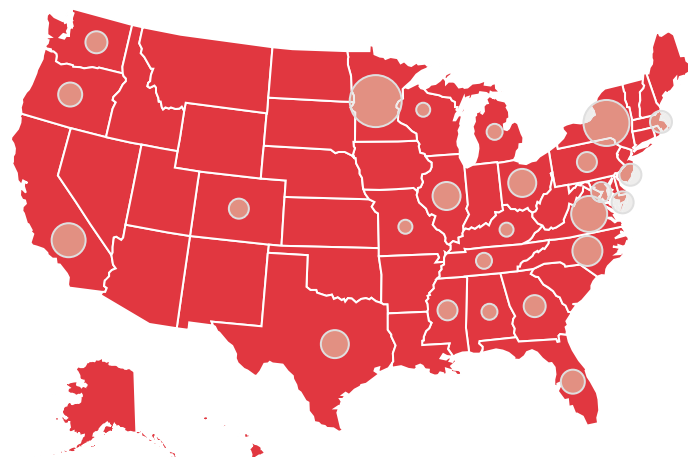
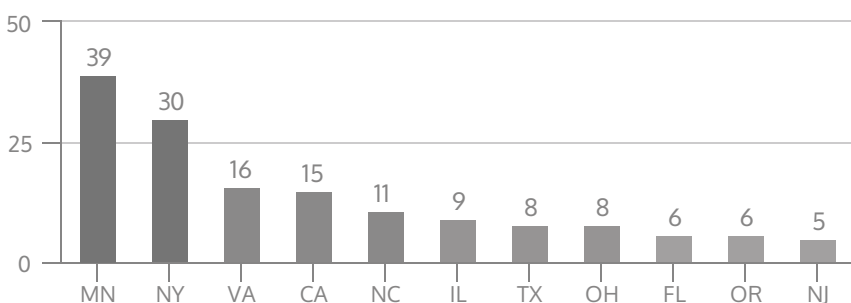


## Overview: Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States-Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF)

Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States - Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF) is a database collected by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) that contains over 100 variables on all phases - pre-travel, travel, and return - of the foreign fighter life cycle. The database currently includes information on 242 individuals who have been publicly identified in open sources as having left, attempted to leave, or expressed an interest in leaving the United States for the purpose of supporting the activities or interests of a foreign non-state armed group or foreign regime, and were motivated by religion, ethnicity, or other ideology. Because many foreign fighters have made multiple trips to a conflict zone, the PIRUS-FF data are coded only for their first known trip. Later versions of the database will include information on individuals' multiple travel attempts, when applicable.

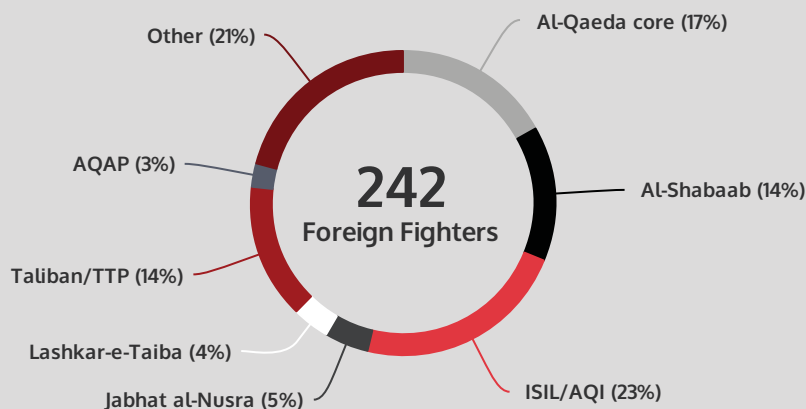
### Foreign fighter "hot spots"

From 1980 to 2015, foreign fighters departed for overseas conflicts from more than 100 cities in 25 states across the United States. During that span, there have been some instances of concentrated foreign fighter activity in both geography and time. The dozens of Somali-Americans who left the Minneapolis/St. Paul area from 2007-2008 are one such example. However, since the ascent of ISIL starting in 2013, foreign fighter travel from the United States has been much more dispersed across the country. Individuals from at least 16 states have sought to join ISIL in Iraq and Syria since 2013.



