

## *Methodology and Statistics*

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The authors collated the sample of 64 American jihadist travelers during a multi-year investigation, utilizing a range of sources. These include thousands of pages of documents from U.S. District Court cases. Some of the court filings presented in this study were unsealed following legal and open-access requests made by the Program on Extremism. The Program submitted more than a dozen Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and six appeals to initial rejections of those requests. In addition to the FOIA process, the Program filed several motions in federal courts across the country to enjoin the release of records. As a result, the authors obtained hundreds of pages of previously sealed documents.<sup>1</sup>

This report also presents data gathered from social media accounts that are confirmed to belong to American travelers. These accounts were drawn from the Program on Extremism's database of over 1,000,000 Tweets, from over 3,000 English-language pro-IS Twitter accounts.

Finally, the authors conducted in-person interviews with U.S. prosecutors, national security officials, defense attorneys, returned American travelers, and their families. These discussions provide insight into the radicalization and recruitment processes, travel patterns, and networked connections of American travelers.

As some of the travelers interviewed were defendants in criminal proceedings, authors took multiple safeguards in presenting information from those interviews in this report. Where necessary, the names of interview subjects were redacted or changed to protect anonymity and privacy.

The principal researchers are well-aware of the significant methodological issues presented by interviewing returned jihadist travelers. In presenting interview data, this report relies on previous studies where researchers

interviewed travelers to understand the motivations and factors behind their travel.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, it attempts to avoid the methodological missteps that many studies and media reports have made in transmitting data drawn from interviews with current or former violent extremists.<sup>3</sup>

In the areas of this study that present material gleaned from interviews with travelers, the authors attempt to introduce but heavily qualify statements made by the traveler, explain the complexities in first-person accounts of radicalization and mobilization, and limit potential inferences. Each interview shows that the decision to travel is often opaque, multivariate, and non-generalizable.

Some interviewed travelers returned to the U.S., and since their return, have either pleaded guilty or been convicted by trial of terrorism-related offenses. Convictions can serve as a check on self-serving information, but also introduce other methodological problems.

On one hand, U.S. federal investigators and law enforcement can corroborate aspects of travelers' stories during court proceedings. Also, if travelers are already cooperating with law enforcement, they have little incentive to lie directly about their motivations for traveling or their activities in Syria and Iraq.

On the other hand, if they are awaiting sentencing, they can inflate or deflate aspects of their actions in the hope of receiving more lenient treatment. In any event, the authors made a considerable attempt to qualify the statements made by travelers that are presented in this report.

From this material, the list of travelers was narrowed down to a sample, using several selection criteria highlighted below. This report codes travelers using demographic variables: age; gender; state of origin; current presumed status; U.S. citizenship/permanent

resident status; whether they had been apprehended or prosecuted; and whether they returned to the U.S.

Using these factors, combined with investigations into their travel and role in jihadist groups, the authors classified travelers (where possible) into one of three categories: pioneers, networked travelers, and loners.

## Definitions

This report defines “American jihadist travelers” as U.S. residents who traveled to Syria and/or Iraq since 2011 and affiliated with jihadist groups active in those countries. An additional selection criterion requires sample subjects to have a legal name. Each aspect of this definition is explained below.

### *U.S. Residents*

The sample includes U.S. citizens, U.S. permanent residents, temporary and unlawful residents of the U.S., and other individuals with substantial ties to the U.S. The term “American” is often used throughout this report to refer to these individuals.

### *Travel to Syria and Iraq*

In order to be included in the sample, Americans must have successfully traveled to Syria or Iraq to join jihadist groups from 2011 onward.

The authors chose 2011 as the starting point as it marked the beginning of protests against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and the formal start of the armed insurgency against al-Assad and the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, 2011 marked the arrival of the first foreign combatants in Syrian jihadist groups.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2011, at least 50 Americans have been arrested for attempting to join IS overseas, with at least 30 more attempting to join other jihadist groups.<sup>6</sup> Attempted, but unsuccessful travelers are not included in the sample. The traveler in question must have successfully entered Syrian or Iraqi territory.

