



# Muslim-American Terrorism: Declining Further

**CHARLES KURZMAN**

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL

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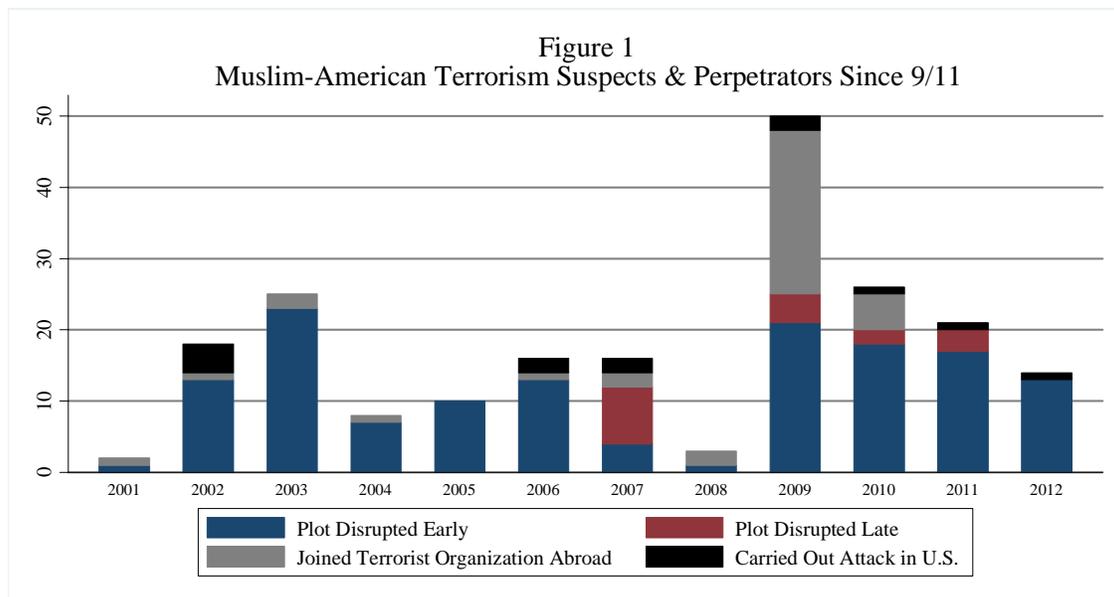
## Muslim-American Terrorism Down in 2012

Fourteen Muslim-Americans were indicted for violent terrorist plots in 2012, down from 21 the year before, bringing the total since 9/11 to 209, or just under 20 per year (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The number of plots also dropped from 18 in 2011 to 9 in 2012 (Figure 2).

For the second year in a row, there were no fatalities or injuries from Muslim-American terrorism. Meanwhile, the United States suffered approximately 14,000 murders in 2012. Since 9/11, Muslim-American terrorism has claimed 33 lives in the United States (Figure 3), out of more than 180,000 murders committed in the United States during this period.<sup>2</sup> Over the same period, more than 200 Americans have been killed in political violence by white supremacists and other groups on the far right, according to a recent study published by the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy.<sup>3</sup> Sixty-six Americans were killed in mass shootings by non-Muslims in 2012 alone, twice as many fatalities as from Muslim-American terrorism in all 11 years since 9/11.<sup>4</sup>

This is the fourth annual report on Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators published by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security. The first report, co-authored by David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, and Ebrahim Moosa in early 2010, also examined efforts by Muslim-Americans to prevent radicalization. The second report, authored by Charles Kurzman and issued in early 2011, examined the source of the initial tips that brought these cases to the attention of law-enforcement authorities. The third report, issued in early 2012, focused on cases of support for terrorism, in addition to violent plots. This fourth report adds educational and occupational information, as well as a comparison with Islamic terrorism in Western Europe. These reports, and the data on which they are based, are available at <http://kurzman.unc.edu/muslim-american-terrorism>.

