

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

On November 15, 2022, anti-terror police launched a raid against the Order of Hagal, a white supremacist organization, in Marigliano. Five men were arrested, with four being charged on the grounds of association for the purpose of terrorism or the subversion of the democratic order, and the fifth being arrested for disseminating propaganda and instigating crimes due to racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination. The men, who have promoted neo-Nazi and anti-vaccination narratives, were purportedly set to carry out violent attacks prior to the raid. A similar arrest was made on October 27, 2022, when Italian police arrested a man in Puglia on suspicion of inciting racial hatred and other terror-related offenses. Allegedly a lone wolf member of “The Base”—a U.S.-based white supremacist organization—the suspect has reportedly spread antisemitic, misogynist, and neo-Nazi content across far-right Telegram channels and online platforms and has even made death threats against Italian senator and Holocaust survivor, Liliana Sengre. (Sources: [Vice News](#), [Euro News](#))

On October 22, 2022, Giorgia Meloni was sworn in as Italy’s first woman prime minister. Meloni heads the Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d’Italia* or FdI), a right-wing populist party that took 26 percent of the vote in September’s national election. FdI is an offshoot of the now defunct neofascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) and heads an alliance with the far-right Lega Nord (“Northern League” or the League) and the center-right Forza Italia party of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The quick rise of the FdI followed the resignation of former Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi on July 20, 2022, as the League and Forza Italia refused to support him in a confidence vote, collapsing Draghi’s coalition majority. Following the national elections, the center-right coalition currently holds 44 percent of the vote. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [Guardian](#), [BBC News](#), [Guardian](#), [France 24](#), [France 24](#), [Washington Post](#), [Guardian](#), [New York Times](#))

Draghi’s resignation followed criticism of his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, of which Italy’s far right was able to use to their advantage. Draghi assumed the role of prime minister in February 2021 when parliament hoped he could steer Italy through the pandemic and related economic crisis. On October 9, 2021, protests in Rome against Italy’s COVID-19 “green pass” requirement—which requires all workers to show proof of vaccinations—turned violent. According to media sources, approximately 10,000 people took to the streets with groups attempting to break barricades and cross police lines as well as violently storm several buildings. The riots left at least two health workers and 38 police officers wounded. In February 2022, Draghi formed a broad coalition, which included the League. Disapproval of Draghi continued, however, leading to a July 14, 2022, confidence vote over Draghi’s handling of Italy’s economic problems. Though Draghi survived the vote, one of his main coalition partners, the 5-Star Movement, boycotted the vote, which led to the July 20 vote that led to the dissolution of Draghi’s coalition. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [Vice](#), [Reuters](#), [Euronews](#), [Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata](#), [Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata](#), [France 24](#), [Financial Times](#), [Reuters](#))

Overview

Between the 1960s and 1980s, far-left and far-right extremists mounted acts of terrorism in a period known as the Years of Lead (“Anni di piombo”). During that time, Italy also suffered attacks perpetrated by nationalist Palestinian groups such as the Abu Nidal Organization and Black September. Jihadist networks began to develop in Italy in the 1980s, and in the 1990s, Islamic extremists began using Italy as a transit point en route to conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa. In recent years, Italy has become increasingly vulnerable to acts of Islamic extremism waged by both domestic Islamists and international terrorist operatives. At the same time, far-right extremism has reemerged in Italy amid the influx of refugees and a struggling economy. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [ADST](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [BBC News](#), [Combating Terrorism Center](#), [Jamestown Foundation](#))

Italian authorities believe that the threat from an [ISIS](#)-inspired or -directed attack is high. In January 2017, police chief Franco Gabrielli told reporters that “we only hope [an ISIS attack] is going to be as restrained as possible, but we are under threat.” Indeed, ISIS regularly threatens Italy in its propaganda and attempts to radicalize Italian Muslims to carry out domestic attacks on its behalf. In August 2016, Italian authorities tightened security in Rome after ISIS released a 35-minute video repeatedly threatening to “conquer” the Italian capital. In addition, Italian citizens in Libya and Syria have been kidnapped and held hostage by ISIS and the [Nusra Front](#), respectively. (Sources: [MB Watch](#), [Middle East Forum](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Telegraph](#), [BBC News](#), [Guardian](#))

The Italian government has implemented legislation dedicated to preventing acts of terrorism, deporting terrorist suspects, and punishing terrorist actors. In February 2015, the government passed new legislation—known as Decree Law 7—as per its obligation under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178. The decree makes it illegal to partake in a conflict in a foreign territory in support of a terrorist organization. In addition, Italy’s government finances counter-extremism programs in prisons and throughout the country. In January 2017, the Ministry of the Interior announced it would be providing lessons to Italian imams on the Italian constitution and the importance of freedom of religion and speech. (Sources:

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

[Ministero degli Affari Esteri](#), [Normattiva](#), [Library of Congress](#), [Istituto Superiore di Studi Penitenziari](#), [La Repubblica](#), [Independent](#)

Internationally, Italy complies with all EU counterterrorism regulations and is a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. Italy also reportedly cooperates with Albania, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia on matters related to counterterrorism and plays a key role in the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. In addition, during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, Italy contributed 933 personnel and more than \$210 million to U.N. peacekeeping missions. (Sources: [Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#), [Council of Europe](#), [Global Coalition](#), [InfoBalkans](#), [Agence France-Presse](#), [European Affairs](#), [United Nations](#), [United Nations](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Far-Left Extremism and the Red Brigades