### Foreign militant groups in PIRUS-FF

The PIRUS-FF data show that U.S. foreign fighters have been associated with 33 foreign militant groups across 14 unique conflicts since 1980. In just a few short years, individuals traveling to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have outpaced those that have sought to join both al-Qaeda core and al-Shabaab. ISIL affiliated individuals make up 23% of the database, compared to 17% for al-Qaeda core and 14% for al-Shabaab. A significant number of U.S.-based individuals have also sought to join the Taliban in Afghanistan, typically out of a desire to engage in combat against U.S. forces. Despite the group's involvement in several high-profile attempts to launch attacks in the United States, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has drawn relatively fewer fighters from U.S. soil, ranking behind both Jabhat al-Nusra and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).



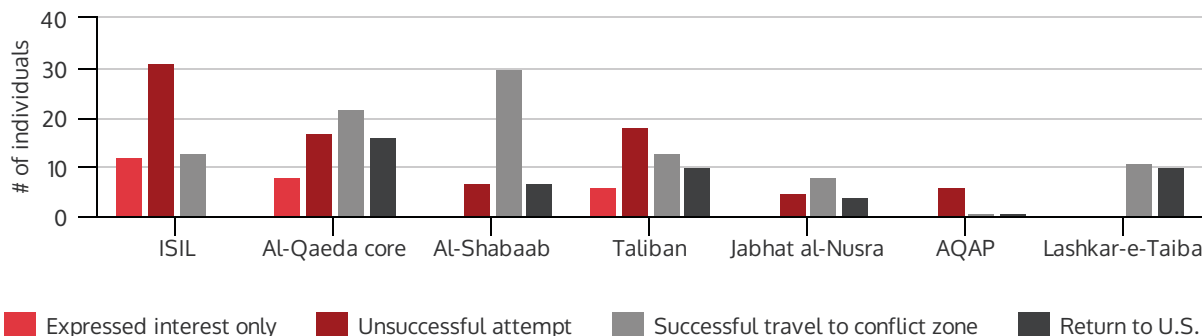
### Median age



Traveling to foreign conflict zones tends to be an activity dominated by young adults and that is a trend that has remained constant over time. The median age at departure for foreign fighters in 2015 was 24, exactly the same as it was for individuals that traveled to foreign conflicts in 1988.

### Success rates for U.S. foreign fighters

Researchers and practitioners can use the PIRUS-FF data to compare relative success rates among foreign fighter groups. For example, only 14% of the individuals in the data aspired to join al-Shabaab, but they make up 23% of all travelers who successfully arrived in conflict zones, making it among the most successful groups by this measure. By comparison, 37% of all unsuccessful travelers were affiliated with ISIL, although ISIL affiliated individuals count for just 23% of the dataset.



# START

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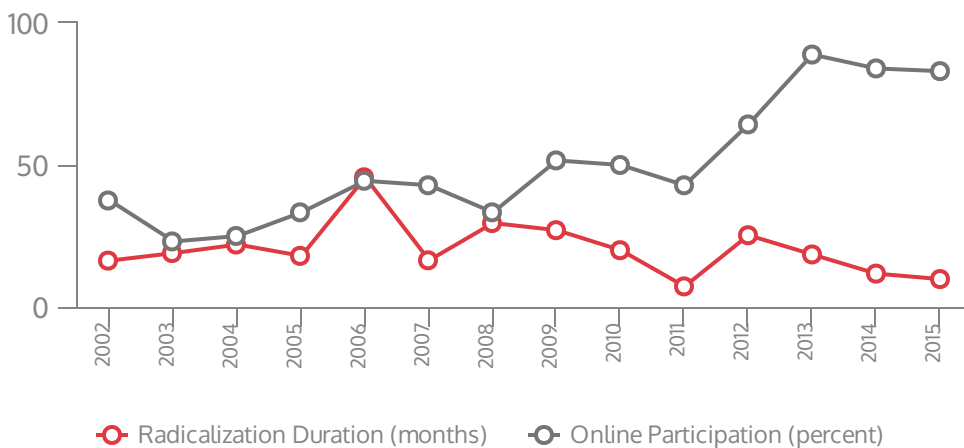
## Foreign Fighter Radicalization

The Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States-Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF) database can be used to explore the radicalization processes and pathways of those who have aspired to join foreign conflicts. For example, the database can be used to assess how many U.S. foreign fighters experienced a religious awakening prior to radicalizing (42%) or how many experienced a traumatic event that directly contributed to their radicalization (12%). Below are some notable findings from the database that shed light on the pre-travel behaviors of U.S. foreign fighters.

