



Islamist Homophobia in the West: From Rhetoric to Violence

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Executive Summary

The global LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual/aromantic/agender) community has historically been subjected to hateful rhetoric, discriminatory practices and acts of violence. In the West, this animosity has traditionally mostly originated from a heterogeneous array of actors that can broadly be identified with the far-right. And while in recent years the LGBTQIA+ community has received rights and a degree of acceptance largely unthinkable only a few decades ago, episodes of intolerance and violence are still very much present. Recently, for example, in June 2022, authorities detained 31 members of a white nationalist group called Patriot Front who were allegedly about to attack the Pride in the Park event in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.¹

If animosity against the LGBTQIA+ community from right wing circles is a well-known and fairly uncontested topic, less so is that originating from Islamist milieus.² Yet, an abundance of evidence indicates that, over the last few decades, hateful rhetoric and occasional acts of violence against the LGBTQIA+ community in the United States and virtually all other Western countries have increasingly come from Islamist actors.

Both in the Muslim world and in the West, mainstream Islamists, such as those from Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist backgrounds, depict homosexuality as a perversion and a grave sin. Islamist anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric takes different angles. At times, it focuses on warning the Muslim community about engaging in homosexual acts, evoking the divine punishments that await those who do so. In line with some Christian fundamentalists, natural events such as hurricanes and earthquakes or diseases like AIDS are also painted as divine punishments against homosexuality. A substantial part of the messaging also views homosexuality and gay rights as a Western plot devised to pervert and weaken Muslims. This report documents several instances of preachers and top-ranking officials linked to prominent Islamist organizations in the U.S. and Europe, several of whom are engaged as partners by Western governments and civil society, that espouse such views.

Most Islamists agree that punishment of homosexuals is the responsibility of God, and not of ordinary Muslims. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for Islamist preachers to speak about homosexuals with extremely hateful characterizations and invoke brutal punishments against them, contributing to a hate-filled atmosphere which can influence individuals with more immediate violent intentions.

Jihadist groups adopt even more extreme positions on homosexuality and justify killing those who engage in it. The Islamic State has been particularly ruthless in its persecution of homosexuals, enacting theatrical executions of individuals it accused of being gay and broadcasting them when it controlled territory in Syria and Iraq.

Like antisemitism, anti-Shi'a sectarianism, and views on blasphemy and/or apostasy, homophobia is a bridge issue linking Western non-violent Islamists and their jihadist counterparts. Despite their disagreements about the precise conditions for applying the death penalty against LGBTQIA+ individuals, which remains a matter of great dispute between the factions, an emerging consensus

¹ Sullivan, Becky. 2022. "A Far-Right Plan to Riot near an Idaho LGBTQ Event Heightens Safety Concerns at Pride." *NPR*, June 15, 2022, sec. National. <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/15/1104481518/idaho-pride-lgbtq-patriot-front>.

² Islamist is a broad term commonly used to describe all movements that adopt a politicized version of Islam. It is at times also used to include Salafism, a puritanical movement within Sunni Islam which calls for reverting the religion back to the time of the prophet Mohammed, and the first three generations of Muslims known as the *Salaf al-salihin*. While most Salafis share a similar creed (*'aqīda*), different strands of the movement diverge significantly on the method (*manhaj*) they employ to achieve their goals. The strand of Salafism that advocates violent confrontation as the main method to achieve its goals is commonly referred to as jihadism.

connects Islamists of all stripes, particularly in the West. First, Islamists and jihadists alike view homosexuality--active or passive--as a grave sin, entailing some form of divine retribution. Second, figures on both sides have expressed their views that the promotion of "LGBTQIA+ ideology" is part of a grand conspiracy by Western countries to dissuade Muslims from living out their faith, and that calamities that befall Western countries are a result of divine judgement against them. Lastly, certain prominent Islamists concur with the jihadist viewpoint that, in an ideal Islamic state, the death penalty should be enforced against homosexuals.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that in recent years the LGBTQIA+ community in the West has suffered a series of terrorist attacks perpetrated by individuals inspired by Islamist and/or jihadist ideology. Successful attacks against LGBTQIA+ targets were carried out in Orlando, Florida (2016, 49 killed), Dresden, Germany (2020, 1 killed), and Oslo, Norway (2022, 2 killed); other attacks were foiled in France, the Netherlands, the U.S. and the UK.

In order to provide a general overview of these dynamics, this report will first outline the main Islamist viewpoints on homosexuality. It will then provide examples of how Western-based Islamist actors have framed the issue, examine the views and actions of jihadist groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, and finally conclude with an analysis of terrorist attacks perpetrated or planned by individuals motivated by Islamist/jihadist ideology against LGBTQIA+ targets in the West.

Islamist and Salafi Views on Homosexuality

Like those of other Abrahamic religions, Islamic texts contain negative views of homosexuality. Quranic passages refer to the prophet Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by God after the people refused to heed Lot's warnings about what was considered their "deviant" sexual behavior.³ As a result, God punished them by ordering the angel Jibreel to lift the entirety of the area and throw it back down to earth, killing its inhabitants with a rain of stones. This Quranic reference is often followed up with the citation of a *hadith* narrated by Ibn Abbas to justify the execution of gay people in an Islamic state, if their illicit act was witnessed by at least four people: "If you find anyone doing as Lot's people did, kill the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done."⁴

Over the centuries, exegeses of these sources have differed. While there is a general consensus that Islam sees homosexuality as a sin, there are disagreements among Islamic scholars and schools of jurisprudence on whether merely having homosexual tendencies without acting on them constitutes a sin, what the punishments should be, who should mete them out, and many other related aspects.

