

Analysing Italian jihadism through court records from 2011 to 2025

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About the Author

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His research interests are terrorism and radicalisation, particularly of a jihadist nature. He has published several scientific articles on these topics. He is also the author of the book "Anatomy of Jihadism in Italy: 526 individuals investigated and prosecuted since 1993", which was presented to the Italian Parliament in 2023. He is also the co-author of the book "Comprendere la radicalizzazione jihadista: Il caso Italia", (Understanding Jihadist Radicalisation: The Case of Italy), as well as the book "Donne e Jihad. Percorsi di radicalizzazione, indottrinamento e finanziamento", (Women and Jihad: Paths of Radicalisation, Indoctrination and Financing), both published by the European Foundation for Democracy and presented to the Italian Parliament.

About the Monitoring Jihadism Project (MjP)



The Monitoring Jihadism Project (MjP) is a large-scale research initiative founded and directed by Francesco Bergoglio Errico that focuses on collecting and analysing Italian judicial documents relating to jihadist terrorism. The project aims to provide insights into the nature and dynamics of jihadist activities by using primary sources. To date, the MjP has collected over 15,000 pages of judicial documents, which refer to more than 550 individuals who have been investigated or charged with jihadist terrorism or related offences since 1993. By meticulously documenting and analysing these documents, the MjP has created an extensive database providing a wealth of quantitative and qualitative information for analysts, researchers, law enforcement personnel, and policymakers. Additionally, the project's research team has written over 230 short biographies of individuals investigated or charged with jihadist terrorism.

Intro

The evolution of jihadism in Italy: a brief overview

Jihadist terrorism in Italy is not a recent occurrence; the first counter-terrorism operations were launched between 1993 (Operation Sphinx) and 1994 (Operation Moskea). An analysis of judicial documents regarding this period reveals a predominance of repression of criminal offences over those of a terrorist nature. Indeed, before the attacks on the Twin Towers, the criminal offence delineated in Article 416 of the Criminal Code, namely "criminal association", constituted the primary charge in investigations directed towards the suppression of jihadist organisations. This is also due to the fact that the offence of "Participation in an association with terrorist aims, including international terrorism", provided for in Article 270 bis, was only included in the Criminal Code in October 2001. Further, during this period, the subjects investigated were predominantly directly associated with the "central command". It is evident that a proportion of the individuals in question were affiliated with al-Qaeda, whilst others occupied leadership roles within terrorist organisations such as the Armed Islamic Group, the Islamic Group for Preaching and Combat, and the Jamaat al-Islamiya. Other individuals were affiliated with radical Islamic movements, including Hizb ut Tahrir, Tabligh Eddawa, and al-Nahda. A further group of individuals consisted of foot soldiers who were firmly convinced of the superiority of their convictions and of their obligation to engage in armed struggle, or jihad. These individuals were generally led by imams or cell leaders.

The primary strategic objectives of the cells located in Italy were to support the jihad network, with a particular focus on the most significant countries of the period, namely Algeria, Bosnia and Afghanistan, and to provide the network with logistical and human resources. In Italy, a significant number of counterfeit documents of various kinds, including passports and driving licences, were discovered. This phenomenon was so widespread that, following 2002, Italian documents were even found in Peshawar. Furthermore, hundreds of individuals passed through Italian territory, including prominent figures from the jihadist and Islamist scene. Also, a significant proportion of these prominent figures had the right to reside in Italy or other European countries because they had been granted international protection or political refugee status.

However, in the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks, there was a considerable shift in the prevailing attitudes and policies. Italian jihadist cells were no longer able to manage entire criminal networks from mosques, as they had previously done. Secondly, the counter-terrorism authorities finally had new tools at their disposal, including the new offence of "participation in an association with terrorist aims, including international terrorism". Thirdly, the "central command" was subjected to considerable pressure in the context of the so-called "War on Terror", especially in the MENA

region. Consequently, within a few years, with a few exceptions, jihadism in Italy and elsewhere underwent a transformation, taking on new forms and strategies.

It is evident from an examination of court records that a substantial transformation has occurred in the realm of jihadism and associated counter-terrorism activities since the end of 2001. A substantial shift has been observed in the investigative framework. Over several years, investigations that formerly encompassed numerous individuals have evolved into investigative activities that focus on a restricted number of individuals, if not a single individual. To elaborate, there has been a shift in focus from comprehensive investigations into terrorist networks to a more targeted approach, with investigations being conducted into individuals primarily involved in the dissemination of jihadist propaganda and material through online platforms such as blogs and forums.

In the context of this 9/11 post-period, jihadism has transformed both its linguistic approach and its organisational structure. The leaders and ideologues demonstrated an acute understanding of the necessity to pursue both expansion and the implementation of rigorous precautionary measures. The necessity to convey the message of jihad to non-Arabic-speaking audiences became imperative, and, in particular, it was essential to allow militants to organise themselves autonomously, without the assistance of the “central command” and without a leader.

In this regard, the Global Islamic Media Front was established in 2004, and the al-Fajr Media Centre was founded in 2006. These media channels were dedicated to the official dissemination of jihadist propaganda, both in English and other languages. The doctrine of "Nizam la Tanzim", which translates to "system, not organisation", was developed with the same intentions. This doctrine advocated for horizontal networks to operate autonomously and devoid of any leadership structures. It is evident that the internet has played a pivotal role in this transformation, contributing to the amplification and intensification of jihadist activities. This period has seen significant development in data transmission technologies, with the evolution of solutions such as ADSL. Moreover, the advent of the YouTube platform and the dissemination of the first instant messaging programmes provided an additional tool for propaganda and communication. Jihadism, akin to criminal organisations, has demonstrated a capacity to swiftly assimilate and utilise emerging technologies for its own ends, often anted up to others in recognising the potential of these emerging technologies.

To further expand upon this concise overview of jihadism, 2011 unquestionably represents a pivotal turning point. From a geopolitical perspective, the Arab Spring led to the breakdown of old political and socio-economic systems in some Arab countries. From a counter-terrorism perspective, individuals of significant importance and symbolic significance were eliminated.

In May 2011, Osama Bin Laden was neutralised in Abbottabad, while in September, Anwar al Awlaki, the creator of the online magazine "Inspire", which is still in use today, was killed in Yemen. Finally,

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Islamic State in Iraq rose from its ashes and began its expansion into Syria, where in 2014 it proclaimed the establishment of the "Caliphate" from the mosque in Mosul.

Since 2011, there have been numerous changes, once again reflected in court documents, in a recurring pattern first evident at the end of 2001. Evidence from legal proceedings, pre-trial detention orders and investigative activities indicates that telematic tools and the online world have become an integral part of the lives of almost all those individuals investigated. The advent of social networks has been particularly instrumental in the proliferation of jihadism on a global scale. Until at least 2016, social platforms were distinguished by a notable level of accessibility and the presence of a wide variety of content, including instructional manuals for the construction of improvised explosive devices, advanced guides for the synthesis of ricin, propaganda in PDF format, Hollywood-style edited videos, and a plethora of other materials. The content was designed with the aim of recruiting new members and winning the "hearts and minds" of a significant segment of the youth population, including non-Arabs.

The Islamic State was the primary actor to comprehend the potential of social media's vast information storage capacity to further its agenda. This awareness enabled the group to disseminate its content expeditiously and efficaciously, to the extent that, in the present day, the eradication of jihadist content from a social network is an insurmountable task, since once expunged, it re-emerges elsewhere within minutes.

Further, the Islamic State was the primary actor able to utilise the power of ideology and deception to generate an exodus of unprecedented proportions. It is estimated that thousands of individuals from numerous countries have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fulfil the obligation set out by their "Caliph". A significant number of Foreign Terrorist Fighters initially engaged in combat within the ranks of the so-called "Caliphate", with many continuing in this capacity until the territorial defeat of the organisation. A subsequent challenge faced by authorities worldwide pertained to the return of these individuals to their respective countries of origin. Consequently, even at present, the issue of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters continues to represent a priority threat for numerous countries.

Furthermore, since 2011, both native Italians (i.e. individuals born in Italy to at least one Italian parent) and "sociologically Italian" individuals (i.e. second and third-generation immigrants) have been subject to counter-terrorism investigations. Additionally, there has been an emergence of investigations targeting women. Despite constituting a numerical minority, women have demonstrated a marked increase in their participation in jihadist activities, which has been characterised by their notable abilities and their active involvement in criminal activities, such as the indoctrination of children, the radicalisation of other women, and the support of the jihadist milieu in recruitment, proselytism, and financing, both online and offline.

