

Introduction

Since the historical events occurring on September 11, 2001, the United States has seen increases in Islamist extremism. This has caused unprecedented challenges for law enforcement and intelligence agencies tasked with ensuring the safety of the general population and reducing vulnerability to these hazards. Consequently, perpetrators of these attacks furthered the existing yet dangerous stereotype that specific characteristics construct a profile of what terrorists are believed to be and appear as. While it is exceptionally important to avoid assumptions of a terrorist profile based upon what is stated above, commonalities between individuals dedicated to, inspired by, and/or radicalized by al-Qaeda can be analyzed to better understand possible contributions to the radicalization process. This poster presents the findings of geographic and demographic analyses in efforts to identify trends in al-Qaeda radicalization throughout the United States. The purpose of this study is to use quantitative and qualitative data to explore al-Qaeda radicalization in the United States to assist in the development of effective counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization measures by revealing trends and respective causes for individual participation.

Methodology

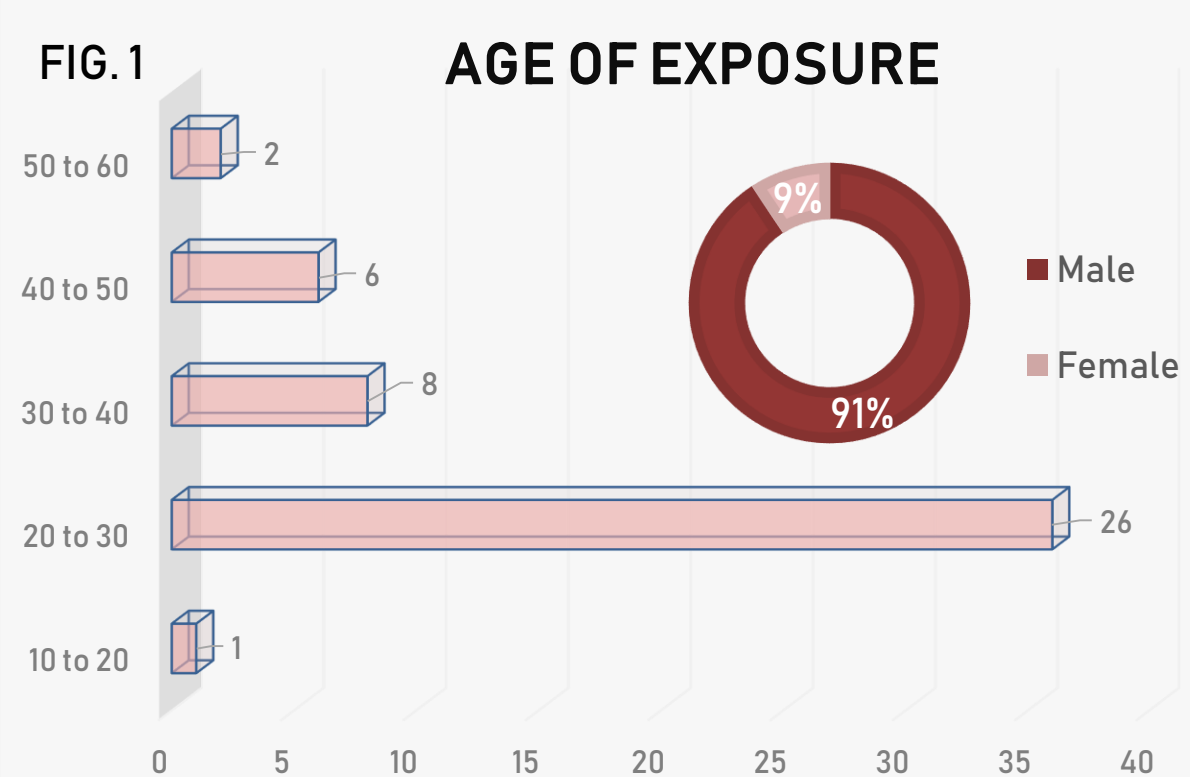
Data for this study were obtained primarily from the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) dataset provided by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland (2018). Variables were selected to analyze individuals who met the following criteria:

- (i) Conformed to Islamist radicalization extremist ideologies
- (ii) Affiliated with/inspired by al-Qaeda
- (iii) United States of America as country of citizenship
- (iv) Citizen by birth residency status

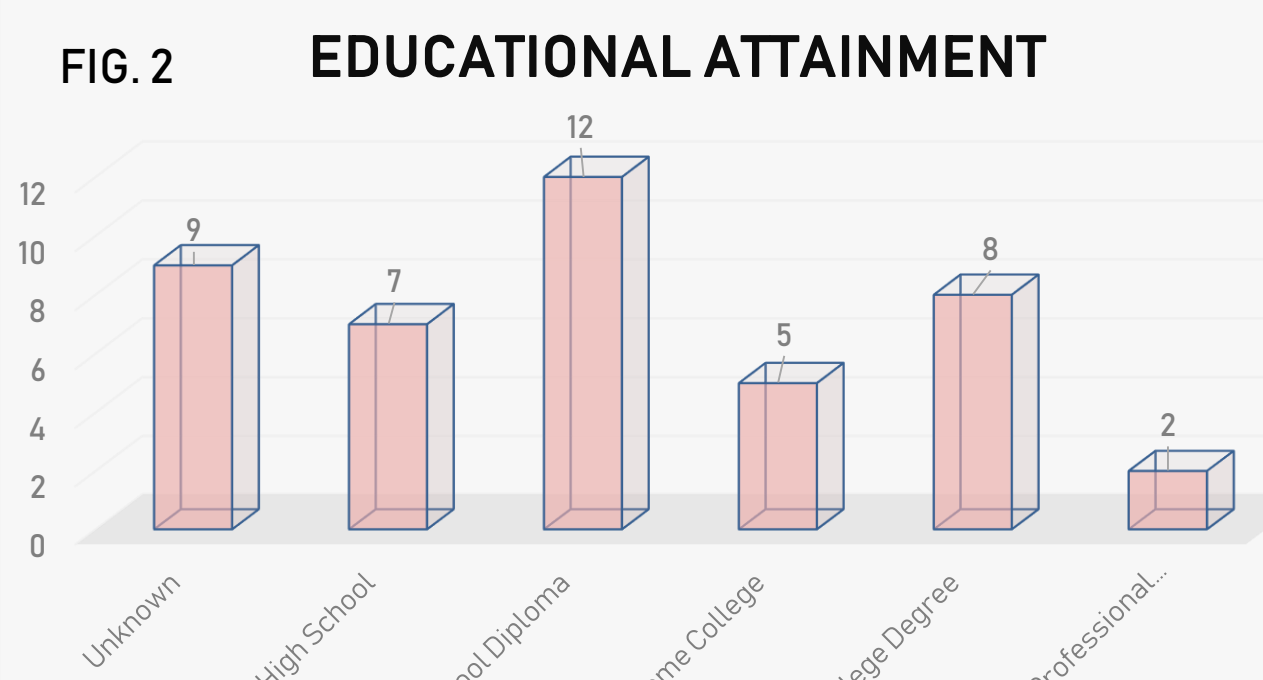
Using these data, relevant graphs and maps were produced using Microsoft Excel and ArcMap 10.6 for further visual analysis and to identify geographic regions of vulnerability in regards to domestic radicalization-the process by which someone adopts extreme positions on social or political issues.