Islamists of various backgrounds also draw from these sources when formulating their stances on homosexuality. However, they differ in how they interpret them for implementation in modern times. Most do adopt the essential conservative Islamic view on homosexuality, which claims that it represents a corruption of the innate and pure nature, or *fitra*, granted by God at a person's birth which ensures procreation by creating all humans with an attraction to the opposite sex. Thus, according to this view, no one is "born gay" but rather people become gay as a result of corruption due to un-Islamic influences or some sort of traumatic experience. As such, homosexuality is seen alongside other sexual "perversions" such as paedophilia and bestiality.

In many cases, Islamists agree that the story of Lot shows that the punishment of homosexuals is the responsibility of God. They argue that individual Muslims have only the duty to try and teach gay people that they are sinful in the hope they change their ways while also working to implement laws and encourage the establishment of social norms which restrict homosexuality.

Others, however, simply refer to the story of Lot and the *hadith* as a guide on how to deal with homosexuality, omitting any qualifiers or context. In June 2020, for example, Egyptian Islamist Hala Samir appeared on the Turkey-based Muslim Brotherhood affiliated television channel *Watan TV* to discuss homosexuality. Referring to the *hadith*, she told viewers that "'If you find men engaged in a homosexual act – kill the active one as well as the passive one.' Don't start asking: 'Are you active or passive?' Just kill both."⁵ She went on to suggest that the most religiously acceptable ways to do this was either by burning them alive or throwing them from a high place and then stoning them, thus mimicking God's punishment of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Similarly, in 2019, Muslim Brotherhood member Amer Shamakh wrote for a Brotherhood website lamenting that the gay liberation movement was being imported from the West to Egypt and reminding readers that, "in Islam, homosexuality is one of the most loathsome deeds, and Islamic law instructs that those who carry it out be killed by burning, being thrown from a high place, or

³ See for instance Surah al-A'raf, 80-84; Surah ash-Shuara 160-175; Surah al-Ankabut 26-35.

⁴ "One who does the action of the people of Lut." Sunan Abi Dawud 4462. <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/40>

⁵ Weinthal, Benjamin. 2020. "US Envoy Encourages Condemnation of Muslim Brotherhood's Call to Kill Gays." Jerusalem Post, June 28, 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/international/us-envoy-urges-condemnation-of-muslim-brotherhoods-call-to-kill-gays-633022>

stoning... For the Prophet said: 'Whoever is found behaving in the manner of the people of Lot – kill him and the one to whom it was done.'⁶

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the spiritual leader of the global Muslim Brotherhood and chairman of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research, a body established to provide religious guidance to European Muslims, has stated about the punishment for gays: "Some say we should throw them from a high place, like God did with the people of Sodom. Some say we should burn them, and so on. There is disagreement. . . . The important thing is to treat this act as a crime."⁷

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood are not the only Islamists to make such claims. Indeed, in South Asia, Islamists have been even more active in protests against homosexuality and its potential legalisation along with same-sex marriage. This is particularly prevalent in Bangladesh, where since 2013, a spate of targeted killings against secular, liberal, and gay or gay rights-supporting bloggers has been linked to the anti-gay hate campaigns and activism of Islamist groups including the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Hefazat-e-Islami (HI).⁸ The killings coincided with Hefazat-e-Islami's production of a list of 84 bloggers it identified as promoting liberal values, atheism, and homosexuality. At least five of the people on that list have since been murdered.⁹

Similarly, in 2015, both JI and HI were among 13 Islamist groups in the country to put forward a 15-point plan which included asking the government to take action against homosexuals by implementing an existing law which criminalises "carnal intercourse against the order of nature."¹⁰ Months later, one of the most notorious killings took place. Xulhaz Mannan, founder of a national LGBTQIA+ magazine, and his friend Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy were murdered with machetes after a group of men forced their way into Mannan's house.¹¹

⁶ Amer Shamakh, "A Homosexual American President," July 10, 2019, available at:

<https://www.fjp.best/259469/%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/>

⁷ "Muslim Cleric Backs Gay Burnings." 2006. *PinkNews*. June 16, 2006.

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2006/06/16/muslim-cleric-backs-gay-burnings/>.

⁸ Amundson, Inga. 2018. "The Ruins of Bangladesh's LGBT Community." *East Asia Forum*, March 23, 2018.

<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/03/23/the-ruins-of-bangladeshs-lgbt-community/>; Hasan, Mubashar, and Geoffrey MacDonald. 2022. "The Persistent Challenge of Extremism in Bangladesh." Washington: United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/persistent-challenge-extremism-bangladesh/>; Hammadi, Saad. 2016.

⁹ "Anyone Could Become a Target': Wave of Islamist Killings Hits Bangladesh." *The Guardian*, April 30, 2016.

[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/30/bangladesh-islamist-attacks-murder-gay-atheist-activists-dhaka/](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/30/bangladesh-islamist-attacks-murder-gay-atheist-activists-dhaka;); Bhatt, Chetan. 2021. "Words and Violence: Militant Islamist Attacks on Bloggers in Bangladesh and the UK." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44 (14): 2615–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1828599>.

¹⁰ Amundson, "The Ruins of Bangladesh's LGBT Community."

¹¹ *BBC News*. 2016. "Bangladesh LGBT Editor Hacked to Death," April 25, 2016, sec. Asia.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36128729>.

