

## Homegrown terrorist recruitment, ISIS and African Americans

Homegrown violent extremism from Islamist based groups are here to stay. Last year, then Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper highlighting that homegrown extremists will likely pose the most significant Sunni threat to the U.S. homeland in 2016 along with an uptick of arrests and indictment in Philadelphia and Baltimore by African American Muslim converts are of major concern. Earlier this year, a Philadelphia man, Edward Archer attacked a police officer invoking ISIS and a Maryland man, [Malik Alim Jones](#) was arrested for his involvement with al-Qa'ida affiliate al-Shabaab.

These attacks and events further builds on the recent 51 minute al-Shabaab recruitment video targeting and recruiting African American youth to jihad which is part of a decades' long effort by violent extremists to specifically recruit from troubled, dissociated and vulnerable segments of the community. Since 2008, Al-Qaida's then second in command Ayman al Zawahiri sought to interlace domestic African American racial grievances with the global jihad movement. In a [video message](#) after President Barack Obama election. Zawahiri's message presented video motifs of Malcolm X, attempting to exploit historical African American Muslim activism as a potential means for future radicalization. However at the time, the message largely fell upon the deaf ears of mainstream and African American media.

Historically, segments of the African American community have been exposed to multiple types of violent extremism because mainly urban marginalized communities have been impacted by perceived historic injustices making them vulnerable and easy fodder- appealing to a collective sense of injustice, feelings of deprivation and social alienation – the formula that violent extremists groups exploit to win over converts the way a gang recruits.

Since 2001, at least half of the most recent prominent attacks and plotting in the United States were carried out by U.S. born men. Of them, [at least 35](#) African American(non-African immigrant) converts were involved in these events and constituted one of the largest [single ethnic group](#) involved in these actions.<sup>1</sup> These individuals' stories and paths to radicalization reveal a variety of reasons for why this demographic group is joining ISIS – from social alienation to political grievances.”

The events in [Ferguson, Missouri](#) and Baltimore, Maryland, along with the growing popularity of America's Black Lives Matters movement, has brought to the forefront issues between urban communities and the police into sharp focus especially among the broader African American community. Furthermore, these current challenges in urban communities throughout America have also convened ISIL facilitators and sympathizers seeking to [capitalize](#) on recent events. A number of online ISIL supporters over the past several months have used hashtags and twitter

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<sup>1</sup> Lai, K.K. Rebecca, and Sergio Pecana. "The Origins of Jihadist Inspired Attackers in the U.S." *The Origins of Jihadist Inspired Attackers in the U.S.* [New York City] 8 Dec. 2015: n. page. Print.

account feeds to express their solidarity and support for African American youth negatively affected by the U.S. criminal justice system and perceived inequities as a way to appeal to them.

Recruitment efforts by extremists who identify with a fundamentalist interpretive are nothing new. Missionary activities started in the early 1990s when the reawakening of African American social identity coincided with the aggressive recruitment mission undertaken by wealthy Gulf based funders. In America, the epicenters of East Orange, New Jersey, and Philadelphia became recruiting grounds where lucrative educational scholarships, satellite exchanges with Saudi-based clerics and immediate infusions of cash into urban communities desperate for resources were provided.<sup>2</sup> Social media and the Internet have just made it more visible.

The abovementioned incidents indicate that a small segment of African American converts have been exposed to and are readily susceptible to dangerous extremist rhetoric. However, violent extremist messages can be mitigated. Social scientists indicate that the vast majority of African American Muslims represent an example of synergy between American and Islamic shared values. My own personal story as a third generation African American Muslim, whose professional and personal life represents the rich tradition of a multi religious and ethnic family is testimony of American pluralism. These examples and achievements should be targeted to the same African American youth that al-Shabaab's recent video and other extremists prey upon in an effort to show a third way to channel frustration and violence.

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<sup>2</sup> Elmasry, Shadee (2010). The Salafis in America: The Rise, Decline and Prospects for a Sunni Muslim Movement among. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(2).