

Despite claims by politicians, Muslim extremism is rare in the U.S.

Last year only 14 Muslim Americans were arrested for alleged involvement with violent extremism—and none of them entered the country illegally.

by [Yonat Shimron](#) in the [February 27, 2019](#) issue

Two reports on extremist attacks in the United States document a marked decline in the number of Muslim Americans associated with extremist acts.

Extremists in the United States killed 50 people in 2018, according to a new report from the Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism. Only one of those attacks was perpetrated by someone linked to a radical Islamist group: Corey Johnson, 17, reportedly told investigators he attacked his friends, killing one, "because of his Muslim faith." He had previously been tracked by law enforcement for fascination with Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.

The rest of the attacks were carried out by right-wing extremists of various ideologies, mostly white supremacists such as Robert Bowers, who killed 11 people at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life-Or L'Simcha synagogue in October.

Another report by Duke University's Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security examined Muslim American extremism in particular. Its findings suggest that U.S. law enforcement and counterterrorism experts pay a disproportionate amount of attention to rare violent incidents involving Islamists.

"My overall question is whether these scattered incidents constitute a threat to national security, which is how they're presented," said Charles Kurzman, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the author of the report from the Triangle Center.

Last year 14 Muslim Americans were arrested for alleged involvement with violent extremism, the lowest total in a decade. None of those arrests involved Muslims who

entered the country illegally, despite President Trump's claims that thousands of potential terrorists have attempted to cross the border illegally from Mexico. Experts say there has never been a case of a known terrorist sneaking into the country through open areas of the Southwest.

The Triangle Center's report concludes: "The wave of Muslim Americans associating themselves with the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State' appears to have dwindled."

One reason is that movements such as IS have lost battles and territory, and possibly their ability to recruit online, wrote David Schanzer, director of the Triangle Center.

"The incidence of violence by extremist Muslim Americans rises when foreign insurgent movements are successful," he wrote. "When these movements don't seem to be doing much themselves, their use of guilt or shame to compel violence by diaspora Muslims loses its bite."

The ADL report, on the other hand, finds a sharp increase in the number of right-wing motivated killings. Right-wing extremists killed 49 people in 2018, more than in any year since 1995, the year of Timothy McVeigh's bomb attack on the Oklahoma City federal building. No killings in 2018, it notes, were related to left-wing extremism.

Mark Pitcavage, senior research fellow with ADL's Center on Extremism, noted two right-wing groups that are gaining followers: the sovereign citizen movement, whose adherents don't believe in obeying any laws, rules, or regulations that they think are part of a government conspiracy; and Atomwaffen Division, a neo-Nazi group whose members tend to be young and violent. (*Atomwaffen* is German for "atomic weapon.") In Orange County, California, a self-proclaimed follower of Atomwaffen named Samuel Woodward faces trial for the murder of a former high school acquaintance who was Jewish and gay.

Despite those examples, right-wing extremists don't tend to belong to larger organizations, Pitcavage said.

"Most extremists do not belong to any group," he said. "They just adhere to the ideology." —Religion News Service

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