Western Islamist and Salafi Views on Homosexuality

In the West, Islamists express very similar views on homosexuality, but are usually more cautious in their language and caveat religious justifications for the execution of gays with warnings that this cannot be pursued by individuals in non-Muslim countries. Influential Western Salafi Bilal Phillips, for example, speaks of the “severe punishment of death” for gays, but only in an Islamic state.¹² American preacher Yasir Qadhi made similar, if slightly more explicit comments: “this is a part of our religion...to kill, by the way, the homosexual. The *fiqh* rulings say that the homosexual be killed, OK? ...This is all a part of our religion. This doesn’t mean we go and do this in America but I’m saying if we had an Islamic state we would do this.”¹³

Abu Khadeejah, a UK-based Salafi who runs Salafi Publications, a publishing house which is among the most influential among American Salafis, also writes that, while the Quran does not detail the punishment for homosexuality, “a saying of the Prophet makes clear: ‘Whoever you find engaging in the action of the people of Lūt, execute the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done.’” However, he too follows this up with a warning that “this saying must not be used by individuals as an excuse to enact or incite violence against homosexuals. Prescribed punishments can only be carried out by the legal authority in a country that practices Islamic Law... A Muslim, regardless of which country he lives in, is not allowed to physically harm those he regards to be sinners, nor incite others to do so. Vigilantism goes against Islamic teachings because it creates an anarchic, unjust and disorderly society.”¹⁴

Following a reasoning common also in some ultra-conservative Christian milieus, some also suggest that divine punishment has struck gay people in the West through the spread of AIDS. Bilal Phillips, for example, claims that “as a consequence of this practice, AIDS spread through the society beginning with the homosexual element...this is divine retribution...from an Islamic perspective.”¹⁵ Similarly, American Salafi imam Abdullah Hakim Quick has said that AIDS is caused by the “filthy practices” of homosexuals.¹⁶

This type of hateful language is commonplace among Western Islamists. Australian Salafi Feiz Mohammed describes homosexuality as the “worst, disgusting, scummy, dirty, filthy, abominated act on the face of this earth.”¹⁷ Also relying on the same *hadith* noted above, he says that Islamic law obligates the killing of those who take part in homosexual acts. A prominent American preacher and former Vice-President of the Muslim Brotherhood-influenced Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Siraj Wahhaj, describes homosexuality as “a disease of this society,” and tells his followers that they should make gay people in America “feel uncomfortable.” He, too, reminds listeners that Islamic law calls for the killing of homosexuals, but that “I don’t want us [American Muslims] to go get sticks and start running outside looking for homosexuals, we don’t condone that.”¹⁸ Another top

¹² Philips, Bilal. 2006. “Homosexuality- Contemporary Issues.” Digital Minbar, December 14, 2006.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AerCqUUxiUo>

¹³ Audio of undated lecture of Yasir Qadhi in authors’ possession, copy available on request. At the time Yasir Qadhi was a very influential American Salafi, but he has since renounced Salafism, see Qadhi, Yasir. 2014. “On Salafi Islam.” Available at: <https://muslimmatters.org/2014/04/22/on-salafi-islam-dr-yasir-qadhi/>.

¹⁴ Abdul-Wahid, Abu Khadeejah. 2019. “The LGBTQ Movement: Homosexuality and Islam: Understanding Muslim Attitudes To Homosexuality (Islam 5.7).” Abu Khadeejah : أبو خديجة. January 30, 2019. <https://abukhadeejah.com/lgbtq-homosexuality-gay-muslims-and-islam/>.

¹⁵ Philips, “Homosexuality- Contemporary Issues.”

¹⁶ “Clayton and Triangle Television Ltd - 2004-001.” 2004. Broadcasting Standards Authority of New Zealand. February 26, 2004. <https://www.bsa.govt.nz/decisions/all-decisions/clayton-and-triangle-television-ltd-2004-001/>.

¹⁷ Mohammed, Feiz. “Homosexuals.” <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2v4rsi>

¹⁸ “Siraj Wahhaj on Homosexuality.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xR-ibkcC_g

ISNA official, former president Muzammil Siddiqi, has similarly stated: “Homosexuality is a moral disorder. It is a moral disease, a sin and corruption . . . No person is born homosexual, just like no one is born a thief, a liar or murderer. People acquire these evil habits due to a lack of proper guidance and education.”¹⁹

The hate-filled homophobic rhetoric of Islamists like the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) also extends to the movements influence in the West. One such example is the East London Mosque, a heavily JI-influenced institution which has been criticised a number of times by gay rights campaigners for regularly hosting speakers with a record of anti-gay hate speech, including Abdullah Hakim Quick.²⁰ In 2007, the mosque was discovered to have hosted a talk in which the speaker, the UK-based Abdul Hattin, showed the audience pictures of gay and heterosexual men and invited them to “spot the fag.”²¹ Through such events, gay activists claim that the mosque has “created an atmosphere in which [anti-gay] hate is socially acceptable; they have spread a message in which maiming and violence is the most dutiful, honorable, devout thing to do.”²²

The “threat” of homosexuality in the West is also often presented by Islamist preachers as a conspiracy in which there is a supposed “gay agenda” to destroy the moral fiber of society and corrupt Muslims. American Salafi Moosa Richardson, for example, warns that “Muslims in the West must reflect seriously over the story of Loot and his trials, especially in an era when the homosexual agenda is being repackaged to the world as personal freedom and even heroism. A Muslim living in the West may be affected by the homosexual agenda, or perhaps a spouse or a child may be affected.”²³

