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# For Caliph and Country: Exploring How British Jihadis Join a Global Movement

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# Contents

Summary	3
Download	6
Notes	7

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## SUMMARY

For more than 30 years, British jihadis have been fighting under the banner of an extreme Islamist ideology in conflicts from Algeria to the Philippines.

# This report explores what connects jihadis from across the UK and how they made their journey into jihadism.

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For half of that time, the streets of the UK have been seen as a legitimate target, as witnessed most recently in London and Manchester. Ideologues made their home in Britain, having been rejected from Muslim-majority countries because the ideas they expounded were considered dangerous. From the UK, they influenced many. In the last five years, the conflict in Syria alone has attracted over 800 British fighters.

Their ideology justifies the use of violent jihad to achieve its aims. Its proponents believe in imposing their interpretation of Islam on others as state law, with no tolerance for alternatives. They believe in brutally punishing apostates and subjugating women. It is Muslims who make up the majority of their victims.

The global jihadi network they are a part of goes back decades. The violence it wreaks is felt all over the world. In the final months of 2016, more than 18,000 lives were lost to jihadi violence or efforts against it. In all, some 58 jihadi groups were involved in at least 2,312 violent incidents in 41 countries.

What connects these disaffected individuals from Beeston to Brighton? How has a global, violent ideology captured the minds of so many British citizens and residents? And what can be done to stop others going down this path?

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Over two thirds have ties to just six individuals.** Sixty-seven per cent of our sample had links, direct or indirect, to six individuals: Abu Hamza al-Masri, Abdullah al-Faisal, Abu Qatada al-Filistini, Omar Bakri Mohammad, Anjem Choudary, and Hani al-Sibai.
- **UK Islamist groups serve as recruiting pools.** Seventy-seven per cent of our sample were associated with non-violent Islamist groups and networks before turning to jihadism. Some of the networks behind these groups continue to operate today.
- **Women tend to be radicalised online more than men.** At least 44 per cent of our sample of women were partly radicalised online, for half of whom there were no known Islamist links in person. In contrast, only four per cent of men in our sample had an online element noted in their radicalisation.
- **Most UK jihadis have links to ISIS and al-Qaeda.** Although a total of 24 jihadi groups are represented in our sample, 84 per cent of the sample are associated with just two groups: al-Qaeda and ISIS. Thirty-five per cent have been associated with ISIS; 90 per cent of these became associated after the group's expansion into Syria in 2013. Forty per cent became associated after ISIS' declaration of a caliphate in June 2014.
- **British jihadism is inspired by global events.** The conflicts our sample participated in were determined by what was capturing the most attention in the global Islamist movement when they came of age. However, only half of our sample fought in more than one conflict. This contrasts with previous research into prominent jihadis from the Middle East and Africa, three quarters of whom had fought in a number of conflicts.
- **British fighters are drawn to hubs of conflict.** Sixty-four per cent of our sample fought in one of three major jihadi conflict hubs: Syria/Iraq, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and Somalia/Kenya.
- **But many are parochial.** Over a third of our sample targeted the UK, and half operated from the UK. Twenty-seven per cent never engaged in jihadi activity outside of Britain.
- **London dominates British jihadism.** Forty-nine per cent of our sample were based in London. Of these, 20 individuals came from just five areas of the city: Hammersmith, Willesden, Barkingside, St John's Wood, and Acton.
- **A minority were involved in non-jihadi crime.** Fifty-eight per cent of our sample have spent time in prison, but only 13 per cent were incarcerated for crimes unrelated to jihadism. Seven

individuals served time in young offenders' institutions, and at least four were believed to be radicalised in prison.

- **Many are well-educated.** Thirty-one per cent started a degree, and over half of these studied STEMM subjects. Nearly one third of those with degrees studied humanities or social science, and four read Islamic studies. Five dropped out of their course before graduating.
- **UK jihadism is a family affair.** Twenty-three per cent of our sample have siblings engaged in jihadi activity, comprising 14 families. Thirty per cent in total have a family link to jihadism. When it came to women, 61 per cent of our sample had relatives involved in jihadi activity, predominantly husbands or siblings. Family ties also influenced theatres of operation. Forty per cent of our sample were of South Asian descent, and a fifth travelled to fight in Afghanistan or Pakistan. However, since the Arab uprisings of 2011, the proportion travelling to the region has dropped significantly.



## DOWNLOAD

[Download the full report. \(/sites/default/files/inline-files/For-Caliph-Country.pdf\)](/sites/default/files/inline-files/For-Caliph-Country.pdf)

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## NOTES

This research is based on the biographies of 113 British men, both citizens and residents, who had engaged in, supported or abetted violent jihad. There is also a case study analysing the biographies of 18 women. Information on each individual was gathered using open-source data. You can download the sample [here \(/sites/default/files/inline-files/IGC\\_Caliph-Country\\_Full%20Sample.pdf\)](/sites/default/files/inline-files/IGC_Caliph-Country_Full%20Sample.pdf).





This report explores what connects jihadis from across the UK and how they made their journey into jihadism.

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