Far-left extremism spread throughout Italy in the late 1960s. Young communist militants—many of whom were students—carried out violent attacks in an attempt to weaken, and ultimately topple, Italy’s capitalist government. (Source: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#))

The Red Brigades (“Brigatte Rosse”) was Italy’s most prominent and well-organized far-left terrorist group. Active between 1970 and 1984, the group sought to replace Italy’s democratic, capitalist government with a proletariat-led dictatorship. Members of the Red Brigades carried out violent attacks against right-wing politicians, factories, law enforcement, and other symbols of capitalism and state repression. At its height, the Red Brigades had thousands of members and supporters, predominantly based in Northern Italy. (Sources: [Stanford Mapping Militant Organizations](#), [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#))

On April 28, 2021, French authorities arrested seven Italians, who were convicted of left-wing domestic terrorism crimes in the 1970s and 1980s, at their homes in France. The following day, two other Italian nationals surrendered to police and a 10th person was later arrested. All 10 of the Italian nationals, including several former members of the Red Brigades, fled Italy to avoid serving prison sentences that ranged from 14 years to life. For decades, French authorities had refused to act on these arrest warrants issued by Italy. However, recent negotiations between the governments of French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi resulted in an agreement in which Paris would act on the arrest warrants. A French court will subsequently decide on whether to extradite each individual to Italy, a legal process that could take two to three years. In May 2021, nine Italians, now aged between 63 and 77, appeared before a French court for an initial extradition hearing. The 10th person is being considered in a separate hearing. In September, the Paris court requested additional information from Rome about the Italians’ legal files and scheduled a new hearing for January 12, 2022. (Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Associated Press](#), [Associated Press](#))

In 2020, Italy reported 24 left-wing and anarchist-attributed terrorist attacks, up from 22 attacks in 2019 and eight in 2018. Italy reported 24 arrests for left-wing and anarchist terrorism in 2020, a decrease from 98 arrests in 2019. The drop of arrests in Italy contributed to a significant decrease of left-wing and anarchist arrests in EU member states overall, from 111 in 2019 to 52 in 2020, according to Europol. (Source: [Europol](#))

Far-Right Extremism

Since the late 1960s, far-right terrorists in Italy have sought to destabilize the government, hoping that political turmoil would lead to a neo-fascist coup. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, far-right terrorist groups such as New Order (“Ordine Nuovo”) and Black Order (“Ordine Nero”) carried out wide scale bombings targeting train stations, government buildings, banks, and anti-fascist rallies. More recently, in December 2014, members of a neo-fascist group calling themselves Avanguardia Ordinovista (“Vanguard Order”) were arrested by police after allegedly plotting to attack immigrants and left-leaning politicians. The group’s members had reportedly been inspired by the ideology of New Order. (Sources: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#), [Corriere Della Sera](#), [Associated Press](#))

Indeed, in recent years far-right political sentiment has grown in Italy due to a weakened economy and the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.

Indeed, in recent years far-right political sentiment has grown in Italy due to a weakened economy and the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Political parties such as Forza Nuova (“New Force”)—which subscribes to ultra-nationalist, conservative, and neo-fascist ideology—are capitalizing on these issues in order to attract supporters. Forza Nuova’s members have committed high-profile acts of violence, though Forza Nuova itself claims to be non-violent. The party has offices and followers in nearly every region of Italy. (Sources: [Forza Nuova](#), [Corriere della Sera](#))

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

The cornerstone of Forza Nuova's conservative ideology is best illustrated by its mantra, "Italians First!" Forza Nuova encourages ethnic Italian population growth and seeks to ban abortion and reinstate the Catholic Church as the official church of the Italian Republic. Forza Nuova also opposes gay marriage and adoption by gay couples. One of its most notorious campaigns, which denounced homosexuals in Italy, included billboards with slogans like "No more f-gs!" (Sources: [TG Regione](#), [Forza Nuova](#))

Forza Nuova lobbies to deport recent immigrants from Italy and bar further immigration into the country. The group makes speeches and places billboards around Italian cities, warning the population of what they claim to be the dangers of immigration, citing that immigrants will bring "scabies, meningitis, tuberculous and Ebola" into Italy. After Mada Kabobo, a Ghanaian immigrant to Italy, killed an Italian citizen with an ax in May 2013, Forza Nuova launched a campaign called "Immigration Kills." Billboards for the "Immigration Kills" campaign feature photos of immigrants who have been convicted of violent crimes, their photos splattered in blood. "Who will be next?" the posters and billboards read. (Sources: [Forza Nuova](#), [Huffington Post Italia](#), [BBC News](#))

Antisemitism is also a key component of Forza Nuova's ideology. In June 2008, Forza Nuova President Roberto Fiore spoke of his support for Iran's then-president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. When asked about his brief conversation with Ahmadinejad, Fiore said, "We at Forza Nuova are against any event of war wished for by the Jewish-American lobby against the Iranian population." Hours before his arrival in Rome, Ahmadinejad stated that Israel will "disappear off the geographical scene." Forza Nuova leader Roberto Fiore has also [publicly denounced](#) U.S. wars that, he claims, were started by "the people who put Christ on the cross." (Sources: [Corriere della Sera](#), [Reuters](#))

