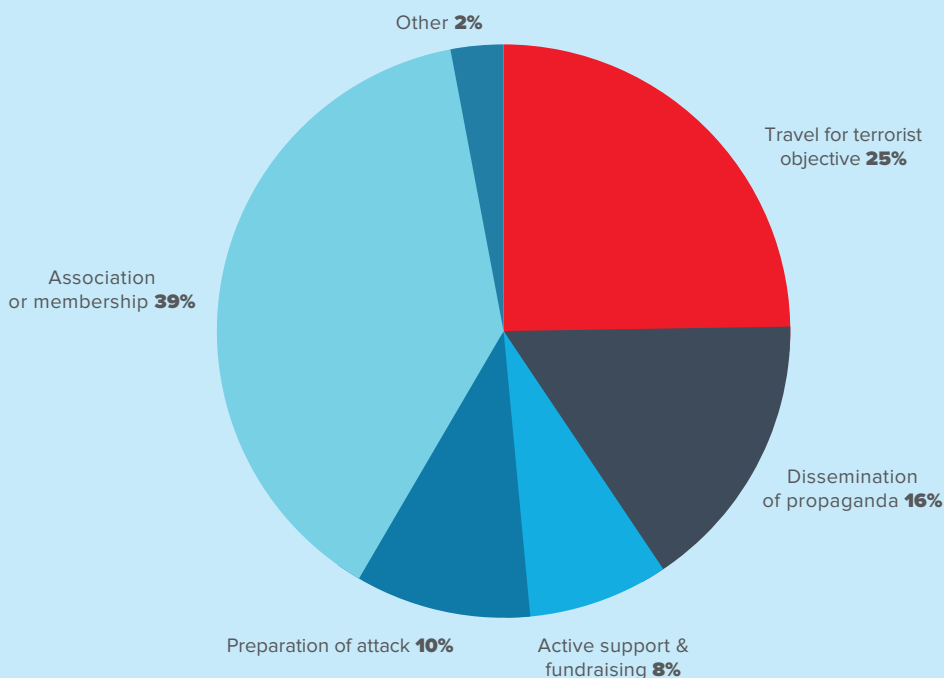
8. “TRAVEL BUREAU” PATHWAY

Instances of families (in Spain and Italy) recruiting their family members and others into jihad in Syria and/or individuals like the “mother of jihad” (Belgium) clearly suggest that parts of **the jihadist network in Europe have been geared towards acting as terrorist “travel bureaus” and not necessarily as attack cells. Indeed, up to 25% of the terrorism arrestees in our database have been arrested for either “recruitment and facilitation of travel of foreign terrorist fighters”, “travel for a terrorist objective”, or an “attempt to join a terrorist organisation.”** Consequently, this has led to a situation in which, e.g., 45% of the French individuals included in our subset are believed to have had foreign fighting experience. In the French cases, this effectively means that every regional node of the French jihadist network—and as was shown, these were scattered around the whole country—sent “representatives” to fight in the Syrian civil war. To some extent, these nodes almost acted like villages in medieval or early modern Europe in which all of the members contributed towards equipping a chosen member for military adventure. In the case of jihadists, this was for a career as an FTF and possibly later, if he returned, as a terrorist in Europe.

The Buttes-Chaumont group, Artigat, Albertville, and Orleans cells in France excelled in this process. The same is, of course, true for the long-established Belgian recruitment rings of the Zerkani Network or Sharia4Belgium.

Interestingly, Syria is not the only foreign country travel destination of the FTFs included in the dataset. Other international jihadist connections include Germany-Somalia, France-Yemen, and Italy-Pakistan. Since many of the Austrian jihadists are of Chechen origin, the fact that they came from a war-torn country, where jihadist entities are present up to this day, is also significant. What is more, additional individuals arriving in Europe from war-torn countries later gravitated towards terrorist networks in their new countries (the UK subset includes Somalis and Iraqi-Kurds who did this).

2015 Terrorist arrests





Pathways into Jihad are:

connected to the feelings of dissatisfaction and outrage.



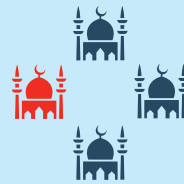
global in ambition but local in nature.

available to both radicals, "thugs" and hybrids.



about one's next of kin.

connected to criminality.



linked to certain places of worship.

prison facilitated.



fostered by "travel bureaus".