Only one of the nine Muslim-American terrorism plots in 2012 led to violence: the bombing of a Social Security office in Casa Grande, Arizona, outside of Phoenix, on November 30, 2012. Nobody was injured by the homemade explosive, which was placed outside a back door of the building. Abdullatif



**Figure 2. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators, Violent Plots, 2012**

Name	Location	Plot or alleged plot	Disrupted	Status of case
Sami Osmakac	Tampa, FL	Plot to bomb sheriff's office and businesses	Early	Trial pending
Jamshid Muhtarov	Aurora, CO	Attempt to join terrorists in Pakistan	Early	Trial pending
Amine El-Khalifi	Alexandria, VA	Plot to bomb the U.S. Capitol	Early	Pled guilty
Adel Daoud	Chicago, IL	Plot to bomb a bar	Early	Trial pending
Henry Dewitt McFarland III	Brownsville, TX	Threatened to bomb university	Early	Trial pending
Sohiel Omar Kabir	Riverside, CA	Attempt to join terrorists in Afghanistan	Early	Trial pending
Ralph Deleon				
Miguel Santana				
Arifeen Gojali				
Raees Alam Qazi	Oakland Park, FL	Plot to bomb unspecified location in New York	Early	Trial pending
Sheheryar Alam Qazi				
Abullatif Aldosary	Casa Grande, AZ	Explosion at Social Security building	No	Trial pending
Mohammad Abukhdair	Mobile, AL	Attempt to join terrorists in Mauritania	Early	Trial pending
Randy Wilson				

Aldosary, an Iraqi refugee, was arrested within an hour, based on an eyewitness description of his license plate number.<sup>5</sup> No evidence of his motives has yet been made public, and there is reason to believe that he was not a well-trained terrorist. Three months earlier, he was charged with disorderly conduct and assault for an incident at a gym in which he allegedly “displayed pornographic pictures and struck a man,”<sup>6</sup> which does not sound like the behavior of a terrorist trying to keep a low profile. The case is included in this report as a possible terrorist incident.

All of the year's other alleged plots by Muslim-Americans were discovered and disrupted at an early stage. This is a shift from the previous three years, in which several plots came to the attention of law enforcement authorities at a later stage, after weapons or explosives had already been gathered.

The most dramatic plot involved Amine El-Khalifi, an illegal resident from Morocco who pled guilty to plotting to bomb the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. According to the criminal complaint filed by the FBI, El-Khalifi met with an informant in January 2011 and indicated

that he was “ready for war.” In December 2011, El-Khalifi confirmed as part of his guilty plea, that he met with an informant and an undercover agent posing as members of al-Qaeda. Over the following two months, he shifted his proposed targets from a military office to a restaurant to the U.S. Capitol. The FBI employees encouraged the plot and provided El-Khalifi with a jacket containing mock explosives. In February 2012, he was arrested at a parking garage in Washington, D.C., after he had put on the jacket and started walking toward the Capitol.<sup>7</sup>

Informants and undercover agents were involved in almost all of the Muslim-American terrorism plots uncovered in 2012. Undercover FBI employees provided Sami Osmakac in Tampa and Adel Daoud in Chicago with inert car bombs. An FBI informant used a debit card to pay for plane tickets for Ralph Deleon, Arifeen Gojali, and Miguel Santana, who allegedly sought to join a terrorist organization in Afghanistan, and another FBI informant used a credit card to pay for plane tickets for Mohammad Abukhdair and Randy Wilson, who allegedly planned to join a terrorist organization in West Africa. All of these

individuals were arrested as they set off to use the tickets. FBI informants sold Raees Alam Qazi and Sheheryar Alam Qazi a laptop computer that they used to research explosives and religious justification for suicide missions. It is impossible to know whether any of these plots would have proceeded without the intervention of the FBI.