One of the main perceived threats of the “gay agenda” is the introduction of gay marriage. In the West in particular there is a focus on how the legalisation of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is a symptom of the evil corruption of Western societies. Michigan-based Salafi Ahmad Musa Jibril, for example, reminds his followers that “The people of Lut were destroyed due to their evil practice of sodomy,” and yet “in this [Western] society it has become legalised! The punishment of Allah is near. Allah will save all those who do good - they hear and they obey. Allah will save those who enjoin the good and forbid the evil.” In a recent lecture on the concept of *al wala wal bara*, Jibril claims that the concept is a crucial way for Muslims to understand the enmity between them and the non-Muslims that surround them in the West who are “such hypocrites” because they allow the massacre of righteous Muslims (a reference to counter-terrorism operations against jihadist targets) while in their own society, even “homosexuals and animals have rights” above Muslims.²⁴

While, as seen, Islamists in the West usually fall short of calling for Muslims to take it upon themselves to kill homosexuals, these and many other examples show how they have they have

¹⁹ Habib, Samar. 2010. *Islam and Homosexuality*. Praeger, p. 299.

²⁰ The East London Mosque and its sister organisation, the Islamic Forum of Europe, were revealed to be taking their ideological line from Mawdudi’s work in a Channel 4 *Dispatches* investigation, “Britain’s Islamic Republic,” first aired on 1 March 2010. See also Gilligan, Andrew. 2010. “Inextricably linked to controversial mosque: the secret world of IFE,” *Daily Telegraph*, February 28, 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/7333487/Inextricably-linked-to-controversial-mosque-the-secret-world-of-IFE.html>.

²¹ Adamidou, Christina. 2011. “Gay and lesbian activists challenge East London Mosque over use of homophobic speakers.” *East London Times*, June 14, 2011. <https://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2011/06/gay-activists-challenge-east-london-mosque-over-extremism/>

²² Butt, Riazat, and religious affairs correspondent. 2011. “Ban Homophobic Clerics from Mosques, Gay Rights Campaigners Urge.” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2011, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/09/gay-rights-london-mosques>.

²³ Richardson, Moosa. 2018. “The Fitnah (Trials) of Passions and Desires.” *Bakkah Publications*. February 9, 2018. <https://www.bakkah.net/en/the-fitnah-trial-of-passions-and-desires.htm>.

²⁴ Jibril, Ahmad Musa. 2022. “Al Wala w’al Baraa Series.”

contributed to an atmosphere of hate and paranoia which can influence those with more immediate and violent intentions.

Jihadists and Homosexuality

If Islamists of all stripes condemn homosexuality in the harshest tone and disseminate a narrative that could be conducive to violence, jihadist groups worldwide take both words and actions one step further. Groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS) have removed the requirement for a jurist to prove a homosexual act took place as a precondition for the application of the death penalty, entailing that it is justifiable to kill someone who merely identifies as homosexual.²⁵

The Islamic State has been particularly ruthless and theatrical in its persecution of homosexuals. The terrorist organization and its supporters have developed “a vast corpus of justifications for killing homosexuals” and have directly incited their followers to prepare attacks on LGBTQIA+-related targets throughout the world.²⁶ Infamously, IS executed dozens of accused homosexuals in Syria and Iraq during the time it controlled territory, using a variety of execution methods (from throwing victims from the roofs of buildings to stoning and shooting) and depicting these killings in multimedia productions.²⁷

Violent anti-gay rhetoric is littered throughout the pages of IS official propaganda. For instance, in the seventh issue of its English-language magazine *Dabiq*, IS commits to “implementing the rulings of Allah on those who practice any form of sexual deviancy or transgression,” and highlights examples of this implementation, including an execution in Raqqa where “the Islamic State carried out the *hadd* [a punishment under Islamic law] on a man found guilty of engaging in sodomy. He was taken to the top of a building and thrown off.”²⁸ IS has also directly encouraged its followers to conduct attacks against LGBTQIA+ targets in the West. In the 9th issue of its English language magazine *Rumiyah*, published in May 2019, IS lists “large outdoor festivals, conventions, celebrations and parades” as ideal targets for truck attacks.²⁹ The image used in the magazine alongside these targets is a picture of a gay pride parade in San Francisco, California.³⁰

While less systematically involved in the physical persecution of homosexuals, al-Qaeda has also consistently expressed similar anti-LGBTQIA+ positions. The group, for example, has claimed that disasters or calamities in the West are a divine response to homosexuality, such as in 2005, when al-Qaeda’s Global Islamic Media Front claimed that Hurricane Katrina was “the wrath of Allah that visited the city of homosexuals.”³¹ More recently, the July 2022 issue of the pro-al Qaeda magazine *Ibnat Al-Islam* (Daughter of Islam), featured an article by the title “The Duty Before The Creeping War Against Nature.” The essay argued that the West was waging a “war against nature” by introducing gay rights in the Muslim world and listed ways to counter the imposition of “sexual perversion on societies in the name of freedom and human rights.”³²

²⁵ Zelin, Aaron, and Jacob Olidort. 2016. “The Islamic State’s Views on Homosexuality.” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. June 14, 2016. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/islamic-states-views-homosexuality>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Zelin and Olidort, “The Islamic State’s Views on Homosexuality.”

²⁸ “Clamping Down on Sexual Deviance.” 2015. *Dabiq* (7), February 12, 2015.

²⁹ “Just Terror Tactics.” 2017. *Rumiyah* (9), May 4, 2017.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Quoted in Aaron, David. 2008. “In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad.” Washington: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG602.pdf.

³² See image below.