Demographic Analysis

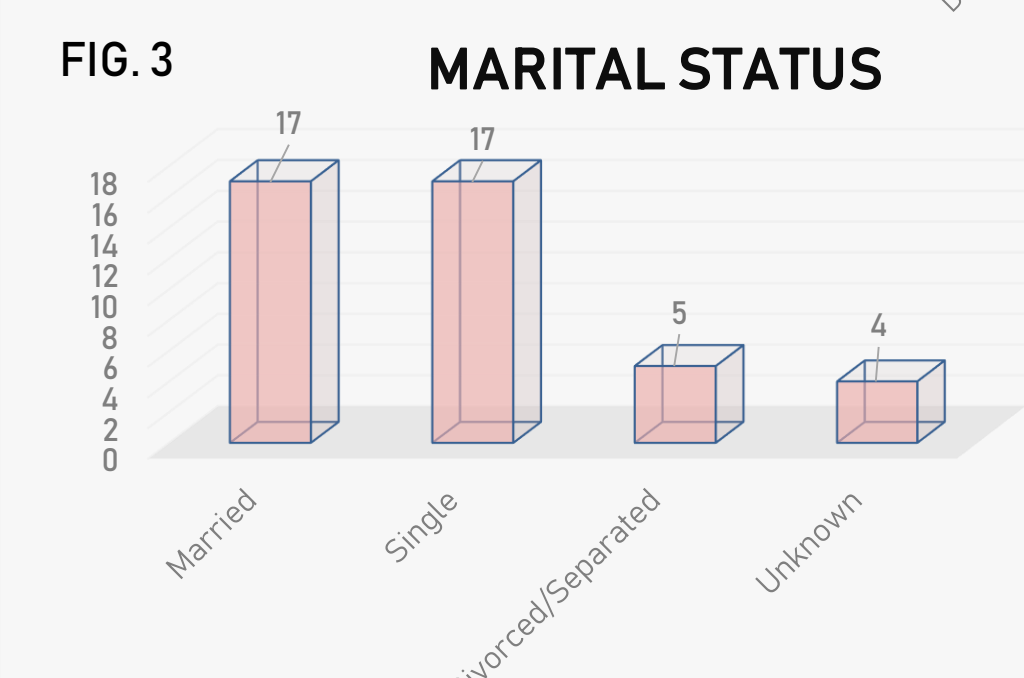
Select demographic variables were chosen to determine if any commonalities existed in the 43 select individuals.



Islamist extremists tend to be young males with many influenced by the internet. However, women are becoming increasingly common in organizations as they seek a sense of belonging in a community, an escape from oppressive conditions, and/or financial security (fig. 1).

