



HOMEGROWN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS



Background

- Homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) are individuals inspired—as opposed to directed—by foreign terrorist organizations and radicalized in the countries in which they are born, raised, or reside.
- In recent years, foreign terrorist groups, predominately al-Qa'ida and ISIS, have seen their organizational hierarchies collapse and their operations stifled due to aggressive intervention from the West. To combat waning influence overseas, these groups have focused on radicalizing individuals to attack on their behalf. These organizations continue to call for attacks in the West, despite their inability to execute large-scale attacks in recent years.
- There is no single factor that leads to radicalization, and motivators can be ideological, personal, sociopolitical, or group- or community-driven. While foreign terrorist organizations encourage radical ideologies and violence, in many instances, personal grievances can play a key role in influencing HVE ideology, target selection, and violent acts.
- HVEs may draw inspiration from multiple foreign terrorist organizations and become radicalized through a variety of means, including on the Internet. Foreign terrorist groups and their supporters will produce and disseminate propaganda on social media—including TamTam and Riot—and various online platforms in order to call for attacks in the West or encourage support for terrorists overseas.

PROPAGANDA

The use of propaganda to inspire supporters has been a widely used tactic for foreign terrorist organizations over the years. It exposes individuals to radical ideologies and can also be a tactical resource to individuals looking to commit violence, such as providing instruction on bomb-making or other tactics.

Both ISIS and al-Qa'ida have not produced English-language propaganda magazines since 2017; however, the older material is still being accessed and consumed by HVEs.

More recently, HVEs started producing and disseminating their own propaganda on behalf of foreign terrorist organizations. Ashraf al Safoo had been a member of al-Khattab Media Foundation, a pro-ISIS media group, before his arrest in 2018. The group routinely published media on behalf of ISIS. In 2019, Kim Anh Vo was arrested after joining the United Cyber Caliphate, another group that created online content for ISIS.

Popular official foreign terrorist organization propaganda, although no longer in production, includes ISIS's *Dabiq* and Al-Qa'ida's *Inspire* magazines.

Threat to New Jersey: High

HVEs will continue to pose a high threat to New Jersey as foreign terrorist organizations encourage supporters to kill Americans, provide material support, and travel overseas to fight. HVE support in the United States for foreign terrorist organizations will remain a constant, highlighted by an increase in arrests in 2019 compared to the previous year.

- In May 2019, authorities charged Jonathan Xie of Basking Ridge (Somerset County) with attempting to provide material support to HAMAS after he sent money to an individual he believed was a member of the group. Additionally, authorities observed Xie outside Trump Tower in New York City shortly before he posted on social media that he wanted to attack that location or the Israeli Consulate General.
- In October 2017, authorities arrested New Jersey resident Sayfullo Saipov after he rented a truck in New Jersey and drove it down a bike path in New York City, killing eight and injuring 11. Saipov was inspired by ISIS and is currently awaiting trial.
- In February 2017, authorities arrested Gregory Lepsky of Point Pleasant Borough (Ocean County) for attempting to build a pressure-cooker bomb and detonate it in New York City. In March 2019, Lepsky was sentenced to 16 years in prison.



Jonathan Xie



Sayfullo Saipov



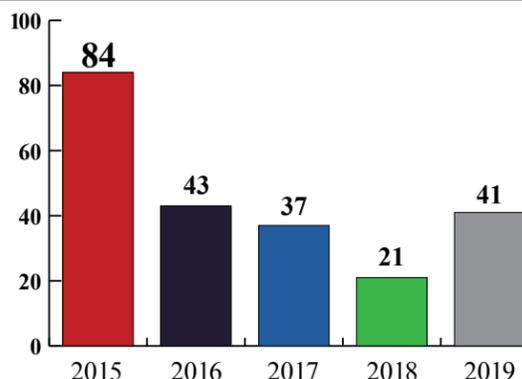
Gregory Lepsky

US Nexus

In 2019, HVEs adopted a variety of methods and means of support to foreign terrorist organizations by creating and disseminating propaganda to recruit new members and plotting attacks that target large gatherings on behalf of a variety of groups.

- In November 2019, authorities in Brooklyn, New York, arrested Zachary Clark for attempting to provide material support to ISIS. Clark allegedly disseminated propaganda through encrypted chatrooms, including instruction manuals on how to construct improvised explosive devices, select targets, and conduct attacks in New York City. Clark pledged allegiance to ISIS beginning in July, first to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and then his successor, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi.
- In June 2019, authorities in Queens, New York, arrested Ashiqul Alam after he purchased two firearms without serial numbers from an undercover agent. Beginning in August 2018, Alam expressed a desire to purchase weapons, grenades, and explosives to conduct an attack. In January 2019, he visited Times Square in New York several times to surveil potential targets while recording the area. Alam is accused of referencing al-Qa'ida and ISIS and admiring Usama bin Ladin.
- In March 2019, Rondell Henry from Germantown, Maryland, plotted to conduct a vehicle attack with a stolen rental van at the National Harbor in Maryland. Prior to his arrest, Henry drove to Dulles International Airport in Virginia to surveil the area but determined the crowd was too small. Court documents stated Henry drew inspiration from ISIS and sought to conduct an attack similar to when an extremist killed 84 people by driving a truck into a crowd in Nice, France, in 2016.

IDENTIFIED HVEs BY YEAR*



**Due to the sensitivity of ongoing HVE investigations, this data only reflects publicly available information and may be subject to change.*

INCREASE IN HVEs ATTEMPTING TO TRAVEL OVERSEAS

At the end of 2018, al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a video encouraging sympathizers to join the group's ranks overseas. Subsequently, an uptick in the number of people who attempted to travel overseas in support of foreign terrorist organizations occurred in 2019. While there were 41 identified HVEs, nine of those were arrested for attempting to travel overseas. For comparison, there was only one individual who attempted to travel in 2018. Two groups of individuals attempting to travel together were arrested in Michigan and Arizona, while the remaining individuals were arrested in New York and Connecticut.

Additional Resources

[2020 Terrorism Threat Assessment](#)

[HVEs: Potential Scenarios](#)