

Dylann Roof's radicalization is like U.S. recruits to Islamic State, says AG

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The social forces that have assisted in the Islamic State's radicalization of dozens of Americans are very similar to what drove Dylann Roof to embrace an extreme racist ideology before he allegedly launched an attack that left nine dead inside an iconic African American church, Attorney General Loretta Lynch said.

In an interview June 25 as she returned from a trip to Birmingham, Alabama, Lynch said the themes of social disconnection and an attraction to radical thought expressed online are common in the recent stream of cases involving recruitment of U.S. citizens by the Islamic State and other homegrown violent extremists.

It's "very similar to Roof," Lynch said. "People disaffected, people being radicalized online. Roof picked this racial hatred theme and that's what fueled him. Others picked the ISIL theme, and that's what fuels them."

The similarities, the attorney general said, also are contributing to a public debate over whether the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, should be characterized as "terrorism."

The federal government and state authorities are conducting investigations into the murders. Federal authorities are pursuing possible hate crime offenses, though Lynch said that all charging options would be considered, including domestic terrorism.

While the attorney general declined to comment on what, if any, charges would be filed, she has suggested that crimes prompted by hate reflect the earliest definitions of domestic terrorism in the U.S.

"Hate crimes are the original domestic terrorism," Lynch said, referring to the early hate-inspired criminal campaigns waged by the Klu Klux Klan and other white

supremacist groups.

South Carolina officials have said they expect state prosecutors to pursue the death penalty against Roof. But Lynch said no decisions have been made in the ongoing federal inquiry.

“We’ll look at the facts and the law and see where it takes us,” the attorney general said, adding that it was “too early” to determine what punishment would be sought if federal charges are brought.

Meanwhile, the comparisons drawn between Roof’s apparent radicalization and ISIL’s recruitment in the U.S. represent a convergence of law enforcement’s most serious concerns.

Last month, FBI director James Comey said there were “maybe thousands” of people across the country who are receiving recruitment overtures from the terrorist group or directives to attack the U.S.

Leveraging the power of Twitter and other social media platforms, Comey said the group targets “disturbed people” who could be vulnerable to launch attacks.

Roof’s link to white supremacist doctrine was brought into sharp relief last week with the emergence of a 2,000 word racist manifesto and photographs of Roof with a gun and a Confederate flag published on a website linked to the 21-year-old suspect.

The written document, which authorities believe is consistent with Roof’s views, indicates that he had “no choice” but to target African Americans whom he derides as “stupid and violent.”

Roof, authorities allege, carried those views along with a .45-caliber handgun into Charleston’s Emanuel AME Church, where he uttered racial epithets as he opened fire on a group engaged in Bible study.