

CANADIAN TERRORISTS BY THE NUMBERS

An Assessment of Canadians Joining
and Supporting Terrorist Groups

Alex Wilner
with Irfan Yar



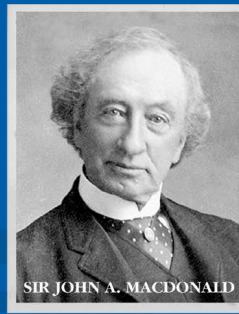
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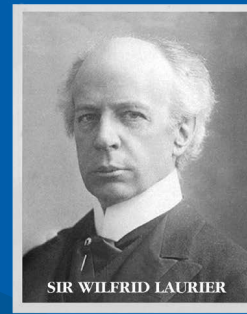
True North in
Canadian public policy



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Executive Summary

Canadian involvement with Islamist (or Salafi-Jihadi) militancy did not start with ISIS. Nor will it end with ISIS. Canada's ISIS recruits, put into a larger historical context, are but a contemporary example of Canadian citizens supporting militancy, both at home and abroad. This report is an exploration of the phenomenon of Canadians joining and supporting terrorist organizations and militant movements associated with ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other similar groups.

Complementing previous research on the composition and motivation of foreign fighters and Canadian terrorists, this report uses open access information to provide a detailed sketch of individuals suspected of having facilitated, sponsored, or participated in terrorism between 2006 and 2017. It establishes a dataset of 95 individuals with a nexus to Canada who have, or are

suspected of having, radicalized, mobilized, and/or participated in Islamist terrorist activity between 2006 and 2017. As in all similar studies of contemporary European or US jihadist violence, the individuals captured by our study are remarkably diverse in their ethnic origins, social and economic status, educational and vocational accomplishments, gender, and so on.

The analysis sheds light on several fronts. It provides a snapshot of the particular militant groups Canadians have historically gravitated to, and information on individual characteristics and traits, including on gender, education, upbringing, family, and cultural and religious background. And, when compared to similar research conducted in other countries, including the US, UK, and several other European states, this report adds international context

This report uses open access information to provide a detailed sketch of individuals suspected of having facilitated, sponsored, or participated in terrorism.

to Canada's experience, highlighting how Canadian militants compare to their foreign counterparts. To better illustrate the particular backgrounds of Canadian terrorists and suspected militants, this paper showcases short vignettes detailing four individuals: Sabrina Djermane, Awso Peshdary, John Maguire, and Mohammed El Shaer. These vignettes offer a narrative account of how each individual became radicalized, and in some cases, participated in political violence and terrorism.

Put together, this report assesses national trends in the support of domestic and international terrorism, and better informs Canada's evolving counterterrorism, counter-radicalization, and intelligence-gathering policies and strategies. Some of the key findings from this dataset of 95 individuals include:

- Men made up 95 percent of cases in this dataset. In comparison, women constitute from 11 and 30 percent of British, French, German, and Dutch foreign fighters;
- Average age of individuals in this dataset was 27, which is roughly on par with the average age of US jihadists but a few years older than the Europeans;
- All individuals were either Canadian citizens or residents of Canada, with 28 individuals reportedly having immigrated to Canada;
- 55 percent of individuals captured in this data originated in Ontario;
- Less than 50 percent had enrolled in post-secondary education programs, which is similar to cases in the US but is significantly higher than in Europe;
- 11 percent are reported to have had criminal charges laid against them prior to their involvement in political violence, which is lower than in Europe;
- A majority of the Canadian profiles were formally or informally affiliated with ISIS (50 percent) or Al-Qaeda (27 percent); and
- 70 percent of the individuals captured in the data sought to travel abroad to join or support a foreign militant organization.

In many ways, Canada's contemporary experience with Islamist terrorism and the foreign fighter phenomenon is more similar to America's. While ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other groups have at times purposefully threatened and targeted Canadian citizens and assets, rarely have they succeeded in doing so directly. The fatal attacks Canada has suffered over the past decade have been organized by individuals inspired to act rather than trained to act.

In contrast, nearly 530 Belgium nationals, for instance, travelled to Syria and Iraq to join militant organizations, and Belgium suffered a string of major and minor terrorist attacks between 2014 and 2018. Its capital, Brussels, was likewise chosen as a base of operation for the ISIS cell responsible for several attacks across Europe, including the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks, which together killed more than 160 individuals. The perpetrators of the Paris attack included several Belgium nationals. The terrorism Canada has faced over the past decade has been dangerous, but also rudimentary in nature and limited in scale.

In addition, the backgrounds of Canadians involved in these activities are also equally distinct from Europeans. For instance, the dataset shows that Canadian profiles had significantly higher educational attainment, less criminal convictions prior to their involvement in political violence, and were on average slightly older than their counterparts in Europe. There were also significantly fewer women in the dataset, although some reports indicate that approximately 30 Canadian women had travelled to ISIS-held territory in the past several years. In many respects, the individuals captured in this data seem closer in terms of their background with those in the United States.

Ultimately, by building a unique dataset of Canadian Islamist radicalization and participation in terrorism over the past decade, this report provides a national snapshot of the individual characteristics and trends associated with a particularly dangerous form of contemporary political violence. And by comparing the Canadian data and analysis to similar research conducted in other countries, an international consensus can be built that illustrates both the similarities and differences between national contexts. In sum, we demonstrate the uniquely Canadian markers that feed into our national experience of Islamist radicalization and terrorism, while also shedding light on larger, global trends that inform and influence developments in Canada.

Sommaire

La participation canadienne au militantisme islamiste (ou salafiste-djihadiste) n'a pas débuté ni ne prendra fin avec la création, puis la dissolution de l'État islamique d'Iraq et de Syrie (EIIS). Considéré dans une perspective historique plus vaste, l'enrôlement par l'EIIS de recrues au Canada est avant tout un exemple de militantisme contemporain soutenu par des citoyens canadiens, tant au pays qu'à l'étranger. Le présent rapport explore le phénomène des Canadiens qui contribuent et donnent leur appui à des organisations terroristes et des mouvements militants associés à l'EIIS, à Al-Qaïda ou à d'autres organisations semblables.

Venant compléter les résultats de recherches précédentes sur la composition et la motivation des combattants étrangers et des terroristes canadiens, ce rapport tire profit des renseignements en accès libre pour livrer une description détaillée des personnes soupçonnées d'avoir facilité ou parrainé la participation au terrorisme entre 2006 et 2017 ou, encore, d'y voir pris part. Il crée une série de données portant sur 95 personnes qui ont des liens avec le Canada et ont été reconnues coupables ou soupçonnées de radicalisation, de mobilisation à la violence et/ou de participation à une activité terroriste islamiste entre 2006 et 2017. Comme dans toutes les études similaires sur la violence djihadiste européenne ou américaine contemporaine, les individus recensés dans notre étude sont remarquablement divers en ce qui concerne leur origine ethnique, leur statut social et économique, leur cheminement scolaire et professionnel, leur identité sexuelle et ainsi de suite.

L'analyse est éclairante sur plus d'un plan. Elle dresse le portrait de certains groupes militants qui, par le passé, ont attiré les Canadiens dans leurs rangs et relève les caractéristiques individuelles de ces personnes, notamment leur identité sexuelle, leur niveau de scolarité et leurs antécédents familiaux, culturels et religieux. En outre, comparativement aux recherches similaires menées à l'étranger, notamment aux États-Unis, au Royaume-Uni et dans plusieurs pays européens, ce rapport établit un rapprochement entre les militants canadiens et leurs homologues étrangers, replaçant ainsi l'expérience canadienne dans un contexte international. Pour mieux illustrer les antécédents caractéristiques des terroristes canadiens et des militants présumés, ce rapport présente de courts exposés sur quatre personnes : Sabrine Djermane, Awso Peshdary, John Maguire et Mohammed El Shaer. Ces exposés portent sur la radicalisation de chaque personne et, dans certains cas, sur sa participation à la violence politique et au terrorisme.

En somme, le présent rapport fait ressortir les tendances nationales en matière d'adhésion au terrorisme national et international afin de mieux éclairer les politiques et les stratégies en constante évolution du Canada en matière de lutte contre le terrorisme et la radicalisation et de collecte de renseignements. Quelques-unes des conclusions clés tirées de cet ensemble de données portant sur 95 personnes sont présentées ici :

- Les hommes comptaient pour 95 pour cent des personnes recensées dans cet ensemble de données. En revanche, entre 11 et 30 pour cent des combattants britanniques, français, allemands et néerlandais étaient des femmes.
- L'âge moyen des personnes recensées était de 27 ans, ce qui correspond à peu près à l'âge moyen des djihadistes américains, mais dépasse de quelques années celui des Européens.
- Toutes les personnes recensées étaient soit des citoyens canadiens soit des résidents du Canada; quelque 28 personnes auraient immigré au Canada.

- 55 pour cent des personnes recensées provenaient de l'Ontario.
- Moins de 50 pour cent d'entre elles se sont déjà inscrites à des programmes d'enseignement postsecondaire, ce qui est similaire aux cas déclarés aux États-Unis, mais nettement plus élevé qu'en Europe.
- 11 pour cent auraient fait l'objet d'accusations criminelles avant leur participation à des actes de violence politique, un chiffre plus bas qu'en Europe.
- La majorité des profils canadiens étaient officiellement ou officieusement affiliés à l'EIIS (50 pour cent) ou à Al-Qaïda (27 pour cent).
- 70 pour cent des personnes recensées ont cherché à voyager à l'étranger pour rejoindre ou soutenir une organisation militante étrangère.

À bien des égards, l'expérience contemporaine du Canada en ce qui concerne le terrorisme islamiste et le phénomène des combattants étrangers ressemble beaucoup à celle des États-Unis. Bien que l'EIIS, Al-Qaïda et d'autres groupes aient parfois délibérément menacé et ciblé des citoyens et des avoies canadiens, ils ont rarement réussi à parvenir à leurs fins de manière directe. Les attaques meurtrières au Canada durant la dernière décennie ont été organisées par des individus inspirés à agir plutôt que formés pour agir.

En revanche, près de 530 Belges se sont rendus en Syrie et en Irak pour rejoindre des organisations militantes, et la Belgique a subi une série d'attentats terroristes majeurs et mineurs entre 2014 et 2018. Sa capitale, Bruxelles, est également devenue la base d'opérations de la cellule de l'EIIS responsable de plusieurs attentats en Europe, qui ont touché notamment Paris en 2017 et Bruxelles en 2016 à Bruxelles et ont fait plus de 160 morts. Par ailleurs, les auteurs de l'attaque de Paris comptaient parmi eux plusieurs ressortissants belges. Si le terrorisme subi par le Canada durant la décennie écoulée s'est avéré dangereux, il a été, par contre, de nature plutôt rudimentaire et de portée limitée.

Ajoutons que les antécédents des Canadiens qui ont participé à ces activités étaient également distincts de ceux des Européens. Par exemple, l'ensemble de données montre que le niveau de scolarité des Canadiens était nettement supérieur, que ces derniers avaient encouru moins de condamnations criminelles avant leur participation à un acte de violence politique et qu'ils étaient en moyenne légèrement plus âgés. L'ensemble de données comprenait également beaucoup moins de femmes, bien que certains rapports indiquent qu'environ 30 Canadiennes se sont rendues sur un territoire contrôlé par l'EIIS au cours des dernières années. À de nombreux égards, les personnes recensées ressemblaient davantage aux cas déclarés aux États-Unis.