In addition to the increase in women, the most recent investigations also demonstrate an increase in minors, who are particularly vulnerable to violent and brutal propaganda. In fact, in recent years, the number of arrests of minors has increased exponentially in every European country.

Finally, it is important to note the recent rise in anti-Semitism. In the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 terrorist attack, perpetrated by Hamas against over 1,200 unarmed civilians at the border between Gaza and Israel, there has been a notable rise in anti-Semitic sentiment within various extremist factions, encompassing a wide ideological spectrum, from the far-right to the far-left, and indeed, jihadism.

In the period following 7 October, content pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and anti-Semitic sentiment became an integral component of the propaganda material that the investigated individuals consulted. This demonstrates that the Hamas attack was a "radicalising event" of global significance, which inevitably contributed to the radicalisation of vulnerable young people and the polarisation of Italian society and beyond.

In conclusion, a comprehensive review of court documents indicates that jihadism has evolved over time and that investigated individuals employ varied methodologies in the commission of terrorist and criminal activities. The present research is grounded in the aforementioned documents, with the aim of furnishing the reader with a comprehensive overview of jihadism in Italy over the past fourteen years, from 2011 to 2025, providing detailed information on the individuals under investigation and the criminal proceedings.

Methodology

Over the years, the author has had the opportunity to study hundreds of cases involving individuals investigated in Italy for jihadist terrorism and related offences. The information has been sourced from judicial materials collected over time, with cooperation from Law Enforcement Agencies and judicial authorities.¹ A significant proportion of information is available on the website of the Monitoring Jihadism Project (MjP), which provides access to hundreds of brief biographies of "Italian" jihadists and a comprehensive database covering more than 550 individuals investigated or charged with terrorism since 1993.²

The analysis is divided into three primary categories: demographic data (personal details such as gender, nationality, and place of residence), individual characteristics (marital status, conversion,

¹ The material collected consists of the following types of documents: Pre-trial detention orders; Sentences handed down by Assize Courts; Sentences handed down by Courts of Appeal; Sentences handed down by the Court of Cassation; Sentences handed down by Review or Liberty Courts; Arrest warrants; Requests for dismissal; Special surveillance measures.

² The biographies can be consulted here: <https://www.monitoringjihadism.com/home/cases/>. Instead, the database is accessible, after free registration, here: <https://www.monitoringjihadism.com/home/database/>

terrorist group affiliations, and criminal records), and legal proceedings data (detention duration, charges, and sentences). The goal of the present study is to provide detailed demographics, sociological profiles, and legal proceedings data on 250 individuals investigated or charged with jihadist terrorism or related offences from 2011 to 2025. This is intended to facilitate a deeper understanding of jihadism in Italy among analysts, researchers, law enforcement, and policymakers. Specifically, this analysis provides part of the information contained in the Monitoring Jihadism Project database. The database can be divided into three relevant areas, which include numerous variables:

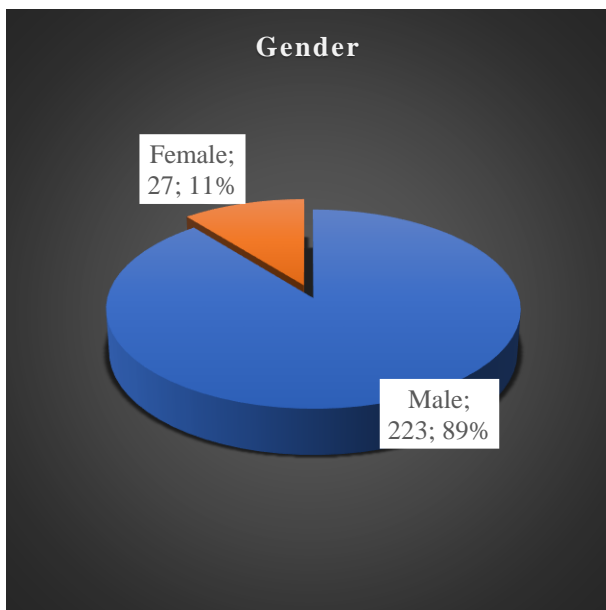
- Demographic data: information related to individuals' personal data, such as gender, nationality, residence, etc.
- Characteristics of individuals: information regarding factors such as marital status, conversion, affiliation with terrorist groups, criminal history, etc.
- Proceedings data: information related to detention durations, charges, and indictments, lengths of imprisonment, etc.

It is not feasible to provide a detailed description of each variable contained within the database. However, a relatively thorough overview of the demographic data and sociological characteristics of the profiles, as well as certain specifics concerning the legal proceedings utilised for this analysis, can be furnished.

The primary data gathered serves as a valuable resource for analysts, researchers, law enforcement personnel, and policymakers, facilitating a deeper understanding of the jihadist phenomenon in Italy.

Demographic data

Gender



A close examination of the gender chart reveals that the vast majority of the research sample is male, with only 27 women out of a total of 250. Despite the relatively low number of women affected, this does not imply that the issue is negligible. Indeed, all registered women are thoroughly integrated into jihadist cells, participating in activities that are just as criminal in nature as those undertaken by men, including recruitment, financing, indoctrination and proselytising.

Furthermore, it is imperative to emphasise that in this particular sample, the women who were

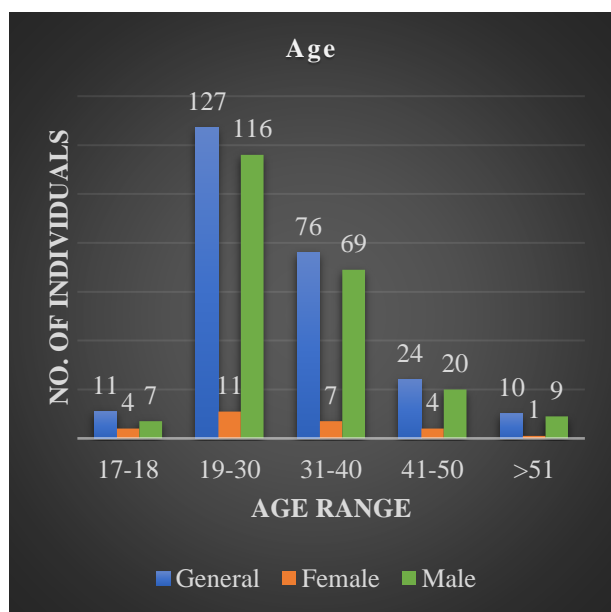
formally involved in criminal proceedings were registered in the General Register of Crime Reports from 2014 onwards. Previously, the available data on women formally involved in criminal proceedings showed only two women: one investigated in 2002 and another in 1999.³

In conclusion, based on the available information, it is possible to assert that jihadism is a predominantly male phenomenon; however, although numerically in the minority, the women under investigation have demonstrated operational capacity comparable to that of men. It is evident that the dissemination of jihadist propaganda via various online platforms, such as forums, websites, and dedicated social network accounts, is among the most prevalent activities. This is followed by the online indoctrination of other women through social media or face-to-face interactions. A significant concern is the indoctrination of children, both minors and young, by their parents. Furthermore, there are activities aimed at financing terrorist organisations. These include the transportation of money and documents, the issuance of false invoices, and the provision of financial support for travel to territories controlled by the so-called caliphate.⁴

³ The two women, specifically, are Anna Giacca and Farida Bentiwaa. For further information, see: <https://www.monitoringjihadism.com/cases/anna-giacca/> e <https://www.monitoringjihadism.com/cases/farida-bentiwaa/>

⁴ For further information on jihadist activities linked to women under investigation and not under investigation in Italy, see: Farinelli F., Manduchi P., Melis N., Colarossi E., Bergoglio Errico F., Cossiga A., Zizola A., (2021) *Donne e jihad. Percorsi di radicalizzazione, proselitismo e reclutamento*, European Foundation for Democracy

Age⁵



With regard to age, the research sample includes individuals between 17 and 65 years of age. The majority of the sample is within the 19-30 age group (127; 51.2%), while a significant portion of the sample is between 31 and 40 years of age (76; 30.6%). Consequently, it can be determined that the absolute majority of the sample is under 31 years of age, but with an average age of 30.9.