On September 9, 2019, Facebook and Instagram suspended the social media accounts of Forza Nuova and another neo-fascist group, Casapound. Facebook claimed that the groups and some of their members had violated the platform's policies against hate speech. Following the ban, Fiore said his group would respond with more street protests and recruitment. Individual members of Forza Nuova and Casapound brought a lawsuit against Facebook in the Court of First Instance in Rome, claiming the removal of the users' pages was illegal and a violation of their right to freedom of expression. On February 23, 2020, the court issued a decision that upheld the removals, claiming that hate speech was not protected by the right to freedom of expression and Facebook was entitled to take action based on its Terms of Service. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Columbia University](#))

In May 2021, as part of an investigation into white supremacist group Last Legion (*Ultima Legione*), Italian police raided 25 homes of suspected members across 18 regions. Authorities seized a trove of weapons and far-right propaganda. Law enforcement began investigating Last Legion in 2019 for allegedly spreading hate against specific racial, religious, and ethnic groups online. Members of the group reportedly promoted political violence and discrimination on various social media and messaging platforms, particularly targeting Muslims, Jews, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Reuters](#))

On October 9, 2021, protests in Rome against Italy's COVID-19 "green pass" requirement—which requires all workers to show proof of vaccinations—turned violent. According to media sources, approximately 10,000 people took to the streets with groups attempting to break barricades and cross police lines as well as violently storm several buildings. The riots left at least two health workers and 38 police officers wounded. Police arrested 12 people in connection with the violent protests, including two leaders of far-right group Forza Nuova, Roberto Fiore and Giuliano Castellino. On October 11, members of Italy's ruling coalition in parliament put forth a motion calling on Prime Minister Mario Draghi's administration to dissolve Forza Nuova and all neo-fascist political movements. Forza Nuova's website was also forced offline by a court order following claims that the group used the site to encourage criminal activity and incite violence. On October 13, a resident in the Marche region town of Jesi discovered a Molotov cocktail outside the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL)'s local office. The incendiary device blackened a wall next to the office's gate but did not explode. The CGIL headquarters in Rome had been ransacked by a mob led by Forza Nuova during the October 9 protests. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Vice](#), [Reuters](#), [Euronews](#), [Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata](#), [Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata](#))

Lega Nord ("Northern League," a.k.a. Lega or the League) is a far-right populist Italian political party that rose to prominence in 2018 on policies of anti-immigration and "Italians First." Umberto Bossi founded the League in the 1990s to represent northern Italians. He campaigned on the idea of gaining independence for a northern Italian region he called Padania. In the latter half of the 20th century, the economic gap widened substantially between the agrarian south of Italy and the industrialized north, and consequently, many southern Italians immigrated to the north. Bossi began to blame southern Italians for northern Italy's economic hardships, regularly demeaning them as lazy parasites living off of hardworking northerners. Salvini took over the party's leadership from Bossi in 2013 and expanded the party's reach beyond Italy's northern region. Salvini views Italian culture and way of life as "under attack" and "at risk" due to mass immigration. (Sources: [Economist](#), [New York Times](#), [Politico](#), [Reuters](#))

In May 2015 regional elections, the League received 20 percent of the vote in Tuscany. Salvini called the results "proof that the days are over when we were labeled as a crazy far-right party." Ahead of Italy's March 2018 elections, the League promised to deport 400,000 immigrants and instruct asylum courts to disregard all circumstances of an applicant's journey to Italy. The League received 17 percent of the vote in March 2018

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

parliamentary elections, and Salvini became Italy's interior minister. Salvini attempted to collapse the Italian government in August 2019 by pulling his party from the ruling coalition in a bid to become prime minister himself in new elections. Instead, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte pulled together a new coalition without the League. (Sources: [Politico](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [Reuters](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Reuters](#))

In February 2022, Prime Minister Mario Draghi formed a broad coalition government, which also included the League. While the League joined Draghi's coalition government in February 2022, Draghi supported pro-Europe and globalist economic policies that left many Eurosceptic League supporters searching for an alternative to the League. They began to support Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia* or FdI) a right-wing populist party considered the ideological descendant of the neofascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), which was formed in 1946 by members of Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party and shut down in 1995. FdI emerged in December 2012 as an offshoot of National Fascist Party successor National Alliance. FdI won only 4.4 percent of the vote in Italy's December 2018 parliamentary elections, but it has won multiple local elections in Italy's north, which has traditionally been the League's primary base of support. FdI leader Giorgia Meloni promotes an "Italians first" mantra, focusing on supporting Italian families while also blaming migrants for Italy's economic and societal woes. Meloni has called for the creation of free nurseries and a monthly family stipend, as well as a naval blockade of Italy to prevent future immigration. Meloni is a self-declared conservative feminist. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Financial Times](#), [Guardian](#), [France 24](#), [Haaretz](#))

On July 20, 2022, Draghi resigned after the League and Forza Italia refused to support him in a confidence vote. Draghi remained in his role as a caretaker prime minister until Italy held new parliamentary elections on September 25. FdI won 44 percent of the vote, becoming Italy's largest party. Brothers of Italy heads an alliance with the League and the Forza Italia party of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who returned to parliament after the elections. The League received only 9 percent of the vote. Senior League members called for the resignation of League leader Matteo Salvini after its poor showing in the 2022 elections, though he has refused to resign. On October 22, 2022, Meloni was sworn in as Italy's first woman prime minister. (Sources: [Guardian](#), [Haaretz](#), [France 24](#), [Washington Post](#), [Guardian](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [The Brussels Times](#))