Ultimement, en créant un ensemble de données unique sur la radicalisation et la participation au terrorisme islamiste au Canada au cours de la dernière décennie, ce rapport dresse le portrait national des personnes et des tendances associées à une forme particulièrement dangereuse de violence politique contemporaine. En outre, la comparaison des données et de l'analyse canadiennes avec des recherches similaires menées dans d'autres pays ouvre la voie à l'établissement d'un consensus international en ce qui concerne à la fois les similitudes et les différences entre les contextes nationaux. En résumé, nous présentons les marqueurs canadiens uniques qui enrichissent notre connaissance de la radicalisation et du terrorisme islamiste au Canada, tout en faisant la lumière sur les tendances mondiales plus vastes qui mettent en évidence et influencent l'évolution de la situation au pays.

Introduction

The rise and fall of the Islamic State has been swift. In just five years, the terrorist organization – also known as Daesh or ISIS – has gone full circle, from being a minor offshoot of Al-Qaeda to rapidly growing into the world’s most expansive terrorist organization to returning once again to its original position, as a relatively weak and disorganized militant organization. Today, ISIS is cornered to a small pocket of territory wedged along Syria’s eastern border with Iraq, where some 2000 ISIS fighters remain according to US military estimates (Nissenbaum and Youssef 2018).

But, at its peak, ISIS directly controlled large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria. And while ISIS used terrorism as a tactic, it was, for some time, more of a state than merely a terrorist organization (Cronin 2015). It collected taxes and provided municipal services; it issued birth certificates and handed down fines; it hired bureaucrats and ran government ministries (Cal-

limachi 2018). It built international partnerships, with affiliates and supporters including established terrorist organizations like Nigeria’s Boko Haram (since renaming itself ISIS–West Africa) and several other smaller organizations around the world, from Bangladesh to Egypt, and Tunisia to the Philippines.

Perhaps most importantly, ISIS attracted global attention. Some 40,000 foreign fighters joined its ranks from all around the world. “In some months,” Professor Daniel Byman (2018) writes, “more than a thousand foreign fighters” travelled to ISIS-held territory to join and support its efforts. Canadians were among them.

Canadian involvement with Islamist (or Salafi-Jihadi)¹ militancy did not start with ISIS, however. Nor will it end with ISIS. Canada’s ISIS recruits,

put into a larger historical context, are but a contemporary example of Canadian citizens supporting militancy, both at home and abroad. This report is an exploration of the phenomenon of Canadians joining and supporting terrorist organizations and militant movements associated with ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other similar groups. The culmination of over 18 months of data collection conducted between 2016 and 2017, this report provides a biographical assessment of 95 Canadians who are suspected of having facilitated, sponsored, or participated in terrorism between 2006 and 2017.

This report uses open access information from hundreds of media, government, and academic sources to provide a detailed sketch of these individuals, providing a nation-wide comparison of suspected and known Canadian militants. It complements recent research on

Canada’s ISIS recruits, put into a larger historical context, are but a contemporary example of Canadian citizens supporting militancy.

the composition and motivation of foreign fighters (Dawson and Amarasingam 2017; Amarasingam and Dawson 2018), as well as previous work on Canadian terrorists from the 1980s to 2011 (Wilner 2010; Mullins 2013; Ilardi 2013; McCoy and Knight 2015). The analysis sheds light on several fronts. It provides a snapshot of the particular militant groups Canadians have historically gravitated to, and information on individual characteristics and traits, including on gender, education, upbringing, family, and cultural and religious background. And, when compared to similar research conducted in other countries, including the US, UK, and several other European states, this report adds international context to Canada's experience, highlighting how Canadian militants compare to their foreign counterparts.

Put together, this report assesses national trends in the support of domestic and international terrorism, and better informs Canada's evolving counterterrorism, counter-radicalization, and intelligence-gathering policies and strategies.

The report itself is divided into three broad sections. Section one offers a review of contemporary support for transnational terrorist groups by individuals living around the world. With a focus on ISIS and Al-Qaeda, a global snapshot is provided, along with national summaries of nine countries, including the Low and Nordic Countries of Europe, Germany, France, the UK, and the US. Section two provides an analysis and breakdown of the Canadian data collected by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute as part of this project. Summaries and discussions are provided thematically, and compared to the European and US data. In section three, short vignettes of several prominent Canadian terrorists and suspected militants are showcased, offering a narrative account of individual processes of radicalization, and in some cases, participation in political violence and terrorism.

The Global Context

Determining the exact number of foreign fighters that ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations have recruited over the past 10 years is difficult. What is evident, however, is that over the past five years ISIS's spectacular growth in the midst of the Syrian civil war has attracted the attention of would-be sympathizers from around the world. While absolute numbers do not exist, trends suggest that thousands of individuals have travelled to train, fight, and die with ISIS in Syria, Iraq, and beyond. Different reports cite different total figures, however. For instance, open-sourced data compiled by the Soufan Group, a US security consultancy, published in 2014, identifies some 12,000 foreign fighters from 81 countries. Soufan's (2015) figures jump to around 31,000 fighters in a report published 18 months later. The latest Soufan report, published in October 2017, estimates that over 40,000 foreigners, travelling from over 110 different countries, have joined ISIS and other groups since 2011 (Barrett 2017).

Separately, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), based in the United Kingdom, pointed to over 20,000 foreign fighters in a January 2015 report by Peter Neumann. Other total figures are provided by the Institute for Economics and Peace. Using data compiled by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) and other media and government sources, they found that nearly 30,000 foreign fighters, from 100 countries, had travelled to Iraq and Syria between 2011 and 2015. Over 7000 recruits joined ISIS in the first half of 2015 alone (Institute for Economics and Peace 2015). And more recently, the European Commission's Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) in 2017 reported that a

total of 40,000 foreigners travelled to Iraq and Syria between 2011 and 2016. Of that total, over 5000 fighters originated from Europe (15).

Building on the European storyline, a 2016 report from the Combatting Terrorism Center (CTC), located at the United States Military Academy in West Point, analysed 4600 ISIS personnel records of incoming foreign fighters that ISIS itself had collected between 2013 and 2014 – a period of time that corresponds with rapid growth for the organization. The records were given to NBC News by an ISIS defector, and subsequently handed over to the CTC for further assessment (Doddwell, Milton, and Ressler 2016, iv; 4; 5). West Point tabulated the number of fighters per million citizens of each country represented in the data. The European countries with the highest rank included Denmark, Belgium, France, Sweden, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

Single-country studies of these and other European countries corroborate the overall trend.² As ISIS continues to collapse, a perennial policy concern is the potential threat returning foreign fighters might pose to the security of their country of origin. The concern is underpinned by the fact that, according to RAN (2017, 15), between 2014 and 2016, 42 terrorist attacks targeted the West, of which 38 involved some form of relationship between ISIS and the perpetrator.

What follows is a detailed breakdown of the European and US data relating both to contemporary foreign fighters, and in cases where such information is available, the longer-term and historical data on domestic violent radicalization and terrorist mobilization.

The Low Countries

The low countries of Europe pose an interesting example of small states with relatively large flows of foreign fighters. Belgium and the Netherlands, compared to their overall population size, have witnessed rather high numbers of citizens and residents travelling to terrorist-held territory in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere. Nearly 530 Belgium nationals, for instance, travelled to Syria and Iraq to join militant organizations (Barrett 2017). This is a telling figure given that Belgium suffered a string of major and minor terrorist attacks between 2014 and 2018. Its capital, Brussels, was likewise chosen as a base of operation for the ISIS cell responsible for several attacks across Europe, including the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks, which together killed more than 160 individuals. The perpetrators of the Paris attack included several Belgium nationals.

Beyond Belgium, an estimated 220 individuals travelled from the Netherlands to terrorist hotspots, of which a reported 70 were women. But even before ISIS rose to prominence, Dutch fighters had joined or tried to join other terrorist groups. For example, in 2001 two Dutch citizens of Moroccan background travelled to India to join jihadist groups fighting in Kashmir but were killed before they were able to make contact, and in 2003 two other Dutch citizens were arrested trying to join Chechen militants (Bakker and de Bont 2016).

In their 2016 descriptive case study of Belgian and Dutch foreign fighters, European scholars Edwin Bakker and Roel de Bont use a database of 370 individual cases, including 211 cases from Belgium and 159 from the Netherlands. They use the data to help identify militant attributes and motivations for radicalization. Respectively, 50 percent and 41 percent of the Belgian and Dutch samples were first- or second-generation immigrants from Morocco. Only 6 percent of the total were converts to Islam. Demographically, the average age was 23.5 years and an overwhelming majority – 81 percent – were male. Of interest, 20 percent of the sample had criminal records. Socio-economically, nearly 70 percent of the Dutch sample were considered lower class, while only 50 percent of the Belgium sample were. A majority of those included in the sample did not finish any higher education.

Based on their data, Bakker and de Bont suggest that two broad factors help explain why individuals from the Low Countries are attracted to militancy. The first, a push factor, is the difficulty some minority groups have in properly integrating into European society and the associated perception of widespread discrimination. A second, a pull factor, relates to a general, human desire for a sense of belonging, to be part of something bigger. Terrorist organizations, in this case, provided individuals with a higher calling (Bakker and de Bont 2016, 846).

These findings and assertions are corroborated by several studies, including a 2016 report published by Sarah Teich with the IDC Herzliya International Institute for Counter Terrorism. Teich applies social movement theory to explore the reality of an integration deficit in Belgium. Like Bakker and de Bont, she points to strained environmental conditions, high rates of perceived lack of social integration, low levels of higher education, and high rates of criminality among Belgium's terrorists (Teich 2016, 12; 38; 39).

Eleswhere, Ben Taub, a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, assesses the power some groups, like Sharia4Belgium – an organization established in 2010 with the goal of transforming Belgium into a strictly theocratic state – have had on framing the extremist narrative and recruiting aggrieved individuals (Taub 2015). As many as 70 former members of Sharia4Belgium are thought to have travelled to join ISIS (Teich 2016, 41). Teich also emphasizes the importance of social networks, noting the particular characteristics of Belgium's Muslim and immigrant community, and their geographic clustering around Antwerp and Brussels (3; 5; 8; 37).

On the importance of framing, Samar Batrawi (2013), a Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, argues similarly that some Dutch foreign fighters were influenced by civil society organizations who used foreign events – including events taking place in Syria – to radicalize and galvanize individuals into supporting militants (6; 7). Writing with Ilona Chmoun, Batrawi (2014) analysed a 150 page manifesto – *De Banier* – written by a leading Dutch jihadist that frames western decadence and debauchery against Islamist solutions (12).

While these studies emphasize several important facets of the contemporary foreign fighter and recruitment phenomenon, they nonetheless treat the phenomenon as a static process. In contrast, Reinier Bergema, from The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, and Marion van San (2017), from the Rotterdam Institute for Strategic Studies, offer an analysis of different waves of Dutch jihadist travellers and recruits. In the first wave (late 2012 to early 2013), 43 recorded foreign fighters were linked to at least one local group based in the country, including Behind Bars, Straat Dawah, or Sharia4Holland (14). Of this first wave, 12 percent were women and another 12 percent were converts.