With the recent decline of IS territory in Syria and Iraq, American travelers have explored other areas as potential destinations for jihadist travelers.<sup>7</sup> There are documented instances of American jihadist travelers to several other countries, including Yemen, Libya, Somalia, and Nigeria. However, these cases are not included in the sample.

## OTHER DESTINATIONS

From 2011 onward, Syria and Iraq were the preferred destinations for travelers. However, there are notable cases of American jihadists who chose other destinations.

**Mohamed Bailor Jalloh**, a Virginia resident, traveled to West Africa in June 2015. During his trip, he contacted IS members active in the region and planned to travel onward to join IS in Libya. However, he did not make the journey. Instead, he returned to Virginia and was arrested after planning an attack on members of the U.S. military.

**Mohamed Rafik Naji**, a citizen of Yemen and legal permanent resident of the U.S., traveled to Yemen in 2015 to join the regional IS affiliate. He eventually returned to New York and was in the process of planning an attack when he was apprehended by law enforcement.

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Sources: “Affidavit in Support of a Criminal Complaint.” 2016. USA v. Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. Case: 1:16-mj-00296. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/Jalloh%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf>; “Complaint and Affidavit In Support of Arrest Warrant.” 2016. USA v. Mohamed Rafik Naji, United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Case: 1:16-mj-01049. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/extremism.gwu.edu/files/Naji%20Complaint%2C%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Arrest%20Warrant.pdf>.

### **Association with Jihadist Groups**

In order to be included in the sample, a traveler must have either:

- associated with a U.S. designated FTO that ascribes to Salafi-jihadist ideology while in Syria and Iraq<sup>8</sup> or,
- associated with a non-designated militant group that ascribes to Salafi jihadist ideology.

The authors use Quintan Wiktorowicz’s definition of Salafi jihadist groups, namely, organizations that “[support] the use of violence to establish Islamic states.”<sup>9</sup> This interpretation directly applies to the two bedrock organizations of the global Salafi-jihadist movement, al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS). Both groups, despite differences in how, when, and where violence is considered permissible, extensively use force in pursuit of establishing a system of Islamic governance in the territory they control.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2011, a seemingly endless number of jihadist organizations have been established in Syria or Iraq. Two designated organizations are especially dominant. The Islamic State (IS) initially emerged from the framework of AQ’s affiliate in Iraq (AQI), but gradually separated from AQ’s central leadership. In June 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the re-establishment of the Caliphate.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, AQ’s regional affiliate in Syria continued operations under the banner of the central leadership. This subsidiary has gone by several different names, but most sources refer to it by its original name, *Jabhat al-Nusra* (JN). Under the leadership of Abu Mohammad al-Julani, the organization underwent a *de jure* separation from AQ’s central leadership in 2016, and renamed itself *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham* (Front for the Conquest of the Levant).<sup>12</sup> As all of the American travelers in the sample who aligned with AQ’s affiliate did so while it was still called *Jabhat al-Nusra*, the authors refer to the group throughout the report using this name.

A third group represented in the sample is *Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Movement of the Freeman of the Levant, known commonly as *Ahrar al-Sham*). *Ahrar al-Sham* is an umbrella organization

for dozens of Salafist and Islamist battalions operating in Syria.<sup>13</sup> Unlike AQ, IS, and JN, it is not a U.S. designated terrorist organization. Specific battalions within *Ahrar al-Sham* associated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which at various points in time has received support from the U.S.-led coalition.<sup>14</sup>

However, as Hassan argues, while *Ahrar al-Sham* has slightly different positions on specific tactics and methods than AQ, IS, or JN, “people in rebel-held Syria still see *Ahrar al-Sham* as it is, as a jihadist organization ... the apple has not fallen far from the tree.”<sup>15</sup> The group also utilizes violence towards the goal of constructing Islamic governance.<sup>16</sup> Thus, this report considers Americans who associated with *Ahrar al-Sham* to have joined a jihadist group in Syria.

