



Towards a Social Characterisation of Jihadist Terrorism in Spain: Implications for Domestic Security and Action Abroad

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Theme: Sociological profile of Jihadist terrorism in Spain and recommendations in regard to preventive antiterrorist measures.

Summary: This ARI analyses socio-demographic data relating to 188 persons who were imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, under suspicion of involvement in Jihadist terrorism, enabling us to map a social characterisation of this phenomenon: they are typically men born between 1966 and 1975, aged from 26 to 40 on arrest, basically North African immigrants and mostly in possession of legal immigration documentation; most had settled in Madrid, Barcelona and the Mediterranean coast; with a few exceptions, they are predominantly uneducated individuals with low standards of professional skills. Based on the above, a series of recommendations can be made to prevent Jihadist terrorism, in terms of both domestic security and action abroad.

Analysis: Since the end of the nineties, and most especially since 11 March 2004, more than 300 people have been arrested in Spain on suspicion of links with Jihadist terrorism, some 200 of whom were imprisoned by the Courts. Specifically, between 2001 and 2005, a total of 285 individuals were arrested in Spain on suspicion of involvement in this global violence, 66% of whom (188) were subsequently imprisoned. Around 130 were still in prison at the end of 2005.

The study of certain demographic and social characteristics typical of those imprisoned under suspicion of involvement with Jihadist networks allows us to build a tentative sociological profile of those linked (in Spain) to cells, groups and organisations associated or aligned with al-Qaeda.** Groups acquiring great significance in Spain, in this regard, were the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat and the so-called Moroccan Islamic Combat group, both with widespread networks in both their North African countries of origin and in various European States.

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Mapping the socio-demographic composition of this Jihadism in Spain and the socio-structural framework to which its mobilisation potential may be ascribed are key factors to better informing a debate in Spanish society on current international Salafist-inspired Jihadist terrorism and how to respond to it, and to updating the various governmental measures to prevent and contain this phenomenon as implemented in Spain during the current government's period of office.

Gender, Date of Birth and Age on Arrest

It is worth noting, first, that almost all of those thought to be involved in Jihadist terrorism and, therefore, holding exclusivist and belligerent views in regard to the religion of Islam, are men. Indeed it verges on the trivial to reflect this situation statistically, since no less than 99% of the individuals imprisoned in Spanish facilities as from 1997, on suspicion of belonging to or collaborating with fundamentalist Islamic terrorist networks, are men (Table 1).

Table 1. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Men	187	99.5
Women	1	0.5
Total	188	(100)

Source: the author.

This overwhelming presence of men among suspected international terrorists may be explained by the behavioural patterns of the Jihadist sub-culture and also the fact that women are a minority in Muslim communities in Spain, which comprise mostly first-generation immigrants. However, it is true that, in general terms, the obvious predominance of men is an invariable feature of the terrorist phenomenon as we have known it for more than a century, and the same applies to global Jihadism as a whole.

Furthermore, Jihadists in Spain would mainly be men born between the early sixties and the late seventies (Table 2). Specifically, up to 86% of all persons arrested and imprisoned in Spain on suspicion of belonging to terrorist networks linked to this ideology were born some time during these two decades.

More specifically, half of them belong to the cohort of those born between 1966 and 1975. In other words, they belong to the generations who reached adolescence, a critical period for political socialisation, at the height of the Iranian revolution and the onset of the Afghan conflict, and who reached this stage of their personal development while the Soviet army was being defeated by the *Mujahedin*. At this time, the idea was spreading among Muslims that the model of Western societies had failed even with the collapse of communism, the Balkan war broke out and the Wahhabi or generically Salafist currents were extending their influence over the Islamic world or Muslim communities elsewhere.

Table 2. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by date of birth

Birth date	Number	Percentage
Before 1956	4	2.1
From 1956 to 1960	13	6.9
From 1961 to 1965	32	17.0
From 1966 to 1970	54	28.8
From 1971 to 1975	41	21.8
From 1976 to 1980	35	18.6
From 1981 to 1985	9	4.8
Total	188	(100)

Source: the author.