مجلة نسائية دورية / العدد 25 / ذو القعدة 1443 هـ الموافق لـ يوليو 2022م

عيد الأضحى المبارك

الواجب أمام زحف الحرب على الفطرة
مسلسل الاستضعاف مستمر حتى نقيم شريعة الله
الأياد لخدمة المسلمين على التوحيد
صناعة المسلمة على نور الكتاب والسنة

Kashmir & Palestine A Recurring Tragedy
The convoy of women martyrs in the proud land of Kandahar
The Etiquette of Naming Children:

L'APPEL DE L'IMAM À LA COMMUNAUTÉ DE L'ISLAM
LA VERTUEUSE DE L'INDE
CARAVANE DE FEMMES MARTYRES SUR LA TERRE FIÈRE DE KANDAHAR



بيت المقدس

Anti-LGBTQIA+ Attacks in the West

As jihadist organizations have escalated their rhetoric from blanket condemnations on homosexual activity to directly inciting violent terrorist attacks against the LGBTQIA+ community, their followers in the West have followed suit, increasingly targeting the community in several acts of violence inspired by jihadist ideology. This escalation has been especially prominent since 2016, when a gay nightclub in Orlando was targeted in one of the most iconic acts of jihadist violence of the post-9/11 era.³³ Since that time, several jihadists have conducted or attempted to conduct terrorist attacks against sites, events, and individuals associated with the LGBTQIA+ community.

The perpetrators of the attacks appear to have several features in common. First, their motivations for targeting the LGBTQIA+ community mix ideology and practicality. While they emphasize jihadist acclamations for those who carry out attacks on homosexuals, they also select sites like Pride parades, gay bars, and clubs for attacks because they perceive them as soft targets. Second, their violent attacks almost exclusively target gay men. Third, many of the attackers or would-be attackers have extensive criminal histories prior to their attack plots, and a majority were known to security services in their respective countries for having previously been the subject of counterterrorism investigations.³⁴ Relatedly, according to the same security services, most had significant or notable connections to jihadist or Islamist networks at the time of their arrest.

2016 Pulse Nightclub Shooting

Arguably the most infamous incident of terrorist violence targeting LGBTQIA+ communities in the West in recent years occurred on June 12, 2016, when 29-year-old Omar Mateen opened fire on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida.³⁵ Mateen's rampage at the nightclub, which predominantly catered to the gay community in Orlando, left 49 dead and over 50 wounded in the deadliest incident of anti-LGBTQIA+ violence in U.S. history, the deadliest terrorist attack in the U.S. since 9/11, and the second-deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.³⁶ After the initial shooting spree and a three-hour standoff, SWAT officers shot and killed Mateen.³⁷

Mateen, a former security guard, was previously investigated by the FBI on at least two occasions. In 2013, he was investigated due to statements he allegedly made while employed that his family had links to al-Qaeda and that he had joined the Shi'a Islamist group Hezbollah.³⁸ One year later, he was interviewed again after one of his contacts, Moner Abu Salha, travelled from Florida to Syria to join Jabhat al-Nusra.³⁹ According to the FBI, in the months prior to the Pulse nightclub shooting, Mateen was increasingly ensconced in ISIS' online propaganda.⁴⁰ On the day of the attack itself, Mateen posted comments to his Facebook page urging "America and Russia [to] stop bombing the

³³ The New York Times. n.d. "Orlando Shooting." Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/2016-orlando-shooting>.

³⁴ For more on this phenomenon, see Vidino, Lorenzo. 2018. "Strasbourg Shooting: Why Known Extremists Can Carry out Terror Attacks." BBC News, December 15, 2018, sec. World. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-46557305>.

³⁵ The New York Times, "Orlando Shooting"

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Biden, Joseph R. 2021. "Statement by President Joe Biden on the 5th Anniversary of the Pulse Nightclub Shooting." The White House. June 12, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-the-5th-anniversary-of-the-pulse-nightclub-shooting/>.

³⁷ The New York Times, "Orlando Shooting"

³⁸ Comey, James. 2016. "Update on Orlando Terrorism Investigation." Speech. Federal Bureau of Investigation. June 13, 2016. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/update-on-orlando-terrorism-investigation>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Islamic state” and warning that “in the next few days you will see attacks from Islamic State in the usa.”⁴¹

Mateen’s familiarity with jihadist propaganda also came to the fore during the commission of the attack itself, when he made several calls to 911 and to a local news station in the midst of the hours-long standoff. During one of the calls to 911 dispatchers, he pledged allegiance to ISIS and its then-leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.⁴² Later, he alluded to the death of ISIS commander Shaker Wahib al-Fahdawi al-Dulaimi (a.k.a. Abu Wahib) and other U.S. airstrikes against the group as a motivation for his attack, and referenced the perpetrators of other jihadist attacks, such as the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing and the 2015 attacks in Paris.⁴³ Although no publicly available evidence substantiates a tangible connection between Mateen and overseas IS personnel, the organization’s radio station *al-Bayan* posthumously acknowledged him as a “soldier of the Caliphate,” and its *Rumiyah* magazine lionized him for “single-handedly slaughtering 49 sodomites.”⁴⁴

It should be noted that the evidence to date is inconclusive on whether Mateen intended to target the Pulse nightclub specifically because it was a gay nightclub. According to testimony from the trial of Mateen’s wife Noor Salman, who was charged but acquitted of aiding and abetting Mateen and obstructing justice, Mateen spontaneously decided on the Pulse nightclub as a target at the last minute after considering other nightclubs in the Orlando area.⁴⁵ Regardless, IS and other jihadist groups have used the Pulse nightclub shooting as a rallying cry to encourage their followers to pick out targets associated with the LGBTQIA+ community in their official and unofficial media outlets.⁴⁶