Association is defined broadly in this report. It includes documented evidence of an individual participating in a range of activities for a jihadist group, including directly fighting for the group, attending a group’s training camp, participating in military operations alongside the group, providing funding or services to the group, or other activities covered under the material support statute.<sup>17</sup>

The sample excludes Americans who have traveled to Syria and Iraq and affiliated with other militant groups or designated FTOs that are not Salafi-jihadist. For instance, there are reports of U.S. persons or residents fighting alongside a litany of Kurdish militant organizations (for example, with *Yekineyên Parastina Gel*, also known as the YPG or People’s Protection Units),<sup>18</sup> with the Free Syrian Army (FSA),<sup>19</sup> and militant organizations affiliated with the Syrian regime.<sup>20</sup> These travelers are not included in the sample unless there is evidence that they assisted or associated with jihadist formations during their time abroad.

### **Legal Name**

Propaganda material and bureaucratic forms released by jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq identify several individuals as “Americans.” With rare exceptions, this material does not list travelers by their real, legal names.

Instead, they default to using the traveler’s *kunya*, or Arabic *nom du guerre*.

The traditional term used to identify Americans is *al-Amriki* (the American). In some cases, a traveler identified in jihadist material as *al-Amriki* could be cross-listed with the legal names of American travelers and identified. For example, Abu Hurayra al-Amriki was found to be the *kunya* of Moner Abu-Salha. Abu Jihad al-Amriki referred to Douglas McCain.<sup>21</sup> Zulfi Hoxha adopted the *kunya* Abu Hamza al-Amriki.<sup>22</sup>

However, some American travelers chose other *kunyas* based on their individual ethnic backgrounds. Talmeezur Rahman, a native of India who attended university in Texas, went by Abu Salman al-Hindi (the Indian).<sup>23</sup> Alberto Renteria, a Mexican-American who grew up in Gilroy, California, took the *kunya* Abu Hudhayfa al-Meksiki (the Mexican).<sup>24</sup>

In at least ten cases, the authors found individuals who were identified as “al-Amriki.” However, absent a connection to a legal name, these cases could not be included in the sample. The designation al-Amriki, while commonly used to refer to Americans, is used to refer to individuals with other nationalities who may

not have any connection to the U.S.<sup>25</sup> Without a link to a legal name, individuals could potentially be included twice in the dataset, once by their legal name and once by their *kunya*.

Finally, in the cases without a legal name, it was incredibly difficult for researchers to uncover essential demographic information about the traveler in question. Therefore, these individuals were excluded from the sample.



Abu Hamza al-Amriki (Zulfi Hoxha), appearing in “We Will Surely Guide Them To Our Ways,” a May 2017 video from IS’ Ninawa province in Iraq.

### UNIDENTIFIED “AL-AMRIKI”

Several individuals identifying themselves as “al-Amriki” have appeared in jihadist propaganda material since 2011. Many are not mentioned in this report, as the authors could not verify their true names or details about their stories. Notable examples include:

- **Abu Muhammad al-Amriki** famously appeared in a February 2014 IS video, criticizing the leaders of JN and explaining his decision to defect from the group to join IS. Speaking in heavily-accented English, he claimed to have lived in the U.S. for over 10 years. His real name and status in the U.S. are unclear, but due to his social media activity and connections in Syria, he was assessed to be a native of Azerbaijan. He was reportedly killed in January 2015.
- In March 2015, IS claimed that one of its militants, **Abu Dawoud al-Amriki**, conducted a suicide bombing in the Iraqi town of Samarra against Iraqi troops and Shi’a militia groups. He was the first reported American to conduct a suicide attack on behalf of IS.

Sources: Lonardo, David. 2016. “The Islamic State and the Connections to Historical Networks of Jihadism in Azerbaijan.” *Caucasus Survey* 4 (3):239–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2016.1221218>; al-Bayan radio news bulletin, March 2, 2015.