In one unusual case, a suspect asked an undercover employee of the FBI furnish spiritual guidance for a terrorist plot. The FBI's criminal complaint against Adel Daoud described the episode: "Daoud had been debating the topic of jihad with someone at his mosque. Someone overheard the conversation and reported it to his sheikh [religious leader], who called Daoud and [another individual, who soon backed out of the plot] to a meeting and 'yelled' at them. Daoud's father was informed of the incident too and told Daoud to stop talking about these topics. Finally, another sheikh became involved and tried to convince Daoud that engaging in violent jihad was wrong. Because of the arguments offered by this second sheikh, Daoud asked the UCE [undercover employee] if the UCE's sheikh had a similar background and could issue 'the real fatwah' justifying attacks on Americans." The following week, the FBI's undercover employee reported to Daoud that the FBI's fictional

sheikh "wants to make sure that he, the sheikh is not pressuring you, that I'm not pressuring you. 'Cuz you know in Islam you can't force anybody. ... This has to be in your heart, especially jihad. You know it's in your heart. It's something you believe in. It's something you either believe in or you don't." Daoud responded, "I'm convinced ... I mean rest assured I was raising jihad before I knew you or your sheikh."<sup>8</sup>

Three terrorism-related indictments of the past year are not included in this list of Muslim-American terrorism cases, based on criteria established by this project in 2010.<sup>9</sup> Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis, who allegedly plotted with an informant and an undercover agent to bomb the Federal Reserve Bank in New York City, is not counted in this report as a Muslim-American because he was indicted less than a year after arrival in the United States on a student visa from Bangladesh. A second individual not included in the list is Nafis's unnamed co-conspirator. According to the criminal complaint against Nafis, the co-conspirator dropped out of the plot and was arrested on non-terrorism-related charges.<sup>10</sup> The third individual not included on this list of Muslim-American terrorism suspects is Khalifah al-Akili of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who was arrested on weapons possession charges

**Figure 3. Muslim-American Domestic Terrorist Attacks Since 9/11**

Name	Year	Plot	Fatalities
Hesham Hadayet	2002	Shot Israeli airline personnel, Los Angeles, California	2 (plus himself)
Charles Bishop	2002	Flew plane into office tower, Tampa, Florida	0 (plus himself)
John Allen Muhammad	2002	"Beltway Snipers," metropolitan Washington, D.C. area	11
Lee Boyd Malvo	2002		
Mohammed Taheri-Azar	2006	Ran over students with rented SUV, Chapel Hill, North Carolina	0
Naveed Haq	2006	Shot workers at Jewish center, Seattle, Washington	1
Sulejmen Talovic	2007	Shot people at shopping center, Salt Lake City, Utah	5 (plus himself)
Tahmeed Ahmad	2007	Attacked military police at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida	0
Abdulahkim Muhammad	2009	Shooting at military recruitment center, Little Rock, Arkansas	1
Nidal Hasan	2009	Fort Hood shooting, Texas	13
Faisal Shahzad	2010	Times Square car-bomb, New York City	0
Yonathan Melaku	2011	Shot at military buildings in northern Virginia	0
Abdullatif Aldosary	2012	Allegedly detonated explosive at Social Security office in Arizona	0