2020 Dresden Stabbing

On October 4, 2020, an assailant stabbed a gay couple who were visiting the German town of Dresden during a biking trip.⁴⁷ One of the men died as a result of the stabbing; the other was left critically injured but survived.⁴⁸ The attacker, later identified as 20-year-old Syrian asylee Abdullah A., fled the scene of the stabbing, but was arrested two weeks later after investigators connected

⁴¹ Kennedy, Merrit. 2016. “Senator Says Orlando Shooter Posted Pro-ISIS Messages On Facebook.” NPR, June 16, 2016, sec. America. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/06/16/482339322/senator-says-orlando-shooter-posted-pro-isis-messages-on-facebook>.

⁴² “Joint Statement From Justice Department and FBI Regarding Transcript Related to the Orlando Terror Attack.” 2016. Department of Justice Press Release. June 20, 2016. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/joint-statement-justice-department-and-fbi-regarding-transcript-related-orlando-terror-attack>.

⁴³ Doornbos, Caitlin. 2016. “Transcripts of 911 Calls Reveal Pulse Shooter’s Terrorist Motives.” Orlando Sentinel. September 23, 2016. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/pulse-orlando-nightclub-shooting/os-911-calls-released-orlando-shooting-20170922-story.html>.

⁴⁴ Winter, Charlie, and Haroro J. Ingram. 2016. “How ISIS Weaponized the Media After Orlando.” The Atlantic. June 17, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/06/isis-orlando-shooting/487574/>; Rumiyah, “Just Terror Tactics.”

⁴⁵ “Defendant’s Response to the Government’s Motion for an Order Revoking Defendant’s Release.” 2017. United States of America v. Noor Zahi Salman. United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, March 8, 2017. Case: 6:17-cr-00018-PGB-KRS.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Salman%20Defendant%27s%20Response.pdf>

⁴⁶ “ISIS Persecution of Gay People.” 2017. Counter Extremism Project, May 2017.

https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/ISIS%20Persecution%20of%20Gay%20People_052317.pdf

⁴⁷ “Germany: Dresden Knife Attack Likely Motivated by Islamic Extremism.” 2020. Deutsche Welle. October 21, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-dresden-knife-attack-likely-motivated-by-islamic-extremism/a-55347395>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

him to DNA evidence from the knife used in the attack.⁴⁹ In May 2021, Abdullah A. was found guilty of murder and sentenced by a German court to life in prison.⁵⁰

Shortly after Abdullah A.'s arrest, Germany's Justice Minister Christine Lambrecht confirmed that the perpetrator had an "Islamist background."⁵¹ During the investigation, the attacker claimed that he targeted the couple specifically because they were gay, in his eyes committing a "grave sin" that was punishable by death.⁵² Citing these statements, the German Office of the Federal Prosecutor (GBA) argued in charging documents that Abdullah A. "acted out of a radical Islamist disposition... he chose to punish both his victims with death for being representatives of an 'infidel' social order whose freedom and openness he had rejected."⁵³

Like Mateen, Abdullah A. also was a known figure to law enforcement in his country, although in a much more concise way. In 2017, he was the subject of a German federal police investigation targeting a cell of IS followers who were planning to conduct a major terrorist attack.⁵⁴ Law enforcement conducted a search of his home and mobile phone, and found that Abdullah A. was in contact with IS militants overseas and was attempting to construct suicide vests filled with explosive devices.⁵⁵ He was subsequently arrested alongside several accomplices, and was sentenced to two years and nine months in a juvenile prison for terrorism-related offenses.⁵⁶ He conducted his knife attack in Dresden only one month after being released from custody, despite being under police surveillance.⁵⁷

2022 Oslo Shooting

The most recent violent Islamist attack against LGBTQIA+ targets in the West occurred on June 25, 2022 when an attacker conducted a mass shooting at the London Pub in Oslo, killing two men and wounding over 20.⁵⁸ The site of the attack was a gay bar that was hosting an event for the Norwegian Organisation for Sexual and Gender Diversity during Oslo Pride Week, and two other nearby bars.⁵⁹ The alleged perpetrator is Zaniar Matapour, a Norwegian citizen of Iranian descent, whom Norwegian police arrested and charged with murder, attempted murder, and acts of terrorism directly after the attack.⁶⁰

Norwegian authorities are currently conducting a terrorism-related investigation into the shooting, and are treating the incident as an "act of Islamist terrorism."⁶¹ The alleged perpetrator was known

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ "Germany: Dresden Islamist Knife Attacker Jailed for Life." 2021. Deutsche Welle. May 21, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-dresden-islamist-knife-attacker-jailed-for-life/a-57604354>.

⁵¹ Deutsche Welle, "Germany: Dresden Knife Attack Likely Motivated by Islamic Extremism."

⁵² Deutsche Welle, "Germany: Dresden Islamist Knife Attacker Jailed for Life."

⁵³ Reuters. 2021. "Germany Files Murder Charges against Syrian over 'infidels' Attack," March 4, 2021, sec. World News. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-idUSKBN2AW1TG>.

⁵⁴ Ramm, Wiebke. 2021. "Islamistenprozess in Dresden: Der Mörder, der Angst vor der Hölle hat." Der Spiegel, April 23, 2021, sec. Panorama. <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/islamisten-prozess-in-dresden-der-moerder-der-angst-vor-der-hoelle-hat-a-fb84730f-e2d9-4c47-a82e-d8373e727c54>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ BBC News. 2022. "Oslo Shooting: Norway Attack Being Treated as Islamist Terrorism, Police Say," June 25, 2022, sec. Europe. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61933817>.