## Statistics

This sample of 64 jihadist travelers comprises a range of ages, ethnic backgrounds, states and cities of origin, group affiliations, and socio-economic statuses.

- The average age at time of travel was around 27 years of age.
- 89% of the dataset are men.
- At least 70.4% were U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents prior to departure.
- Travelers came from 16 different states; the states with the highest rates of travelers are Minnesota, Virginia, and Ohio.
- Upon arrival in Syria, 82.8% affiliated with the Islamic State (IS), while the remainder (17.2%) affiliated with other jihadist groups.
- 22 travelers (34.4%) are believed to have died in Syria. 12 (18.8%) were apprehended in the U.S. or overseas, and 3 (4.7%) returned to the U.S. without facing charges.\* 28 travelers (43.8%) are at large, or their status and whereabouts are publicly unavailable.
- 12 travelers (18.7%) returned to the U.S. The majority (75%) of returned travelers were arrested and charged.

\* One traveler returned to the U.S. from Syria and did not face public charges. Later, he went back to Syria, where he conducted a suicide bombing attack.

## Demographics

Within the sample, the average age that a traveler embarked on their journey to Syria and Iraq was 26.9.<sup>26</sup> The youngest travelers in the dataset were 18 years old. Minor travelers, whose identifying information is sealed, meaning that it is not made available to the public, are not included in the sample. The youngest, Reza Niknejad, went to Syria and joined IS shortly after his 18th birthday, with the assistance of two high school classmates who were eventually tried as adults for assisting him.<sup>27</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, the oldest American traveler with a known age was 44 when he traveled to Syria.<sup>28</sup> Kary Kleman, a Floridian, claimed that he migrated to Syria to participate in “humanitarian” activities,

later realizing that what led him to Syria was a “scam.”<sup>29</sup> Kleman surrendered to Turkish border police in 2017; he was promptly arrested on charges that he fought for IS. His extradition to the U.S. is pending.<sup>30</sup>

A majority of the travelers in the sample (70.4%) were U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Furthermore, two travelers were granted refugee status in the U.S. before departure, and another was studying in the U.S. under a student visa. Sixteen cases (25%) involve an individual whose residency status could not be determined.

Men comprise 89% of the sample. However, in assessing the gender breakdown of American jihadist travelers, it is essential to consider potential methodological barriers. Samples of Western travelers may underestimate the number of women, particularly those that draw largely from publicly available data. Women jihadists are more likely to avoid detection and apprehension than their male counterparts, and are possibly underrepresented in datasets as a result.<sup>31</sup> In this report’s sample, the seven cases (11%) of American women jihadist travelers are important for assessing the overall mobilization. This number may not reflect the extent of American women’s participation in jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. Studies of European travelers have found higher percentages of women travelers. A 2016 study of all Western travelers found that around 20% were women, but in some countries, women represent as much as 40% of the contingent.<sup>32</sup>

One of the earliest known American cases of jihadist travel to Syria or Iraq was Nicole Lynn Mansfield, a 33-year-old from Flint, Michigan, who left for Syria in 2013. Mansfield, a convert to Islam, was the first American to have been killed in Syria.<sup>33</sup> She was shot and killed during a confrontation with Syrian government forces in the Idlib province in May 2013.<sup>34</sup> There are multiple conflicting accounts of which jihadist group she was affiliated with at the time of her death: Syrian government sources claim she was fighting for JN and was killed after throwing a grenade at Syrian soldiers. *Ahrar al-Sham* also claimed her as a member.<sup>35</sup>

In November 2014, 20-year-old Hoda Muthana (*kunya*: Umm Jihad) left her hometown of Hoover, Alabama, for Syria. Prior to her departure, she was active in the community of English-speaking IS supporters on Twitter and other social media sites, and continued her online presence after arriving in Syria.<sup>36</sup> Reports at the time suggested that she likely lived in the city of Raqqa with a notable cluster of Australian IS supporters, including her husband, Suhan Rahman (Abu Jihad al-Australi).<sup>37</sup> Ninety days after their marriage, Rahman was killed in a Jordanian airstrike.<sup>38</sup> Muthana's current status and whereabouts are unknown.<sup>39</sup>