FUTURE RESEARCH

As was shown, this research is a thematic analysis of a larger dataset of European terrorists and it will be followed by a more focused, quantitative analysis of 60 jihadist pathways of individuals from five European countries. At this stage, the research team was also able to identify the themes it feels are of key importance to the issue at hand but, due to the scarcity of data, has been unable to address them comprehensively. What is more, the following two issues are often at the forefront of questions posed to the research team's members during their public appearances and presentations of their findings and results: 1. the offline vs online aspects of radicalisation, and 2. the homegrown vs imported nature of the threat.

Ad. 1.

Since this study concerns individuals involved in terrorist activities in highly developed countries, it has been assumed that they all, or almost all, consumed jihadist propaganda online or downloaded from the internet. At this stage, however, the research data the team has gathered to date contain too few specifics on that issue to present and discuss any potential pattern emerging across individuals included in the dataset. Sometimes, this information does not go beyond banality, e.g., “watching ISIL videos together” (which videos exactly?) or “studying ISIL literature” (what exactly?). It seems that data is rarely specific and exhaustive on this front. The researchers will continue to pay close attention to this issue because it is considered highly relevant when discussing jihadist pathways.

Ad. 2.

Of the 310 jihadists included in the dataset and discussed in this paper, 228 (74%) were born in the EU. An even higher number, 254 of the 310 (or 82%), were EU citizens. That suggests the highly homegrown nature of the threat, with a string of naturalised individuals (not born in the EU but later acquiring EU passports) involved in European jihad, and a minority (less than 20%) of participants with very few links with Europe. This, however, hardly addresses all the concerns related to this point. The research team is often challenged to probe deeper and establish “how homegrown” the aforementioned 74% and 82%, respectively, of the terrorists included in the dataset had truly been. This entails, e.g., studying the family backgrounds of all the individuals and establishing if any of them had been first-, second-, third-generation (or later) immigrants, and if yes, then how many. Establishing this information could in some cases, but not all, help provide more contextual data on the European terrorist pathways, though this information should be treated cautiously as these individuals can hardly be seen as representative. At the moment, the research team only has thorough data on the French terrorist subset, in which 77 out of 90 (85%) were born in France and Belgium, respectively, as second-generation immigrants. Of these, 66 have French citizenship, 13 have dual citizenship, mainly Franco-Algerian, 4 others are Belgians, 2 are Moroccans, and one is a Tunisian citizen. The citizenship of the remaining four is unknown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aforementioned thematic analysis is the first attempt to assess the GLOBSEC dataset as far as the issue of pathways into jihad is concerned. **It maps out patterns and questions and puts in context some of the conventionally held wisdom on the issue as to “how” and “why” people join global jihad by highlighting relatively unknown facts from the biographies of individuals who gravitated towards terrorism in Europe.** As was shown, these pathways intersect and intertwine in the cases of many individuals included in our dataset. It is never just “one”, e.g., private, at-home radicalisation by a family member, which is responsible for a given individual’s entry into the world of global jihad. Consequently, drawing up recommendations that would only address one pathway at a time would not be the most effective approach. Thus, the authors would like to offer a different approach and look for solutions that would tackle them in a more complex manner, rather than one by one. **As European jihad is a self-perpetuating phenomenon, induced by “entrepreneurs” long present within its confines, and often animated in or around establishments seemingly unconnected to jihadism (certain mosques, prisons, cultural centres etc.), it is necessary to:**

- 1. Locate the jihadist “entrepreneurs”** using police and counter-intelligence methods and consequently, bring them to justice so that their networks are disrupted and they are taken out of the jihadist circulation. In this sense, however, ISIL’s alleged defeat and retreat should be seen as a signal to wind down the resources devoted the security services which in some countries have been edging up since the peak of European jihadism in 2015.
- 2. Look for candidates for “hybrids,”** i.e. individuals who are neither Kepel’s radicals or Roy’s thugs, as such in-betweeners constitute a major element of the European jihad and spotting them early could help limit the flow of recruits into the jihadist ranks.
- 3. Continuously monitor families with a track record of jihadist radicalisation.** Relatively few European families embrace jihadism but there seem to be many families within the European jihad.
- 4. Induce the prison service and the prison intelligence into the security systems of European countries** as too little is known about what is happening behind bars vis-à-vis jihadist radicalisation.
- 5. Establish fusion centres in which intelligence and counter-intelligence officials would work with the police forces.** The latter are first responders and often first spotters of the local troublemakers, criminals, “misfits” or “drifters,” who, if other pathways align in their individual cases, could evolve into jihadist recruits.



**COUNTER
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