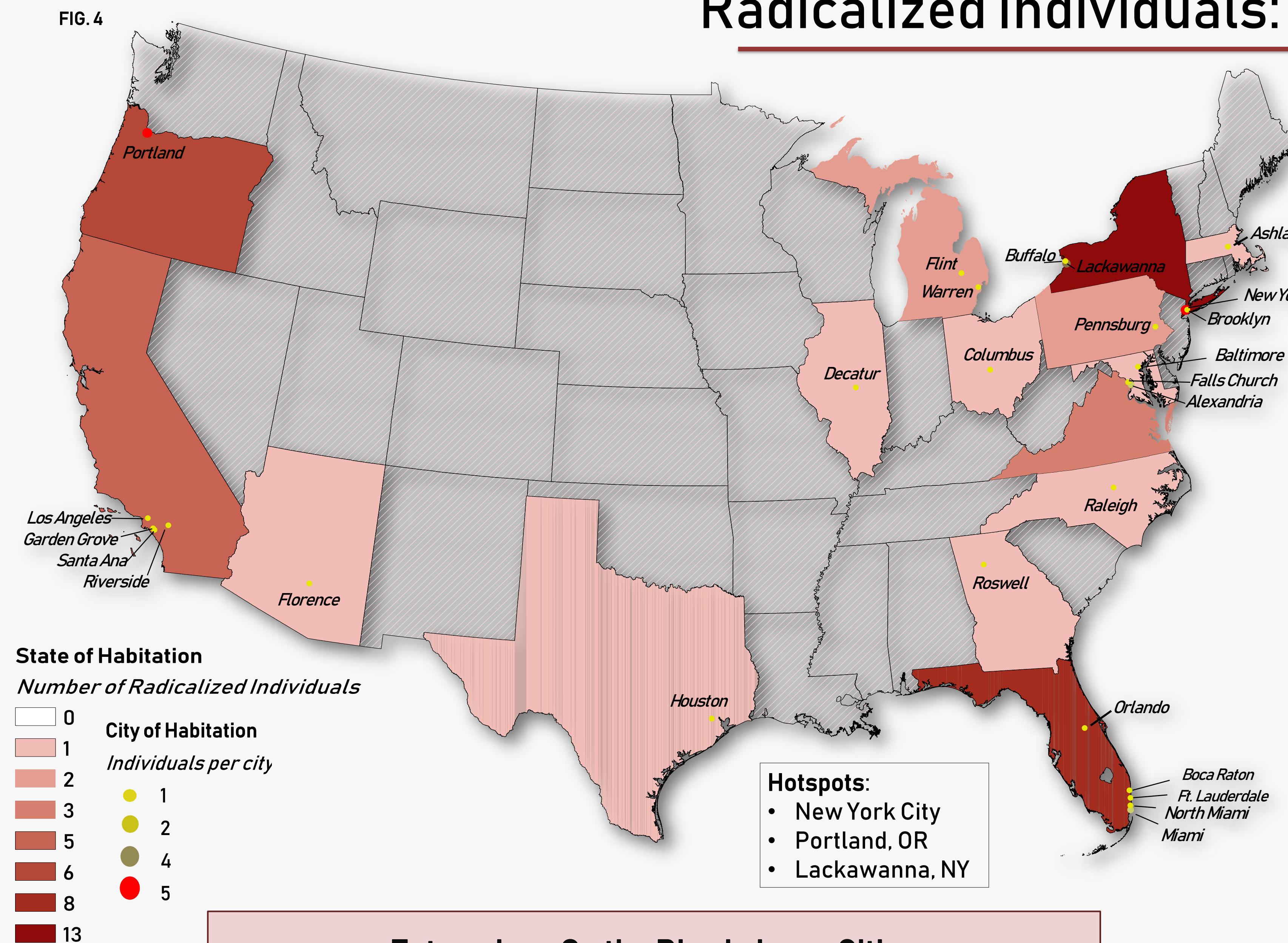


Education levels were known for 34 individuals. Interestingly, no level was significantly higher than another. However, all 34 individuals obtained some level of education. Both holders of a Doctoral/Professional degree were married males and had no record of previous plot attempts (fig. 2).



Single/unmarried individuals were more likely to plot a violent attack in comparison to those married or divorced/separated. Approximately 84% of individuals who did not plot attacks were married (fig. 3).