Zakia Nasrin, her husband Jaffrey Khan, and her brother Rasel Raihan all entered Syria through the Tal Abyad border crossing in the summer of 2014.<sup>40</sup> Nasrin

is a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Bangladesh.<sup>41</sup> Shortly after graduating from high school, she married Khan, whom she met online. Her friends noted her increasingly conservative behavior following her marriage.<sup>42</sup> Following arrival in Syria, Khan and Nasrin had a daughter. Nasrin allegedly worked as a doctor in a Raqqa hospital controlled by IS.<sup>43</sup> Rasel Raihan was killed in Syria; Nasrin and Khan's statuses remain unclear.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the small sample size, American jihadist women travelers help shed light on Western women's participation in jihadist networks. The three women above, alongside others in the sample, defy conventional stereotypes about how and why women (especially Western women) participate in jihadist movements. Although many presume that female jihadists are duped into participation, and motivated by the personal pursuit of love or validation, their contributions and motivations for engagement vary as much as their male counterparts.<sup>45</sup> Though often relegated to support roles, women's more "traditional" efforts as the wives and mothers of jihadists are not necessarily passive either. American women were committed to the jihadist cause and decided to travel on their own accord. They also appear to have played significant roles in their respective jihadist organizations.<sup>46</sup> Muthana highlights the role of Western women in networks of online jihadist supporters, Nasrin served in a critically important and understaffed non-combat position (in a hospital), and Mansfield may have been more directly involved in operations.

### Geography

The sample includes travelers from 16 states. It is paramount to assess total figures alongside the rate of recruitment in proportion to the total population. The rates used in this report are generated by taking the number of travelers from a state or metropolitan statistical area and dividing them by either the total population of the state or the Muslim population in the state.<sup>47</sup> To provide a more accurate sample, these figures are then multiplied by 100,000 (for the total population rate) and 1,000 (for the Muslim population rate), resulting in estimates of how many jihadist travelers in Syria and Iraq

### AMERICAN CHILDREN IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Minors are excluded from the sample. However, there is evidence that some American children traveled to Syria or Iraq alongside their families. Some, including Zakia Nasrin and Jaffrey Khan's daughter, were born in jihadist-controlled territory.

In 2017, a 15-year-old Kansas teenager escaped IS-held territory after living there for five years. She left the U.S. with her father and traveled to Syria. There she married a IS fighter, and was pregnant with his child when she escaped. Additionally, IS released a video in August 2017 that depicted an unnamed young boy in jihadist-held territory making threats against the U.S. In the video, the boy claimed to be an American citizen.

Sources: "We Were Prisoners': American Teen Forced into ISIS Speaks." 2017. CBS News. October 11, 2017. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/american-teen-forced-into-syria-by-father-escapes-isis-in-raqqa/>; Dilanian, Ken, and Tracy Connor. 2017. "The Identity of the 'American' Boy in an ISIS Video Is Still a Mystery." NBC News. August 24, 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-trying-identify-american-boy-isis-video-n795691>.

from a particular state there are for every 100,000 people and 1,000 Muslims in the state. Finally, states with less than two travelers are not included to avoid inferences from incomplete samples.<sup>48</sup> This method places the issue of jihadist travel in the U.S. in the proper context by using a proportional rate.