In the second wave (late 2013 to early 2014), 34 fighters left for Syria or Iraq. This group was largely motivated by Syria's use of chemical weapons (including sarin) in Ghouta, a region on the outskirts of Damascus, in mid-August 2013, which according to the US government killed

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nearly 1500 people, including over 400 children, and to US President Barack Obama's unwillingness to subsequently adhere to his own "red lines" in retaliating against Syria (16). Around this time, Islamist and jihadist sympathies gradually became "mainstream" in some social networks in the Dutch cities of The Hague and Delft. The third and final wave of 59 foreign fighters began with ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's June 2014 proclamation of the caliphate and his exhortation for *hijrah* (or emigration) (18).

The Nordic Countries

To begin with, when taking into account each country's relatively small Muslim population, it is important to note that all Nordic countries are included in the list of top 10 sources of foreign fighters (Benmelech and Klor 2017, 6). By 2017, an estimated 135 Danish, 90 Norwegian, 80 Finnish, and 300 Swedish nationals had left the country as foreign fighters (Counter Extremism Project 2019). Of these, 67 Danish fighters, 43 Finnish fighters, and 106 Swedish fighters are thought to have returned to their country of origin (Barrett 2017, 11; 13).

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According to a Finnish researcher, Juha Saarinen (2014; Whyte 2017), while 2012 can be considered the starting point of mobilization towards joining the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, it was during the summer of 2013 that the greatest number of individuals from Finland actually joined jihadist groups. A smaller subset of foreign fighters also joined other opposition forces fighting the Syrian government. By August 2015, at least 70 individuals from Finland had travelled to Syria and Iraq. Approximately one dozen died fighting and another 35 are believed to be still active in the conflict. Some Finnish fighters are relatively young, in their late teens and early twenties, but another third of the total are believed to be over 30 years of age. An estimated 20 percent of the Finnish contingent are women.

Shifting towards better understanding individual motivations for departing in the first place, Jakob Sheikh (2016), an investigative reporter with the Danish daily *Politiken*, conducted 16 in-depth interviews with active and returned foreign fighters from the cities of Aarhus and Copenhagen, including eight that joined ISIS. His findings, published in 2016, emphasize that most individuals in his sample received their religious and extremist inspiration not from established religious institutions but rather from friends and confidants. That ISIS declared itself a caliphate was also a specific point of attraction. Other sources note further, for illustration, that of the Danish overall contingent, roughly 27 fighters died abroad.

Another journalist, Per Gudmundson (2013) from Sweden's *Svenska Dagbladet*, found that of the first 30 Swedish foreign fighters to join various militant groups, roughly a third had criminal records, and that a majority came "from relative poverty." And, moreover, half of the sample had previous links to terrorism (5). A subsequent and rather robust descriptive portrait of Swedish foreign fighters was published in 2017 by Linus Gustafsson and Magnus Ranstorp from the Swedish Defence University. Using declassified figures from the Swedish Security Services and

other open sources, their sample includes 237 individuals. Of particular interest is their observation that 80 percent of Sweden's foreign fighters originated from just a few counties: Västra Götaland, Stockholm, Skåne, and Örebro. Like other Nordic researchers, Gustafsson and Rans-torp find that the yearly number of foreign fighters peaked in 2013 (with 98 reported cases) and 2014 (with 78 cases) and dropped dramatically by 2016 (with just 5 cases).

Germany

While the flow of German foreign fighters travelling to join militant organizations overseas ebbed to an average of five a month in 2017, the total suspected number stands at over 915 (Barrett 2017; Lang and Al Wari 2016, 8; Heinke 2017, 17). According to a 2016 report published by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), more than 30 percent of the foreign fighters emanating from Germany are still abroad. Some 250 have returned to Europe and over 100 had died overseas (Boutin et al. 2016). The same ICCT report finds that 60 percent of these fighters hold German or dual German nationality, while the remaining were themselves foreign nationals living in Germany.

Exploring the German figures further in his 2017 report, Daniel Heinke, the Director of the *Landeskriminalamt* (state criminal police office) in Bremen, Germany, collects a sample of 784 individuals who are suspected of having left Germany to support a terrorist organization (17). Heinke finds that most individuals were radicalized and mobilized by inter-personal relations, through friends, family, contacts at extremist mosques, and contacts made through the Internet. This finding is largely corroborated by Anne Speckhard and colleagues, in their analysis of data collected in personal interviews with dozens of ISIS defectors/returnees from around the world, including Europe. Many of these individuals first joined ISIS as a result of a friendship or family bond (Speckhard, Shajkovci, and Yayla 2018, 6; 7). Heinke also illustrates that travellers who left before Baghdadi's proclamation of the caliphate were, on average, three years older than those who left after.

Many of these individuals first joined ISIS as a result of a friendship or family bond.

Criminality plays an interesting role in Heinke's analysis. While two-thirds of the sample had been "subject to criminal investigation," the type of crime changed over time. Before their radicalization, those with links to crime were largely involved in property crimes (62 percent of criminal activity) and drug trafficking (35 percent). Less than 5 percent of criminal activity was linked to political ideology. That changed following the radicalization process: politically motivated offences, as defined by German law, made up 55 percent of criminal activity, whereas drug related offences dropped to under 15 percent.

Finally, Heinke finds that over 130 individuals were converts, and on gender, that 21 percent of the overall sample were women, a finding corroborated by several other reports published in various years (Boutin et al. 2016; Barrett 2017). However, Heinke also finds that of travellers who left only after Baghdadi's 2014 proclamation, the share of women rose from 15 percent to

nearly 40 percent, suggesting that women found the establishment of the Islamic State particularly encouraging.

Attempting to explain jihadi recruitment and mobilization, scholars Efraim Benmelech and Esteban Klor (2017), relying on aggregated data from two Soufan reports, explore how country-level attributes in economics, politics, and development relate to the rate and number of foreign fighters. They argue that foreign fighters are not necessarily driven by economic conditions, but rather by difficulties in assimilating into western society. By contrast, in a 2017 study based on interviews with 20 jihadi foreign fighters from around the world, Canadian scholars Lorne Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam (2017) find instead that “religion,” “religious discourse,” and “religiosity” – however ill-informed – provide a “dominant frame” that motivates the decisions and behaviors of these individuals.

However, in a separate 2017 study of 99 German foreign fighters built using open and government sources, US scholars Sean Reynolds and Mohammed Hafez (2017) discover only limited evidence that mobilization to violence results from a perceived lack of socioeconomic integra-

tion, and far greater evidence that recruitment and mobilization is linked, instead, to interpersonal ties, “peer-to-peer networks,” and radical milieus (21).

In western Europe, the country of origin with the greatest number of foreign fighters has been France.

Their German sample led to the discovery of geographic clustering of foreign fighters at the state and city level. For instance, nearly 45 percent of their sample lived in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Specific cities, too, produced a higher-than expected ratio of radicals: together, the cities of Bonn, Solingen, and Dinslaken – all located in North Rhine-Westphalia – produced 24 of the 43 fighters from that state. Moreover, the vast majority of foreign fighters captured by the sample had some relation or link to the German Salafist movement; 82 of the 99 profiled fighters had “pre-existing”

relationships with at least “one fighter, recruiter, supporter, or Salafist scene leader” prior to their departure from Germany. In sum, Reynolds and Hafez make a compelling case that peer association and one’s social environment play an important factor in radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization.

France

In western Europe, the country of origin with the greatest number of foreign fighters has been France. Early estimates published in 2016 by the ICCT notes that over 900 French foreign fighters had travelled to Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2015 (Boutin et al. 2016). Of this total, 75 percent had joined ISIS. The study warned, however, that the number of potentially radicalized French citizens and residents who were active in jihadist activity but remained in France likely included another 2000 individuals. By November 2015, the ICCT found that as many as 570 French foreign fighters were still active in the conflict zones, that 140 had died, and another 246 had returned to France.

A more recent study published by the US-based Soufan Center in October 2017 includes even starker figures: France was the origin of 1910 foreign fighters, including 320 women, and that some 700 French fighters remained active in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere (Barrett 2017). According to the European Parliament, of these, only 12 percent have returned to France, the lowest rate of returnees in all of western Europe (Scherrer 2018).

Despite these figures, and notwithstanding the number of diverse terrorist attacks France has suffered since 2012 – including 11 failed, foiled, or completed jihadist attacks in 2017 alone (EUROPOL 2018) – relatively few studies have fully explored French foreign fighters. Marc Hecker, a Director at the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), suggests in a 2017 article that no major study has scrutinized the returned foreign fighters, for instance (24; Hecker and Tenenbaum 2017, 5). Even then, some rudimentary assessments have been made. For instance, the ratio of women to men is higher among French returnees than it is among French departees. Of the 1910 departees, roughly 17 percent were women, but of the estimated 256 that had returned, 28 percent were women (Scherrer 2018).

France stands out, too, in the overall number of arrests it has made. In 2017, it made 373 arrests linked to jihadist terrorism, far surpassing every other European state, except for the UK (EUROPOL 2018). And based on a sample of 182 French foreign fighters, Daniel Milton (2015), Director of Research at West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, finds that their average age was under 25, which is relatively young.

Other studies place France's experience into larger context. For instance, in a descriptive analysis that functions as a foreword to an assessment of French counterterrorism policies and strategies, Hecker, writing with Ifri colleague Elie Tenenbaum (2017), notes that France faces several distinct types of jihadist threat (6). These include the threat that European foreign fighters might be purposefully dispatched by ISIS or another group to launch attacks in France (as happened in the November 2015 Paris attack).

Along these lines of reasoning, Anne Speckhard and Ahmet Yayla (2017) explore how the Emni, ISIS's intelligence apparatus, coordinated attacks in Western countries by leveraging local foreign fighters. Other French concerns include the risk that older French jihadist networks – including those that were active in the country in the decades and years before ISIS came to prominence – might re-emerge, spurred by global developments, or that homegrown radicals, unknown to authorities, might be inspired by ISIS or another group to conduct acts of rudimentary violence.

United Kingdom

Like France, the terrorism threat to the UK is acute. For illustration, in a nine-week period in the spring of 2017, the UK witnessed five foiled and three successful terrorist plots (Barrett 2017).³ But unlike France, the UK has been a source of relatively few foreign fighters. According to several reports, between 2011 and 2015, approximately 750 foreign fighters travelled overseas from the UK to participate in terrorist activity (Soufan 2015; Boutin et al. 2016). Out of these early estimates, roughly 70 are thought to have died in battle and close to half had returned to the UK (Boutin et al. 2016). Finally, as in the French case, the UK has aggressively sought to arrest suspected terrorists, conducting nearly 415 terrorism-related arrests in 2017 alone (the most of any western European state) (EUROPOL 2018). Relatedly, and perhaps as a consequence of imprisoning many would-be jihadists, as of 2016, 600 individuals were “being monitored for ‘radicalisation’ concerns” within UK prisons (Scherrer 2018).