A thorough examination of the data pertaining to individuals under the age of 18 underscores the necessity for additional analysis. The sample considered includes only four minors, of whom

only one is female. This is a small number that is not representative of the current situation. Indeed, a growing body of recent investigations,⁶ not included in the sample, indicates an increase in the participation of young people in jihadist ideology, which is often characterised by what might be termed a form of "hybrid extremism".⁷

⁵ In this context, age was calculated by subtracting the year of birth from the year in which the criminal proceedings were entered in the General Register of Criminal Offences. It should also be noted that it was possible to calculate the age of 248 out of 250 individuals; the two missing subjects are men.

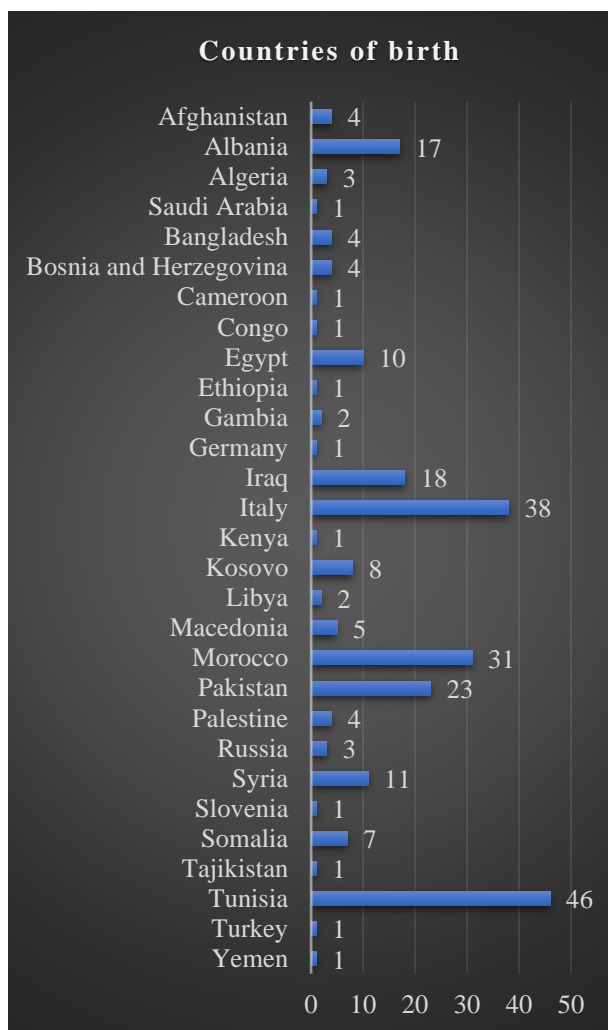
⁶ Some recent investigations involving minors are the following:

- A 14-year-old arrested in Potenza who was found to be the owner of two Telegram groups created to bring together supporters of Islamic State and promote the creation of an IS Wilayat in Italy. See: <https://www.basilicata24.it/2024/10/terrorismo-islamico-arrestato-un-14enne-di-potenza-142855/>
- A 15-year-old arrested in the province of Siena who was found in possession of a switchblade knife and who openly expressed sympathy for Islamic terrorism, even swearing allegiance to an organisation described as “a group of Muslims from all over the world who aim to support our oppressed brothers in Palestine, Syria and even our Uyghur brothers in China”. See: <https://www.virgilio.it/notizie/siena-15enne-radicalizzato-giura-fedelta-alla-jihad-sul-cellulare-video-con-minacce-contro-i-miscredenti-1707193>
- A 17-year-old was arrested in Taranto, where paintings and drawings depicting ISIS flags were found in his home, while numerous videos and photos depicting actions carried out in the past by the terrorist organisation were found on the electronic devices used by the minor. See: <https://www.corriereditaranto.it/2024/10/01/arrestato-17enne-in-odore-di-terrorismo/>
- 22 minors searched in various parts of Italy after emerging in police monitoring activities of environments linked to supremacist, accelerationist, antagonistic and jihadist contexts. See: <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/antiterrorismo--22-minori-perquisiti-in-tutta-italia>

⁷ For more information on what is meant by “mixed extremism” or “mixed extremist ideas”, see: Roberts K., Wallner C., (2023) *Beyond ideological categories. Mixed ideologies and what they mean for preventing and countering violent extremism*, Radicalisation Awareness Network, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/df3c8a78-d222-487f-aaca-f8a1b924622d_en, Meleagrou-Hitchens A., Ayad M., (2023) *The Age of Incoherence? Understanding Mixed and Unclear Ideology Extremism*, Program on Extremism, NCITE, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-06/the-age-of-incoherence-final.pdf> e Baele S., (2025)

Forensic analyses conducted on telephone and telematic devices belonging to minors who were the subjects of various investigative activities have revealed a significant presence of propaganda that alludes to different kinds of extremism, including jihadist, supremacist and antagonistic nature. This finding suggests the possibility of a single individual engaged in multiple propaganda channels, reflecting diverse ideological spheres. This shows a mix of extremism inspired by different areas that sometimes are at odds with each other. But these areas are also linked by a shared trait: a strong hatred of “the other” and a tendency for brutal violence.

Countries of birth



Firstly, the chart demonstrates that the 250 subjects were born in 29 countries, including seven European countries, 11 African countries and 11 Asian countries, predominantly in the Middle East. This data underscores the substantial heterogeneity in terms of nationalities within the research sample. Secondly, at least four countries are worthy of particular attention when considering the data presented in the graph: Tunisia (46 individuals), Italy (38 individuals), Morocco (31 individuals), and Pakistan (23 individuals). The following countries were found to have a smaller, but still significant, birth numbers: Iraq (18), Albania (17), Syria (11), Egypt (10) and Kosovo (8). In the remaining countries, the number of individuals born in each country was less than five.

A qualitative analysis of the data reveals that the information concerning Italy merits particular consideration. Of the 38 subjects born in Italy, 24

(9.6% of the research sample) are native, i.e. born in Italy to at least one Italian parent. The remaining 14 individuals, by contrast, are “sociologically Italians”, namely, second-generation immigrants. Furthermore, among the Italian-born subjects, 21 individuals hold dual citizenship: two Italian-Albanians, one Italian-Algerian, one Italian-Bengali, one Italian-Cameroonian, three Italian-

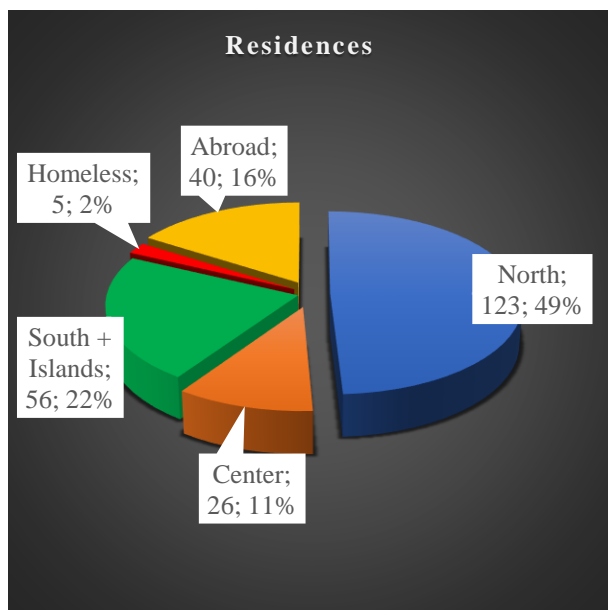
The rise of “composite” extremism - and of its classifications, Vox-Pol, <https://voxpath.eu/composite-fused-muu-extremist-ideologies/>

Egyptians, one Italian-Kosovar, five Italian-Moroccans, three Italian-Pakistanis, two Italian-Swiss and two Italian-Tunisians.

In summary, the figures indicate that 90.4% of the research sample does not have Italian origins. Consequently, immigration has become a substantial issue in the ongoing debate on jihadism and radicalisation in Italy. Furthermore, several of the subjects entered the country illegally, mainly via the Central Mediterranean route, both from Libya and Tunisia, and to a lesser extent via the Balkan and Iberian routes.