This research was supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs and the National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice (DOJ). The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Justice.

## Radicalization and Internet Usage

While variable, the PIRUS-FF data show that the average duration of radicalization (i.e., time from first adoption of radical beliefs to travel attempt) has been decreasing in recent years. In 2002, the average radicalization duration for individuals in the database was approximately 16 months. The average duration was just under 10 months for individuals that attempted to travel in 2015. Over the same period, the internet played an increasingly pivotal role in the radicalization of foreign fighters. The internet was a factor contributing to the radicalization of 37% of the individuals who attempted travel in 2002. By comparison, the internet contributed to the radicalization of 83% of the individuals that attempted travel in 2015.

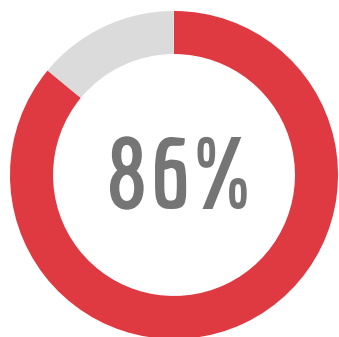


## Radicalization Duration

16.3 → 9.8 Months

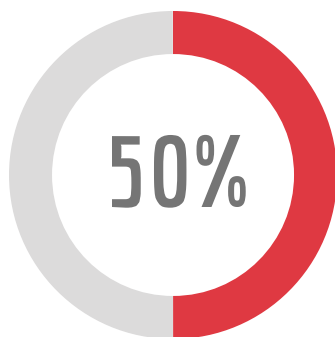
## PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL RADICALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES

## FOREIGN FIGHTERS



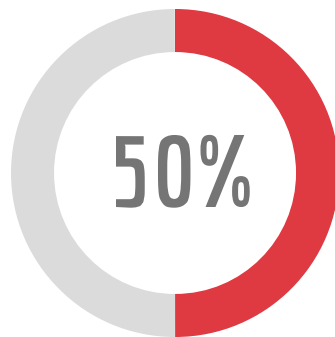
### Internet

The internet played a primary or contributing role in the radicalization of 86% of the foreign fighters listed in the database (since 2005). Those who radicalized wholly or partly online used the internet to view extremist materials, research conflicts, groups, and attack methods, and participated in online communities of like-minded individuals.



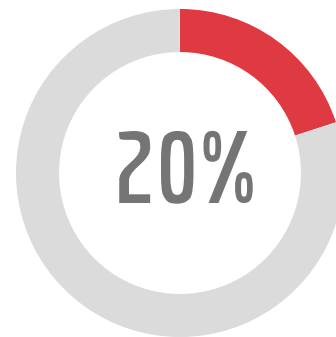
### Social Media

Approximately half of the successful travelers in the database maintained an active presence on social media from conflict zones (since 2010). Most often, these individuals used social media to encourage others to travel, to document their experiences in the conflict zone, and to share with others tips for evading law enforcement detection.