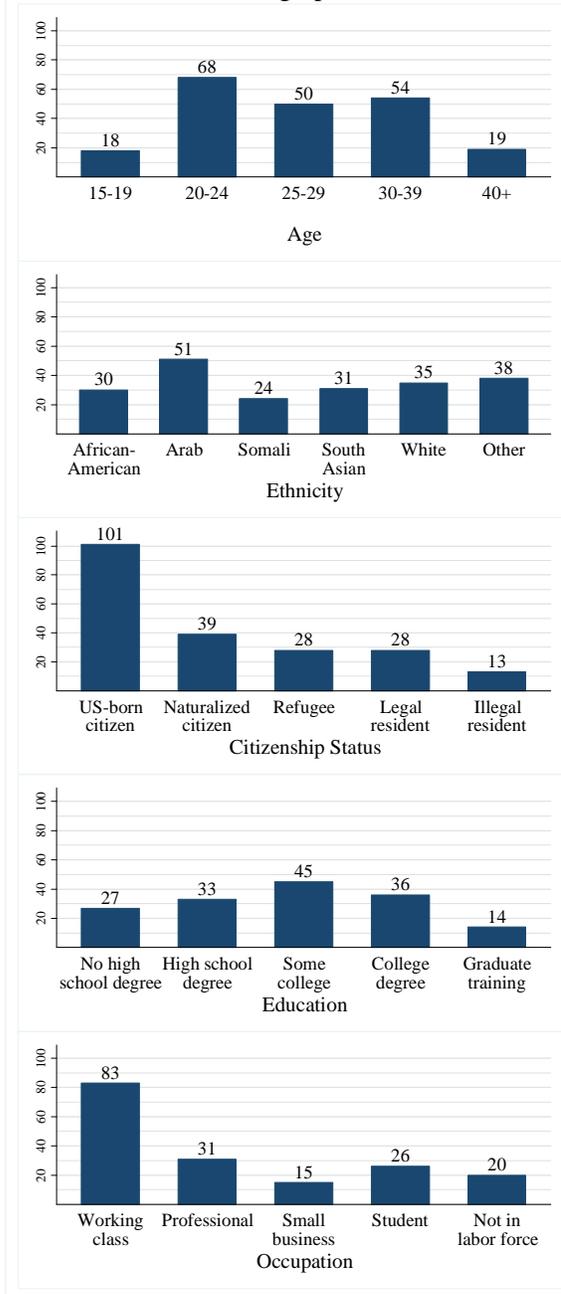
days after he posted his suspicions on-line that he was being set up for terrorism prosecution by FBI informants.<sup>11</sup> An FBI agent testified at his bail hearing that al-Akili told an informant he wanted to join insurgents in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Since al-Akili was not charged with a terrorism-related offense, the accuracy of this allegation will not be determined in court.

None of the 2012 suspects had been to terrorist training camps overseas. Since 9/11, 34 individuals (16 percent) attended camps overseas and returned to the U.S. – 37 percent of the cases in 2001-2005 and 8 percent of the cases since then.

As in previous years, the 2012 suspects fit no particular profile (Figure 4). 29 percent were age 30 and older, as compared with 35 percent of all cases since 9/11. The suspects came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds: four were Arab-American, two were South Asian, two were white converts to Islam, two were East Asian converts to Islam, and one each were Afghan, Kosovar, Uzbek, and a Latino convert. Thirty-six percent were converts, as compared with 35 percent of all cases since 9/11. Two suspects (14 percent) were ex-convicts, compared with 9 percent of all cases since 9/11. Two suspects (14 percent) had served in the U.S. military, compared with 9 percent of all cases since 9/11: Afghan-American Sohiel Omar Kabir, who served briefly as an interpreter a decade ago, and Henry Dewitt McFarland III, a veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder who made a bomb threat during a call to the National Veterans Crisis Hotline. No explosives were found in his apartment.

Sixty-four percent of the 2012 suspects were U.S. citizens, as compared with 67 percent of all cases since 9/11. Two suspects were refugees (Abdullatif Aldosary from Iraq and Jamshid Muhtarov from Uzbekistan), bringing the total of refugees involved in terrorism

Figure 4.  
Muslim-American Terrorism  
Suspects & Perpetrators Since 9/11  
Demographics



cases to 28 (13 percent) since 9/11. Of these, 21 were Somali-Americans who left the Minneapolis area to join the militant group al-Shabaab in 2007-2009. There have been no new cases involving Somali-Americans in the last two years.

There is no distinctive pattern in educational levels of the 209 Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators since 9/11. Among the 155 individuals whose educational attainment could be determined, 39 percent had a high school degree or less education, 29 percent had some college education, and 32 percent had a college degree or more education. This is a close approximation of educational attainment in the Muslim-American community at large, according to an extensive Gallup survey: 37 percent high school or less, 23 percent with some college education, and 40 percent with a college degree.<sup>13</sup> Only 7 (3 percent) had any training in a madrasa, a traditional Islamic seminary.