Islamic Extremism

Jihadist networks have operated within Italy since the 1980s. In the 1990s, jihadists began using the country as a transit point en route to conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa. Up until the early 2000s, jihadists reportedly refrained from directly targeting Italy in order to avoid a crackdown by authorities. That changed following Italy's participation in the U.S.-led interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). During the 2000s, Italy experienced a number of lone-wolf terrorist plots perpetrated by Islamic extremists. More recently, since the start of the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS, Italian authorities have worked to combat the growing threat from ISIS- and al-Qaeda-linked cells inside Italy and internationally. Nevertheless, Italy has not experienced a jihadist-related attack comparable in size to al-Qaeda's 2003 Madrid attacks or 2007 London bombings, nor ISIS's November 2015 Paris attacks or March 2016 Brussels bombings. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#), [Jamestown Foundation](#))

However, in the run-up to the Christmas holidays in November and December 2017, the pro-ISIS group Wafa Media Foundation released propaganda posters threatening attacks on the Vatican City, the papal enclave within Rome, as well as Pope Francis himself, the head of the Catholic Church. Earlier in the year, head of Italian Police Franco Gabrielli warned of a domestic ISIS attack, telling reporters in January that "we only hope it is going to be as restrained as possible, but we are under threat." ISIS views Italy's capital city, Rome, as an important symbolic target given its status as home to the Catholic Church and its spiritual leader. ISIS's then-spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani declared, "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women," and in ISIS propaganda, the "army of Rome" represents modern Western forces who are destined to be finally annihilated at Dabiq, near Aleppo in Syria. (Sources: [Fox News](#), [International Business Times](#), [Guardian](#), [Local](#), [Il Giornale](#), [Al Arabiya](#), [Atlantic](#))

On January 31, 2018, Interpol released a list of 50 Tunisian ISIS members it believed had entered Italy by boat between July and October 2017. On March 28, 2018, Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti told newspapers that "the security threat to Italy from supporters of [the] Islamic State was higher than ever." (Sources: [Guardian](#), [Reuters](#))

As of May 24, 2017, Italian police were searching for 36-year-old Fouad Khaskhoussi, born in Tunisia and carrying German identity papers, with suspected ties to terrorism. Authorities believed he traveled by car into Italy with another man, Wassim Ben Hassem, 31. Khaskhoussi was able to enter Italian despite being included in an Italian database of terrorism suspects. (Source: [New York Times](#))

Between March 15 and March 29, 2018, Italian police carried out four counterterrorism operations resulting in the arrest of at least eight men accused of supporting or planning ISIS-inspired terror attacks in the country. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#))

The majority of Islamist extremist activity inside Italy is believed to be concentrated in the north, in particular the Lombardy region, which is home to 26.5 percent of Italian Muslims. According to the Italian Military Center of Strategic Studies, the city of Milan—located in the Lombardy

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

region—is “the epicenter of radical Islam in Italy” due to its high rate of terrorism-related arrests. Between 2001 and 2011, more than half of all terrorism-related arrests in Italy took place in Milan. (Source: [Dossier Sulla Comunità Islamica Italiana: Indice di Radicalizzazione](#))

In 2020, Italy reported 10 jihadist arrests, down from 40 in 2018. Italy reported no jihadist attacks, either foiled, failed, or completed, for the same year. (Source: [Europol](#))

Rawti Shax

Rawti Shax or Didi New was a Europe-based splinter group of Ansar al-Islam, a U.N. designated terrorist organization that is also affiliated with al-Qaeda. Rawti Shax, founded in 2009 by Mullah Krekar, whose real name is Najmaddin Faraj, primarily sought to overthrow the Iraqi Kurdish government and erect a caliphate in Iraq to be governed by sharia law. The group had various cells in operation across Europe, with members often communicating through the Internet. Along with Italy, Rawti Shax has cells in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Finland, Greece, Sweden, Norway, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. As the group developed, their operation expanded to include providing logistical and financial support to recruiting terrorist fighters to be sent to Syria and Iraq. Upon receiving training in Iraq and Syria, it was suspected these fighters would go on to Iraqi Kurdistan to incite future conflict. Additionally, Krekar allegedly set up an online “secret committee,” to plan various attacks in Norway and other undisclosed European countries. (Sources: [European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation](#), [Center for International Security and Cooperation](#), [Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium](#))

On November 12, 2015, 16 suspected leaders and several members of Rawti Shax, were arrested in a joint counterterror operation across Italy, the U.K., Norway, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland. The operation was launched by the Italian ROS Carabinieri, under the direction of the Public Prosecution Office in Rome. The group was accused of using an online network to radicalize fighters to send to the Middle East. It was also suspected that members plotted to target Norwegian and British diplomats and kidnap other envoys in an attempt to free Krekar who has been imprisoned in Norway since early 2012. Krekar, who fled to Norway as a refugee from northern Iraq in 1991, is a U.S.- and U.N.-designated terrorist. It has been reported that Rawti Shax is now defunct, but there have not been reports detailing when the group officially disbanded. (Sources: [European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation](#), [NBC News](#))

