

# Religion of Terror? Leaked ISIS Documents Reveal that 70% of Recruits Don't Even Know What Islam Is

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*Shredding the oft- and self-propagated notion the Islamic State is comprised of radical Muslims, the vast majority of the group's recruits have only superficial knowledge about the religion of Islam — some even purchased the book "Islam for Dummies" just prior to joining.*

An [analysis](#) of leaked Islamic State documents obtained by Syrian opposition site Zaman al-Wasl and undertaken by the Associated Press found 70 percent of recruits at the height of the group's push for members only possessed basic knowledge of Shariah, laws derived from verses in the Quran, and "hadith," the words and actions of the prophet Mohammed.

While 24 percent had attained an intermediate understanding of the religion, a mere 5 percent were considered advanced students of Islam.

That exact ignorance of the religion's true tenets likely helped inflate Islamic State numbers. As the outlet explains:

"At the height of the Islamic State's drive for foot soldiers in 2013 and 2014, typical recruits included the group of Frenchmen who went bar-hopping with their recruiter back home, the recent European convert who now hesitantly describes himself as gay, and two Britons who ordered 'The Koran for Dummies' and 'Islam for Dummies' from Amazon to prepare for jihad abroad. Their intake process complete, they were grouped in safe houses as a stream of imams came in to indoctrinate them, according to court testimony and interviews by the Associated Press."

Recruits like these, largely unaware of what violent extremism entails, can be facilely manipulated by actual radicals once family ties have been severed and means of communication with the world, like cellphones, have been taken away. Once in the clutches of the group, either full indoctrination into ISIL's perverted interpretation of Islam occurs, or the realization its terrorist ways go too far still leave a recruit without means of escaping easily.

"I realized that I was in the wrong place when they began to ask me questions on these forms like, 'when you die, who should we call?'" a 32-year-old European recruit, who thought he was joining a group to fight Pres. Bashar al-Assad and help Syrians, told the AP on the condition of anonymity.

Based on the analysis, it would seem religious ignorance — not thorough understanding of Shariah and Islam — makes the perfect background for potential Islamic State fighters.

For example, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel — the driver who plowed a truck through a crowd of people, killing 85, on Bastille Day in Nice — “was described by family and neighbors as indifferent to religion, volatile and prone to drinking sprees, with a bent for salsa dancing and a reported male lover,” the AP described.

In the 4,030 entry documents for ISIL’s foreign recruits for Syria from 2013 and 2014 examined by the AP were those of Karim and Foued Mohammad-Aggad — both shortly returned to France, and Foued eventually participated in the Paris attacks on the Bataclan nightclub in November that left 130 people dead.

“Islam was used [by the Islamic State] to trap me like a wolf,” Karim told the court prior to sentencing.

According to the documents analyzed by the Associated Press, Karim and Foued Mohammad-Aggad were both listed as having only “basic” knowledge of Sharia.

This proved to be true in court. Under questioning by the judge concerning his grasp of Shariah and Islam, Karim repeatedly intoned, “I don’t have the knowledge to answer the question.”

Undoubtedly, some who join or vow allegiance to the terrorist group, do so for misguided religious reasons. However, as Patrick Skinner — a former CIA case officer who specialized in extremist organizations in the Middle East — explained, most who join are “reaching for a sense of belonging, a sense of notoriety, a sense of excitement.”

Indeed, he added, “Religion is an afterthought.”

Skinner also told the AP the thousand-year-old seat of learning for Shariah and Quranic studies in Cairo, Al-Azhar, came under sharp criticism in the Islamic State’s recent issue of its English-language magazine, Dabiq, which said Al-Azhar is part of an “approach to subdue Muslims through appeasement” with the West.

Al-Azhar Islamic scholar, Mohammed Abdelfadel, said ISIL propaganda videos heralding fighters’ supposed martyrdom directly contradict ‘Islamic laws that forbid terrorism, the murder of non-combatants in war, the imposition of Islam on non-Muslims and other criminal activity,’ as the AP paraphrased.

Further still, those with the most thorough understanding of Shariah were far less inclined to want to ‘martyr’ themselves as suicide bombers, a study by the U.S. military’s Combating Terrorism Center found, quoted by the AP:

“If martyrdom is seen as the highest religious calling, then a reasonable expectation would be that the people with the most knowledge about Islamic law (Shariah) would desire to carry out these operations with greater frequency.”

But, despite ISIL’s claims of religious motivations for its attacks, “those with the most religious knowledge within the organization itself are the least likely to volunteer to be suicide bombers.”

Though these points have been argued and championed by a number of Muslims in an attempt to grow understanding of Islam and fight bigotry and prejudice, Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan urged Muslim scholars to demonstrate that what ISIL teaches isn’t Islam.

“The people who are doing this are not experiencing martyrdom, they are criminals. They are killing innocent people,” Ramadan implored. “Nothing in Islam, nothing ever can justify the killing of innocent people, never, ever.”

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