Of the 175 individuals whose occupation could be determined, 47 percent were employed in working-class jobs. Another 18 percent were employed as professionals, 9 percent ran small businesses, and 15 percent were students. Most of the rest were unemployed, plus several inmates and one homemaker.

A small proportion of the suspects – 13 of 209, or 6 percent -- had been diagnosed with

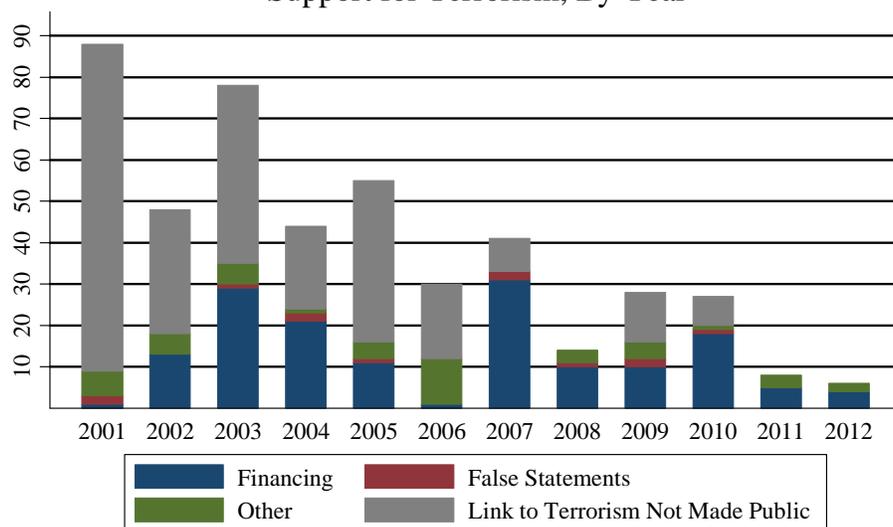
mental illness prior to their arrest or attack. Another 4 suspects were diagnosed by authorities after their arrest, but were later deemed mentally fit for trial.

Of the 164 individuals whose plots were disrupted, the initial tip to the authorities could be identified for 126. Of these, 34 percent were discovered by U.S. government investigations and 27 percent were turned in to authorities by members of Muslim-American communities. Fifteen percent were turned in by non-Muslim acquaintances, 14 percent were identified through foreign government investigations, and 10 percent came to light through public statements by the suspects, usually on-line.

### Support for Terrorism

The number of Muslim-Americans indicted for support of terrorism -- financing, false statements, and other connections with terrorist plots and organizations -- fell even more dramatically than terrorist plots, from 27 individuals in 2010 to 8 in 2011 and 6 in 2012, bringing the total to 467 since 9/11 (Figure 5).

Figure 5  
Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators Since 9/11  
Support for Terrorism, By Year



As detailed in last year's report,<sup>14</sup> this total includes 256 Muslim-Americans whose cases were classified as "terrorism-related" in a 2010 report by the U.S. Department of Justice, but who were not charged with terrorism-related offenses, and whose connection to terrorism was not made public.<sup>15</sup>

Two of the six indictments involved a plot to assassinate witnesses in the terrorism trial of Hysen Sherifi in Raleigh, North Carolina. Sherifi's brother Shkumbin Sherifi and a friend, Nevine Elsheikh, pled guilty later in the year to giving money to an undercover agent posing as an assistant to a hit-man. This case does not appear to constitute a terrorist plot, but it is included in this report as support for terrorism, since Hysen Sherifi's case involved

a terrorist plot to attack a military base in Virginia. Hysen Sherifi was indicted in 2009 and convicted in 2012.