⁵⁹ NPR. 2022. "Oslo Pride Organizers Cancel a Parade after a Gunman Kills 2 and Wounds 10," June 25, 2022, sec. World. <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/25/1107619558/oslo-norway-mass-shooting>.

⁶⁰ "Norway: Suspect in Pride Month Attack Won't Talk to Police." 2022. POLITICO. June 26, 2022. <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/26/norway-pride-attack-shooting-00042459>.

⁶¹ BBC News: "Oslo Shooting: Norway Attack Being Treated as Islamist Terrorism."

to the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) since 2015, when an investigation into Matapour was opened on the grounds that he was undergoing radicalization to violent Islamist extremism.⁶² Aside from this investigation, Matapour has a lengthy criminal record in Norway, with several drug and simple assault charges that cycled him in and out of the Norwegian prison system.⁶³

In April 2022, two months before the shooting, Matapour was reportedly stopped by Norwegian police in a car with Arfan Bhatti, a well-known Norwegian Islamist who is a leader in the IS-sympathizing group *Profetens Ummah*.⁶⁴ Bhatti was previously convicted in Norway for firing rounds at a synagogue in Oslo and for planning attacks against the American and Israeli embassies in Norway, and served three years in prison.⁶⁵ Days before Matapour's attack, Bhatti posted an image of a burning gay pride flag and a quote from hadith: "Whoever you find doing as the people of Lot did, kill the one that does it and the one to whom it is done."⁶⁶

Foiled Jihadist Plots Targeting the LGBTQIA+ Community

In addition to the jihadist attacks described above, security services in several Western countries have also arrested various individuals in recent years who planned but failed to carry out attacks on LGBTQIA+ targets due to their arrest. Many were partially inspired by the actions of the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks described above as well as the propaganda output of jihadist groups and their supporters following these attacks.

French police arrested two men in the Paris suburb of Seine-et-Marne in June 2018 for planning terrorist attacks on behalf of IS.⁶⁷ French police claim that although "their plan was ill-defined, there were elements to suggest that they planned to attack homosexuals."⁶⁸ A subsequent raid on their properties conducted by France's General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) uncovered IS propaganda, several knives, and a detonation system for explosive devices.⁶⁹

In September 2018, police foiled a major terrorist attack in the Netherlands when seven members of a jihadist cell were arrested in the towns of Arnhem and Weert.⁷⁰ As a result of the arrests, police seized over 200 pounds of fertilizer and other bomb-making materials.⁷¹ During the trial of the group's ringleader, a 34-year-old Dutch citizen of Kurdish origin named Hardi N., an undercover officer embedded with the group testified that the cell was planning on conducting a massive attack

⁶² Holm-Nilsen, Sverre. 2022. "Zaniar Matapour (42) er terrorsiktet etter skytingen i Oslo." NRK. June 25, 2022. https://www.nrk.no/norge/zaniar-matapour-_42_-er-terrorsiktet-etter-skytingen-i-oslo-1.16016753.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Svendsen, Christine, and Sverre Holm-Nilsen. 2022. "Arfan Bhatti la ut sitater om drap på homofile på Facebook." NRK. June 25, 2022. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/arfan-bhatti-la-ut-sitater-om-drap-pa-homofile-pa-facebook-1.16016960>.

⁶⁵ NRK. 2012. "Arfan Bhatti trolig i Pakistan." NRK. October 19, 2012. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/arfan-bhatti-trolig-i-pakistan-1.8364071>.

⁶⁶ Svendsen and Holm-Nilsen, "Arfan Bhatti la ut sitater om drap på homofile på Facebook."

⁶⁷ "French Police Say Terror Attacks on Sex Club and Gay People Thwarted." 2018. CBS News. June 15, 2018. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-terror-attack-sex-club-thwarted-police-say-swingers-club-bomb-plot/>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ BBC News. 2018. "Dutch Arrests: Bomb-Making Materials Seized by Police," September 28, 2018, sec. Europe. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45684104>.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

on Amsterdam's Gay Pride parade.⁷² Hardi N. told the officer that the prophet Muhammad instructed him to conduct the attack, which would be carried out by using explosive devices and assault rifles.⁷³

In April 2019, US authorities arrested 21-year-old Fabjan Alamei, a resident of New York City, and charged him with unlawful possession of a firearm and making false statements to the FBI in a terrorism case.⁷⁴ In early 2019, Alamei began contact with a confidential human source who he believed was an ISIS member. He told his contact that he was interested in planning an attack in the U.S. on behalf of ISIS, and provided a list of potential targets that included a gay club.⁷⁵ Alamei was arrested after he travelled to Bozeman, Montana and rented a firearm; he pleaded guilty and was sentenced in December 2019 to four years and nine months in prison.⁷⁶

In 2019, 28-year-old Mohiussunnath Chowdhury also planned to conduct an attack on a gay pride parade, this time in the United Kingdom.⁷⁷ He told undercover law enforcement personnel that the parade would be a good target because of its "piss-poor security... the way they march they are asking to get hit by some jihadist."⁷⁸ This was not Chowdhury's first attempted jihadist attack in the United Kingdom; in 2017, in fact, he had charged police officers outside of Buckingham Palace with a sword and attempted to attack them, but was acquitted after he convinced a jury that he was planning a suicide-by-cop.⁷⁹ A court convicted Chowdhury for his plot against the gay pride parade in February 2020.⁸⁰

⁷² "Dutch Islamist Cell Targeted Gay Pride Parade, Court Hears." 2020. Barron's. June 12, 2020.