Calculated this way, the states with the largest frequency of jihadist travelers per 100,000 people are Minnesota (0.127 travelers), Virginia (0.048 travelers), and Ohio (0.043 travelers). For the rate per 1,000 Muslims, the top three states are Minnesota (0.417 travelers), Missouri (0.171 travelers), and Ohio (0.150 travelers).<sup>49</sup> The nationwide frequencies, in contrast, are 0.019 travelers per 100,000 people, and 0.018 travelers per 1,000 Muslims.<sup>50</sup>

These rates, compared to the total population and the estimated Muslim population in each state, are infinitesimally small. In sum, these numbers demonstrate that the phenomena of recruitment of jihadist travelers in all states to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq is limited. Unlike in Europe and elsewhere, the phenomenon of traveler recruitment in the U.S. has not been characterized by large-scale networks with deep transnational ties to foreign jihadist groups. Rather, it has been shaped and facilitated by individual

kinship- and friendship-oriented groups and, at times, virtual connectivity.

Only seven out of the 16 states in the sample produced more than three jihadist travelers. The states with the highest number of cases are California (13), Texas (9), and Minnesota (7). However, given that the two most populous states in the country represent the highest producers of travelers reveals relatively little about the geographic dimensions of IS recruitment in the U.S.

The authors also utilized a smaller unit of analysis, and evaluated mobilization within particular cities. At this level, rates per capita (due to the low number of travelers from each metropolitan statistical area) are less helpful, but in terms of total count, several metropolitan areas stand out. The areas with the highest frequency of travelers are the Minneapolis-St. Paul and San Diego metropolitan areas, which have seven cases each. The Twin Cities also have the highest proportion of travelers to every 1,000 Muslims in the broader metropolitan statistical area.<sup>51</sup>

These areas are considered anomalies with regard to how many travelers emerged from each metropolitan area, but pale in comparison to recruitment from other Western cities. In the U.S., even when areas like the

FREQUENCY OF TRAVELERS BY STATE

State	Number of Travelers	Travelers per 100,000 people	Travelers per 1,000 Muslims
California	13	0.033	0.048
Texas	9	0.032	0.021
Minnesota	7	0.127	0.417
Ohio	5	0.043	0.150
Florida	4	0.019	0.024
Virginia	4	0.048	0.019
New York	4	0.020	0.010
Missouri	2	0.033	0.171
Massachusetts	2	0.029	0.092
Michigan	2	0.020	0.017
New Jersey	2	0.022	0.012

FREQUENCY OF TRAVELERS BY METRO AREA

Metropolitan Statistical Area	Number of Travelers	Travelers per 100,000 people	Travelers per 1,000 Muslims
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington (MN-WI)	7	0.197	0.495
San Diego-Carlsbad (CA)	7	0.211	0.318
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington (TX)	6	0.083	0.039
Columbus (OH)	5	0.245	0.321
New York-Newark-Jersey City (NY-NJ)	5	0.025	0.022
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria (DC-VA-MD)	4	0.065	0.029
Sacramento-Roseville-Arden-Arcade (CA)	3	0.131	0.169
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land (TX)	3	0.044	0.022
Flint (MI)	2	0.489	0.181
St. Louis (MO-IL)	2	0.071	0.169
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater (FL)	2	0.066	0.055
Boston-Cambridge-Newton (MA)	2	0.042	0.022



Twin Cities and San Diego produce seemingly sizable traveler contingents, the cases do not usually exhibit the same networked ties between them as seen in European towns and cities.

Nevertheless, further analytical research is necessary to uncover which factors in these American communities make them frequent places of origin of jihadist travelers, in comparison to others. In some cities, most notably the Minnesota Twin Cities, there have been high-profile court cases on American travelers and attempted travelers. This resulted in extensive local investigative journalism that yielded a considerable amount of publicly available information. However, in many other areas, information is scarce.

### ***Status in Syria and Iraq***

Gathering evidence about an individual's activities in Syria and Iraq after leaving the U.S. is a challenging task. In the constellation of militant groups and other organizations active in Syria and Iraq, evidence about which organization an individual traveler affiliated with can be difficult to come across. Adding to this issue, individuals change their affiliations as the landscape of militant groups changes.