When arrested, around seven of every ten individuals later imprisoned were aged between 26 and 40 (Table 3). This age band is basically similar to the one for members and supporters of other terrorist movements including the secular organisations better known in Western countries until, in an initial expression during the eighties and in its current phase from the nineties onwards, risks and threats to security from Jihadist sources emerged on the scene. As a hypothesis, the individual process of violent radicalisation may be estimated to have started within ten years before their arrest.

Table 3. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by age at time of arrest

Age at time of arrest	Number	Percentage
Up to 21 years	2	1.6
From 21 to 25 years	14	11.1
From 26 to 30 years	32	25.4
From 31 to 35 years	33	26.2
From 36 to 40 years	28	22.2
From 41 to 45 years	10	7.9
46 years and more	7	5.6
Total	126	(100)

Cases with no available data: 62

Source: the author.

Country of Origin, Geopolitical Region and Nationality

Only a small percentage of persons imprisoned in Spain on suspicion of being Jihadist terrorists are Spanish in origin and, based on legal documents and press reports, the number of radical converts is statistically negligible. It is thus especially relevant to determine where the others come from. It turns out that 37% are Moroccan in origin, slightly fewer are Algerian, around 12% are Syrian, around 6% Pakistani and the rest, less than 5%, from another eleven countries (Table 4).

In line with the revised 2005 municipal census, Algerian immigrants amount to scarcely 46,000 people, just one-tenth of the number of Moroccans, who number around 470,000. However, among Jihadist terrorism suspects imprisoned in Spain in the last five years, the percentage of Algerians is similar to the percentage of Moroccans. This situation is impossible to explain without referring to the background of Islamic terrorism in Algeria during the nineties and its gradual international expansion.

Syrians stood out among those arrested and imprisoned on suspicion of Jihadist terrorism in Spain immediately after the 9/11 attacks on Washington and New York, but their numbers later waned. Pakistanis appear somewhat more recently to have been involved in cells and groups linked in Spain to global terrorism. Although Pakistani immigration in Spain is a recent and relatively insignificant phenomenon in terms of numbers (just over 31,000 according to the revised 2005 census), it is worth noting that their country of origin is a focal point for global Jihadism networks.

Table 4. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by country of birth

Country of birth	Number	Percentage
Morocco	69	36.7
Algeria	67	35.6
Syria	22	11.7
Pakistan	12	6.4
Spain	8	4.3
Lebanon	2	1.1
Other	8	4.2
Total	188	(100)

Source: the author.

Overall, therefore, seven of every ten prisoners in Spanish institutions between 2001 and 2005 for Jihadist terrorism-related offences are from North Africa (Table 5). This is coherent with the geographical proximity of this geopolitical region, as well as the origins of the predominating population of Muslim immigrants in Spain. It also fits in with the aforementioned surplus of Islamic terrorism partially relocated to Spain, as well as other European societies, as a result of measures to repress it in Algeria, and its alignment with the global Jihad movement, a sequence of transnationalisation which may be applied to some terrorist elements of this persuasion originating in Morocco.

Two out of every ten of these individuals were born in the Middle East and Central Asia. Middle-Eastern terrorists and their sympathisers now have a smaller presence relative to the total numbers imprisoned in Spain for Jihadist terrorism, but those from Central Asia, who have appeared more recently, have boosted their presence in the last few years.

Table 5. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by geopolitical region of origin

Geopolitical region of origin	Number	Percentage
North Africa	142	75.5
Middle East and the Gulf	28	14.9
Central Asia	13	6.9
Western Europe	3	1.6
Other regions	2	1.1
Total	188	(100)

Source: the author.

The breakdown by country of birth of persons suspected of Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005 is comparable to the figures regarding nationality (Table 6), except in the case of Spanish citizens, who more than doubled their numbers and increased more than significantly in proportional terms, although without exceeding 10% of the total. This variation may well be due especially to the number of persons from Syria who acquired Spanish nationality during the nineties. In any event, Spaniards' involvement in Jihadist terrorism is still far from being hugely significant.

Table 6. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by nationality

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Moroccan	66	36.1
Algerian	66	36.1
Spanish	18	9.8
Pakistani	12	6.5
Syrian	11	6.0
Lebanese	2	1.1
Other	8	4.4
Total	183	(100)

Cases with no available data: 5

Source: the author.