In conclusion, it is essential to highlight that the exploitation of illegal immigration is an illegal activity perpetrated by jihadist cells since the 1990s, but also by foreign criminal groups composed of individuals directly or indirectly linked to jihadism.⁸ Nevertheless, there is an absence of any indication that terrorist organisations are using irregular immigration channels in a structured manner.⁹

Residences



In consideration of the available data, it was determined that 205 out of 250 individuals were residing in Italy at the time of the criminal investigations; the remaining individuals consisted of five homeless persons and 40 residing abroad.

The individuals included in the research sample resided in 53 different provinces, covering almost all Italian regions. Specifically, the majority resided in the province of Milan (28 people), followed by Turin with 19, Bari with 17, and Brescia and Rome with 10 people, respectively. Consequently, geographically speaking, northern Italy has the

highest number of subjects, equal to 123.

From a historical perspective, Milan is distinguished by its high number of residences, as evidenced by the period from 1993 to the present day. Indeed, particularly in the past, Milan has functioned as a pivotal nexus with regard to both recruitment and operations. The US Treasury Department's

⁸ For further information on the connection between the exploitation of illegal immigration and Italian jihadist cells, as well as on jihadists who arrived in Italy illegally, see: Bergoglio Errico F. (2024) *Anatomy of Jihadism in Italy: 526 individuals investigated and prosecuted since 1993*, Monitoring Jihadism Project

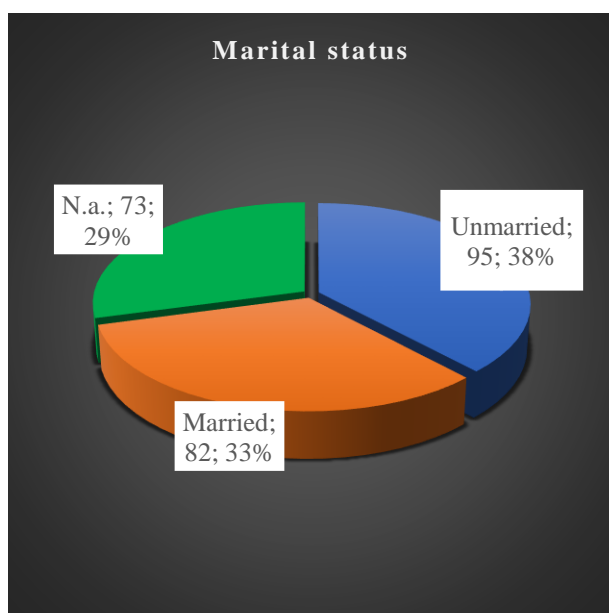
⁹ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2022) *Relazione annuale sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza*, Sistema di Informazione per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, p. 33, https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr/nsf/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Relazione_annuale_2022_interattiva.pdf

declaration that al-Qaeda's European base was located in Milan is of particular interest. The Islamic Cultural Institute in Viale Jenner was identified as being central to the management of entire supply chains for documents, money laundering and the coordination of Mujaheddin.¹⁰

In the most recent context, it is imperative to emphasise the strategic importance of Bari and Puglia in general. Indeed, over the past decade, the Apulian authorities have undertaken a considerable number of counter-terrorism operations, seemingly in response to its strategic location in proximity to both Albania and the broader Balkans. This region, in particular, has become a significant epicentre of radicalisation over time, as well as a hub for sending Foreign Terrorist Fighters to Syria and Iraq.¹¹ Finally, among the most significant provinces, Turin and Brescia also stand out for their substantial presence. The former has been identified as an area of primary importance for jihadist activities since the 1990s, while the latter has assumed a more prominent role in the last ten years, with an intensification of investigations launched by the competent District Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Directorate.

Sociological characteristics

Marital status



The chart illustrates that the sample consists of 82 married and 95 unmarried individuals. A more detailed analysis reveals that the majority of the women engaged in jihadist activities were married at the time of the investigation (21 out of 27), while a significant proportion of the men were unmarried. A series of investigations revealed that militants were actively seeking to marry radicalised women, assisting each other in finding a partner who met certain requirements, in particular, strict adherence to Salafi dictates.

In this context, it is important to emphasise that marriage has been, and continues to be, a fundamental element for the cohesion of jihadist cells.

¹⁰ Vidino L. (2008) *Islamism and Jihadism in Italy*, Hudson Institute, Current Trends in Islamist Ideology, Vol. 7, p. 19, 55, <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/Islam-Islamism-and-jihadism-in-italy> e Kohlmann E. (2004) *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe. The Afghan-Bosnian Network*, New York: Berg Publishers, p. 34, 35

¹¹ For further information on jihadism in the Balkans, see: Shtuni A. (August 2019) *Western Balkans Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Jihadis: Trends and Implications*, CTC Sentinel, Volume 12, Issue 7, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/western-balkans-foreign-fighters-homegrown-jihadis-trends-implications/>

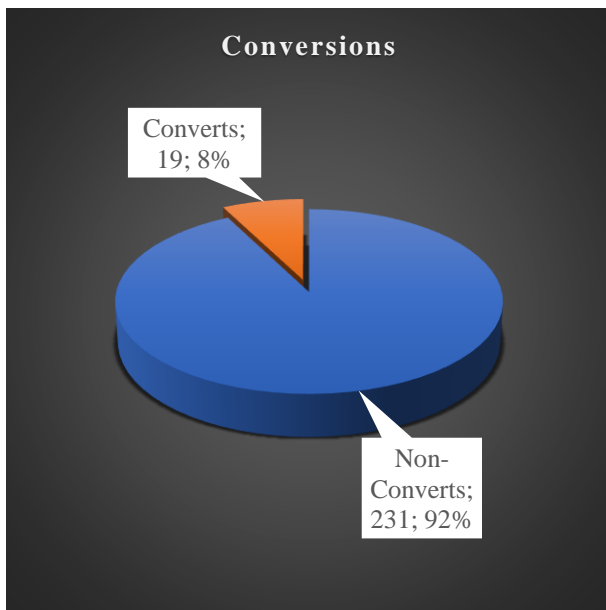
Indeed, a substantial number of cases have demonstrated that marriage serves to fortify and reinforce the bonds between militants. It has also been observed that some militants have chosen to marry the sisters or cousins of members of the same cell, thus creating an unbreakable network based on blood ties. Furthermore, the issue of marriage has assumed significant importance, particularly among radicalised women who are seeking to reach the territories controlled by the Islamic State. These women are entering into marriages with the explicit intention of travelling to Syria or Iraq.

The issue of marriage is of particular importance in the context of jihadism. For instance, within the context of the al-Qaeda organisation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it has been established that members of al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the Haqqani network have entered into matrimonial unions with women from families belonging to groups other than their own. This practice has been identified as a strategic initiative aimed at fostering alliances that are characterised by complexity and resilience, making them challenging to dismantle.¹² Turning to the realm of Islamism, it becomes evident that marital unions serve as a conduit for the establishment of alliances between various familial entities. For instance, within the Muslim Brotherhood, numerous leaders have familial connections that are sanctioned by marital unions, thereby serving to fortify their dedication and allegiance to the movement. Moreover, it is customary for members of the brotherhood to select their spouses from amongst affiliated families. This custom is explicitly endorsed by the group's leaders, who strongly encourage young members to marry "sisters" belonging to the movement, while discouraging matrimony with individuals outside it.¹³

¹² Fantz A. (2012) *The Haqqani Network, a family and a terror group*, CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/09/07/world/who-is-haqqani/index.html>, Pontecorvo S. (30 maggio 2022) *Se in Afghanistan governa Al Qaeda*, Ristretti Orizzonti, <https://ristretti.org/se-in-afghanistan-governa-al-qaeda> e Pugliese M. (2021) *I Talebani proteggono ancora Al-Qaeda: ecco cosa sappiamo*, ISPI, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/i-talebani-protteggono-ancora-al-qaeda-ecco-cosa-sappiamo-31377>

¹³ Al-Anani K. (2016) *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood*, Oxford University Press, p. 80

Conversions to Islam

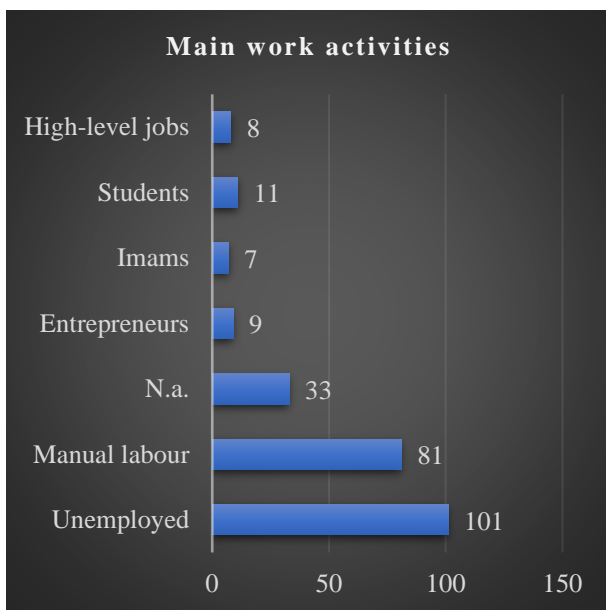


An analysis of the available data indicates that 19 individuals have converted to Islam. No data are available on their previous religion, but it is reasonable to assume that it was Catholicism, considering that, except for one Slovenian individual, all the others are of Italian origin.