Radicalized Individuals: Places of Habitation



Extremism: On the Rise in Inner Cities

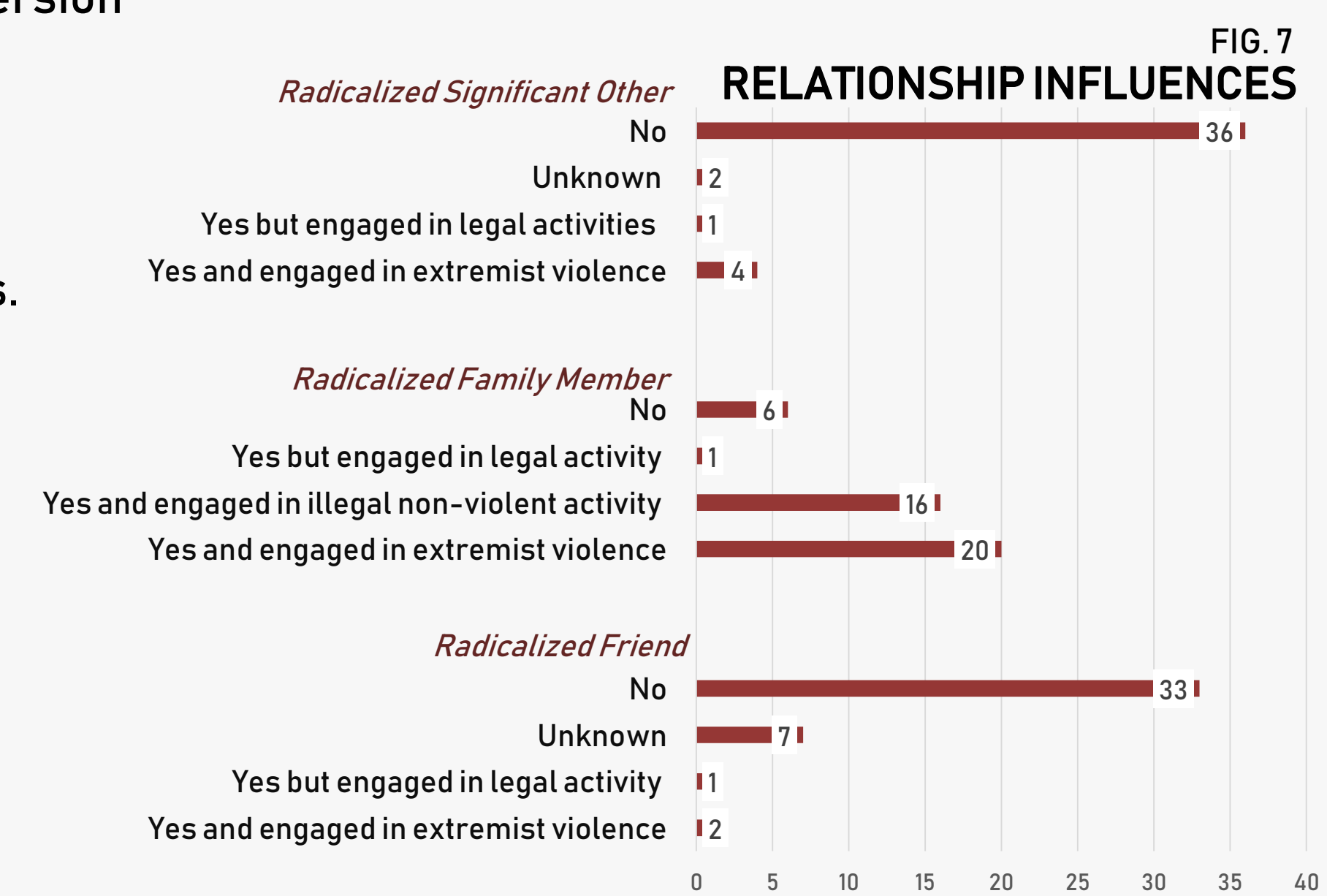
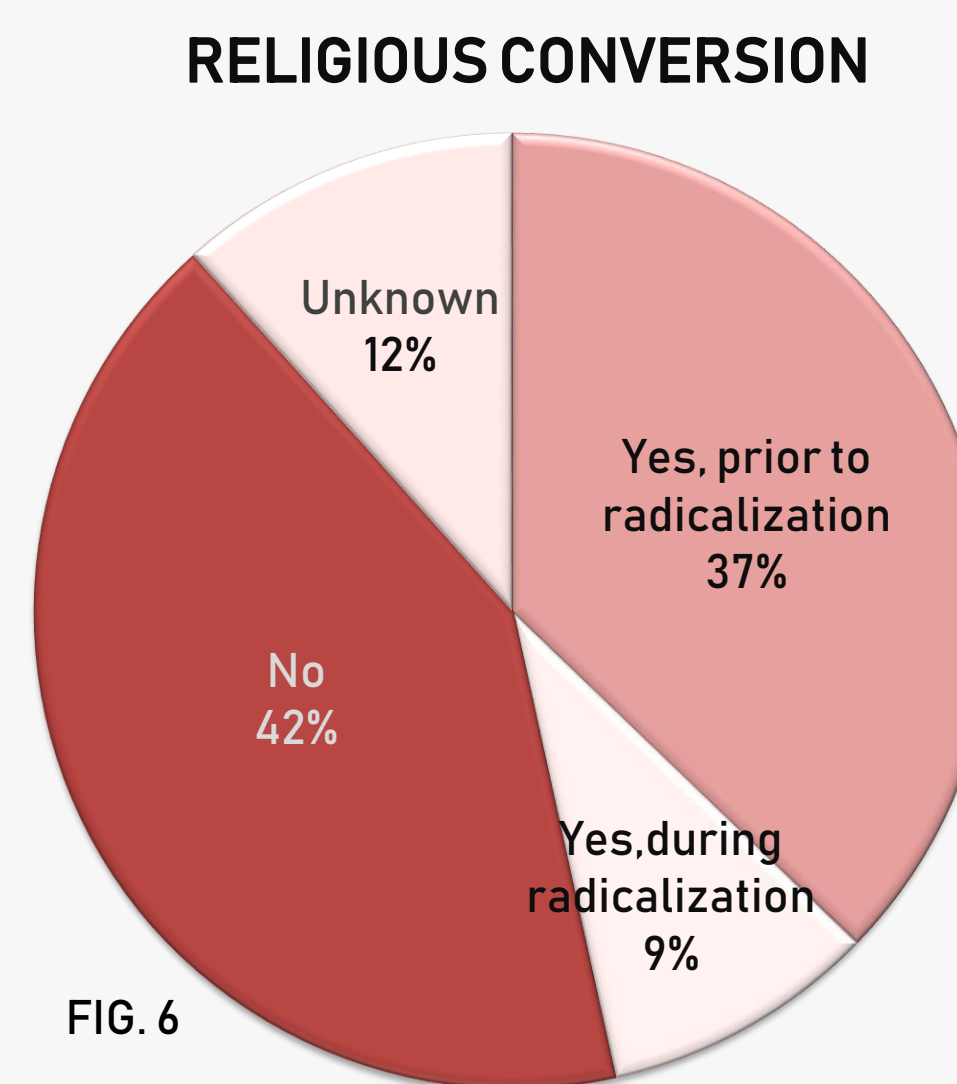
In cities across the United States, social issues including economic disparities, drug addiction, alcoholism, and violence run rampant in poverty stricken areas. Such concerns are resonating within certain populations in urban areas generating increased support for al-Qaeda rhetoric in New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia. In findings published by the Clarion Project (2018), interviewers found that many Muslims living within impacted areas dislike the American government and blame administration for a lack of relief and support to alleviate their grievances. al-Qaeda's vocal detestation of the U.S. government may serve to attract vulnerable individuals to their cause.