Updated figures published in 2017 suggest that the UK's share of foreign fighters grew to only 850 individuals (Barrett 2017). Again, data suggest that 50 percent had returned home, the highest rate of return in all of Europe (Scherrer 2018; Barrett 2017). Of interest, too, is that according to Tanya Silverman (2017), a coordinator at London's Against Violent Extremism (AVE) Network, the average age of individuals in the UK linked to terrorism has dropped consistently over the past few years, with 1 in 6 under the age of 20. And women have played a relatively minor role, accounting for just 12 percent of all UK departees, compared to the European average of roughly 20 percent (Scherrer 2018).

In terms of proselytizing jihadi content via social media, Jytte Klausen (2015), a professor at Brandeis University, discovered that a number of UK-based individuals or groups were "deeply embedded in the network of Twitter streams attributable" to western foreign fighters. The most prolific and influential account, she notes, with over 7000 followers, belonged to Anjem Choudary, the leader of UK-based al-Muhajiroun, a banned group known to have inspired scores of British foreign fighters and domestic terrorists. Choudary was jailed in 2016 for "inviting support of a terror group"; he was released on parole in October 2018 (Doward 2018).

As the Choudary example illustrates, the UK's Islamist radicalization problem precedes the most recent foreign fighter phenomenon. In a detailed study, Hannah Stuart (2017), a senior researcher at the Henry Jackson Society, built a database of individuals who were convicted of Islamist-inspired terrorism offences or who conducted suicide attacks in the UK, between 1998 and 2015 (xiv; xv). She finds 269 individual offences. Perhaps not surprising given international and domestic contexts, the yearly rate of offending rose by 92 percent, from 12 to 23 offences a year between 2011 and 2015 compared to the period between 1998 and 2010. Moreover distinct terrorism cases increased by 180 percent, from an average of just five per year over the previous decade, to 14 per year between 2011 and 2015.

Using her dataset, Stuart provides a very nuanced picture of UK Islamist offences stretching back nearly two decades. Some of the highlights:

- men perpetrated 93 percent of offences;
- women's involvement went from just 4 percent of offences up to 2010 to 11 percent between 2011 and 2015;
- the modal age of offenders was 22;
- over 70 percent of offences were carried out by UK nationals though more than half of offences were carried out by individuals of Southern Asian ancestry;
- 16 percent of offences were carried out by converts to Islam;
- 40 percent of offenders lived in London;
- over 25 percent of offenders had some kind of higher education, and 35 percent and 12 percent were either employed or fulltime students, respectively, at the time of offence;
- 55 percent of offenders were living with other family members (such as partners, siblings, parents) at the time of offence, and one in five offences were carried by individuals whose "living arrangements and family circumstances" were also connected to terrorism;
- nearly half of the offences were committed by individuals who were already known to security services and 38 percent were committed by people with existing criminal convictions;

- 44 percent of offenders were known or suspected of having direct links to proscribed domestic and international terrorist organizations, and 22 percent of individuals received some form of terrorist training (either abroad or at home); and finally,
- 25 percent of offences were linked to attempted or planned domestic attacks.

United States

Although the United States is threatened by Islamist-inspired terrorism, radicalization, and mobilization, the intensity of that threat, by contemporary standards and in comparison with Europe, is rather minimal. The US is relatively less exposed to Islamist extremism due, but not limited to, its geographic distance from jihadi hotspots and the perceived better social, economic, and political integration of Muslim (and other minority) communities in the US. For illustration, jihadists have killed fewer than 105 people in the US since the attacks of September 11, 2001. But neither Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Somalia's Al-Shabab, nor any other foreign terrorist group has successfully managed to conduct an attack inside the US since then. In fact, of the 13 lethal jihadist attacks in the US since 2001, not one perpetrator received any physical training from a foreign terrorist entity (Bergen and Sterman 2018). By global and European standards, this is astonishing.

By other measures, including by assessing criminal and terrorism investigations, the US is far safer than Europe. In 2015, for instance, George Washington University released a comprehensive report on ISIS in America under its Program on Extremism (Vidino and Hughes 2015). According to the report, between 2001 and 2013, more than 200 US citizens and residents were convicted of terrorism-related activities, while 900 other active terrorism investigations were ongoing. In tracking the data, however, New American, a US research institute, has found that the total number of individuals charged with terrorism-related crimes in the US has dropped from a high of 80 in 2015, to just eight to the end of August 2018 (Bergman and Sterman 2018).

The recent jihadi attacks that have taken place in the US over the past half-decade are largely linked to ISIS. The US has suffered eight lethal (and 12 non-lethal) jihadi-inspired attacks since 2014, of a total of 13 lethal attacks since 2001, resulting in the death of 83 people, which accounts for roughly three-quarters of all US deaths from jihadi terrorism since the September 11 attacks. This trend corresponds directly to the rise of ISIS: seven of the eight fatal attacks and almost all of the 12 non-fatal attacks were inspired by ISIS.

As in the European context, US citizens have sought to join ISIS and other groups as foreign fighters, though in far lower numbers. In its 2015 report, the Program on Extremism finds that roughly 250 Americans attempted to or successfully travelled to Syria, Iraq, and other areas under militant control, a total the Soufan Group corroborates (Soufan 2015; Vidino and Hughes 2015). These figures have remained roughly the same since then (Barrett 2017). Surprisingly,

Jihadists have killed fewer than 105 people in the US since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

and in direct contrast to European figures, of the Americans who have successfully left the country, only a handful – “likely in the tens,” according to New America – have managed to return to the US (Bergen and Sterman 2018).

Several descriptive studies of US foreign fighters and jihadi terrorists have been published in the past five years, providing a snapshot of their general characteristics. The Program on Extremism has published two useful accounts. The first, in 2015, builds off a dataset of 71 individuals who had been charged with ISIS-related activities in the US (Vidino and Hughes 2015). Their average age was 26, and the vast majority were male (86 percent) and US citizens or permanent residents (90 percent). Approximately 40 percent were converts to Islam, a higher percentage than is usually found in the European data. New York and Minnesota were home to the highest number of those arrested, 13 and 11, respectively. Interestingly, over half of those charged had attempted to travel abroad to join ISIS, and 73 percent were not involved in plotting attacks in the US.

The Program on Extremism’s second report, published in 2018, builds a dataset of 64 American “travellers,” defined as Americans who travelled abroad to “participate in jihadist formations” including, but not exclusively, to fight alongside foreign groups (Meleagrou-Higgins, Hughes, and Clifford 2018).

The data find that their average age is 27 and that most (89 percent) were male. Minnesota was again a top-producing state (by frequency and population), and 70 percent of the travellers were US citizens or permanent residents. Interestingly, only 12 of the 64 have returned to the United States, again, a comparatively low number by European standards, and only one of these 12 returned with the intention of carrying out an attack on behalf of a terrorist group. Twenty-two others died overseas.

A third batch of studies were published by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a Center of Excellence of the US Department of Homeland Security housed at the University of Maryland. START manages the Global Terrorism Database, the world’s leading source for historical and contemporary data on political violence.

START also manages the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States – Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF) database, which includes biographical information on 288 individuals who have sought to leave the US for purposes of supporting violent non-state groups between 1980 and 2016.⁴

All told, US foreign fighters have been linked to 27 foreign groups since 1980, spanning over a dozen different conflicts. And yet, ISIS and ISIS-affiliated groups account for nearly 35 percent of PIRUS-FF’s data, a clear illustration of the organization’s power of attraction. Other findings illustrate that Minnesota and New York state again represent foreign fighter “hot spots,” and that the median age of US foreign fighters is 23.

START findings also relate to the nexus between radicalization and the Internet: 95 percent of the sample, from 2005 on, used the Internet in some capacity during the radicalization

*US foreign fighters
have been linked to
27 foreign groups since
1980, spanning over a
dozen different conflicts.*

process; 33 percent, from 2010 on, maintained a social media presence from a conflict zone; and 60 percent of those who attempted to leave the US, from 2005 on, used Internet sources to acquire information on their destination, contacts, and travel routes. Interestingly, a vast majority of the sample, over 70 percent, had associated with known extremists before deciding to travel, and/or had publicly expressed their extremist views, while less than 5 percent of foreign fighters “failed to exhibit any pre-travel warning signs of any kind.”

The data also relate to the link between foreign fighters and domestic terrorism: 74 US foreign fighters were involved in 56 distinct plots targeting the US in the 36 years covered by the database, though 88 percent of these individuals were unsuccessful in these attempted attacks. Of these 74 individuals, only 24 were provided with direct support (such as logistical, weapons, training, financial) from a foreign terrorist organization.

Summary

This review of European and American experiences with Islamist terrorism and the foreign fighters phenomenon reveals a number of importance differences between the two. While the US remains threatened by Islamist-inspired terrorism, radicalization, and mobilization, its actual exposure to such actions has been relatively minimal since 9/11. This can be seen in terms of actual number of fatalities, with jihadists killing fewer than 105 people in the US since 9/11 compared to the hundreds that have died in Europe. It can also be seen with the role of terrorist organizations, where neither Al-Qaeda, ISIS, or Al-Shabab have succeeded in conducting an attack in the United States since 9/11. At most, these groups have only been able to inspire terrorist acts. In addition, the number of Americans who have left to join ISIS or other groups is small compared to European figures. The difference is pronounced when taking into account the variance in population size.

The Canadian Context

There is a small, but burgeoning, Canadian academic – and journalistic (e.g., Bell 2005; Gurski 2015) – body of scholarship exploring contemporary radicalization and political violence with a specific nexus to Islamist ideologies, motivations, and militant groups. A subset of this research focuses on Canada’s evolving counterterrorism strategy, policy and law (e.g., Littlewood, Dawson, Thompson 2019; Nesbitt 2019; Forcese and Roach 2015; Juneau 2015; Kitchen and Sasikumar 2009; Leman-Langlois and Brodeur 2005). Other Canadian scholars – notably Amarasingam, Dawson, and Stephanie Carvin – have taken to media and social media to discuss research on political violence and radicalization.

Contemporary scholarship is also fostered and supported through the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society (TSAS), a pan-Canadian academic organization established in 2012 with public funding from the Canadian government.⁵ Among other things, TSAS houses the Canadian Incident Database (CIDB), a dataset of over 1,800 violent extremist and terrorist incidents with a nexus to Canada between 1960 and 2014.⁶ Unlike START’s pioneering work through its PIRUS dataset, however, the CIDB does not yet contain detailed biographical data on individual perpetrators, but rather focuses on providing information of specific events, as START’s Global Terrorism Database does.

Nonetheless, a few scholars have explored Canadian terrorism from a biographical context. In an article pre-dating the Islamic State, for instance, Sam Mullins collected data on 64 individual “Canadian jihadists” active between 1980 and 2011, though only 29 cases were active in the decade following Al-Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks (Mullins 2013). In exploring the radicalization process, Gaetano Joe Ilardi conducted in-depth personal interviews with seven “Canadian Muslim radicals” from the Greater Toronto Area in 2011 (Ilardi 2013). And more recently, John McCoy and Andy Knight assess how global jihadi developments influence Canadian trends in homegrown terrorism, by building detailed assessments of several notable Canadian jihadists, including Momin Khawaja, leading members of the Toronto 18, and a few “extremist travellers” who joined ISIS or other foreign militant groups (McCoy and Knight 2015).

