

INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT



(U//FOUO) Most Foreign-born, US-based Violent Extremists Radicalized after Entering Homeland; Opportunities for Tailored CVE Programs Exist

1 March 2017



**Homeland
Security**

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

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(U//FOUO) Most Foreign-born, US-based Violent Extremists Radicalized after Entering Homeland; Opportunities for Tailored CVE Programs Exist

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A). Coordinated with CBP, the Department of State, ICE, NCTC, and USCIS.

(U) Scope

(U//FOUO) This Assessment examines the immigration history and radicalization of 88 foreign-born, US-based persons who participated in a terrorism-related activity inspired by at least one named foreign terrorist organization (FTO).^{*} All examined individuals primarily resided in the United States either at the time of their involvement in a terrorism-related activity or prior to their travel to join an FTO. The list of individuals included in this study was derived from academic and government sources, including a Department of Justice (DOJ) list of unsealed international terrorism and terrorism-related cases. The terrorism-related activities these individuals engaged in were identified in US Government sources or reliable media reporting. These activities include conducting or attempting to conduct an attack in the United States, traveling or attempting to travel from the United States to join an FTO overseas, and providing funds, goods, or logistical assistance to support an FTO. All individuals examined in our study were indicted or killed between March 2011—the start of the Syrian conflict—and December 2016. Individuals who were minors at the time of their indictment or death were not included. Our review did not consider classified or non-disseminated investigative information.

(U//FOUO) This Assessment identifies several factors, some of which are constitutionally protected activity, which we assess contributed to the radicalization of foreign-born, US-based violent extremists mentioned in this report. None of these factors should be viewed as definitive indicators of radicalization to violence absent corroborative information revealing a link to violence or terrorism. This Assessment is intended to inform federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial counterterrorism, law enforcement, and countering violent extremism (CVE) officials, as well as immigrant screening and vetting officials on trends of foreign-born individuals engaged in terrorism activity in the Homeland. It also provides an overview of opportunities to prevent and detect future violent extremist radicalization. The information cutoff date is 31 December 2016.

(U) Key Judgments

(U//FOUO) We assess that most foreign-born, US-based violent extremists likely radicalized several years after their entry to the United States, limiting the ability of screening and vetting officials to prevent their entry because of national security concerns. We base this assessment on our findings that nearly half of the foreign-born, US-based violent extremists examined in our dataset were less than 16 years old when they entered the country and that the majority of foreign-born individuals resided in the United States for more than 10 years before their indictment or death. A separate DHS study that found recent foreign-born US violent extremists began radicalizing, on average, 13 years after their entry to the United States further supports our assessment.

(U//FOUO) We assess nearly all parents who entered the country with minor-age children likely did not espouse a violent extremist ideology at the time they entered or at any time since, suggesting these foreign-born individuals were likely not radicalized by their parents before or after their arrival in the Homeland. We base this judgment on their admissions to the United States by screening and vetting agencies who review all available derogatory information, our review of press interviews of parents after their child was arrested or killed, and the lack of arrests of the parents since their entry.

^{*} (U//FOUO) DHS defines radicalization as the process through which an individual changes from a nonviolent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to effect societal or political change.

material support to ISIS as a group, according to DOJ criminal complaints.^{9,10}

- » (U//FOUO) In 2012, two individuals born in Uzbekistan were arrested for providing material support to the Islamic Jihad Union, according to DOJ criminal complaints.^{11,12} Separately, four Uzbekistan-born individuals were arrested in 2015 for providing material support to ISIS, according to a DOJ criminal complaint and superseding indictment.^{13,14} These two groups comprised six of the nine individuals in our dataset who were born in Uzbekistan.
- » (U//FOUO) All seven individuals born in Bosnia were associates of each other. Six were arrested in 2015 for providing material support to ISIS and one died in 2014 after successfully joining ISIS in Syria, according to DOJ criminal complaints and a press report.^{15,16}
- » (U//FOUO) Two of the seven violent extremists in our dataset who were born in Pakistan were brothers who plotted together to provide material support to al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), according to a DOJ indictment.¹⁷

(U//FOUO) We assess nearly all parents who entered the country with minor-age children likely did not espouse a violent extremist ideology at the time they entered or at any time since, suggesting these foreign-born individuals were likely not radicalized by their parents before or after their arrival in the Homeland. We base this judgment on their admissions to the United States by screening and vetting agencies who review all available derogatory information, our review of press interviews of parents after their child was arrested or killed, and the lack of arrests of the parents since their entry.