Major Arrests on Terror Charges

Italian authorities—experienced in combating organized crime and radical far-right and far-left movements—have also investigated Islamic terrorist suspects inside the country. Italian police have made several large-scale terror-related arrests in which they detained multiple members of clandestine cells or networks. In April 2015, for example, police arrested nine al-Qaeda-linked individuals suspected of plotting to attack the Vatican and other sites in Italy. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Wall Street Journal](#))

Authorities have also detained ISIS sympathizers and would-be lone wolves, including Lassa Briki and Muhammad Waqas in Brescia in July 2015. The men had planned to carry out domestic attacks against military institutions and civilians, before attempting to travel to Syria to fight with ISIS. Briki is believed to have had online contact with Syrian-based ISIS fighters. The men had also been active on social media, reportedly tweeting: “We are already in Rome...it won’t be long, our knives are sharpened and ready for the slaughter.” Also in July 2015, Italian and Albanian authorities jointly arrested five people—three Italians and two Albanians—on charges including planning to travel abroad to commit acts of terrorism. Among the arrested were family members of Maria Giulia Sergio, an Italian national and convert to Islam who traveled to Syria in September 2014 to join ISIS. Maria Giulia Sergio had reportedly convinced her family members to join her in Syria. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Wall Street Journal](#), [La Repubblica](#), [Huffington Post](#), [International Business Times](#), [Il Sole](#), [Wall Street Journal](#))

On November 12, 2015, suspected leaders and several members of Rawti Shax, an Iraqi Kurdish extremist group seeking to overthrow the Iraqi government, were arrested in a joint counterterror operation across Italy, the U.K., Norway, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland. The operation was launched by the Italian ROS Carabinieri, under the direction of the Public Prosecution Office in Rome. The group was accused of using an online network to radicalize fighters to send to the Middle East. It was also suspected that members plotted to target Norwegian and British diplomats and kidnap other envoys in an attempt to free the group’s founder Mullah Krekar, who has been imprisoned in Norway since early 2012. The Europe-wide sweep raided over 26 properties with officials seizing electronic devices and documents. Some of the suspects were not located as it was suspected that they had already traveled to the Middle East. (Sources: [European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation](#), [NBC News](#))

On March 26, 2020, Krekar was extradited to Italy from Norway. Norway’s government approved the extradition of the fundamentalist Islamic preacher on February 12, 2020. On July 18, 2019, an Italian court sentenced Krekar to 12 years in prison for leading the now defunct Rawti Shax network. The extremist Kurdish movement allegedly had links to ISIS and intended to carry out attacks in Western countries. (Sources: [Euro News](#),

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

[BBC News](#), [The Local](#), [Yahoo News](#), [Center for International Security and Cooperation](#))

On April 17, 2019, Italian police arrested two men—one Italian and one Moroccan—who intended to carry out terrorist attacks in the name of ISIS. Police were alerted to the two men after they posted images and videos of ISIS across social media. The suspects also downloaded instructions on how to carry out bombings and suicide attacks. (Source: [The Local](#))

On November 28, 2018, Italian police arrested Amin Alhaj Ahmad, a 38-year-old Lebanese man who was allegedly planning to poison the water supply of the Italian island of Sardinia. Italian authorities had been monitoring Ahmad since September 2018, when his cousin—who was detained in Lebanon after attempting to poison a water tank used by the Lebanese army—revealed information about Ahmad’s plans during an interrogation. A warrant for Ahmad’s arrest was issued after investigators discovered that Ahmad had researched and attempted to purchase ricin and anthrax on his smartphone. Police have reported that there is no evidence to suggest that Ahmad had successfully obtained the poison. However, Federico Cafiero De Raho, Italy’s chief anti-terrorism prosecutor, stated “he must have been close to doing something,” after noting that Ahmad had withdrawn all the money from his bank accounts. Ahmad, who is believed to be linked to ISIS, was arrested outside of his house in the Sardinian town of Macomer, where he lived with his wife and three children. (Sources: [Jerusalem Post](#), [Independent](#))

On March 30, 2017, Venetian police arrested three suspected ISIS supporters in early morning raids. The men—Italian residents from Kosovo—had reportedly planned to blow up the city’s Rialto Bridge. At least one of the suspects is believed to have returned to Italy from Syria in 2016. The suspects reportedly underwent physical training within Italy and watched ISIS videos instructing lone wolves to carry out knife attacks. During a telephone conversation that was wire-tapped by Italian police, the men celebrated the March 22, 2017 car-ramming- and stabbing-attack in London perpetrated by [Khalid Masood](#). The men had also expressed eagerness to die for jihad with one stating in another wire-tapped conversation: “I can’t wait to take an oath to Allah. If they let me take the oath, I’m ready to die.” (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Telegraph](#))

On December 19, 2016, a Milan court convicted in absentia Maria Giulia “Fatima” Sergio, an Italian who left for Syria to join ISIS in 2014, and sentenced her to nine years in prison for international terrorism. The court also sentenced a Canadian, Bushra Haik, who grew up in Bologna, to nine years in prison for recruiting and indoctrinating Sergio. The convictions were among the first in Italy under a 2015 counterterrorism law regarding foreign terrorist fighters in a combat zone abroad. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