Knight and McCoy, with funding from TSAS, have also begun exploring extremism among Canadian religious converts, building a dataset of 18 Canadian converts who radicalized to violence (TSAS 2018). And finally, Lorne Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam have likewise amassed biographical information on several contemporary Canadian jihadists using a series of innovative data collection processes, including direct and social media interviews with foreign fighters and their family and friends, and by monitoring dozens of public social media accounts (Dawson and Amarasingam 2016). As part of this research, their 2017 study analysed 25 interviews with men fighting overseas, including with six Canadians (Dawson and Amarasingam 2017). And in a subsequent 2018 publication with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), Amarasingam and Dawson analyse data on 30 men and women who travelled to Syria and Iraq, which includes a detailed case study of several Canadians from Quebec (Amarasingam and Dawson 2017).

The fatal attacks Canada has suffered over the past decade have been organized by individuals inspired to act.

In many ways, Canada’s contemporary experience with Islamist terrorism is similar to America’s. While ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other groups have at times purposefully threatened and targeted Canadian citizens and assets, rarely have they succeeded in doing so directly. The fatal attacks Canada has suffered over the past decade have been organized by individuals inspired to act rather than trained to act. Two Canadian victims were killed in these attacks: a 2014 vehicular attack in Quebec and a 2014 shooting attack in and around Parliament Hill in Ottawa, with each attack killing one Canadian soldier (warrant officer Patrice Vincent and Cpl. Nathan Cirillo).

Other attacks, including a 2016 stabbing attack at a Toronto Armed Forces recruitment centre (the accused was acquitted of terrorism charges in mid-2018), a 2016 explosion of a homemade explosive device in Strathroy, Ontario, and a 2017 ramming attack in Edmonton, have resulted in injuries. And several other Islamist attacks were thwarted, including for instance in 2006, 2013, and 2017.⁷ The terrorism Canada has faced over the past decade has been dangerous, but also rudimentary in nature and limited in scale.

While Canadians have, even before ISIS, travelled overseas to join militants and participate in terrorism, overall numbers have remained small by European standards. As in all cases, deter-

mining the exact number of Canadian foreign fighters is difficult to do. Since 2014, open-source estimates suggest that by 2014, 30 Canadians had travelled abroad to fight; that by 2015, 130 Canadians had done so; and that by October 2017, 185 Canadian foreign fighters had travelled abroad. Public Safety Canada, in its latest *Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada*, published in December 2018, suggests that 190 “extremist travellers with a nexus to Canada” are currently living abroad (with half of them located in Turkey, Syria, or Iraq), and that another 60 individuals who are suspected of having engaged in international militant activities have returned to Canada (though only a few of these have returned from Turkey, Iraq, or Syria).

This report takes all of this into consideration, and, using open-source media, government, and academic sources, establishes a dataset of 95 individuals with a nexus to Canada who have, or are suspected of having, radicalized, mobilized, and/or participated in Islamist terrorist activity between 2006 and 2017. As in all similar studies of contemporary European, Canadian, or US jihadist violence, the individuals captured by our study are remarkably diverse in their ethnic origins, social and economic status, educational and vocational accomplishments, gender, and so on. What follows is a description and analysis of the data, alongside graphics to provide a visual representation of the data.

Gender and Age

Our sample, like many others, is largely made up of young males. Yet by comparison with European figures, our dataset is heavily dominated by men, which make up 95 percent of all cases. Only 5 women were identified, despite reports that approximately 30 Canadian women had travelled to ISIS-held territory in the past several years (Barrett 2017).⁸ The Canadian gender ratio is far lower than the European gender ratio, in which women, according to the latest Soufan data, make up anywhere from between 11 and 30 percent of British, French, German, and Dutch contemporary foreign fighters (Barrett 2017).

In terms of age, most of the individuals captured in the Canadian data became active in radical and/or violent activity in their mid and late 20s. Only one was over 40, and a few were 19 years old or younger (the youngest was 16). Their average age was 27, which is roughly on par with the average age of US jihadists but a few years older than the Europeans. The Canadian data also show that 23 individuals had died (some overseas, others in Canada).

FIGURE 1: RADICALIZATION AND AGE

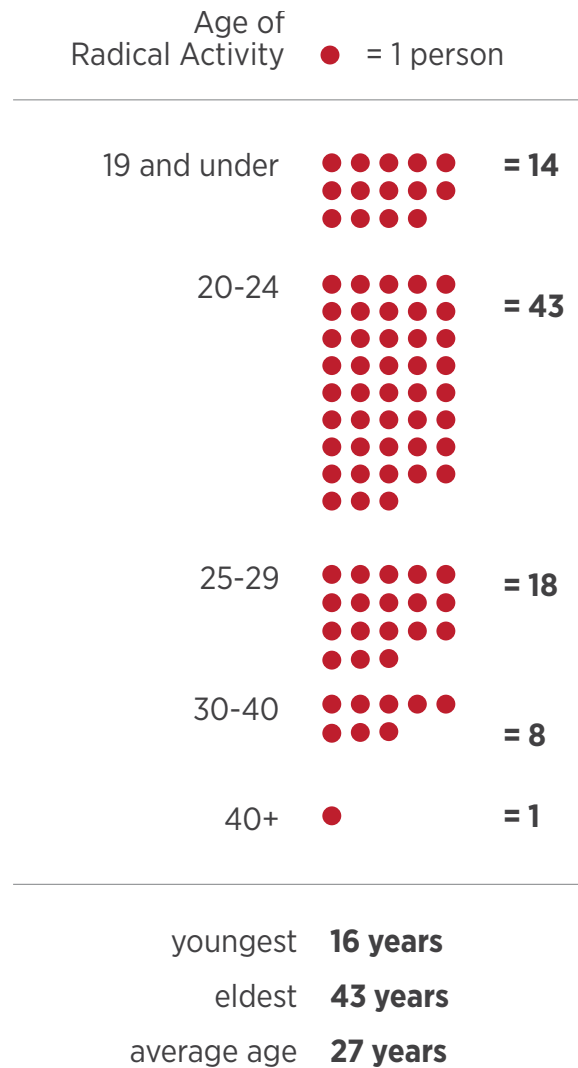
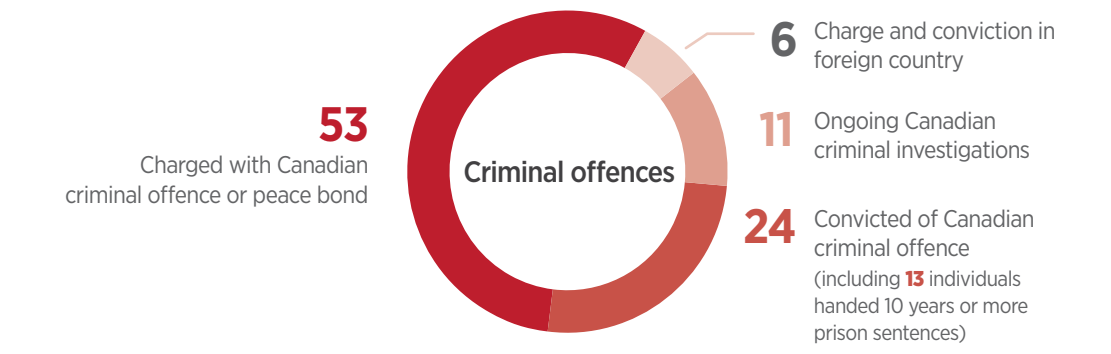
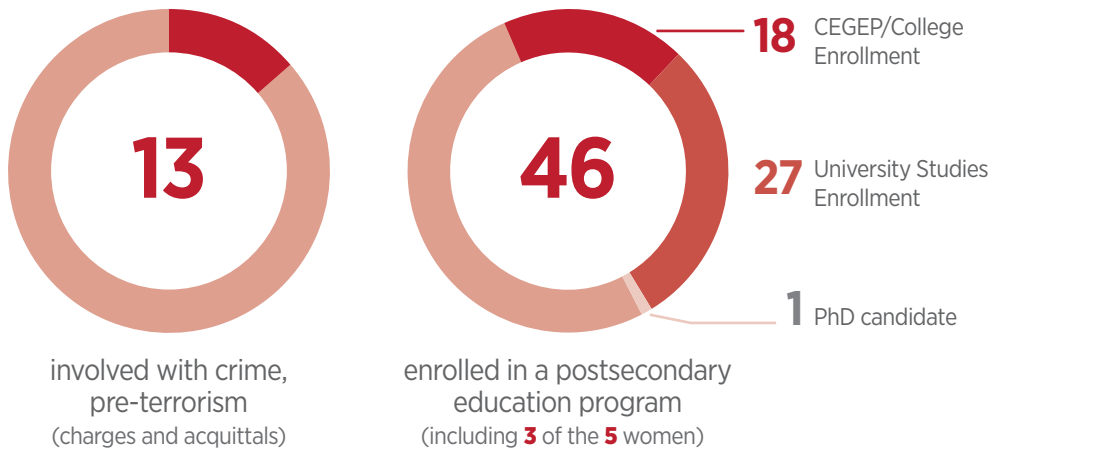
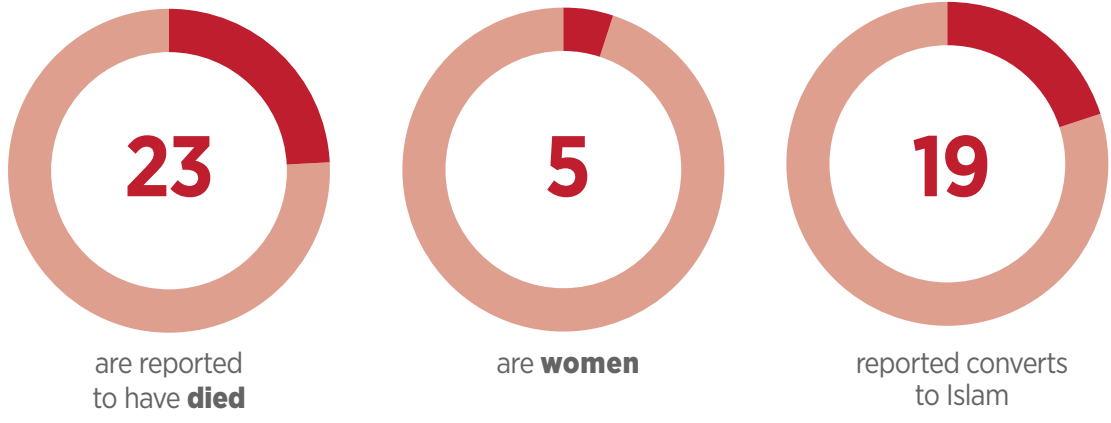


FIGURE 2: BREAKDOWN OF THE DATASET - GENDER, EDUCATION, CRIMINAL BACKGROUND, AND DEATHS



Education and Criminal Background

The Canadian data show that just under half of the sample had enrolled in post-secondary education programs (including three of the five women or 60 percent). Eighteen individuals had, at one point, been enrolled in a CEGEP or college program, and another 28 – approximately 30 percent – had spent time studying at a university, with one individual pursuing a doctorate. These figures match those produced by START's (2018b) data on American Islamists, where approximately 36 percent of individuals had acquired at least some college education, but are quite a bit higher than the data collected on British Islamists, where only a quarter of the sample is thought to have acquired some form of higher education (Stuart 2017). In comparison to other European cases, however, the educational achievement of Canadian and American Islamists is exceptionally high. Reynolds and Hafez (2017), for illustration, find that German foreign fighters performed “below average in the German education system,” with just 7 percent of the sample having completed undergraduate degrees, while Bakker and de Bont (2016) find that Belgian and Dutch jihadists have “low levels of education.”