- » (U//FOUO) Two months before Somali immigrant Abdirizak Warsame^{USPER} was arrested for conspiring to provide material support to ISIS, his mother lectured other parents about the importance of talking with their children about risks stemming from adhering to a violent extremist ideology and the need to work with the FBI, according to press reporting.¹⁸ Warsame was sentenced to 30 months in prison in November 2016 because of his attempt to travel to Syria to join ISIS, according to a press report.¹⁹
- » (U//FOUO) Harlem Suarez's^{USPER} family was surprised by his arrest for plotting an attack in support of ISIS in 2015, according to a press report.²⁰ The family described Suarez, who was born in Cuba, as curious and unable to hurt anything, according to the same report.²¹ Suarez is currently awaiting trial, according to another press report.²²
- » (U//FOUO) Jose Pimentel's^{USPER} mother publicly apologized to the City of New York after his arrest in 2011, saying she was disappointed with her son's actions, according to multiple press reports.^{23,24,25} Pimentel—who immigrated from the Dominican Republic with his family when he was five—was sentenced to 16 years in prison after pleading guilty in February 2014 to terrorism charges related to plotting to conduct an attack in the Homeland, according to a separate press report.²⁶

(U//FOUO) Similar Radicalization Factors among Native- and Foreign-born US Violent Extremists

(U//FOUO) Our review of 116 native-born US violent extremists, who were publicly identified as having been arrested or killed between March 2011 and December 2016, showed that many had similar experiences and grievances to the 88 foreign-born violent extremists we examined. We assess that these experiences and grievances probably in part contributed to the radicalization of some native- and foreign-born, US-based violent extremists and included perceived injustices against Muslims in the Homeland and abroad because of US policies, feelings of anger and isolation, and witnessing violence as a child. The lack of extensive open source information detailing some of these US violent extremists' radicalization histories prevented us from identifying motivating factors for all individuals examined in our dataset.

- » (U//FOUO) Native-born brothers Nader Saadeh^{USPER} and Alaa Saadeh^{USPER}—who both pleaded guilty after their arrest in 2015 for providing material support to ISIS—believed the United States oppressed its own people and failed to protect Muslims, according to DOJ criminal complaints.^{27,28} Similarly, Ibrahim Mohammad^{USPER}, born in the UAE and arrested in 2015 for providing material support to AQAP, believed the United States was actively at war with Islam, according another DOJ criminal complaint.²⁹
- » (U//FOUO) Native-born Josh Van Haften^{USPER}, who is awaiting his trial for attempting to travel overseas to join ISIS, became isolated from his peers after a sexual assault required him to register as a sex offender, according to press reporting.³⁰ He was told to leave his housing because he was a sex offender, and he was never able to have a romantic relationship, according to a press interview with Van Haften's mother and her partner.³¹ The FBI assesses isolation to be one of many factors in Van Haften's radicalization, but not the primary one. Similarly, the now-deceased foreign-born former editor of AQAP's Inspire magazine, Samir Khan, and now-deceased ISIS foreign fighter Abdullah Ramo Pazara felt isolated or different from their communities and peers, according to multiple press reports.^{32,33,34}
- » (U//FOUO) At least five foreign-born US violent extremists were exposed to violence or substance abuse as children, according to a review of available press reporting.³⁵⁻³⁹ We judge, however, there are likely additional individuals included in our dataset who were also exposed to violence during their childhood, based on our finding that 41 foreign-born US violent extremists in our dataset entered the United States as a refugee, asylee, or child of a refugee or asylee.

(U//FOUO) CVE Opportunities to Prevent Radicalization of Foreign-born, US-based Individuals

(U//FOUO) We assess that the integration and mentoring services provided by federal, state, and private sector entities to refugees and asylees offer an opportunity to help foreign-born US residents adjust to their new communities and raise their awareness of and resistance to violent extremist narratives and recruiters, and likely increase their resistance to radicalization. Immigrants not entering the United States as refugees or asylees must prove their ability to provide basic needs for themselves before arriving in the United States, and thus they would not be eligible to receive many of these healthcare, housing, employment, and education services; however, there are many programs available to all immigrants to assist with integration into US society.