The PIRUS dataset utilized for this study examined 2,148 far-left, far-right, Islamist, and single issue extremists in the United States. Of these, 42% (922) were far right extremists, followed by Islamist extremists at 23% (496). The remaining individuals were associated with far-left ideologies (366) and single-issue ideologies (364).

Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, Islamist extremism became more prevalent throughout the United States. A total of 83 of the 496 (16%) Islamist-ideology based extremist organizations were affiliated with and/or inspired by al-Qaeda core. More than half of these individuals (43) were citizens by birth.

Religious affiliation may be one of the most influential characteristics for individuals committing to extremist ideologies. (fig. 6). For Islamic extremist organizations like al-Qaeda, their devotion to Allah combined with violent interpretations of Prophet Muhammad's teachings that serve as the foundation of Islam often are used as justifications for attacks, killings, and nefarious plots. These interpretations can also be used to influence the sense of appeal and righteousness associated with becoming an active member and/or serving as a martyr. Islamic conversion plays an essential role in al-Qaeda's foundation. The organization views their transformation of individuals from the Christian- West to Radical Islam to be one of their greatest victories.

Along with religious association, the influence of relationships with other radicalized individuals can be a critical push factor, pull factor, and aid in long term commitment.

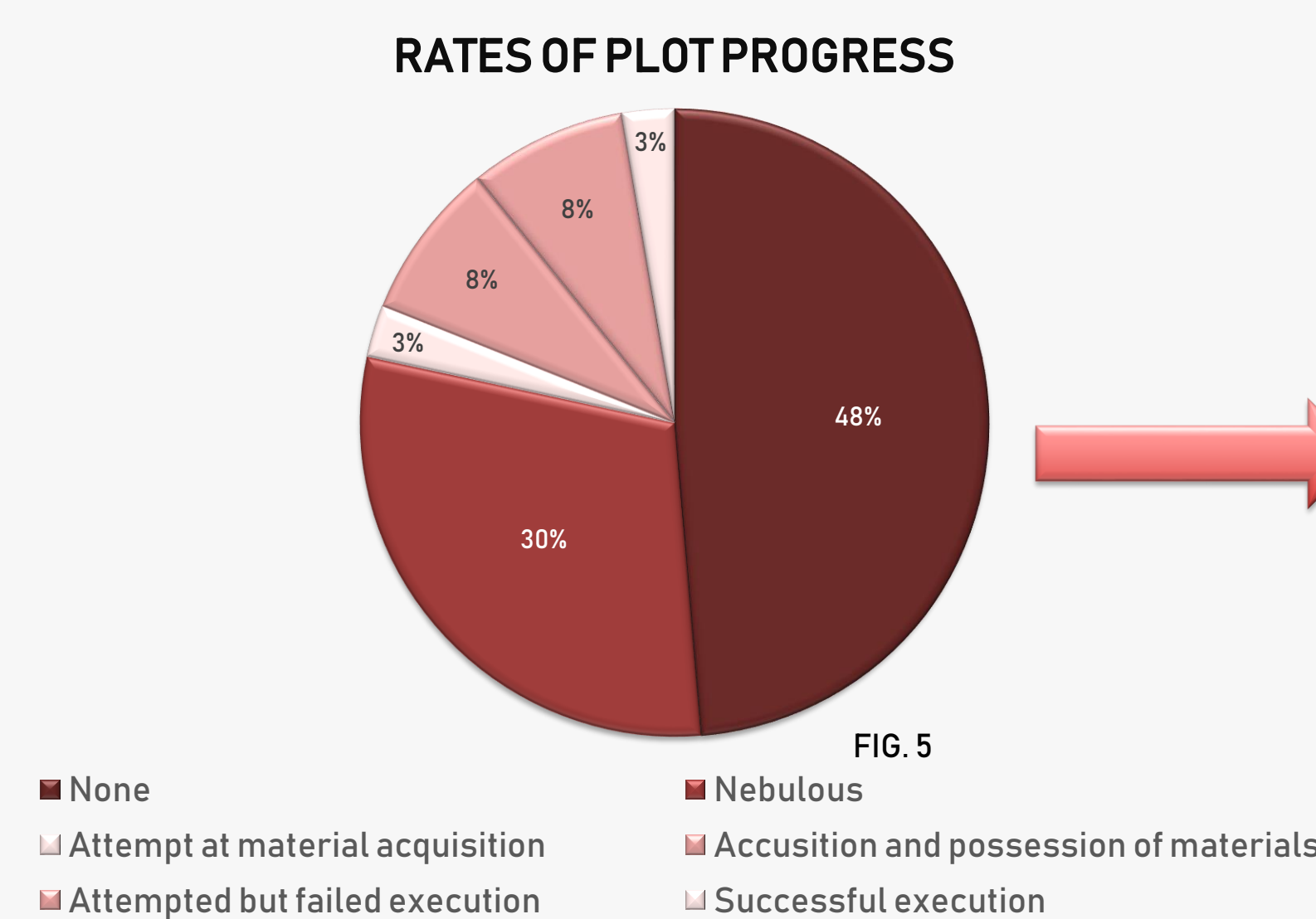


Attack Plots: Targets, Success Rates, and Acquisition

"More aspirational than operational."