On a rather similar note, the vast majority of the Canadian profiles did not have a criminal background prior to their radicalization or mobilization to violence.⁹ Only 11 percent are reported to have had criminal charges laid against them prior to their involvement in political violence (for theft, vandalism, drug possession, or domestic abuse, for instance). By comparison, 16 percent of German, 20 percent of Belgian and Dutch, and 26 percent of British jihadists had prior criminal convictions or are suspected of non-terrorism-related criminal activity prior to the radicalization process.

Canadian Place of Residence

A majority of the individuals captured in the data originated from Ontario (55 percent). Quebec came next (23 percent), followed by Alberta (16 percent). In terms of cities, 30 individuals originated from the Greater Toronto Area, 18 from Montreal, 15 from Ottawa-Gatineau, and 10 from Calgary.

Ethnic Origin

All 95 individuals are either Canadian citizens or were residents of Canada, and all had lived in Canada for many years. But collectively, they do have very diverse ethnic backgrounds. As many as 28 were reported to have immigrated to Canada, usually as children and teenagers. Pakistan and Somalia were the most represented countries of origin, though others in the sample had immigrated from the Middle East (Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and more) and North Africa (including Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia). Another 19 individuals converted to Islam (20 percent). This figure sits somewhere in the middle of similar data (where available) collected in other countries, with European converts representing roughly 12 percent and US converts representing as much as 40 percent of samples.

Terrorist Affiliation, Domestic Plots, and Foreign Travel

The data reveal that the vast majority of the Canadian profiles were formally or informally affiliated with ISIS (50 percent) or Al-Qaeda (27 percent). Others were affiliated with Al-Shabab and the Taliban. Interestingly, only 27 percent of the profiles were involved with a domestic terrorism plot. The vast majority, 70 percent, of the individuals captured in the data sought to travel abroad to join or support a foreign militant organization. Of these, close to 80 percent

FIGURE 3: PLACE OF RESIDENCE IN CANADA

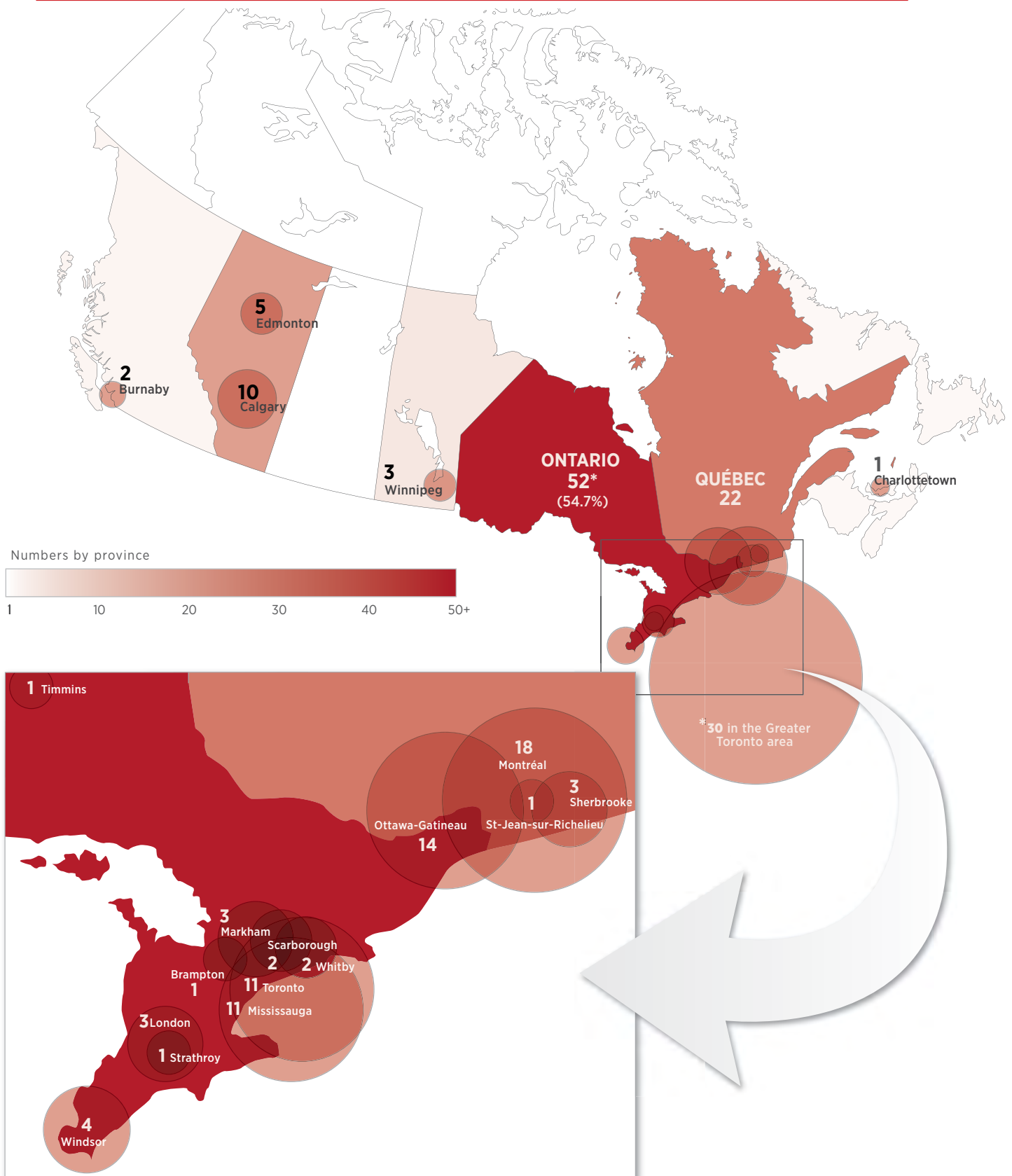
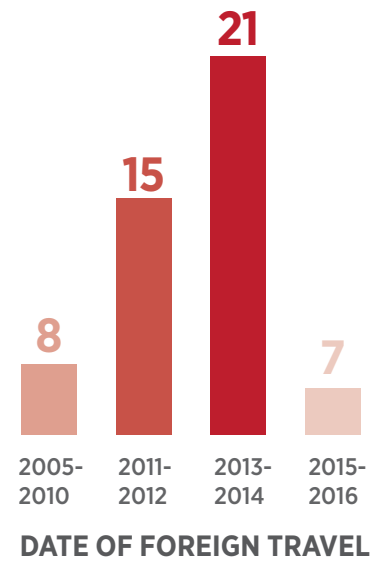
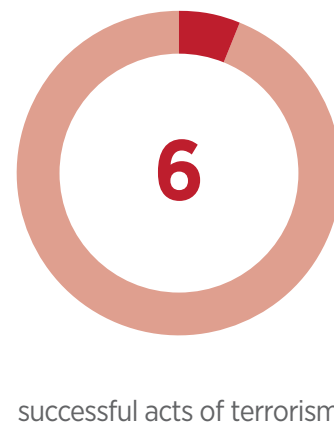
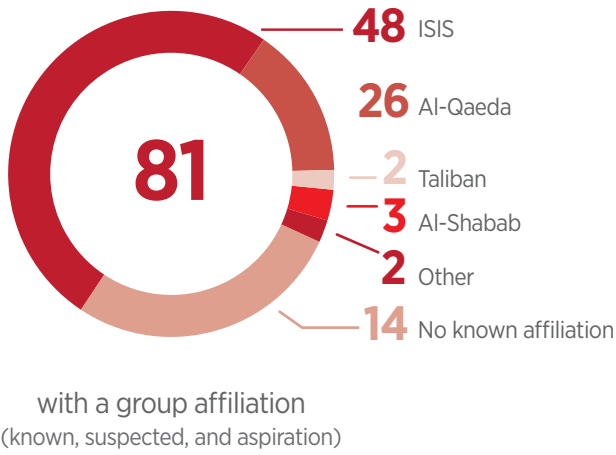
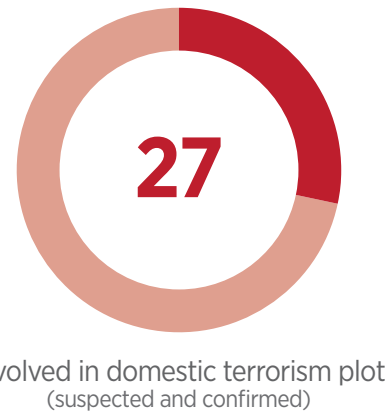


FIGURE 4: BREAKDOWN OF THE DATASET - ETHNIC ORIGINS, TERRORIST AFFILIATION, DOMESTIC PLOTS, AND FOREIGN TRAVEL



succeeded in doing so. The bulk of departures took place between 2011 and 2014, coinciding with ISIS's rise.

Summary

Our analysis of the background of Canadians involved in these terrorist or foreign fighter activities reveal important differences with cases in Europe and similarities with those in the United States. For instance, the dataset shows that Canadian profiles had significantly higher educational attainment, less criminal convictions prior to their involvement in political violence, and were on average slightly older than their counterparts in Europe. The dataset also includes significantly fewer women than cases examined in Europe, though there are reports of relatively more Canadian women travelling to ISIS-held territory than has been captured in our data. In many respects, whether looking at the age of the individual or their level of educational attainment, the individuals in our dataset seem closer in terms of their background with those in the United States. The same can also be said of the nature of the terrorist acts themselves, in which attacks against both countries after 9/11 have been largely done by individuals inspired to act rather than trained to act.

Vignettes

To better illustrate the particular backgrounds of Canadian terrorists and suspected militants, this paper showcases short vignettes detailing four individuals: Sabrine Djermane, Awso Peshdary, John Maguire, and Mohammed El Shaer. These vignettes offer a narrative account of how each individual became radicalized, with a range of different outcomes, including acquittal and rehabilitation, court-ordered restrictions, ongoing criminal trial, and in one case, being charged in absentia following his departure to Syria (with uncorroborated reports of his death as part of an ISIS-offensive).

Sabrina Djermane, Montreal, Que., acquitted, signed peace bond

In April 2015, Montrealer Sabrine Djermane was arrested as a preventive measure, alongside her boyfriend El Mahdi Jamali. Both were under 20 years old at the time of their arrest and were students at Collège de Maisonneuve in Montreal. According to the criminal investigation, they had been planning to travel abroad to commit terrorism-related acts (Cherry 2015). Denied bail, they faced a series of charges, including attempting to leave Canada between January 2015 and April 2015 to commit terrorist acts abroad; developing or possessing an explosive substance; facilitating terrorist activity; and committing an act for the profit of a terrorist group (Leavitt 2016).