On August 13, 2016, Italy expelled Hosni Hachemi Ben Hassen, a Tunisian imam of the Andria mosque, who was arrested in April 2013 on suspicion of belonging to an Islamic extremist cell. The expulsion occurred after an Italian court cleared Hassen of involvement in international terrorism, while upholding a conviction on hate crime charges for which Hassen had been sentenced to five years and three months in prison. Hassen had been accused, by Italian authorities of collecting bomb-making instructions, training in the use of firearms, and trying to recruit and indoctrinate foreign fighters to travel abroad between 2008 and 2010. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Politico](#))

In April 2016, police in northern Italy arrested four suspected ISIS sympathizers in what authorities called a “vast counterterrorism operation.” The suspects were allegedly plotting to carry out terrorist attacks against the Vatican and the Israeli embassy in Rome, and were believed to have received direct orders from Syria- or Iraq-based ISIS operatives via the messaging service WhatsApp. The following month, police arrested three members of a Puglia-based ISIS-linked terror cell who had allegedly been plotting to carry out attacks in Rome and London. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Newsweek](#), [La Repubblica](#), [Reuters](#))

Italian Mosques and Places of Worship

There are only eight official, registered mosques in Italy, forcing the vast majority of Italian Muslims to worship at makeshift, unregistered mosques or Islamic centers. By 2011, Italian authorities had identified more than 100 unregistered mosques that authorities described as propagating “radical ideas.” According to authorities, 11 of those mosques had been directly or indirectly involved in terror activity. In 2007, for example, authorities discovered that the imam at the Ponte Felcino mosque in Perugia had schooled children and adolescents in various forms of combat, including how to use different types of weaponry. (Sources: [La Repubblica](#), [Dossier Sulla Comunità Islamica Italiana: Indice di Radicalizzazione](#), [Independent](#))

In late 2015, Italian Interior Minister Angelino Alfano announced that the government would work to “close the clandestine and unregulated spots, not to hamper [Islam], but so that it [would] be practiced in a more orderly manner.” The announcement came one week after Alfano said that “garage mosques” are “where the inspiration to fundamentalism is born.” (Source: [Daily Beast](#))

Domestic Islamic Extremist Groups and the Muslim Brotherhood

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

Several Islamic extremist groups are believed to operate within Italy. Among these are the Union of Islamic Organizations and Communities (UCOII), the Islamic Alliance of Italy, and Sharia4Italy.

On June 2, 2020, Italy ratified an agreement with Qatar that will allow the country to fund organizations and build mosques throughout Italy. Rome has raised concerns that Qatar's increasing influence will empower its ally, the Muslim Brotherhood, to also expand its operations throughout Italy. Most of Qatar's funding has been directed towards the UCOII, which is suspected as acting as an umbrella for Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated mosques in the country. Members of Italy's parliament have expressed concerns that Qatar will disseminate Islamic fundamentalist propaganda, and that the Muslim Brotherhood would sponsor organizations and programs that would possibly lead to radicalization and terrorism among Italy's population. (Source: [The National](#))

The Islamic Alliance of Italy is one of 165 associations that make up the UCOII.

The UCOII is the largest Islamic organization in Italy. It is a member of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), an umbrella group reportedly convening Muslim Brotherhood-tied organizations throughout Europe. Founded in 1990, the UCOII exercises a near monopoly over Italian mosques. Its members have endorsed suicide bombings and expressed antisemitic and homophobic sentiments. Founding UCOII member Roberto Hamza Piccardo downplayed the act of beheading, saying that "In war, everyone uses the means that they have." Piccardo also answered "it depends," when asked if suicide bombings are a legitimate form of resistance. (Sources: [The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West](#), [Hudson Institute](#), [Middle East Forum](#), [MB Daily Watch](#), [Panorama](#))

The Islamic Alliance of Italy is one of 165 associations that make up the UCOII. It was officially designated as a terrorist organization by the United Arab Emirates in November 2014. According to former Italian Minister of Community Policy Andrea Rochi, the Islamic Alliance of Italy "[holds] ambiguous positions on terrorism at the national and local level." (Sources: [Gatestone Institute](#), [Il Tempo](#))

Sharia4Italy is the self-styled Italian chapter of the global Sharia4 network, a radical Salafist network that aims to implement sharia in the countries in which it operates. Sharia4Italy's founder, Italian citizen and U.S.-designated terrorist Anas El Abboubi, previously operated a blog called "Sharia4Italy" on which he propagated extremist ideology and called for an Islamic caliphate in Italy. In addition, according to Italian police, Abboubi allegedly plotted to carry out a domestic attack and had utilized Google Maps to search for potential targets. He was arrested in June 2013, but was released after two weeks and ultimately traveled to Syria to fight alongside ISIS in September 2013. It is unclear whether Sharia4Italy has evolved beyond Abboubi's activities into an organization as prominent as Sharia4Belgium, the Belgian Sharia4 chapter whose members have allegedly radicalized, recruited, and facilitated the travel of a number of Belgian foreign fighters to Syria. (Sources: [Corriere Della Sella](#), [Il Fatto Quotidiano](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Sharia4Italy](#))

Foreign Fighters

By August 2016, there were approximately 100 individuals "linked to Italy" who had traveled to fight alongside extremist groups in Syria and Iraq, according to estimates by the International Centre for Counterterrorism in The Hague. Only a minority of these 100 are believed to hold Italian passports. (Source: [ICCT](#))