The Territorial Breakdown of Jihadism

Except for a few who were extradited, the almost 190 individuals who are currently in prison in Spain for activities linked to Jihadist terrorism lived and were arrested in Spain. But they were not distributed homogeneously throughout the country. Just over one-third lived and were arrested in the Madrid Region, at least a quarter in Catalonia and close to 13%, respectively, in Andalusia and Valencian Community, with much smaller percentages, always less than 5%, in other regions (Table 7).

Table 7. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by autonomous region where they lived and were arrested

Autonomous region	Residence		Arrest	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Madrid	57	34.1	40	37.0
Catalonia	45	26.9	27	25.0
Andalusia	21	12.6	13	12.0
Valencia	21	12.6	14	13.0
Ceuta	5	3.0	5	4.6
Basque Country	5	3.0	3	2.8
Aragon	4	2.4	–	–
Navarre	3	1.8	–	–
Canary Islands	–	–	3	2.8
Other regions	6	3.6	3	2.8
Total	167	(100)	108	(100)
<i>Cases with no available data:</i>	21		80	

Source: the author.

Madrid, the main scenario of international terrorism in Spain, and Barcelona, are the provinces with most persons related to these Jihadist networks. They are followed by another four provinces located in evident geographical continuity from Barcelona along the Mediterranean coast. More than half of the persons imprisoned in Spain for links with Jihadist terrorism were arrested on the Mediterranean coast and most of them were legally resident in the region. It is of course the region closest to the Western end of the North African coast, it is a natural route to other European countries and it boasts a diversified economic structure in which some sectors, such as construction or agriculture, are especially propitious for absorbing immigrant labour (Table 8).

Table 8. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by province where they lived and were arrested

Province	Residence		Arrest	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Madrid	57	34.1	40	37.4
Barcelona	29	17.4	22	20.5
Gerona	11	6.6	6	5.6
Valencia	11	6.6	6	5.6
Alicante	9	5.4	7	6.5
Málaga	7	4.2	8	7.5
Ceuta	5	3.0	5	4.7
Almería	4	2.4	3	2.8
Granada	4	2.4	2	1.9
Lérida	3	1.8	–	–
Other regions	27	16.1	8	7.5
Total	167	(100)	107	(100)
<i>Cases with no available data:</i>	21		81	

Source: the author.

As one might assume, Madrid and Barcelona, again in this order, are the most frequent cities for residence and, above all, the top locations for the arrest of individuals linked to Jihadist terrorism in Spain (Table 9). Indeed, if we include the immediately surrounding area, metropolitan Madrid accounts for no less than 30% of the total, of both residents and arrests. Barcelona and its metropolitan area account for around 15%, varying slightly depending on whether the calculation refers to residence or arrests.

Except Alicante (in terms of residence) and Málaga and Valencia (in terms of arrests), no other Spanish town records rates of over 5% of the total of persons imprisoned for their links to global Jihadism. And, once again, these three cities, as with Barcelona, are located on the Mediterranean coast, from the Andalusian coast to Catalonia, in line with what we have already observed with respect to the provinces where the arrest of individuals linked to Jihadist terrorism attains noteworthy levels.

Table 9. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by town of residence and arrest

Location	Residence		Arrest	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Madrid	27	22.9	38	34.5
Barcelona	12	10.2	17	15.5
Alicante	6	5.1	4	3.6
Ceuta	5	4.2	5	4.5
Leganés	5	4.2	–	–
Badalona	4	3.4	–	–
Getafe	3	2.5	–	–
Valencia	3	2.5	6	5.5
Málaga	2	1.7	6	5.5
Banyoles	–	–	3	2.7
Other locations	51	43.3	31	28.2
Total	118	(100)	110	(100)
<i>Cases with no available data:</i>	70		78	

Source: the author.

Administrative Status, Education and Occupation

Almost nine out of ten persons imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005 for links with Jihadist terrorism are foreign. The rest are a few naturalised Spaniards and very few of Spanish origin. However, apart from the few who have been extradited, contrary to what most people think, 60% of those foreigners were legal residents in Spain, whereas the remaining 40% were not (Table 10). At least 20% of them, especially those without a residence permit, had already been in prison for other offences. This points to a connection between petty crime and Jihadist terrorism, and it suggests that prisons may be hotbeds of radicalization and recruitment.