A total of 37 extremists were considered violent by actively engaging in operations and actions ideologically motivated with the intent to cause harm resulting in casualties or injuries. However, a majority of these plots either failed while in progress or were prevented during the initial planning period (fig 5.).

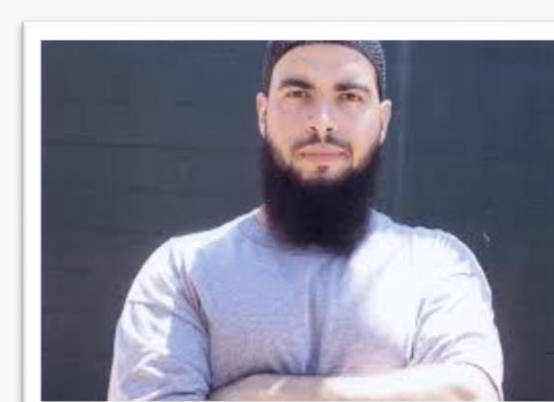
Single/unmarried individuals made the most extensive plot progress. While eight had no plot, six had a nebulous plot. Two of these six were attempted but failed to be executed. Only one plot was successfully executed.



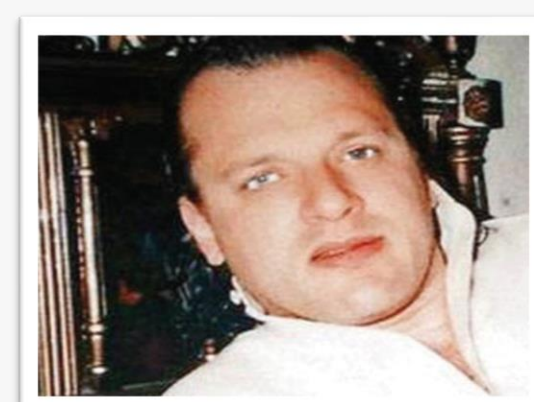
The individuals shown below are just a few of the many natural born American citizens recruited by al-Qaeda. While their functional roles and hierarchical positions vary, their missions were similar: to carry out an attack on behalf of al-Qaeda to bring attention to some of the most recurring grievances faced by the global Muslim Community.



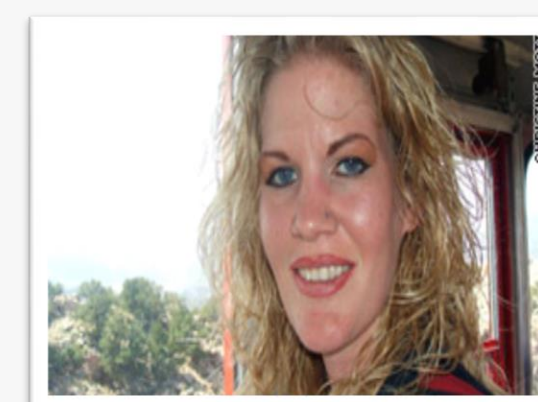
Anwar al-Awlaki



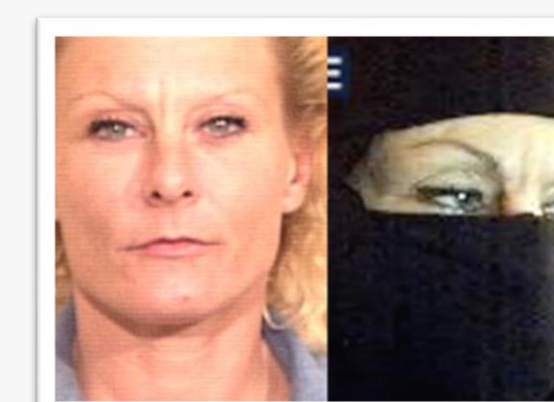
Tarek Mehanna



David Headley



Jamie Ramirez, "Jihad Jamie"



Colleen R. LaRose, "Jihad Jane"



Adam Yahiye Gadahn

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