Four indictments involved financial support for terrorism, on a relatively small scale as compared with previous years (Figure 6). Three of the suspects were brothers who allegedly laundered \$45,000 in drug money from a nightclub to a relative in Austin, Texas, to a relative in Lebanon who is associated with the militant organization Hizbullah. Another individual was indicted for giving \$300 to Jamshid Muhtarov, who was arrested in 2012 for planning to join an Uzbek terrorist organization. For the first time since 9/11, there were no cases involving terrorism financing above \$100,000.

**Figure 6**  
Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators Since 9/11  
Financing Cases, By Year

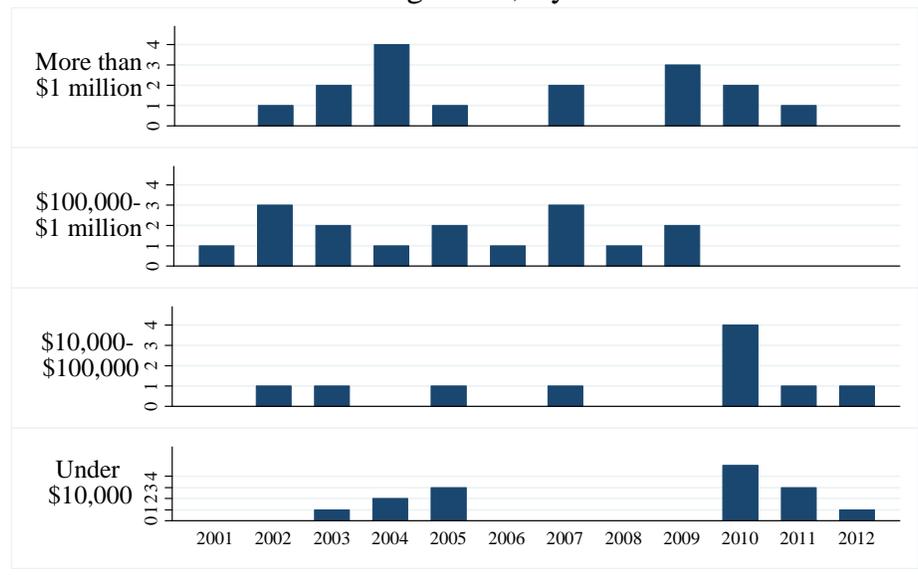
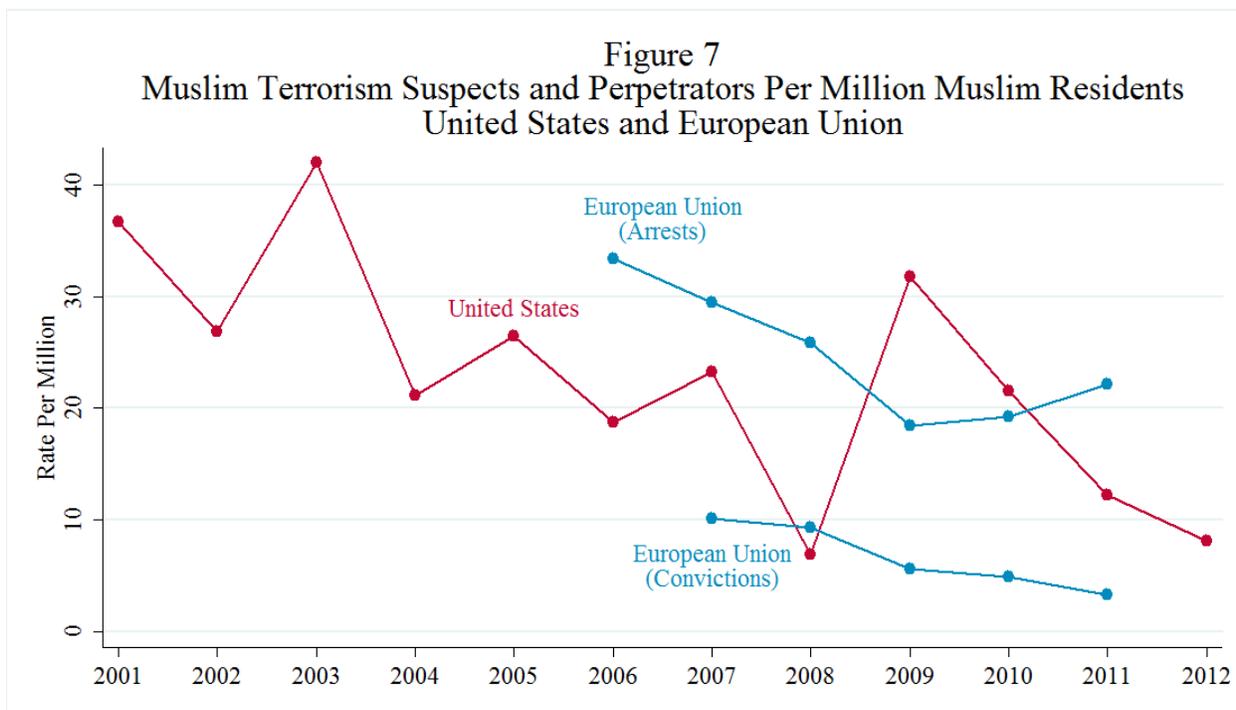