<https://www.barrons.com/news/dutch-islamist-cell-targeted-gay-pride-parade-court-hears-01591976105>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ "Sentencing Memorandum." 2019. United States of America v. Fabjan Alamei. United States District Court for the District of Montana, December 4, 2019. Case: 2:19-cr-00013-DLC.

<https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Fabjan%20Alamei%20Govt%20Sentencing%20Memo.pdf>

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Casciani, Dominic. 2020. "The Takeaway Worker Who Plotted to Attack Pride." BBC News, February 10, 2020, sec. UK. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51405537>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Chowdhury later commented to undercover police officers that he was proud of having successfully deceived the jury in his 2017 case.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Like antisemitism, anti-Shi'a sectarianism, and views on blasphemy and/or apostasy, homophobia is a bridge issue linking Western non-violent Islamists and their jihadist counterparts. Despite their disagreements about the precise conditions for applying the death penalty against LGBTQIA+ individuals, which remains a matter of great dispute between the factions, an emerging consensus connects Islamists of all stripes, particularly in the West. First, Islamists and jihadists alike view homosexuality--active or passive--as a grave sin, entailing some form of divine retribution. Second, figures on both sides have expressed their views that the promotion of "LGBTQIA+ ideology" is part of a grand conspiracy by Western countries to dissuade Muslims from living out their faith, and that calamities that befall Western countries are a result of divine judgement against them. Lastly, certain prominent Islamists concur with the jihadist viewpoint that, in an ideal Islamic state, the death penalty should be enforced against homosexuals.

As the case studies of attack plots in the West involving targets associated with LGBTQIA+ communities demonstrate, these three consensuses between non-violent and violent Islamists help individuals who are part of the former milieu traverse disparities between the two and join the latter faction by mobilizing to violence. Perhaps due to a failure to appreciate the nuances between the positions, several individuals in recent years have taken it upon themselves to mete out the death penalty to perceived LGBTQIA+ people, in the form of violent terrorist attacks. In several of these cases, such as the perpetrators of violence in Orlando, Dresden, and Oslo, the attackers had been longstanding participants in Islamist networks prior to their decision to conduct an attack.

In this context, violent homophobia does not only help bridge the gap between violent and non-violent Islamists, but can also help both of these groups form an interest convergence with other identitarian movements in Western countries-- even those movements that share little else in common with the Islamist project. For instance, in early August 2022, Ali al-Qaradaghi, Secretary General of the influential Qatar-based International Union of Muslim Scholars, reposted a video of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban defending his country's restrictions on gay marriage and "gay propaganda" to his Twitter account, thanking Orban for taking a "noble position" that "preserves the Sunnah of purity and life."⁸¹ In the future, increasing overlaps and similarities between Islamist and far-right identitarian movements' viewpoints on LGBTQIA+ issues could be an important standpoint for comparison and analysis of these two groups.

Because violent homophobia has a tendency to unite the ideological positions of disparate identitarian movements, it can serve as a predicate for what senior U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials refer to as "salad bar extremism."⁸² This term refers to the phenomenon of American violent extremists drawing from several, seemingly contradictory ideologies to justify their violent attacks.⁸³ In this regard, as practitioners grapple with the rise of blended ideological extremism, which former DHS counterterrorism coordinator John Cohen referred to as the "primary challenges" for today's domestic counterterrorism authorities, examining the role of homophobia as a narrative motivator of mixed-ideology terrorism can assist law enforcement in making sense of the

⁸¹ al-Qaradaghi, Ali. 2022. Tweet, August 9, 2022.

https://twitter.com/Ali_AIQaradaghi/status/1556972952360452097?t=L9d7ImJGI0er8gfaPaSOPg&s=09

⁸² Alcoke, Matthew. 2019. "The Evolving and Persistent Terrorism Threat to the Homeland." The Washington Institute. November 19, 2019. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/evolving-and-persistent-terrorism-threat-homeland>.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

phenomenon.⁸⁴ In certain cases, such as the ones detailed above, a person of interest in a counterterrorism investigation beginning to more adamantly express anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives could potentially serve as an indicator of mobilization to violence.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies should especially take note of the way that homophobic narratives coalesce different extremist ecosystems online. The prevalence of blended-ideology extremism is, to a certain extent, a function of interactions between different online extremist communities, especially on platforms like Telegram that concentrate multiple types of identitarian extremist movements.⁸⁵ In studying one of these communities, the admixture of Salafi and alt-right online networks that the researchers refer to as “Islamogram,” a team from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that Telegram channels associated with this community frequently posted “Islamic State, Nazi, neo-Nazi, alt-right and antisemitic sticker packs and memes [that] were frequently used to express support for the killing of LGBTQ+ community members.”⁸⁶ In the future, as these seemingly-opposed groups join forces to promote violent anti-LGBTQIA+ discourses online, counterterrorism practitioners may consider the potential for these blended ideologies to play a role in future terrorist attacks targeting the community .

⁸⁴ Cohen, John. 2021. “Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part IV): Examining the Biden Administration’s Counterterrorism Strategy.” Hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Oversight and Reform. September 29, 2021. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-117hrg45879/html/CHRG-117hrg45879.htm>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ayad, Moustafa. 2021. “Islamogram: Salafism and Alt-Right Online Subcultures.” London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Islamogram.pdf>.

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