

FROM CRIMINALS TO TERRORISTS AND BACK

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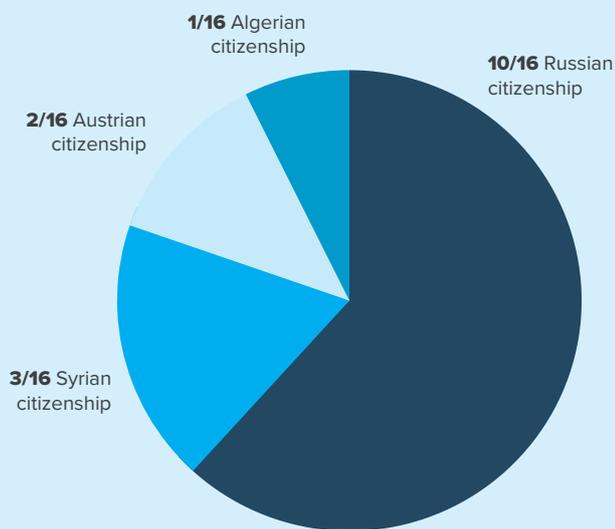


CASE LOAD: 16 „AUSTRIAN“ INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED FOR TERRORISM OFFENCES IN 2015

- The inclusion criterion for the cases in this report was the arrest in Austria in 2015 only. Out of this reason and as there are still few cases to be analyzed, the sample size reached 16 individuals and cannot be regarded representative. The findings are a mere illustration of our current state of analysis regarding this project.

NATIONALITY

- 2 out of 16 individuals had Austrian citizenship. 6 out of 16 had spent most of their life in Austria, including the two aforementioned.

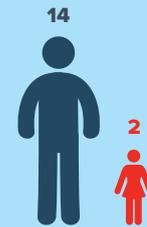


ORIGINS

- In our particular sample, we see a clear pattern of participation in terrorism against a background of previous experience with conflict in another place, namely Chechnya. This is a phenomenon associated with the particular instance of foreign fighting. It might appear counterintuitive to become involved in armed conflict after having barely survived a prior armed conflict. Nevertheless, we see many first-generation immigrants (having arrived as children though), and also second-generation individuals.

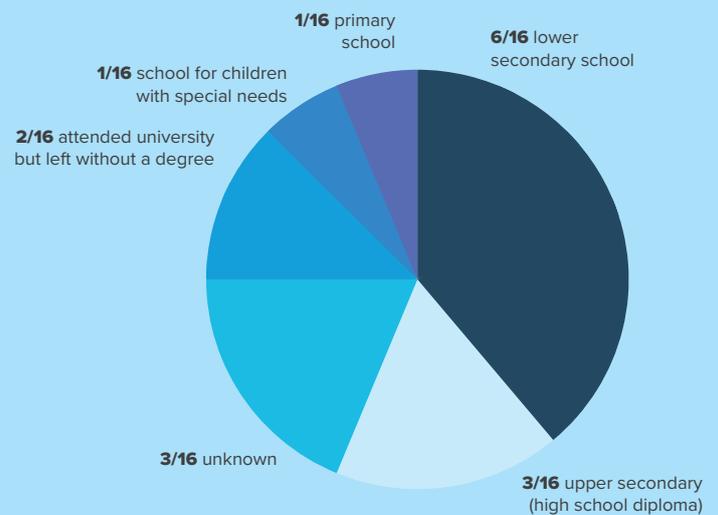
There is a strong sense of guilt for not helping their “brothers” in need or people experiencing a similar hardship as their family’s once did. These parallels are of course exploited in propaganda. With regard to a lack of opportunities, we can clearly distinguish the picture of an integration failure, not necessarily the lack of language skills, but rather a lack of education and; consequently, problems in the job market.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

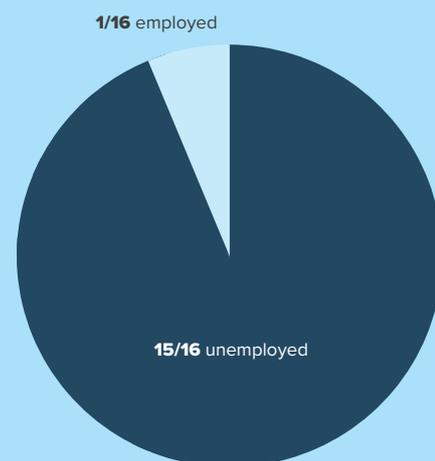


- Terrorism remains predominantly a male phenomenon. Furthermore, the females were radicalised and conducted their activities together with men, rather than independently.