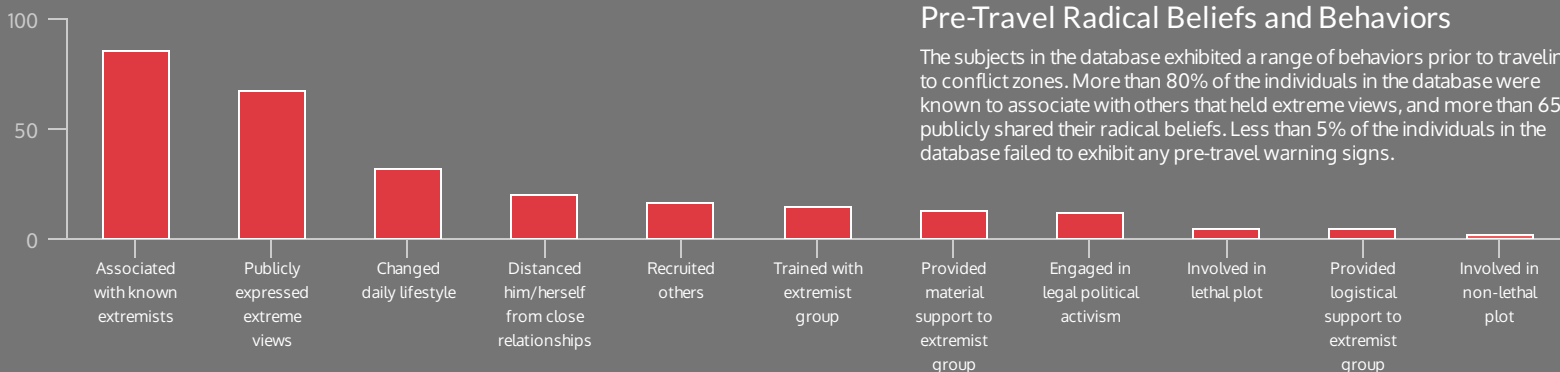
### Travel Knowledge

Half of the individuals in the database used the internet as their primary source of information about traveling to conflict zones. Through websites, forums, blogs, and social media, subjects were able to retrieve information on travel routes and methods, border crossing points, travel supplies, and methods for avoiding detection.



### Online Facilitation

20% of the individuals in the database established relationships with online travel facilitators. Online facilitators often acted as liaisons between travelers and groups, helping individuals to locate safe-houses and to arrange escorts to conflict zones.



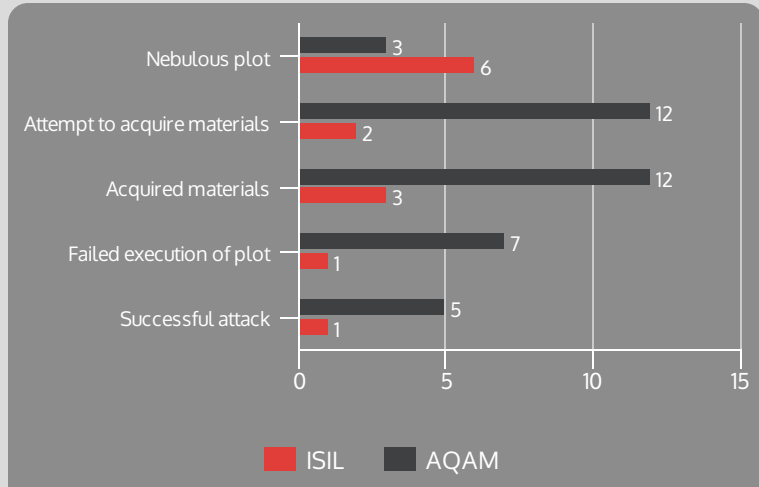
## Pre-Travel Radical Beliefs and Behaviors

The subjects in the database exhibited a range of behaviors prior to traveling to conflict zones. More than 80% of the individuals in the database were known to associate with others that held extreme views, and more than 65% publicly shared their radical beliefs. Less than 5% of the individuals in the database failed to exhibit any pre-travel warning signs.

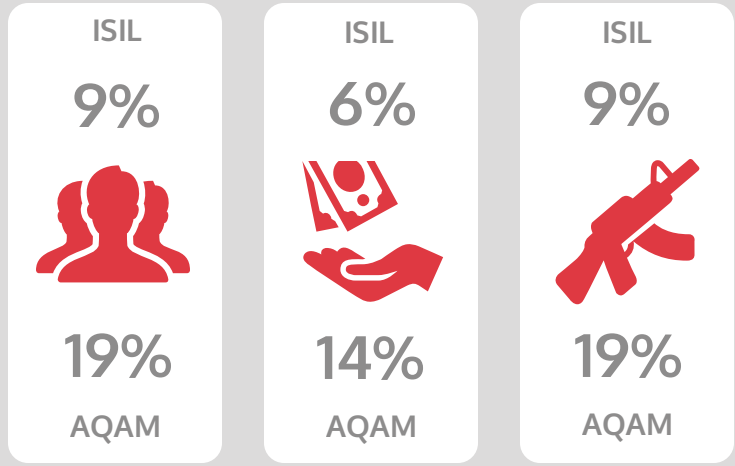
## Comparing al-Qaeda and Islamic State Affiliated Foreign Fighters

The Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States-Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF) dataset contains information on 56 individuals that aspired to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and 155 individuals that sought to join al-Qaeda and Associated Movement (AQAM) groups. Below are some of the ways in which ISIL affiliated individuals differ from those who sought to join AQAM groups. Most important, travel success rates for those wishing to join ISIL have been noticeably lower than those seeking to join AQAM groups. Nearly 65% of AQAM affiliated individuals successfully made it to conflict zones, while only 29% of those seeking to join ISIL were successful in their attempts.

This research was supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs and the National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice (DOJ). The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Justice.



All of the 52 foreign fighters in the PIRUS-FF dataset who aspired, planned or attempted to execute plots against the U.S. homeland were affiliated with, or inspired by, ISIL or AQAM groups. In terms of plot success, ISIL affiliated individuals fared poorly in comparison to those connected with al-Qaeda and its allies. One ISIL-related plot was successful, while the other 12 failed. By comparison, individuals associated with al-Qaeda and its affiliates were responsible for 5 successful attacks in the United States.

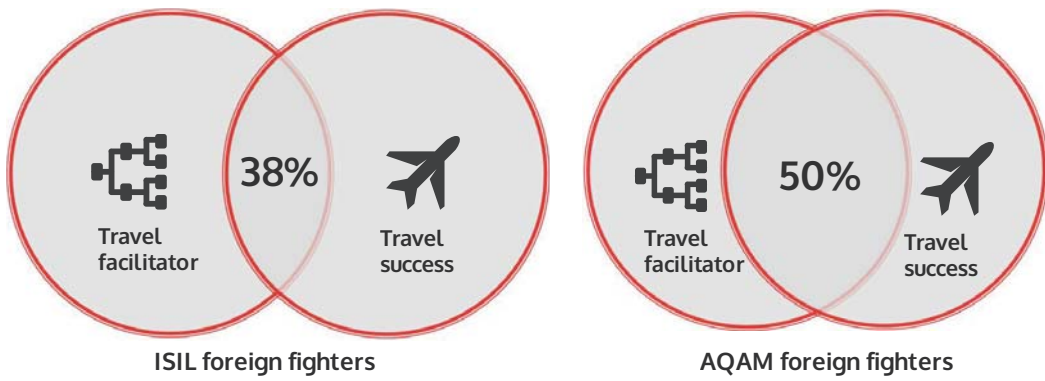


In the pre-travel phase, the majority of U.S. foreign fighters associated themselves with radical social groups and made expressions of their intentions to travel abroad. While comparatively uncommon, noticeable differences between individuals affiliated with ISIL and those linked to AQAM groups appear in three pre-travel behaviors--recruiting, providing material support to organizations, and seeking weapons training. In each case, AQAM affiliated individuals engaged in the behaviors twice as often as those affiliated with ISIL.

## PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL RADICALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES FOREIGN FIGHTERS