Figure 7  
Muslim Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators Per Million Muslim Residents  
United States and European Union



#### Comparison of the U.S. and Europe

The number of Muslim terrorism suspects and perpetrators has been declining in Europe as well as in the United States. According to Europol, the European law enforcement agency, the number of terrorism-related arrests of Muslims in Europe fell from more than 400 in 2006 to under 300 per year in 2009-2011, though the decline was partially reversed in 2010 and 2011.<sup>16</sup> The number of terrorism-related convictions dropped even more dramatically, from 137 in 2007 to 45 in 2011. There were no terrorist attacks by Muslims in Europe in 2011, compared with 1.2 attacks per year since 2006. These terrorism suspects “largely continue to exhibit poor skills and professional tradecraft,” Europol reported.

This downward trend is visible in Figure 7, which presents the rate of arrests and convictions per million Muslim residents in the European Union, along with the rate of Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators per million Muslim residents in the U.S.<sup>17</sup> In Europe, fewer than half of all

arrests resulted in conviction; we do not have comparable data for Muslim-American terrorism cases in the United States.

Comparing terrorism rates across countries is complicated because legal definitions and law-enforcement strategies differ. The U.S. figures combine the totals from Figures 1 and 5, counting individuals who engaged in domestic attacks, joined terrorist organizations abroad, or were involved in a terrorist plot or support of terrorism. The U.S. figures do not include arrestees who were later released or acquitted, while the European arrest figures do. The European data includes only individuals who were arrested or convicted in Europe; the U.S. figures also include individuals who were charged for engaging in terrorism abroad, or who died during an act of terrorism, even if they were not arrested or convicted in the U.S. The U.S. figures include only Muslim-Americans, while the European figures may include non-European Muslims. Europol reports annual totals, not individual

defendants, making detailed comparison difficult.

With these caveats in mind, however, it is notable that the per-capita rate of terrorism convictions of Muslims has been, on average, much lower in Europe than in the United States. This comparison runs counter to expectations that terrorism rates are the result of socioeconomic conditions, since Muslims in Europe are considerably poorer and less educated than the rest of the population, while in the United States, Muslims are better educated and only slightly lower-income than non-Muslims.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that large-scale socioeconomic forces may not be the driving factor in terrorist activity.

### **Conclusion**

Muslim-American terrorism dropped for the third year in a row, resulting in no injuries or fatalities in 2012. Fourteen Muslim-Americans were indicted for plotting terrorist violence, and another six were indicted for support of terrorism. Almost all of the plots became known to law enforcement at an early stage, before weapons or explosives were gathered.

What accounts for this decline in Muslim-American terrorism?

One possibility is that aggressive counter-terrorism policies may have deterred more and more potential terrorists. In this view, the number of Muslim-Americans who would like to engage in violence may be constant, or even rising, but the proportion acting on this impulse has decreased.