One of the most well-known examples of an Italian foreign fighter is that of Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo, an Italian citizen and convert to Islam. He traveled to Syria in 2012 and died there in June 2013 while fighting alongside a Chechen-led brigade with ties to ISIS. Another well-known Italian foreign fighter, convert to Islam Maria Giulia Sergio, left Italy in September 2014 and traveled to Syria to join ISIS. Sergio then reportedly persuaded her father, mother, and sister to convert to Islam, convincing them to join her in Syria. Police arrested her family members in July 2015 before they were able to travel to ISIS-controlled territory. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#), [Independent](#), [Corriere Della Sera](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) has over 900 incidents of terrorism in Italy documented between 1970 and 2017, the majority of which took place before 1980 and were perpetrated by far-right, far-left, and nationalist Palestinian organizations. More recently, Italy has seen a rise in Islamic extremism. Though the country has not experienced an attack similar in scale to those in France and Belgium, in March 2018, Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti told newspapers that "the security threat to Italy from supporters of [the] Islamic State was higher than ever." (Sources: [Global Terrorism Database](#), [L'Occidentale](#), [Reuters](#))

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

According to Italy's Interior Ministry, between March 2016 and March 2017, counterterrorism authorities stopped and questioned 160,593 persons, including 34,000 at airports, and arrested 550 suspected terrorists, 38 of whom have been sentenced on terrorism charges. (Source: [Guardian](#))

July 2015 ISIS-Linked Kidnappings in Libya

On July 19, 2015, four Italian construction workers—Gino Pollicardo, Filippo Calcagno, Fausto Piano, and Salvatore Failla—were abducted in Sebrata, Libya. Then-Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni told the media that it was difficult to determine which group had carried out the kidnapping, while Ahmed Safar, the Libyan ambassador to Italy, said that he suspected “criminal motivations” were behind the attack. It was later revealed that the men were being held by ISIS operatives in Libya. In March 2016, Italian authorities reported that two of the men—Fausto Piano and Salvatore Failla—had been released, while the two other men had been killed. According to a Libyan military official, Piano and Failla had escaped by breaking down the door of the house where they were being held before finding refuge with neighbors. Alternatively, some Italian media alleged that a ransom had been paid for the men's release. Both Piano and Failla subsequently returned to Italy. (Sources: [Chicago Tribune](#), [BBC News](#), [Il Sole](#), [New York Times](#))

July 2014 Nusra Front Kidnappings in Syria

In July 2014, the Nusra Front kidnapped two Italian citizens—Vanessa Marzullo, 20, and Greta Ramelli, 21—in Aleppo, Syria. That December, the women—dressed in black hijabs—appeared in a 23-second video on YouTube in which Ramelli warned that they were in “big danger.” The pair was freed in January 2015 after Italy allegedly paid a ransom to secure their release. (Sources: [Corriere della Sera](#), [Guardian](#), [Telegraph](#))

Neo-Fascists' 2014 Anti-Immigrant Plot

In December 2014, Italian police uncovered a neo-fascist plot to attack immigrants and left-leaning politicians. The plot was hatched by members of an Italian far-right movement called Avanguardia Ordinovista (“Vanguard Order”), reportedly inspired by the ideology of Ordine Nuovo (“New Order”)—an Italian far-right group that carried out acts of terrorism throughout the 1970s and 1980s. According to Italian authorities, the Avanguardia Ordinovista plotters stockpiled arms, organized over social media, and identified potential targets, including immigrants, magistrates, the Equitalia tax collection agency, and the Italian railway system. The individuals were charged with attempted terrorism, attempted subversion of democracy, and instigating racial violence. (Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Huffington Post](#), [Corriere Della Sera](#))

- **November 15, 2022:** Anti-terror police launch a raid against the Order of Hagal, a white supremacist organization, in Marigliano. Five men are arrested, with four being charged on the grounds of association for the purpose of terrorism or the subversion of the democratic order, and the fifth being arrested for disseminating propaganda and instigating crimes due to racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination. The men, who have promoted neo-Nazi and anti-vax narratives, were purportedly set to carry out violent attacks prior to the raid. Source: [Vice News](#)
- **October 27, 2022:** Italian police arrest a man in Puglia on suspicion of inciting racial hatred and other terror-related offenses. The man allegedly is a lone wolf member of “The Base”—a U.S.-based white supremacist organization and has reportedly spread antisemitic, misogynist, and neo-Nazi content across far-right Telegram channels and online platforms. Additionally, the suspect has made death threats against Italian senator and Holocaust survivor, Liliana Sengre. Source: [Euro News](#)
- **October 13, 2021:** A resident in the Marche region town of Jesi discovers a Molotov cocktail outside the local office of Italy's main trade union, the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL). The incendiary device causes a small fire next to the office's gate but does not explode. The CGIL headquarters in Rome had been ransacked by a mob led by Forza Nuova during the October 9 protests against Italy's COVID-19 “green pass” requirement. Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata](#)
- **October 9, 2021 - October 11, 2021:** On October 9, protests in Rome against Italy's COVID-19 “green pass” requirement—which requires all workers to show proof of vaccinations—turn violent. According to media sources, approximately 10,000 people take to the streets with groups attempting to break barricades and cross police lines as well as violently storm several buildings. The riots leave at least two health workers and 38 police officers wounded. Police arrest 12 people in connection with the violent protests, including two leaders of far-right group Forza Nuova, Roberto Fiore and Giuliano Castellino. On October 11, members of Italy's ruling coalition in parliament put forth a motion calling on Prime Minister Mario Draghi's administration to dissolve Forza Nuova and all neo-fascist political movements. Forza Nuova's website is also forced offline by a court order following claims that the group used the site to encourage criminal activity and incite violence. Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Vice](#), [Reuters](#), [Euronews](#), [Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata](#)
- **July 1, 2020:** Authorities in Italy confiscate the largest-ever shipment of amphetamines, which they believe to have been manufactured by ISIS. According to police, more than 84 million tablets valued at one billion euros were seized in the port of Salerno. ISIS has a history of manufacturing the drug to fund its operations as well as administering it among its fighters to enhance their combat abilities. Given the large size of the shipment, investigators believe that the drugs were brought in for a network of criminal groups. Source: [Organized Crime and Corruption](#)