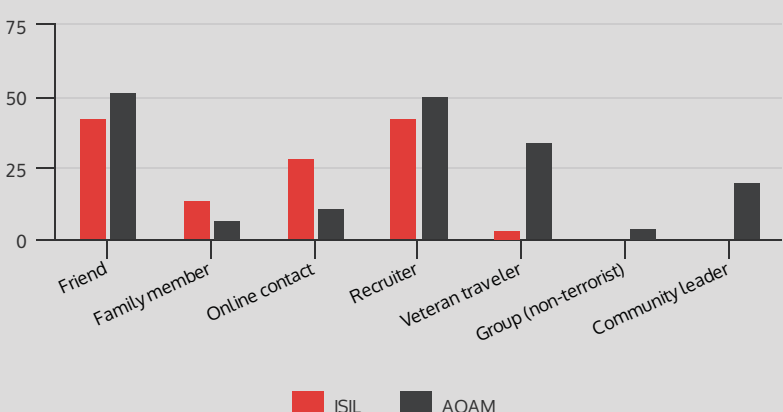
### Travel Facilitators

A key component of foreign fighter travel is the facilitator. Since 2001, those who have sought to join groups in foreign conflict zones have consistently sought the help of facilitators. In fact, during that period, 87% of all individuals that aspired to join foreign groups were aided by at least one facilitator in travel preparation and execution. Those seeking to join ISIL connected with travel facilitators at a rate of 90%. The presence of a facilitator, however, does not guarantee successful arrival in a conflict zone. Only 38% of ISIL affiliated individuals with facilitator support made it to Iraq or Syria. Those affiliated with AQAM groups fared slightly better. Facilitators helped approximately half the individuals that sought to join AQAM groups successfully arrive in conflict zones.



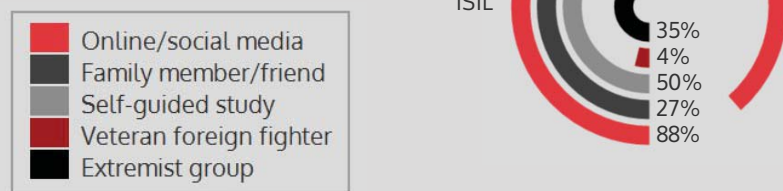
### Facilitator Relationship

As noted above, U.S. foreign fighters seeking to join ISIL or AQAM groups regularly sought financial and logistical guidance from travel facilitators. The PIRUS-FF data show that the relationships between travel facilitators and aspiring fighters are diverse, as family members, friends, online contacts, and even face-to-face recruiters often support the efforts of those wishing to travel. ISIL-bound individuals connected with facilitators online three times as often as those wishing to join AQAM groups. Meanwhile, about 55% of AQAM facilitators were veteran travelers or community leaders.



### Travel Knowledge

Significant differences between ISIL and AQAM affiliated foreign fighters are found in their respective sources of travel knowledge. While AQAM affiliated foreign fighters acquired the knowledge needed to successfully travel to conflict zones from a variety of sources, including veteran foreign fighters and family members, ISIL affiliated individuals overwhelmingly relied on the internet and social media for travel expertise. Through social media, propaganda videos, and its own online publications, ISIL has excelled at using the internet as a tool for educating those wishing to join the group on route planning, supply preparation, and avoiding law enforcement detection.



# START

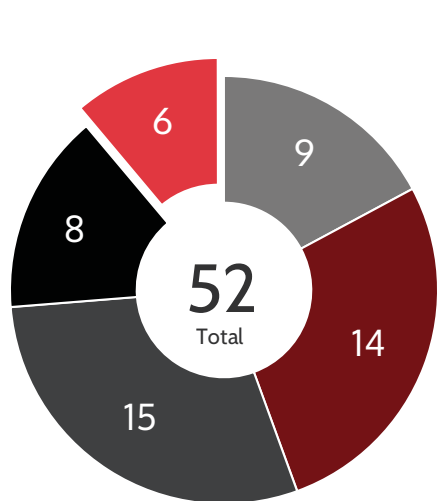
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## Terrorism in the United States Involving Foreign Fighters

The Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States - Foreign Fighters (PIRUS-FF) dataset contains information on 52 foreign fighters that were involved in plots to attack the United States between 1980-2015. The vast majority (88%) were unsuccessful in their attempts. Six subjects, however, were involved in four unique successful attacks that resulted in a combined 18 deaths and 1304 injuries. The most lethal of those attacks--the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993--killed six people and injured over 1000. The attack involved the participation of two individuals that had previously traveled from the United States to Afghanistan to fight against Soviet forces and later participated in post-conflict training camps. More recently, the May 2015 shooting at the Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, Texas, was carried out by two individuals who had expressed interest in traveling to Somalia to join al-Shabaab and traveling to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