### **About the author:**

Charles Kurzman is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a specialist on Islamic movements. His latest book, *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2011. Jacob Filip assisted with the research for this report.

Another possibility is that government agencies may be disposing of potential terrorism cases more quietly than in the past. Perhaps some suspects who would have been indicted on terrorism-related charges in previous years are increasingly being charged with non-terrorism offenses, or are being identified at an earlier stage than previously and handled through mental health or other interventions without an indictment. In this view, the number of Muslim-Americans embarking on terrorist plots may be constant or rising, but the proportion that is publicly announced by law-enforcement agencies has decreased.

A further possibility is that fewer Muslim-Americans are drawn to terrorism than in previous years. In this view, the decline in terrorism cases reflects a shrinking of violent extremism among Muslim-Americans.

All of these possibilities might be true at the same time: perhaps more potential terrorists are being deterred, more are being thwarted without public knowledge of their cases, and more are drifting away from terrorism on their own.

Yet another possibility is that the number of Muslim-Americans engaging in terrorist plots is so low that year-to-year shifts are essentially random. In this view, the difference between 3 arrests in 2008, 50 arrests in 2009, and 14 arrests in 2012, out of an estimated population of more than 2 million Muslim-Americans, does not constitute a trend but statistically insignificant variation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Previous years' totals have been adjusted slightly as new information emerges on indictments and acquittals.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2011*, Table 1, "Crime in the United States by Volume and Rate per 100,000 Inhabitants, 1992-2011." The estimate for 2012 is extrapolated from the FBI's "Preliminary Semiannual Uniform Crime Report, January-June 2012."

<sup>3</sup> Arie Perliger, *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America's Violent Far-Right* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, U.S. Military Academy, 2013), p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Mother Jones*, July 20, 2012, updated December 15, 2012. Mass murders are defined in this publication as incidents involving four more fatalities, including incidents in Norcross, Georgia (February 22, 5 killed); Oakland, California (April 2, 7 killed); Seattle, Washington (May 29, 5 killed); Aurora, Colorado (July 20, 12 killed); Milwaukee, Wisconsin (August 5, 6 killed); Minneapolis, Minnesota (September 27, 5 killed); and Newtown, Connecticut (December 14, 26 killed).

<sup>5</sup> United States of America v. Abdullatif Ali Aldosary, Criminal Complaint, U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona, December 1, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> "Casa Grande Police Log," *Casa Grande Dispatch*, September 5, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> United States of America v. Amine El Khalifi, Criminal Complaint and Statement of Facts, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, February 17 and June 22, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> United States of America v. Adel Daoud, Criminal Complaint, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, September 15, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, and Ebrahim Moosa, "Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim-Americans," January 10, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> United States of America v. Quazi Mohammad Rezwanaul Ahsan Nafis, Complaint, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, October 17, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> *The Guardian*, March 26, 2012; *Washington Post*, April 13, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, March 17, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> The Muslim-West Facts Project, *Muslim-Americans: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC: Gallup, 2009), p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Kurzman, "Muslim-American Terrorism in the Decade Since 9/11," February 8, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Introduction to National Security Division Statistics on Unsealed International Terrorism and Terrorism-Related Convictions* (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Europol, *TE-SAT: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, 2007-2012*. This series does not report specific data on arrests related to "Islamist terrorism" (or the euphemism introduced in 2012, "religiously-inspired terrorism") in the United Kingdom; these figures (covering the period July 1 to June 30 of the following year) are drawn from the category labeled "international terrorism" in the *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 11/12*, September 13, 2012, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Population estimates are drawn from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population* (2009). Figure 7 uses static population estimates; the trend in arrests would be slightly steeper downwards if population growth were taken into account.

<sup>18</sup> The Muslim-West Facts Project, *Muslim-Americans*, pp. 23-24; Pew Research Center, *Global Attitudes Project: Spring 2006 15 Nation Survey* (dataset released in 2008).