- » (U) There are a variety of federal, state, local, and nongovernmental programs aimed at helping refugees and asylees integrate into US society by addressing their basic healthcare, housing, employment, and education needs.⁴⁰ Additionally, USCIS, through its Citizenship and Integration Grant Program, as of September 2016 awarded \$63 million through 308 competitive grants in 37 states to help immigrants prepare and apply for US citizenship, according to USCIS.⁴¹
- » (U) Many nonprofit organizations engage with immigrant communities, including a Georgia-based nonprofit that serves the cultural, psychological, and social-economic needs of refugees and immigrants in Atlanta, according to their website.⁴²

(U//FOUO) The experiences and grievances we assessed as common within these individuals present opportunities for CVE programs focused on integration and mentorship. Such programs could address adolescent immigrants' feelings of isolation, anger, and depression caused by immigration experiences—which could in turn reduce the ability of FTOs to exploit these feelings for recruitment. Program administrators would be positioned to assist adolescents if the administrators are made aware of common radicalization vulnerabilities and behavioral indicators, as well as effective counter-narratives to challenge FTO messaging.

- » (U//FOUO) Guled Omar^{USPER}, who was sentenced in 2016 for attempting travel overseas to join ISIS, claimed in a December 2016 press interview that after his older brother traveled to Somalia in 2007 to join al-Shabaab, he was shunned and isolated from the Somali-American community in Minneapolis, which led to his depression, drug use, and taunting by peers.⁴³
- » (U) Successful programs for adolescent immigrants could include convening youth from varying cultural backgrounds to promote cultural understanding and providing opportunities to counter anti-immigrant attitudes in mainstream culture, according to research published by a State University of New York at Albany^{USPER} program called Voices for Change: Immigrant Women and State Policy.⁴⁴ Separately, the Department of Health and Human Services' Child Welfare Information Gateway offers online resources for immigrant youth, including a guide on living in America, educational and safety resources for parents, and a handbook for raising children in a new country.⁴⁵

(U//FOUO) We also judge that open discussions with community and religious centers about overseas conflicts and ways that violent extremists may use religion to justify their actions would likely help dissuade some foreign-born, US-based individuals who are seeking answers to their questions from relying exclusively on research conducted online, which is often dominated by FTO messaging that offers only a violent extremist perspective.

- » (U//FOUO) Some individuals in our dataset who became interested in conflict zones or their religion sought to educate themselves on the Internet—where they encountered videos and literature espousing violent extremist ideology—rather than their local religious or community leaders, according to press reporting.^{46,47} Somali-Americans Abdi Nur^{USPER} and Guled Omar—who have since been indicted for attempting to provide material support to ISIS—were asked to leave their respective mosques because of their expressions of violent extremist beliefs, which, in effect, pushed their research underground, where they turned to the Internet and had their nascent violent extremist views reinforced, according to a press report.⁴⁸ Abdi Nur was indicted on conspiracy charges for providing material support to ISIS in 2014, according to a DOJ press release.⁴⁹
- » (U//FOUO) Abdizirak Warsame stated in his court appearance that he was always listening to one side, referring to the “radical” messages he saw online, according to a press report. Warsame claimed that at the time he did not realize innocent people were being killed, according to the same report, which was likely a reference to terrorists' targeting of civilians.⁵⁰

(U//FOUO) Most Foreign-born, US-based Violent Extremists Probably Radicalize After Entering the Homeland

(U//FOUO) I&A examined the immigration history and radicalization activities of 88 foreign-born, US-based violent extremists who were indicted or killed as a result of their participation in a terrorism related activity inspired by at least one foreign terrorist organization between March 2011 and December 2016. We based this study primarily on DHS immigration records, publicly available court documents and reliable press reporting. Nearly half of the foreign-born violent extremists in our dataset entered the United States when they were under the age of 16 and a majority remained in the United States for over ten years before their indictment or death, suggesting most foreign-born, US-based violent extremists likely radicalized after entering the Homeland.

(U//FOUO) DHS defines radicalization as the process through which an individual changes from a non-violent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to effect societal or political change.

(U) AGE OF ENTRY OF FOREIGN-BORN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS



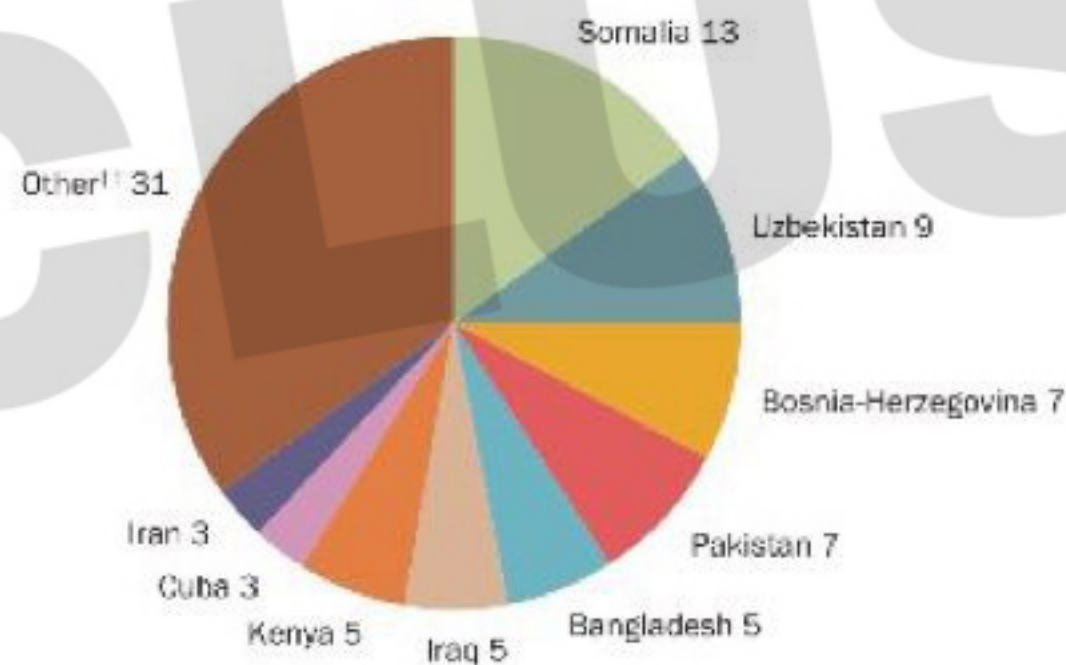
(U) LENGTH OF TIME IN US OF FOREIGN-BORN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS



(U//FOUO) For the purposes of this graphic, we compared our findings on foreign born US-based violent extremists with those of 116 native-born US-based violent extremists indicted or killed during the same time period. We found that many native and foreign-born US-based violent extremists had similar experiences and grievances that may have contributed, in part, to their radicalization, including perceived injustice against Muslims, grievances against the United States, and feelings of anger and isolation.[†]

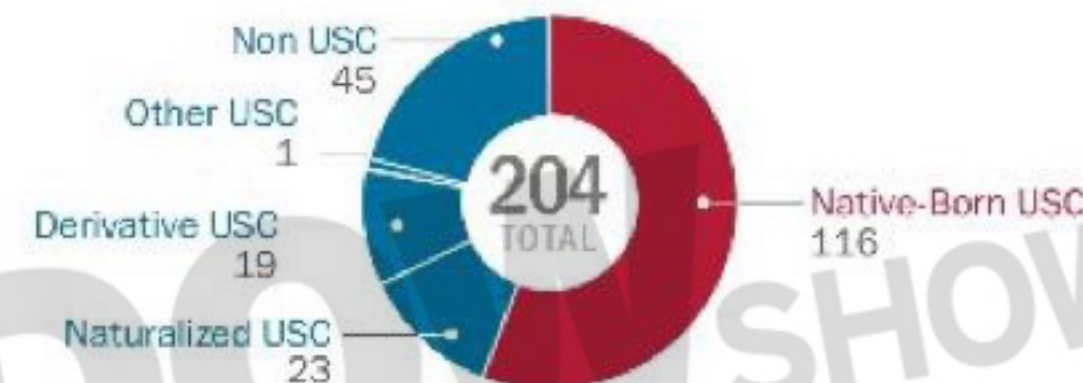
†(U//FOUO) These factors alone do not indicate an individual has radicalized to violence.

(U) COUNTRIES OF BIRTH OF FOREIGN-BORN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS



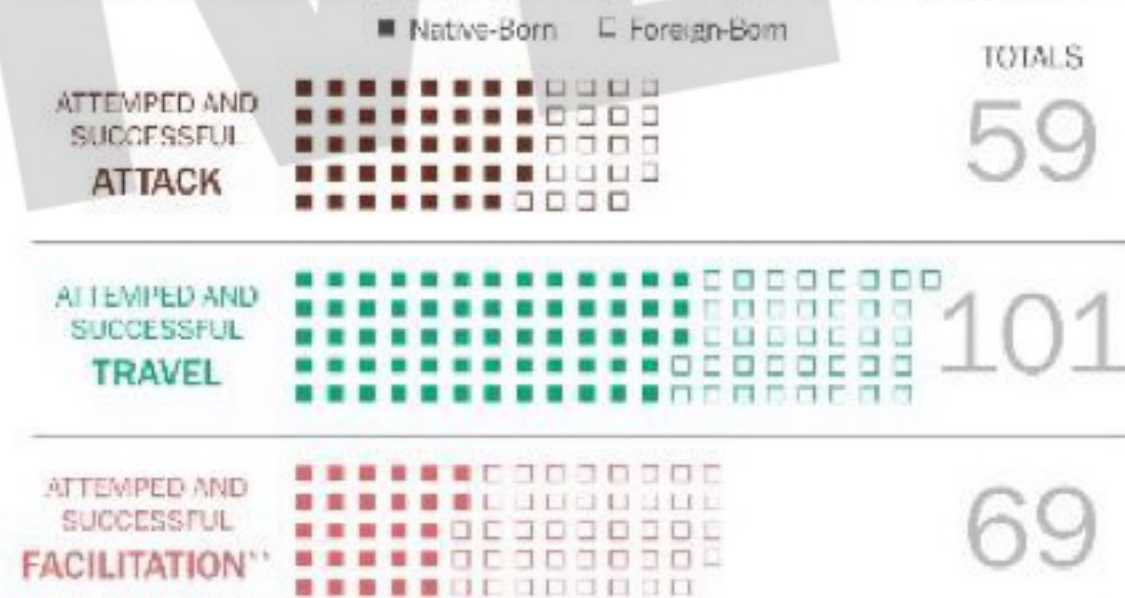
††(U//FOUO) Either one or two individuals were born in each of the following 24 countries: Albania, Afghanistan, Australia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Yugoslavia.

(U) NATIVE- AND FOREIGN-BORN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS US CITIZENSHIP (USC) STATUS AT TIME OF INDICTMENT OR DEATH[‡]



‡(U//FOUO) Non-USCs includes legal permanent residents (LPR), nonimmigrant visa holders, refugees, and individuals with no status.

(U) TERRORISM-RELATED ACTIVITIES OF NATIVE- AND FOREIGN-BORN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS[§]



§(U//FOUO) Numbers include individuals who participated or were interested in more than one activity.

*** (U//FOUO) Facilitation activities include financial or logistical support, and terrorist recruitment.*

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(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) This Assessment is based primarily on I&A's review of DHS immigration and travel records and publicly available court documents as well as relevant reliable press reporting. The scope of our study did not include consideration of non-disseminated investigative information.

*(U//FOUO) I&A has **moderate confidence** that most foreign-born US violent extremists likely radicalize several years after their entry to the United States, based on a review of court documents and press reporting from which we determined the first known sign of radicalization to violence among recent US violent extremists and a body of USCIS data from which we determined the length of time the individuals examined in our current dataset spent in the United States before their indictment or death. We note that there are challenges in determining the exact date that radicalization began, which is often a personal and individualized process that is difficult to observe. Additional reporting on the online activities of the US violent extremists, as well as information from the US violent extremists themselves or their family and friends about possible indicators of their loved ones' radicalization would further strengthen our confidence in this assessment. Our assessment is further supported by our finding that nearly half of the foreign-born individuals in our dataset entered the United States when they were younger than 16 years old, an age group that is typically younger than the age most violent extremists begin radicalizing.*

*(U//FOUO) We have **moderate confidence** in our assessment that nearly all parents who entered the country with these foreign-born, US-based violent extremists likely did not espouse a violent extremist ideology or exhibit any violent radicalization or mobilization indicators at the time they entered or since. Our assessment is based on a qualitative review of reliable press reporting describing the family life and parents of the individuals in our dataset. Additional information about the parents of these individuals—which is likely contained in immigration screening and vetting interview transcripts related to these individuals and their parents, which we lacked access to—would strengthen our confidence in this assessment.*

*(U//FOUO) We have **moderate confidence** that provision of services to refugees and asylees and programs tailored to adolescents offer opportunities to provide CVE programs to address radicalization factors possibly relevant to foreign-born US residents. Our assessment is based on a review of services provided to refugees and asylum seekers and current programs focused on immigrant youth, which, collectively, can address many of the common grievances and experiences of the foreign-born individuals in our dataset.*

*(U//FOUO) We have **moderate confidence** that open discussions with community and religious centers about overseas conflicts and ways violent extremists may use religion to justify their actions would likely help dissuade some foreign-born, US-based individuals from relying exclusively on Internet research. Our assessment is based on an analysis of current CVE programs and grievances cited by the individuals in our dataset to determine whether these programs would likely address the radicalization factors of these individuals. The inherent challenges involved in proving that CVE efforts have successfully countered radicalization of violent extremists or possible radicalization of vulnerable individuals limit our confidence in this assessment.*

(U) Report Suspicious Activity

(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement. Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit <http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx>.

(U) Tracked by: HSEC-8.1, HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.5

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