The RCMP first learned of Djermane from her older sister. Having attended a conference in Ottawa about identifying indicators of violent radicalization, she became concerned for Sabrine given her evolving behaviour (Cherry 2017a). On April 10, she called the RCMP. An early RCMP-drafted affidavit reflects how Djermane had become socially estranged, moving from the family home to an apartment, despite maxing out her credit card.

The trial began on September 12, 2017. While Djermane's father had initially suggested at the

time of their arrest that Jamali wished to marry his daughter, evidence produced during the first trial hearing painted a more nuanced portrait (Woods 2015a; Cherry 2017b). Using a series of Facebook messages drawn from the computer seized in Djermane’s residence, RCMP Corporal Maryse Robert presented information that illustrated a degree of tension in the relationship. Other evidence included a picture of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev – one of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers – with the super-imposed text: “When you attack a Muslim you attack all Muslims” (Cherry 2017b).

In December 2017, Djermane was acquitted by jury of all charges, while El Mahdi was found guilty of possessing an explosive device without a lawful excuse, a lesser charge than he originally faced. They were both released after the verdict, having been detained since their 2015 arrest (CBC News 2017). The next year, in May 2018, both Djermane and El Mahdi agreed to the conditions of a peace bond, which stipulated that they not use social media, leave the country, possess material promoting terrorism or extremism, or visit a specific Montreal-area Islamic institution, Le Centre communautaire islamique de l’est de Montréal, otherwise known as the Assahaba Mosque, which is led by Moroccan-born imam Adil Charkaoui (Cherry 2018).

Djermane’s case is noteworthy for several reasons, including her association with Collège de Maisonneuve, a location that figures prominently in several counterterrorism arrests and developments in recent years. In May 2015, the RCMP intercepted 10 teenagers and young adults at Montreal’s Pierre Elliot Trudeau Airport, on suspicion that they were aspiring to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (CTV Montreal 2015). Four of these individuals were students at Maisonneuve; several others were regular attendants of Charkaoui’s Assahaba Mosque (Patriquin 2015; CTV Montreal 2015; Woods 2015b; Kelly 2015).

Charkaoui himself was arrested in May 2003 on suspicion of having travelled to Pakistan in 1998 for purposes of obtaining militant training in neighboring Afghanistan, then largely controlled by the Taliban, a proscribed militant organization in Canada (ICI Grand Montréal 2015). He was held without trial or charge until his release in 2005, and he has denied all allegations against him (Kelly 2015). The security certificate that facilitated his arrest was successfully challenged and subsequently rescinded in 2009. Charkaoui became a Canadian citizen in 2014 (ICI Grand Montréal 2015).

Charkaoui appears as a common thread tangentially linking many recent terrorism-related developments in and around Montreal, including Djermane’s case. His organization had a presence at Collège de Maisonneuve campus, renting classrooms for Arabic language and Koranic studies (CBC News 2015a; Kelly 2015; Duchaine 2017). The Collège suspended his contract in February 2015 after four of their students, part of a larger group of six people from Montreal and Laval in Quebec, were suspected of having travelled to Syria to join ISIS (CBC News 2015a and 2015c; Kelly 2015). At least two of these individuals were acquainted with Charkaoui. And, as noted, Djermane’s 2018 peace bond forbade her from associating with Charkaoui’s organization.

Djermane’s case is noteworthy for several reasons, including her association with Collège de Maisonneuve.

In response to these related episodes, the Government of Quebec has become more proactive in assisting local communities in and beyond Montreal to withstand and counter radicalization. Maisonneuve College, for instance, received \$400,000 from the provincial government in March 2016 to help it address the rising spectre of radicalization on campus (Lague 2016). And in November 2015, Montreal inaugurated the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV), which operates with several million dollars in funding from the governments of Montreal and Quebec (CBC News 2015b).

While Djermane and Jamali were in detention, the CPRLV developed a tailored “intervention plan” for both individuals, which sought to help them reintegrate into society. And indeed, upon their release, the CPRLV went on to hire them as consultants to help the Centre develop a guide for better understanding radicalization and indoctrination in Quebec. “It was in that context,” suggests CPRLV’s Director, Herman Deparice Okomba, “that we suggested they help us, by talking about what they’ve gone through and to see if they can help us develop a guide to how to take care of people who have been charged with terror offences” (Abboud 2018).

Awso Peshdary, Ottawa, Ont., criminal case ongoing

The ongoing criminal case against Canadian citizen Awso Peshdary, 28, intersects with several anti-terrorism operations and Canadian counter-radicalization efforts. Peshdary was born to a Shia family of Kurdish descent but converted to Sunni Islam (Dyer 2015). According to his personal listing on a matrimonial website, posted when he was 18 years old, he wanted to pursue university studies in education (Schwartz 2010). Prior to his (second) arrest in February 2015, he worked at the Ottawa Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre (Dyer 2015).

Peshdary represents an important case of an alleged Canadian facilitator of violent radicalization.

Peshdary’s run-in with police began in 2010. During the RCMP’s Project Samossa – a terrorism investigation involving a plot to attack a Canadian military base – police uncovered a homegrown terrorist network that enlisted and radicalized new recruits. Four individuals were arrested in August 2010 on various charges, including Peshdary; two were eventually convicted (Gurski 2016b, 102; Helmer 2016). Ottawa hospital technician Misbahuddin Ahmed, found guilty for conspiring to facilitate and participate in terrorist activity, was handed a 12-year prison sentence. And Hiva Alizadeh, a Kurdish refugee who became a Canadian citizen in 2007 but went on to receive militant training in Afghanistan in 2009, subsequently pled guilty to

explosives possession with the intent to cause harm. The judge, in handing Alizadeh a 24-year sentence, reiterated that he had “effectively been convicted of treason” (Cobb 2014). While Peshdary was suspected of being involved in the terror network, he was not charged with any terror-related offences. However, as part of the investigation, police did charge him with domestic assault, though those charges were dropped when his wife refused to testify (Gurski 2016b, 102; Helmer 2016).

Peshdary had some success establishing himself as a Muslim Canadian leader, acquiring a degree of social authority. In 2009, for example, he was featured in posters for a series of Montreal-based lectures called “The Resurrection” for Muslim youth in Quebec and Ontario (Nease 2010; Schwartz 2010). In 2010, he gave talks to Muslim youth about the non-use of alcohol and drugs (Schwartz 2010). He was also deeply involved with the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at Algonquin College in Ottawa, participating in various public events, including Islam Awareness Week. He also coordinated trips to the Splatterville paintball centre in Stittsville, Ontario, and tried to establish a mixed martial arts program in the basement of a mosque (Dyer 2015; Helmer and Dimmock 2016). Peshdary took to preaching at the Islam Care Centre in Ottawa, and received permission from the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board to offer religious schooling to Muslim students at two local-area high schools (Dyer 2015). The man who succeeded Peshdary in the latter role shared his alarm with the CBC about the types of material students had been taught.

The RCMP again scrutinized Peshdary’s activities in 2012, as part of a two-year operation named Project Servant that was aimed at disrupting networks associated with ISIS (Helmer 2016). Arrested in February 2015 for ties to the Islamic State, he was charged with recruiting, financing, and facilitating homegrown terrorism (Gurski 2016b, 102; Helmer 2016). Other charges were laid against two of Peshdary’s radicalized contacts, John Maguire and Khadar Khalib, both believed killed fighting for ISIS (Helmer 2016). The Project Servant investigations also spawned Project Slipstream – a parallel investigation – that ultimately led to the apprehension and conviction of Suliman Mohamed and the Larmond twins (Carlos and Ashton) in January 2015. All told, Peshdary was a subject of at least three police and intelligence operations between 2010 and 2015. Peshdary represents an important case of an alleged Canadian facilitator of violent radicalization.

Recent developments from the criminal case against Peshdary further shed light on the role played by the Canadian Security Intelligence Agency (CSIS) and RCMP informants in counterterrorism operations. Justice Julianne Parfett ordered CSIS to hand over files concerning an agent that infiltrated an ISIS network in Ottawa, after Peshdary’s defence lawyer filed a third-party access application (Dimmock 2017a).

It was later revealed that the informant was Abdullah Milton, a Muslim convert originally from New Brunswick who worked at the paintball centre in Stittsville (McCooley 2015). Milton’s transformation into a paid intelligence and police asset began when CSIS first approached him after he raised a “red flag” when touring Ottawa in January 2011, posting his pictures of Parliament Hill and the Saudi Arabian Embassy on Facebook. The RCMP, however, had begun investigating Milton without knowledge of his CSIS work (Dimmock 2017b). CSIS subsequently notified the RCMP, after which they employed him and remunerated him with at least \$800,000. The success of Project Slipstream is credited to Milton’s efforts (McCooley 2015; Dimmock 2017a and 2017b).

Milton, currently in the RCMP’s witness protection program, is a key Crown witness in the Peshdary case (Dimmock 2017a and 2017b). Peshdary’s long-delayed trial began in June 2018 (Helmer 2018).

John Maguire, Kemptville, Ont., charged in absentia, reported dead

John Maguire – a native of Kemptville, Ontario – rose to prominence in December 2014 with the release of an ISIS propaganda video. In it, Maguire is identified as Abu Anwar al-Canadi – the Canadian. He goes on to justify the 2014 Parliament Hill shooting in Ottawa as a legitimate response to Canada’s “unprovoked acts of aggression against our people” in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere (Dimmock 2015; CBC News 2014). In the six-minute video, he calls upon fellow Muslims to commit *hijra* – emigration or migration to Muslim majority countries – or to organize attacks in Canada (Bell 2014). “You either pack your bags,” Maguire says, “or prepare your explosive devices. You either purchase your airline ticket, or you sharpen your knife.”

His departure to Syria in December 2012 triggered the RCMP’s operation Project Servant. Though ISIS-affiliated Twitter accounts reported that Maguire was killed during an ISIS offensive against the northern Syrian city of Kobani in January 2015, the RCMP nonetheless charged him in absentia a month later; his death has not been independently corroborated (Gurski 2016b, 120; Duffy and Hurley 2015).

Maguire’s violent radicalization was at least partly facilitated by US-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.

Maguire’s story of radicalization and militancy has captivated Canadians. The *Ottawa Citizen* reports that he first encountered Islam in the United States, while studying business at Los Angeles City College in 2009 (Duffy and Hurley 2015). Alternatively, his family suggests that his process of conversion began earlier, with a friendship with Muslim co-workers at an Ottawa-area Walmart (Postmedia News 2015). Either way, he officially announced his conversion to Islam via Facebook after returning to Canada, and went on to earn top grades at the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa. Maguire’s interest in and practice of Islam

grew stronger still (Duffy and Hurley 2015). A confidant of Maguire’s, another convert, described him as possessing “a particular zeal . . . to learn everything, to know everything” about his newfound faith. Maguire regularly attended daily prayers at the University’s multi-faith prayer room.

According to an anonymous former student, Maguire’s violent radicalization was at least partly facilitated by US-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, an Al-Qaeda leader killed in a September 2011 US drone strike in Yemen (Duffy and Hurley 2015). Awlaki’s English-language lectures and sermons, posted online, distilled militant jihadist ideas to a simple religious obligation to help ease the purported suffering of Muslims abroad.