Education



Employment

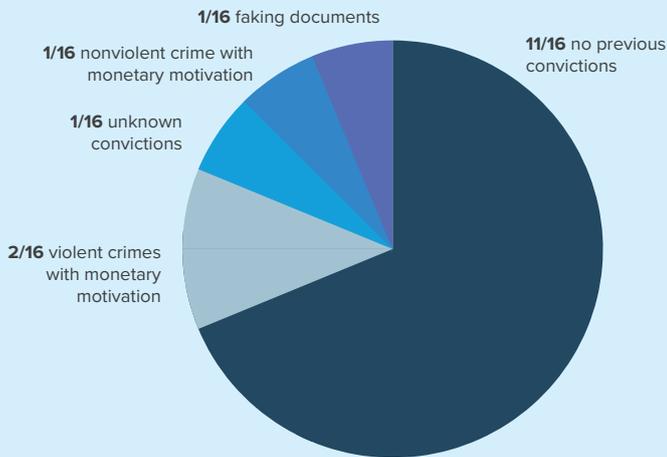


- We can observe here a clear trend of underachievement connected to involvement in terrorism; in Austria, perhaps more than in other European countries, we can see a pattern of individuals with little education and little opportunity on the job market opting for jihad. This trend can be connected with the particular situation outlined above, namely the almost exclusive focus on foreign fighting. For individuals with few options in terms of occupation, the perspective of engaging in a—in their view—meaningful activity and, in their case, one that promised material reward, appeared attractive.

CRIMINAL HISTORY

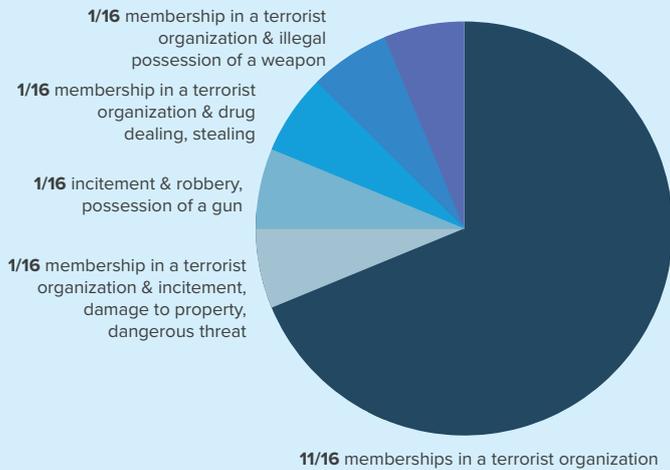
16 Austrian cases coded

Prior convictions in 5 cases, or 31%



- ▶ All the individuals were arrested for terrorism offences in 2015 and convicted by December 2018. None of them were killed, expelled, or remained fugitive. The majority of the convictions in Austria were in Vienna and Graz; jihadism is rather a city phenomenon.

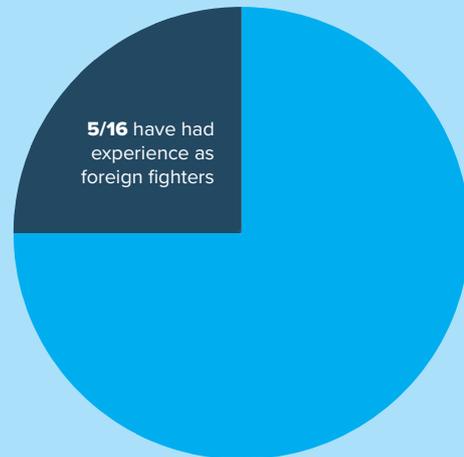
1/16 membership in a terrorist organization & theft



11/16 memberships in a terrorist organization

- ▶ All the cases so far are related to the Syria conflict although the terrorist organizations with which the individuals are associated with differ; and thus, are not only related to ISIS. The cases so far reveal a substantial foreign fighter phenomenon, including sympathizing with terrorist-type groups and related offences, rather than the classic homegrown terrorist idea. This might be specific to the year in question when there was still the ISIS hype. Generally, while there have been efforts to orchestrate events within Austria as well, the vast majority of terrorism-related activity stemming from Austria was focused on foreign countries and specifically on Syria.

FOREIGN FIGHTING



- ▶ Out of the 16 individuals, 5 clearly had experience as fighters, predominantly for ISIS and the Al Nusra Front. Three of them were Syrians (one cannot speak of foreign fighters) who used the migration crisis to come to Europe. They were, however, convicted for their acts committed in Syria.

RADICALISATION VARIABLES

There are several types of radicalisation stories in Austria, for example:



1. There is the conversion story of one individual, where we can see how the jihadist option offered various kinds of incentives such as belonging, family, and meaning in life, and how disillusionment set in shortly after his arrival in Syria.

2. There are also the typical crime-terror nexus and redemption stories of youth becoming involved in criminal gangs and then reorienting their worldview somewhat by following Salafi precepts, but still continuing with their criminal behaviour. (In some cases, the family histories matter, either as background to the perceived necessity to help or due to the involvement of their own family members in jihadism.)



3. Finally, there are also cases of marginal engagement with jihadi ideology and behaviour in which simply distributing videos was already counted as an offence.

At least within this sample there is no evidence of major financial efforts or support from abroad.

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