The remaining 231 non-converts are all Sunni Muslims. This data does not engender any particular reflection, nor does it allow for a more accurate analysis, given that the world of jihadism, especially in Europe, is made up almost exclusively of Sunni Muslims. It is noteworthy, however, that

among the 19 converts, there are 9 women and 10 men. Finally, it is important to note that 14 of the 19 converts are married.

Main work activities



A thorough analysis of the available data reveals a broad spectrum of occupations, amounting to a total of 38 distinct roles.

A substantial proportion of these roles can be categorised as "manual labour", including, for instance, pizza maker, general labourer, bricklayer, tiler, electrician and car washer.

A total of 81 individuals (32.4%) were engaged in manual labour at the time of the investigation. However, the majority of subjects were unemployed (101; 40.4%). It is noteworthy that this final specification may be misleading, as the

majority of the unemployed were engaged in illegal activities, frequently highly lucrative ones. Consequently, although there are exceptions to this generalisation, the unemployed-poor pairing is not a reliable indicator in this case, nor is the poor-radicalisation pairing.

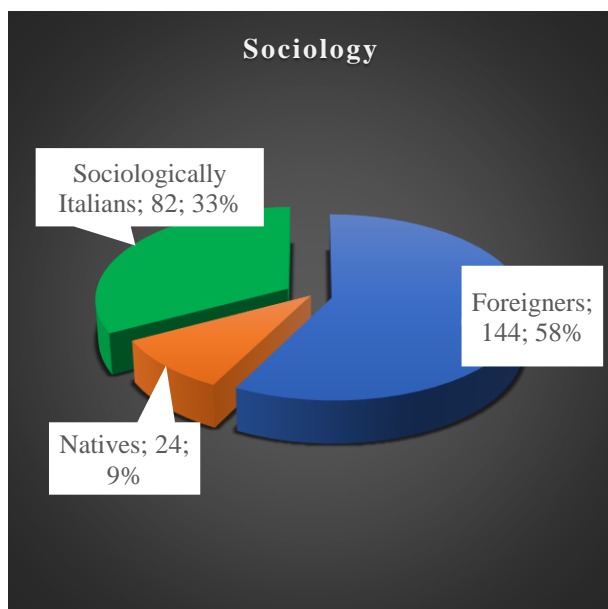
Another noteworthy occupational category is that of imams (7; 2.8%), who are often self-proclaimed. Historically, imams have played a central role in recruitment processes, with documented links to all fighter mobilisations over the last 30 years, ranging from Afghanistan to Algeria, via Iraq, Syria and

Chechnya. Moreover, if the expelled imams were to be included in this number, the total would be increased exponentially. Indeed, between 2015 and 2018 alone, 16 imams were expelled,¹⁴ while according to data from ANSA, 30 imams were expelled between 2002 and 2016.¹⁵

A further group that merits consideration is that of entrepreneurs (9; 3.6%), defined as individuals who own a business or shop, for example. It has been established that entrepreneurs have utilised illicit funds for the purpose of financing terrorist activities, in addition to their conventional activities. It is evident that between 2011 and 2014, there were documented cases of financing directed towards Jabhat al-Nusra. Following 2014, there were also recorded instances of financial transfers being made to the terrorist organisations al-Shabaab and Islamic State.

A smaller percentage of the sample consists of students (11; 4.4%). Given the broad age range encompassed by the research sample, which includes subjects of "school or university age", this percentage signifies that a considerable proportion of the population has not yet attained a high level of education, such as a university degree. This assertion is further substantiated by the limited number of individuals employed in occupations that necessitate a university education or in high-level roles, with a mere 8 people (3.2%) engaged in such professions. The aforementioned professionals include two teachers, an optician, two cultural mediators, a chemist, an accountant and an IT specialist.

Sociology



The majority of the research sample consists of foreign nationals, accounting for 58% of the sample. The second most prevalent category is the "sociologically Italian" individuals, accounting for 33% of the sample. This category includes individuals born abroad to non-Italian parents who arrived in Italy during their childhood or pre-adolescence, as well as individuals born in Italy to non-Italian parents. It is evident that, from a sociological perspective, the "sociologically Italian" individuals can be categorised into two distinct groups: first-generation and second-

¹⁴ Longo G. (29 Marzo 2018) *In tre anni espulsi 16 predicatori. Ecco la rete dell'Islam radicale*, La Stampa, <https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2018/03/29/news/in-tre-anni-espulsi-16-predicatori-ecco-la-rete-dell-islam-radicale-1.33998422/>

¹⁵ (03 Settembre 2016) *Alfano, espulsi due imam a Novara*, Ansa, https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/topnews/2016/09/03/alfano-espulsi-due-imam-a-novara_252ea6a3-3b27-4bd0-9d7e-af4f10318996.html

generation. The first group, numbering 27, comprises individuals who are direct descendants of immigrants, while the second group, numbering 55, consists of individuals who are children or grandchildren of immigrants. The final demographic of the sample consists of 9% natives, defined as individuals born and raised in Italy with at least one parent of Italian origin.

It is noteworthy that among the over 500 individuals investigated for jihadism or related crimes since 1993, there was a marked increase in the number of natives and "sociologically Italian" individuals after 2012. Specifically, prior to 2012, the demographic consisted exclusively of five natives, all of whom were born to Italian parents. Conversely, "sociologically Italian" individuals emerged starting from 2007, and prior to 2012, the demographic comprised 33 individuals. Consequently, these data indicate that after 2012, there was a considerable increase in sociological categories analysed.

Criminal records

The research sample included 58 individuals with criminal records at the time of the investigation. The offences primarily encompassed common crimes such as drug dealing and theft, in addition to receiving stolen goods, exploitation of illegal immigration, and crimes against persons and property. It is also noteworthy that criminal records and arrests in countries other than Italy were given due consideration in the analysis.

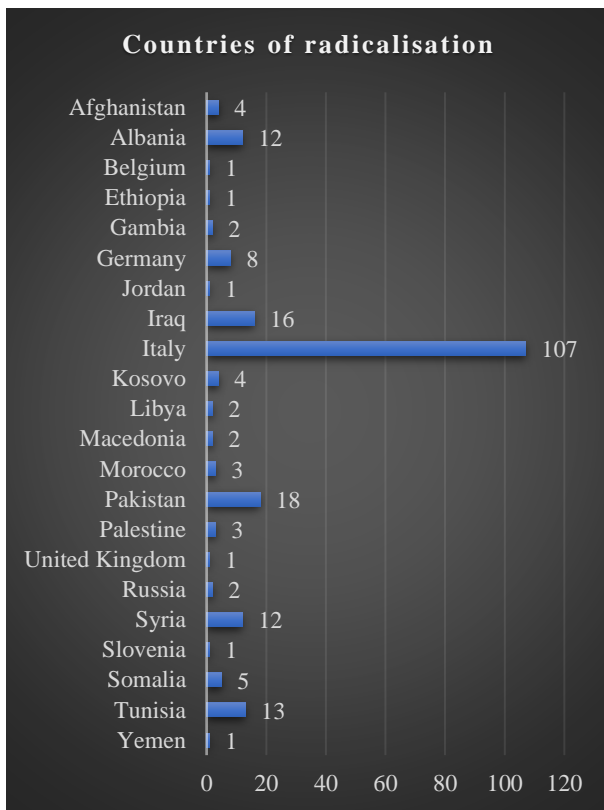
It is also important to note that only three individuals had been investigated for terrorism-related offences more than once. This data allows the conclusion that the recidivism rate is significantly low. However, this does not imply that, upon completion of their custodial sentence following a conviction for terrorism, individuals cease to adhere to jihadist ideals. Moreover, it is not possible to determine whether those expelled have been re-arrested for similar crimes by the authorities in their country of destination following their deportation.