One of Awlaki’s most notorious audio lectures, “Constants on the Path of Jihad,” is an eschatological account of the religious duty to pursue external violent jihad until the Day of Judgement. His messages are credited with having influenced several high-profile terrorists, including: Cherif Kouachi, one of the gunmen who attacked the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris, France in 2015; the Tsarnaev brothers, responsible for the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings; US Major Nidal Hasan, responsible for the 2009 Fort Hood attack in Texas; Saad Khalid, a leading member

of Canada's Toronto 18; and Damian Clairmont (aka Mustafa al-Gharib), a native of Nova Scotia radicalized in Calgary who died fighting with Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria.

Maguire, having adopted Awlaki's radical message, travelled to Syria in December 2012. By then, he was no longer receptive to other, more moderate and mainstream interpretations of Islam. Prominent Calgary Imam Syed Soharwardy – founder of Muslims Against Terrorism – exchanged Facebook messages with Maguire after denouncing ISIS's 2014 murder of journalist James Foley as a “crime against humanity.” Maguire shot back, calling Soharwardy a “deviant imam,” condemned to hellfire.

Another major, and perhaps more concrete, influence on Maguire's radical trajectory was Awso Peshdary, a Canadian currently standing trial on terrorism charges (Dimmock 2016), and profiled in these vignettes. Maguire met Peshdary in 2012, at a lecture organized by Algonquin College's Muslim Students' Association (MSA). Before long, they had become close friends (Helmer and Dimmock 2016). An August 2013 letter written to the RCMP by CSIS acting director general reveals that Peshdary even accompanied Maguire to Montreal's Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport, where Maguire caught his flight to Istanbul, Turkey, from where he presumably travelled on to ISIS-held territory in Syria or Iraq (Dimmock 2016).

Maguire, moreover, became friends with and influenced other high-profile Canadian radicals, notably Ashton and Carlos Larmond, twin brothers from Ottawa. Maguire developed a close friendship with Ashton in 2012, after they attended the same Ottawa lecture (Dimmock 2015; CBC News 2016; Helmer 2016; Helmer and Dimmock 2016). A Facebook conversation the two had, dated to August 2013 after Maguire had successfully joined ISIS, reveals how the brothers were concerned with the logistics of travelling to the region to join him. Maguire offered reassurance and contact information, including a Syrian telephone number (Dimmock 2015). Carlos was arrested in January 2015, at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport, on his way to Syria. Ashton was arrested in Ottawa, the same day. Both pleaded guilty to terrorism-related charges and were handed stiff prison sentences in 2016.

Mohammed El Shaer, Windsor, Ont., under court-ordered restrictions

Mohammed El Shaer, a self-employed business and website administrator, marketing graduate, and husband and father from Windsor, Ontario, travelled to ISIS-controlled territory – and back to Canada – on no less than three separate occasions. Once, he did so in the presence of another serial traveller and ISIS supporter, Ahmed Waseem, who himself had travelled back to his home in Windsor to acquire medical treatment for apparent gunshot wounds he suffered fighting with ISIS (Bell 2018a). Waseem again returned to the Middle East, despite the confiscation of his passport, and died fighting with ISIS in March 2015 (Quan 2015). El Shaer also travelled with his family in tow, and on at least two occasions, did so without valid travel documents and while subject to a court order barring him from leaving Canada (Bell 2016b).

El Shaer's first attempted trip abroad ended abruptly when he, and his wife and children, were turned away from a US border crossing for “undisclosed national security reasons” in July 2013 (Pearson 2014). Months later, on November 3, he successfully travelled to France, via Iceland, on a one-way ticket with Waseem. Ten days later, he and Waseem were photographed standing outside an ISIS police station in the Syrian town of Atmeh, on the border with Turkey (Bell 2016a).

By December, El Shaer was requesting an emergency Canadian travel document from Turkey, noting that his passport had been destroyed. In early 2014, he returned to Windsor, where he was later arrested, in June 2014, for providing false information on the Citizenship and

Immigration Canada form that he had filed in Turkey (Pearson 2014). Out on bail with strict travel restrictions and a pending court appearance set for November 2014, he again disappeared, notwithstanding the fact that he had also been placed on a federal “high risk” travel list (Calgary Herald 2014). In the meantime, El Shaer’s wife, Maryam Kadri, flew to Warsaw, Poland with their two children in August 2014, only to return in mid-September via an Egyptian airline (Pearson 2014).

This time El Shaer resurfaced in Khartoum, Sudan. In September 2014, he again requested emergency travel documents from the local Canadian mission (Bell 2016b). Upon his return to Canada in November 2014, he was once again arrested as his flight landed at Toronto Pearson International Airport. Pleading guilty to passport fraud, he was sentenced to 90 days in jail and 12 months of probation in December 2014 (Pearson 2014). As before, he was likewise banned from leaving Ontario.

Released on probation in February 2015, he again evaded detection and flew to Istanbul, Turkey, with his wife and children, using a forged Syrian passport. Police retrieved images of El Shaer’s family boarding their flight (Waddell 2016). Once in Syria, he changed his Twitter handle to “Abu Omar Ex Kanadi” and began using a profile picture of Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, the terrorist who killed an unarmed Canadian soldier at the Ottawa War Memorial in 2014. He listed his location as “Islamic State” (Bell 2016a). After several months of living in the Middle East, El Shaer’s family returned to Canada in September 2015. El Shaer, lacking valid personal documentation, again applied for emergency Canadian travel documents in Istanbul, using his own name. He was arrested in Canada on arrival in October 2015 (Waddell 2016).

In March 2016, El Shaer was sentenced to a year in jail (with time served), and two years’ probation, after pleading guilty to several charges, including possessing false identification and breaking the terms of his previous probation. He was also ordered to provide authorities with a DNA sample and was banned from possessing a passport or other travel documentation. Days after his release, he was once again arrested in June 2016 on a terrorism peace bond, due to RCMP concerns that he might seek to leave Canada (for a fourth time) to participate in the activity of a terrorist organization.

In December 2016, a judge placed 17 restrictions on El Shaer, including that he surrender his passport, not travel beyond Windsor or to any airport, not communicate with ISIS supporters, not possess devices with Internet access, and wear a GPS-enabled electronic ankle bracelet (Bell 2016a). Crown lawyer Howard Piafsky argued that the “weight of his history” clearly illustrated that a peace bond was necessary to help keep El Shaer from again travelling abroad: “What we’ve seen with Mr. El Shaer . . . is a demonstrated pattern of behavior that’s repeated itself over and over again.”

Phil Gurski (2016a), a former Canadian intelligence analyst who has written several books on the subject of radicalization, recounted his personal experience with El Shaer. Years before El Shaer’s latest arrest, Gurski participated in an information session on violent radicalization organized in Windsor by local Muslim youth. Gurski was invited to share his research on the indicators of radicalization. El Shaer was in the audience. At the end of Gurski’s talk, El Shaer became vocally belligerent, accusing him of Islamophobia and of fabricating concerns over terrorism. Embarrassed, members of the community later privately apologized to Gurski, calling El Shaer “our local extremist.” To Gurski, the episode epitomized the “audacity and brashness with which radicalized people act in public forum.” Not only do they seem to care little about attracting public attention or scrutiny, but they so profoundly believe in their ideology that they cannot but help share their views, in hopes of convincing others to join their cause.

Conclusion

Radicalization to violence, terrorism recruitment and mobilization are complex and evolving concerns. The rise and fall of ISIS is but the latest iteration of these phenomena. By building a unique dataset of Canadian Islamist radicalization and participation in terrorism over the past decade, this report provides a national snapshot of the individual characteristics and trends associated with a particularly dangerous form of contemporary political violence. And by comparing the Canadian data and analysis to similar research conducted in other countries, like the US, UK, France, and several other European states, an international consensus can be built that illustrates both the similarities and differences between national contexts.

In sum, this report demonstrates the uniquely Canadian markers that feed into our national experience of Islamist radicalization and terrorism, but also sheds light on larger, global trends that inform and influence developments in Canada. Three next steps present themselves.

First, having identified the Canadian and foreign characteristics of Islamist radicalization and political violence, a comparative historical study of Canadian, European, and US counterterrorism and counter-radicalization strategies, approaches, and policies should be conducted next. Such a study would highlight how different states tackle commonly shared concerns and challenges, and help unearth best practices along the way.

Second, the dataset itself should be regularly updated and expanded, with fresh open-source information supplementing existing entries and newly identified individuals added to the mix. Adding new cases, especially of returning, captured, or killed Canadian foreign fighters from various militant hotspots from around the world, will augment the existing data and add greater context and nuance to the project. Doing so will help strengthen overall findings. In a similar vein, the updated Canadian dataset itself should be periodically re-analysed, perhaps every few years, and reassessed alongside newly published foreign research. This will ensure that the shifting and evolving Canadian and global context is properly understood.

Third, and finally, a similar dataset of non-Salafi-Jihadi Canadian radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization should be constructed and assessed. Support for political violence and terrorism comes in a variety of stripes: the current project only captures one subset – albeit, a rather important one – of the larger phenomenon. Far-left, far-right, and various other radical political ideologies have all led to episodes of violence and terrorism. A recent surge of fatal attacks in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the US, and Canada perpetrated by far-right and/or white nationalist individuals and groups is particularly worrisome.

Canadian research on the phenomenon of right-wing extremism, violence, and terrorism has recently begun to expand in scope (Perry and Scrivens 2016; Tanner and Campana 2014; Parent and Ellis 2014; Scrivens and Perry 2017). Building and analysing a Canadian dataset of far-right radicalization and political violence would help identify the national traits, trends, and characteristics of an evolving domestic security and policy concern that has important international ramifications.

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Endnotes

- 1 See Shiraz Maher, 2016, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*; and Seth Jones, Danika Newlee, and Nicholas Harrington, 2018, “The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadi Threat.”
- 2 See the EUROPOL’s 2018 *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* for further detail.
- 3 For details, see EUROPOL, 2018, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*.
- 4 See also START, 2018, “PIRUS - Reports.”
- 5 The author is a member of TSAS’ Executive Committee and has received research grants from the organization.
- 6 This database can be found at <http://www.extremism.ca/Default.aspx>.
- 7 For details, see Public Safety Canada, 2018, *2018 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada*.
- 8 Media reports published in October 2018, and not subsequently captured by our dataset, identify another three Canadian women who joined ISIS; see Stewart Bell, 2018, “I’m Going to Die Here’: Wives of ISIS fighters want to return home to Canada,” *Global News*, October 11.
- 9 For more on the difference between radicalization and mobilization to violence, see Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2018, “Mobilization To Violence (Terrorism) Research - key findings,” Canadian Security Intelligence Service, February 5, available at https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/isis-scrs/documents/publications/IMV_-_Terrorism-Research-Key-findings-eng.pdf.

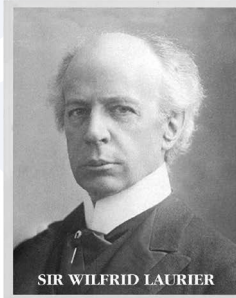
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