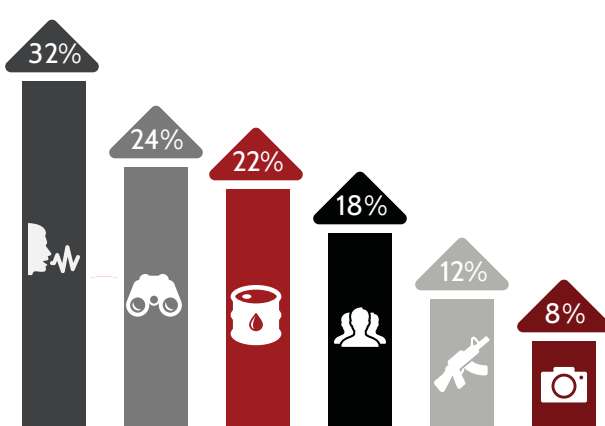
## PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL RADICALIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES - FOREIGN FIGHTERS



- Involved in nebulous plot
- Involved in attempted materials acquisition
- Involved in successful materials acquisition
- Involved in unsuccessful attack
- Involved in successful attack

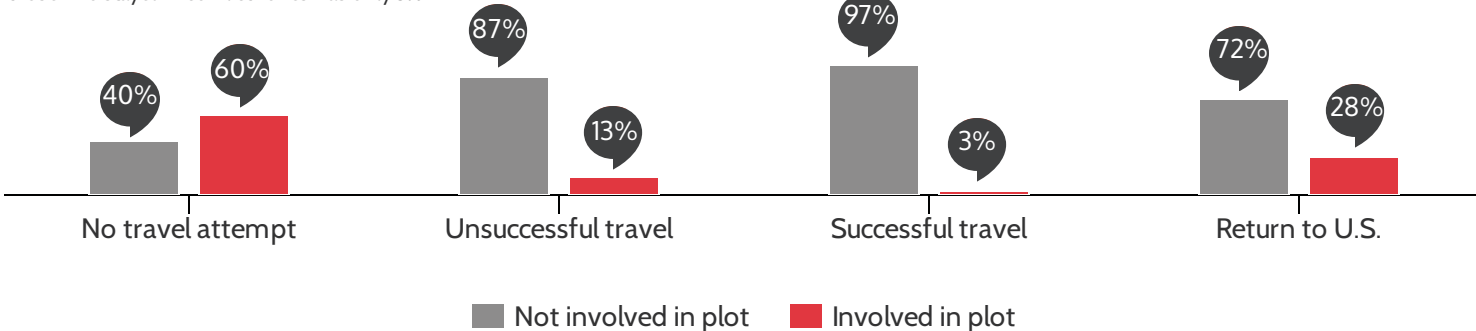


**Suspicious Activity Reporting**  
Foreign fighters involved in U.S. terror plots engaged in a number of the behaviors featured on the Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) indicators list. 59% of the subjects acquired the expertise needed to launch attacks and 32% expressed or implied their intentions to launch attacks to others that were not involved in the plots. 24% engaged in observation and surveillance of potential targets, while 8% photographed the targets. 18% recruited others to assist in the plots. Finally, 22% of the individuals acquired bomb making and other materials, and 12% stockpiled weapons.



## PLOT OUTCOMES

Foreign fighter involvement in plots to launch attacks in the United States varied significantly for the subjects in the database depending on how far they made it in the travel lifecycle. Those who successfully traveled to conflict zones and eventually returned to the United States were involved in plots at a rate of 28%. By comparison, those who publicly expressed an interest in traveling to conflict zones, but made no appreciable attempts to do so, were involved in domestic plots at the rate of 60%. Approximately 13% of those individuals who made unsuccessful attempts to travel to foreign conflicts were involved in domestic plots, while plot involvement among those who stayed in conflict zones was only 3%.



## FOREIGN GROUP SUPPORT

Foreign terrorist organizations provided support to 40% of the foreign fighters that plotted attacks in the United States. Al-Qaeda core supported the majority (60%) of these individuals by providing a combination of logistical, planning, ideological and financial help. This support did not significantly increase the individuals' chances of committing successful attacks. 15% of the individuals who received group support committed successful attacks, which is only slightly higher than those that did not receive any foreign support (10%).

40%