Finally, the issue of prisons must be addressed.¹⁶ Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing prevalence of radicalisation within prisons. Indeed, prior to 2011, there were several documented cases of radicalisation, as well as instances of proselytising, indoctrination and recruitment activities being carried out by inmates. However, following 2011, the literature on radicalisation acknowledged prisons as a significant hub for recruitment.

A number of the subjects analysed claimed to be imams and demonstrated a notable propensity for radicalisation during their period of incarceration. Conversely, others were recruited in prison by charismatic individuals who exhibited a particular capacity for persuasion and manipulation.

¹⁶ (December 2016) *Dealing with radicalisation in a prison and probation context*, RAN P&P - Practitioners working paper, p. 1, Note 1, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/en?file=2016-12/ran_p_and_p_practitioners_working_paper_en.pdf

Countries of radicalisation



The concept of a “country of radicalisation” refers to the nation where the radicalisation process has been fully realised, signifying the point at which an individual has been effectively radicalised.

The data, which is available for 219 out of 250 subjects, indicates that Italy is the country where the majority of people (107; 48.8%) have undergone the process of radicalisation. In this context, radicalisation is understood as the process that leads an individual to embrace extremist ideas, in this case jihadist, and to engage in illegal behaviour based on and justified by those ideas.

It is important to note that, although the research sample consists primarily of individuals born abroad, almost half of them underwent

radicalisation in Italy, either online, for instance through social networks, or offline, for example by attending mosques led by radical imams, or following radicalised family members and/or friends.

A further noteworthy observation is the number of countries highlighted in the graph; in fact, there are 22 countries of radicalisation, including 8 European countries, 8 Asian countries and 6 African countries.

It can be argued that, in Italy, both Italian and foreign nationals become so radicalised that they are arrested for terrorism or related offences. However, it is also important to note that in many cases, people born abroad and radicalised in Italy arrived in the country already in the process of radicalisation, i.e. they were not entirely unfamiliar with typical jihadist narratives or belonging to so-called political Islam.

Conversely, 112 individuals, constituting 51.2% of the sample, underwent radicalisation in their country of origin or in a foreign country. Consequently, these individuals arrived in Italy already radicalised and, in some cases, already an integral part of active jihadist cells. The most significant countries in this regard are Pakistan, Iraq, Albania, Tunisia and Syria.

Type of training

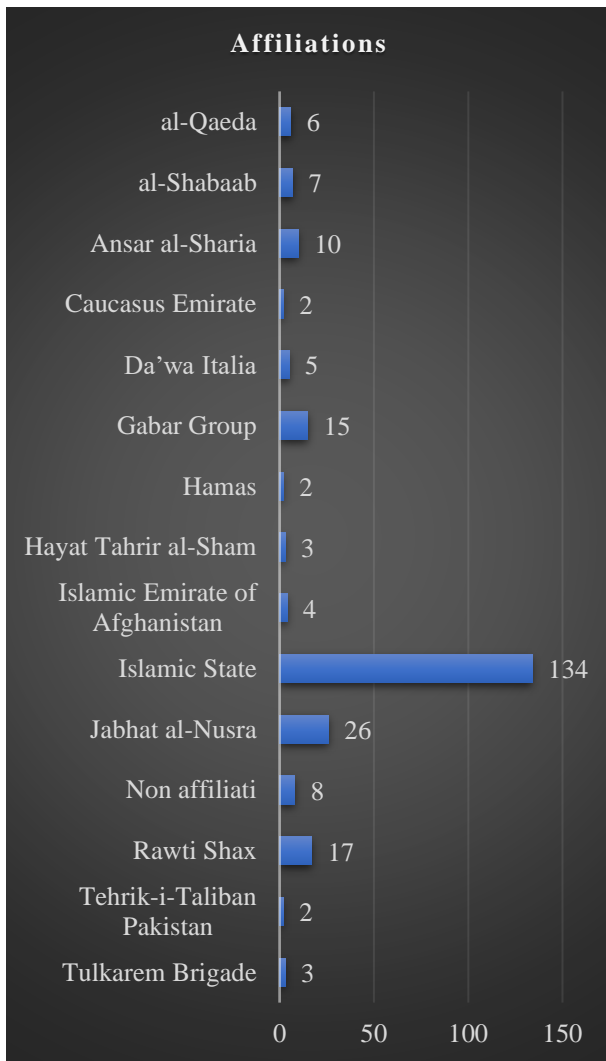


Of the 250 subjects, the training type of 109 could be verified. Of these individuals, 62% were found to have undergone self-training, characterised by the compulsive study of specific manuals concerning, for example, the manufacture of explosives, the use of bladed weapons and firearms. This self-training involved the viewing of video tutorials useful for the use of the aforementioned weapons, as well as the study of espionage and counter-espionage techniques, and the performance of physical exercises and training in public places or sometimes in the individual's own homes.

Conversely, 38% of individuals have undergone military or paramilitary training. This group includes individuals with combat experience in war zones, such as so-called Foreign Terrorist Fighters, or individuals who have previously participated in compulsory military service in their country of origin. It is noteworthy that as many as 14 individuals with military or paramilitary training became radicalised in Italy, opting to undertake training subsequent to joining a terrorist group on Italian soil. On the other hand, 39 individuals who radicalised in Italy underwent self-training.

In recent times, particularly following the advent of novel online platforms and social networks, there has been a marked increase in the accessibility of audio, video and text material. This material comprises a wide variety of instructions on subjects including the fabrication of explosive devices, the use of weapons, and methods of camouflage in hostile territory. This has undoubtedly contributed to the effective fuelling of the self-training of aspiring jihadists. Furthermore, this modus operandi has resulted in the exacerbation of the jihadist threat, given that any individual can now undertake training and manufacture an improvised explosive device in their own residence.

Affiliations



Of the 250 subjects, the affiliation of 244 was successfully ascertained.

Affiliation refers to membership of a terrorist organisation, but sometimes this affiliation may be only material, i.e. without sharing the ideology of the programme pursued by the organisation. Conversely, an individual may be ideologically linked to an organisation even without active and practical participation in a cell.

As demonstrated in the chart, there are 10 terrorist organisations represented, but the Islamic State is the clear leader with 54.9% of the sample.

Among the other terrorist organisations examined in the study is Jabhat al-Nusra, which accounted for 10.6% of the research sample. The group first emerged in 2011 when seven commanders of the Islamic State in Iraq crossed the Iraqi border into north-eastern Syria. One of these individuals was Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani, who would later become the President of Syria. On behalf of Abu

Bakr al-Baghdadi, al-Jawlani established a new network in Syria with the objective of providing support to the uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. In January 2012, the group adopted the name Jabhat al-Nusra, which was subsequently designated as a terrorist organisation in December 2012 and included in the United Nations blacklist.

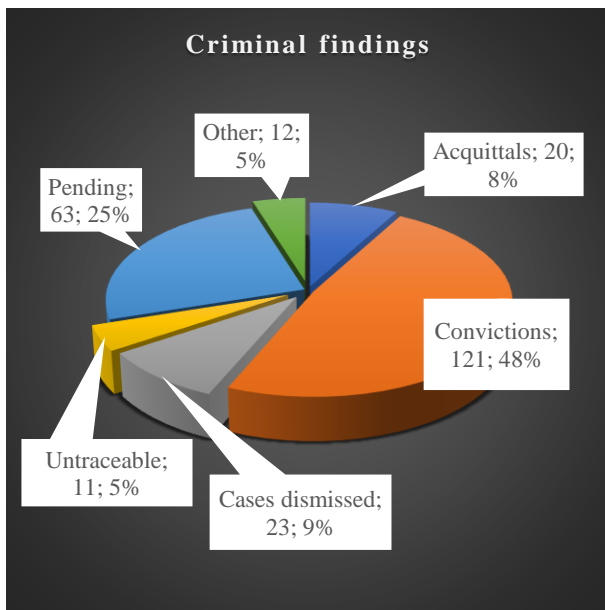
The Rawti Shax group is the third most significant, with 6.9% of the total. This terrorist group was rebuilt by Mullah Krekar from the remnants of Ansar al-Islam, an organisation that was dismantled between 2003 and 2004 throughout Europe. Ansar al-Islam played a decisive role in Italy in coordinating and sending fighters to Iraq.