Table 10. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by administrative status

Administrative status	Number	Percentage
Legally-resident foreigners	94	53.7
Illegally resident foreigners	59	33.7
Extradited foreigners	3	1.7
Naturalised citizens	11	6.3
Spanish-born	8	4.6
Total	175	(100)

Cases with no available data: 13

Source: the author.

With the due caution in regard to extracting information based on only one-quarter to one-third of the total of persons imprisoned in Spain in the last five years in connection with Jihadist terrorism, we might deduce that one out of every ten has no formal education, six were only educated to primary level and another three have secondary to higher education qualifications (Table 11).

Table 11. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by education level

Education level	Number	Percentage
No regulated education	4	7.4
Primary studies	32	59.3
Secondary studies	8	14.8
Higher education	10	18.5
Total	54	(100)

Cases with no available data: 134

Source: the author.

It is possible to estimate (with still greater caution, since the number of cases with available information is limited to just one-fifth of the total of these prisoners) that around 60% have no employment skills and if they did work it was as labourers in either the construction or agricultural sectors; 20% could work as skilled labourers or in services, 10% were professionals or had white-collar skills, and a similar percentage were self-employed in industry or services, usually retail (Table 12).

Table 12. Persons linked to Jihadist terrorism imprisoned in Spain between 2001 and 2005, by occupational category

Occupational category	Number	Percentage
Entrepreneurs with salaried personnel	1	2.5
Self-employed in industry and services	4	10.3
Professionals and administrative personnel	4	10.3
Services personnel	4	10.3
Skilled labourers	4	10.3
Unskilled labourers	16	41.0
Agricultural workers	6	15.3
Total	39	(100)

Cases with no available data: 149

Source: the author.

Conclusions: A pattern of characteristics emerges in regard to persons in some way suspected of involvement in Jihadist terrorism in Spain. They are predominantly men, born between 1966 and 1975, aged between 26 and 40 when arrested, basically North African immigrants and mostly without residence permits. They tend to settle in Madrid or Barcelona and other coastal locations. Despite some notable exceptions, they are generally individuals with low levels of education and generally low standards of professional skills.

This sociological profile provides certain guidelines for the prevention and containment of international terrorism in Spain, in addition to intergovernmental initiatives developed inside and outside Europe. First, material and human resources available for policing must be provided urgently, although not exclusively, for certain niches in the social structure in certain areas of Spain. It is also necessary to continue to strengthen antiterrorist cooperation with a series of Arab or Islamic countries, as is the case with Western nations who hold significant operating intelligence.

Secondly, since the Jihadists in Spain present themselves as Muslims and exercise proselytism, it is absolutely vital to promote further dialogue between government authorities and leaders of Islamic communities, who in turn must continue to be committed to delegitimising the terrorism which is practiced in the name of Islam. Just as it is important to develop effective social integration programmes which contribute to satisfying the expectations of North African immigrants with low education levels and scant professional qualifications, to lay the foundations for making their time in Spain more gratifying at a personal level, and to decrease the likelihood of their feeling individually frustrated and collectively slighted, and therefore turning to excluding Islamic subcultures and Jihadist movements.

Finally, the fact that most persons imprisoned in Spain for links with Jihadist terrorism come from North Africa and the Middle East suggests we define and coordinate public diplomacy that is focused, interministerial in dimension and includes the relevant players from civilian society. This public diplomacy must be part of a national strategy on international terrorism and be complementary to other collective programmes to which the Spanish government must either contribute or promote. Its purpose would be to convey not only to the political classes but also to public opinion in the Arab and Islamic world the meaning of the measures implemented to prevent this kind of terrorism in Spain, as well

as less well-known or widespread aspects of Spanish immigration policy, religious matters, international cooperation and foreign intervention.

A public policy of this kind has nothing to do with appeasement towards Jihadists, but is action aimed at offsetting processes of nurturing hate and terrorist recruitment, such as those observed in Spain among Arab or Central Asian minorities in which global Jihadists see potential for mobilising militants. This is, let us face it, of undeniable importance when the al-Qaeda ideologues, such as Ayman al Zawahiri himself, insist again and again that followers of Islam are systematically offended and discriminated against in Western countries such as Spain simply because of their religion. This is how they try to make their Jihadist propaganda into a reference framework for those Muslims who perhaps feel slighted, frustrated or alienated, and how they turn a few of them to terrorism.

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