To resolve some of these concerns, this study codes travelers in the sample by the last known jihadist group that they participated in based on evidence available to the authors. For some of the travelers in this dataset, it was the group they were affiliated with at the time of their death; for others, it was the last group to which they publicly claimed support. Additionally, for travelers who were subject to federal investigations with available evidence, court records also detail their interaction with FTOs in Syria and Iraq.

A majority of the travelers (82.8%) are associated with IS. Several started their careers with other jihadist groups, but later joined IS as the organization grew territorially and established itself as a formidable force in Syria and Iraq. The remaining 17.2% includes travelers who affiliated with JN, *Ahrar al-Sham*, and other jihadist groups.

The fact that IS enjoyed this level of support within the demographic is unsurprising. In comparison to other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, IS relied heavily on travelers to provide assistance to their military campaigns and solidify the ideological narrative that they were attracting Muslims from all over the world to re-establish the historical Caliphate.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, groups like JN and *Ahrar al-Sham* were mainly reliant on local Syrian fighters, although before IS' rise to preeminence, they also attracted some travelers in the early stages of the conflict.<sup>53</sup>

The travelers in the sample who did not affiliate with IS generally arrived earlier in the conflict and were killed, captured, or left the conflict before June 2014. Some of the sampled travelers who initially associated with JN or another AQ affiliate also arrived early. If they stayed in Syria or Iraq for a significant period, especially following IS' declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014, they switched affiliations. This would appear to underline another noted shift in how recruitment of travelers to the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts occurred. Early Western travelers were often motivated mainly by joining the armed resistance against al-Assad in defense of the Syrian people; later travelers were more drawn to specific groups, their goals, and their ideologies (notably IS).<sup>54</sup>

The status and current whereabouts of the sampled travelers is more difficult to determine. Without conclusive evidence that an individual traveler has been killed or captured, they are considered in this report to be "at large" (43.8%). That notwithstanding, death rates for Western travelers have been catastrophic. In early 2017, Western intelligence services estimated that more than half of the travelers from Western Europe and North America died fighting in Syria and Iraq.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, it is likely that some percentage of individuals who are considered at large were killed, but their deaths went unreported.

The authors found credible evidence that 22 of the 64 sampled travelers (34.4%) died in Syria and Iraq. The first reported death was Nicole Mansfield on May 29, 2013, but the U.S. government has yet to publicly provide a

confirmation. Following her case, there were several high-profile deaths of American travelers in the summer and fall of 2014. This includes Douglas McCain, the first U.S. citizen whom the government acknowledged had died fighting for IS. In many cases, the exact date of death for travelers is unknown.

Twelve of the 64 sampled travelers (18.8%) returned to the U.S. Nine of the 12 were either apprehended overseas and extradited to the U.S. or returned to the U.S. and promptly arrested. Law enforcement has not pressed public charges against the remaining three travelers. In addition to the American travelers who have returned to the U.S., two more participants in the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts within the sample are currently being detained by foreign governments.

### *Categorization*

Based on a combination of the factors discussed above that shaped why, when, and how an American traveled to Syria and Iraq to participate in jihadist organizations, the authors derived a tripartite typology for American travelers. These categories help provide a useful heuristic

for not only American policymakers, but other countries that are facing the problem of jihadist travelers.

This is intended to contextualize the factors shaping jihadist travel and assist in preliminary risk analysis. Developing complex frameworks for responding to jihadist travel is a priority for the U.S. government and many other countries. Using these categories, analysts and policymakers can more accurately determine the type of threat a specific traveler is likely to pose.

These three categories are not mutually exclusive. The networked traveler and loner categories are predicated on the factors that influenced an individual's travel, whereas the pioneer category is mainly based on their role. Thus, while it is not possible for an individual to be a networked traveler and a loner at the same time, pioneers may be either.

The three categories—pioneers, networked travelers, and loners—are defined below, with a statistical breakdown (where possible) of what percentage of the sample they comprise.<sup>56</sup> Each section provides case studies of individual U.S. travelers within that category, and the relevance of the classification.