The Gabar Group, a terrorist association composed of 15 Pakistani individuals, including Zaher Hassan Mahmood, is identified as having 6.1% of the total. On 25 September 2020, Mahmood perpetrated a violent attack with a knife, resulting in severe injury to two individuals in proximity to the former headquarters of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris. The ideological orientation of the group is analogous to that of the Barelvi movement, a constituent element of the Hanafi school

of Islamic law. Finally, with percentages below 2.8%, the following terrorist organisations are identified: Hamas, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Tulkarem Brigade, Caucasus Emirate, al-Shabaab, Ansar al-Sharia and al-Qaeda.

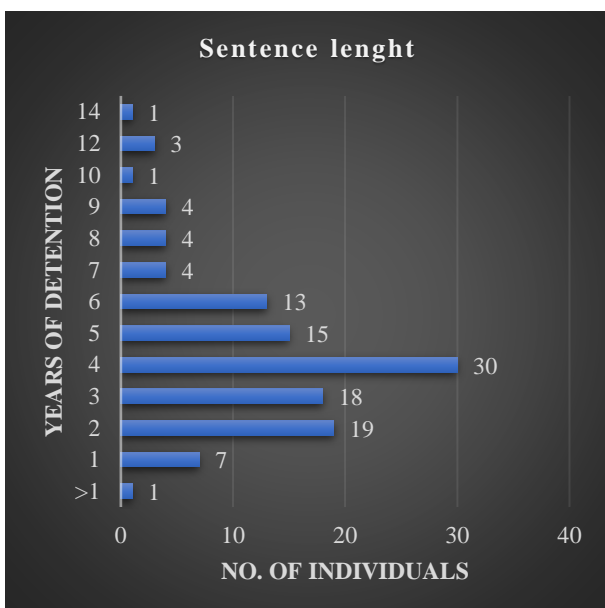
Data on criminal proceedings

Criminal findings



A total of 121 convictions, 20 acquittals, 23 dismissals and 63 proceedings were recorded in the criminal proceedings collected. Of these, 121 were convictions, 20 acquittals, 23 dismissals, and 63 were proceedings pending before the respective Assize Courts, or still to be heard before the Preliminary Hearing Judge. In contrast, 11 individuals have not been traced, while 12 others have specific criminal statuses, including special surveillance measures, compulsory residence, extradition, detention abroad, or the annulment of preventive detention measures.

Sentence length



A close examination of the sentences reveals that the range of penalties imposed is from six months to 14 years and six months' imprisonment. However, it should be noted that in one instance, verification of the penalty was not possible.

The majority of those convicted were sentenced to between two and six years' imprisonment; seven people were sentenced to one year in prison, while only one person was sentenced to six months. Conversely, 17 people received sentences ranging from seven to 14 years in prison. The data unequivocally demonstrates that sentences

surpassing ten years' imprisonment were imposed on only five individuals.

The average prison sentence is 4 years and 6 months, which is generally considered to be lower than in other countries.

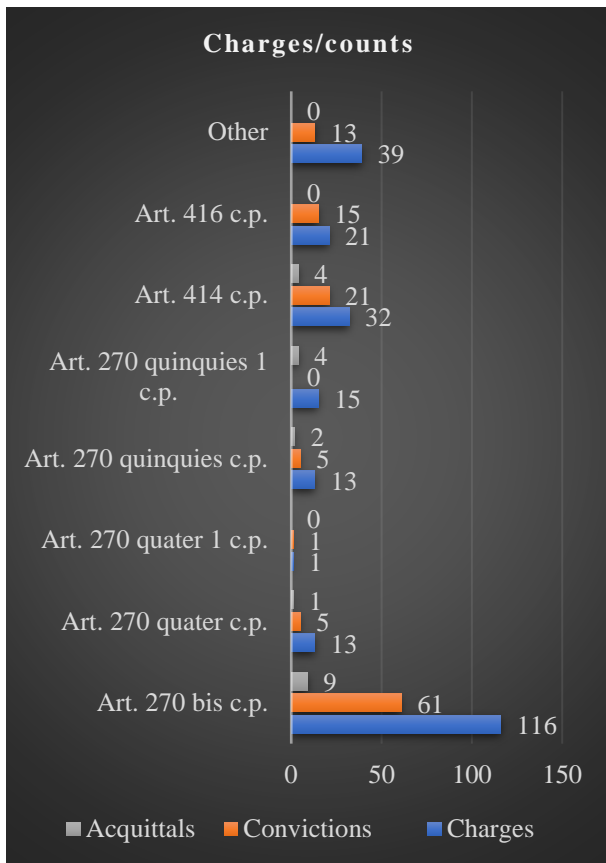
According to the most recent data, between 2012 and 2019, in Spain, the jihadists convicted were sentenced to an average of 5 and a half years in prison, with a range similar to that in Italy: between 6 months and 13 years. In Britain, over the same period, jihadists were sentenced to an average of 7 years imprisonment with a range between 9 months and 45 years. In Belgium, 50% of those convicted of terrorism-related crimes received sentences of less than 10 years, and 20% received sentences of less than 5 years. In Denmark, the situation is very similar to Italy: the average imprisonment is just over 4 years, ranging between 6 months and 10 years. The average prison sentence in Greece is much higher than in other countries, with 16 years of imprisonment.¹⁷ Similar to the latter country, in the United States, people convicted of jihadist terrorism received a sentence equal to 13.5 years in prison.¹⁸

The above analysis reveals that Italy and Denmark have the lowest average number of years of imprisonment compared to other countries where such data is available. Regarding Italy, it is crucial to emphasise that the absence of very high sentences in the collected cases is because there were no recorded instances of individuals committing terrorist attacks resulting in fatalities, which would entail a prison sentence of more than 20 years. This circumstance would significantly elevate the average.

¹⁷ Basra R., Neumann P.R. (2020) *Prisons and Terrorism: Extremist Offender Management in 10 European Countries*, ICSR, p. 12, https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ICSR-Report-Prisons-and-Terrorism-Extremist-Offender-Management-in-10-European-Countries_V2.pdf

¹⁸ Program on Extremism (02 December 2022) *The Islamic State in America*, GW Extremism Tracker, [https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-02/december 2022 is in us tracker preview.png](https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-02/december%2022%20is%20in%20us%20tracker%20preview.png)

Charges/counts



The most prevalent charge, or count, is that determined by Article 270 bis of the Criminal Code (Participation in an association with terrorist aims, including international terrorism).

In a total sample of 116 individuals, 61 were convicted under Article 270 bis, while 9 were acquitted. The remaining 46 individuals are divided into the following categories: 21 with ongoing proceedings, 4 with rejected arrest warrants, 16 with dismissed cases, and 5 currently untraceable.

The second most prevalent charge is that determined by Article 414 of the Criminal Code, which punishes those who incite or advocate violence. This offence is often accompanied by the aggravating circumstance of terrorist intent. Of the 32 individuals under scrutiny, 21 were convicted,

while 4 were acquitted.

The third most frequent charge, or count, is that determined by Article 416 of the Criminal Code (criminal association). Of the 21 individuals, 15 were convicted, while no acquittals have emerged at this stage of the examination. It is noteworthy that this criminal offence was widely utilised prior to 2011, particularly prior to the full implementation of Article 270 bis. Consequently, in the past, jihadist terrorism was also combated through the criminal offence typical of organised crime trials (but not of the mafia type). Indeed, prior to 2011, a significant number of cases involving individuals associated with terrorist organisations exhibited characteristics consistent with those of organised crime.

To a lesser extent, other criminal offences typical of the fight against terrorism are also present:

- Under Article 270 quater, “Recruitment for the purposes of terrorism, including international terrorism”, 13 people were charged;
- Under Article 270 quater 1, “Organisation of transfer for the purposes of terrorism”, only one person was charged;
- Under Article 270 quinquies, “Training for activities for the purposes of terrorism, including international terrorism”, 13 people were charged;

- Under Article 270 quinquies 1, “Financing of conduct for the purposes of terrorism”, 15 people were charged.

Finally, 39 individuals were charged or indicted for additional offences, including, for instance, possession of weapons, aiding and abetting illegal immigration, drug trafficking and document forgery. Of particular note is the conviction of an individual under Article 280 bis, which pertains to "Acts of terrorism with deadly or explosive devices".

Final remarks

Profiling a typical radicalised individual

The scientific and intelligence communities have long argued that it is impossible to establish a profile of radicalised individuals that is valid in all cases. This is due to the fact that radicalisation is fluid, changeable and sometimes deceptive. Nevertheless, there are characteristics of radicalised individuals that recur across space and time.

With particular reference to Italy, this research provides a number of characteristics that can assist in understanding who, in general, is a radicalised individual. Consequently, regardless of gender, it is possible to list some typical characteristics from the data presented:

- Men between the ages of 19 and 30, with a tendency towards younger men, including minors, and a tendency towards women.
- Radical Sunni Muslim, generally a practising Salafi (jihadist), but often lacking in-depth knowledge of Islam and sometimes concealing their identity by appearing unfamiliar with the obligatory rituals imposed by the religion, especially prayer.
- Foreigners with no deep ties to Italy, but sometimes the children of immigrants, even those born in Italy.
- Often, individuals with criminal records (common crime).
- Unemployed, but often involved in lucrative illegal activities, or in manual labour.
- A low level of education.
- Engaged in online activities aimed at spreading jihadist propaganda or assimilating violent ideology or technical knowledge useful for carrying out terrorist acts.

With regard to radicalisation processes, understood as the process that leads an individual to embrace jihadist ideology and not necessarily to commit a terrorist act, the data presented provides some important analytical information. 48.8% of the research sample completed, or carried out entirely, the radicalisation process in Italy. Consequently, although the majority of these subjects were not born in Italy, almost half had the opportunity to become radicalised in Italy.

The vast majority of subjects had online interactions with propaganda, or occasionally with radicalised individuals, or in any case with people who shared a similar worldview. It is important to highlight that, especially in recent years, there has been a rise in the number of individuals who, when surfing the internet, make little distinction between al-Qaeda-style propaganda and that linked to the "Caliphate". Furthermore, a form of "hybrid extremism" is emerging, involving the consumption of jihadist propaganda alongside neo-Nazi, supremacist, antagonistic, and generally violent and brutal propaganda.

More than half (54.9%) of the individuals analysed in the sample became radicalised under the banner of the Islamic State. However, in recent years, cases have emerged where the attribution of an individual to a specific terrorist group has been rendered uncertain by the analysis of IT and telecommunications tools, which have revealed material attributable to both al-Qaeda and Islamic State. It is important to note, however, that this percentage suggests that al-Qaeda is no longer the sole reference point for the jihadist phenomenon. Indeed, over time, al-Qaeda appears to have been downgraded.

Furthermore, it is imperative to emphasise the perilous nature of the subjects analysed in this study. The research sample reveals 68 individuals who demonstrated a high level of dangerousness and terrorist capability. An examination of court records reveals that these individuals manifested a readiness and commitment to personal sacrifice. In some cases, these groups have emerged in the context of planning, albeit in an embryonic state, for a possible terrorist act. Conversely, others materialised within the milieu of orchestrating meticulously planned terrorist acts, which were, on occasion, poised for execution.

In conclusion, the data pertaining to the nature of training indicates that 109 individuals possessed considerable capabilities with the potential to engage in terrorist activities. 62 of these individuals have undergone self-training, characterised by extensive consultation and study of specific manuals concerning, for instance, the manufacture of explosives, the utilisation of bladed weapons and firearms, and the observation of instructional video tutorials on the utilisation of these armaments. Additionally, these individuals engaged in the study of espionage and counter-espionage techniques, in addition to the execution of physical training exercises in public locations or, on occasion, within the confines of their personal residences. Conversely, 41 have undergone military or paramilitary training, indicating individuals with combat experience in war zones, such as so-called Foreign Terrorist Fighters, or those who had previously participated in military service within their respective countries of origin.

Consequently, these findings demonstrate that there were individuals in Italy with the necessary skills to carry out potentially serious and lethal terrorist acts.¹⁹

Limitations and benefits of the research

The present research is grounded in the Monitoring Jihadism Project database, which is a compendium of judicial materials pertaining to individuals investigated for terrorism and associated offences since 1993. The database provides information of considerable interest for counter-terrorism investigations, including the specific characteristics of jihadism and those who adhere to this ideology. Moreover, the database in question is a unique tool in the field of research and analysis on jihadism in Italy, as it is able to provide primary information on a significant number of court cases that would otherwise have remained in the archives of the courts. Consequently, as corroborated by numerous users, including counter-terrorism operatives, prosecutors and experts, the database is exerting a pivotal and determinative function. For instance, according to a former director of the Italian Police Anti-Terrorism Service, this research provides "additional elements useful for guiding policies to prevent religiously motivated violence, a phenomenon with a karstic trend whose danger should never be underestimated".²⁰

Despite its current value as a resource for researchers and professionals, the database remains subject to certain limitations. The primary constraint pertains to the documentation on which it is grounded, and consequently, the absence of documentation that has not yet been amassed. For example, it is unclear how much undigitised documentation is gathering dust on the shelves of some court. The utilisation of this extensive, albeit dated, documentation holds the potential to enhance the present research and to deepen our understanding of past jihadism, with a particular focus on the phenomena observed during the 1990s and the early 2000s.

A further salient limitation is the non-existence of comprehensive documentation for each individual criminal proceeding. Consequently, it is not always possible to ascertain the manner and timing of

¹⁹ For information purposes, below is a list of terrorist acts that emerged from the judicial documents collected, including those prior to 2011. In particular, eight radicalised individuals emerged who committed at least one attack, for a total of 11 attacks, including three suicide attacks.:

- Domenico Quaranta carried out four attacks between 2001 and 2002;
- Tarek Ben Brahim carried out an attack in August 2002;
- A suicide attack was carried out by Muhannad Shaliq al-Khatib (deceased) in December 2003;
- A suicide attack was carried out by Moustafa Chaouki (deceased) in March 2004;
- A suicide attack (attempted) was carried out by Mohamed Game (not deceased) in October 2009;
- Ismail Tommaso Hosny carried out an attack in May 2017;
- Mahamad Fathe carried out an attack in September 2019;
- Dani Hakam Taleb Moh'd carried out an attack in February 2024.

²⁰ Bergoglio Errico F. (2024) *Anatomy of Jihadism in Italy: 526 individuals investigated and prosecuted since 1993*, Monitoring Jihadism Project

the conclusion of a particular trial or investigation. For instance, it is not always feasible to obtain the judgments of the Courts of Appeal, the Review Tribunals, or the dismissal orders. This limitation has repercussions on the analysis of the overall data of criminal proceedings, which may be partially incomplete. A third and final limitation of some significance pertains to the restricted availability of research funds.

Notwithstanding the inherent limitations of the research, there is potential for further development and exploration. For instance, the database could be augmented with additional variables. In consideration of the various options, the inclusion of a variable that considers the reasons behind the radicalisation of individuals would represent a significant and decisive step forward. This addition would facilitate a deeper understanding of radicalisation processes, broadening knowledge of the phenomenon and supporting the development of more effective counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation policies.

Significant headway could be achieved in this domain; nevertheless, the dearth of financial resources continues to act as a substantial impediment.

A further important and stimulating development would be to compare the data obtained with similar databases, such as the European Database on Terrorist Offenders or the PIRUS dataset. The execution of comparative analyses of this nature has the potential to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the phenomenon, both within the Italian context and in other international settings.

Moreover, a substantial advancement could be represented by the incorporation of individuals into the database who have not been subjected to prosecution but have been expelled on grounds of national security through administrative expulsion measures. Furthermore, a significant development could be achieved by including information on cases handled by the Central Investigation Unit of the Prison Police, i.e. the body responsible for monitoring and managing radicalised prisoners.

In order to achieve these developments and insights, cooperation with the competent authorities is necessary. In the absence of systemic collaboration, access to and analysis of primary sources, such as judicial documentation, would have been unthinkable. Consequently, further consolidation and refinement of cooperation between the research and institutional worlds is necessary in order to ensure more effective collection of the data still to be gathered, which could be decisive for the analysis of the phenomenon of jihadism in Italy.