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

Reporting Project

- **May 8, 2020:** Silvia Romano, an Italian aid worker, is released after being held hostage by al-Shabab militants for over 18 months. Romano was kidnapped in November 2018 in Chakama, Kenya and was transported around Somalia during that time. While in captivity, Romano converted to Islam, which has led to a barrage of criticism from Italian citizens on social media. It is uncertain if the Italian government paid ransom—reportedly worth millions of euros—to the al-Qaeda linked group to secure Romano’s release. Sources: [The National](#), [New York Times](#)
- **March 26, 2020:** Mullah Krekar, a Muslim cleric and the founder of Ansar al-Islam, is extradited to Italy from Norway. In July of 2019, Mullah Krekar, whose real name is Najmaddin Faraj, was convicted by an Italian court of leading the now defunct jihadist group, Rawti Shax network which allegedly had links to ISIS and intended to carry out attacks in Western countries. Mullah Krekar is a U.S.- and U.N.-designated terrorist. Sources: [Euronews](#), [BBC News](#)
- **September 30, 2019:** Al-Shabab militants detonate two explosives targeting armored vehicles in an Italian convoy in Mogadishu. No casualties or injuries are reported in the attack. Source: [Telegraph](#)
- **September 17, 2019:** A man wielding a pair of scissors stabs an Italian soldier in the neck in front of Milan’s central train station. The soldier is wounded in the attack with non-life-threatening injuries. The attacker shouts “Allahu Akbar,” before fleeing the scene and is immediately apprehended by paramilitary Carabinieri police officers. Source: [New York Post](#)
- **April 17, 2019:** Italian police arrest two men—one Italian and one Moroccan—who intended to carry out terrorist attacks in the name of ISIS. Police were alerted to the two men after they posted images and videos of ISIS across social media. The suspects also downloaded instructions on how to carry out bombings and suicide attacks. Source: [The Local](#)
- **March 21, 2019:** An Italian driver hijacks a school bus filled with children and sets it on fire near Milan. None of the children suffer major injuries. The driver, Ouseynou Sy, is an Italian citizen originally from Senegal, and claimed to carry out the attack in retaliation to Italy’s immigration policy and the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean. Sy faces charges of kidnapping, attempted mass murder, causing a fire, and resisting arrest. Interior ministry officials have suggested annulling Sy’s Italian citizenship. Source: [BBC News](#)
- **November 28, 2018:** Italian police arrest 38-year-old Lebanese national Amin Alhaj Ahmad after finding evidence to suggest he was planning to poison the water supply of Sardinia. Sources: [Jerusalem Post](#), [Independent](#)
- **February 3, 2018:** Luca Traini, 28, shoots and wounds six African immigrants in Macerata during a rampage in his car targeting Black migrants. Before surrendering to police, Traini wraps himself in an Italian flag and gave a fascist salute. He calls the attack retaliation for the rape, death, and dismemberment of Roman woman Pamela Mastropietro near Macerata three days earlier by Nigerian immigrant Innocent Oseghale. He is sentenced to 12 years in prison in October 2018. He later apologizes for the attack, saying his time in prison gave him time reconsider that skin color does not correlate to one’s actions. Traini was an unsuccessful League candidate in local elections and reportedly had affiliations with other neo-fascist groups. Far-right party Forza Nuova offers to pay for Traini’s legal defense. Sources: [Financial Times](#), [Guardian](#), [Reuters](#), [Ansa](#)
- **May 18, 2017:** Ismail Hosni, 20, stabs a policeman and two army officers at Milan’s main train station after he was asked to show identification. Hosni is a Tunisian national born in Milan. Police have Facebook close his account on its platform, after discovering it contained videos praising ISIS. Source: [Reuters](#)
- **March 30, 2017:** Italian police disrupt a cell of suspected ISIS supporters in Venice planning to blow up that city’s famous Rialto Bridge. Authorities arrest three suspects—all Kosovar men with Italian residence permits. The men had reportedly expressed a desire to die for jihad, and had celebrated a recent terror attack in London. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Telegraph](#)
- **December 23, 2016:** Italian police in Milan shoot dead Anis Amri, the ISIS sympathizer who drove a truck through a Christmas market in Berlin four days prior, killing 12 people and wounding 48 others. Amri had reportedly traveled by train to Italy from Germany via France. Sources: [CNN](#), [U.S. Department of State](#)
- **July 2, 2016:** Nine Italian citizens are killed at a cafe in Dhaka, Bangladesh, when ISIS militants storm the restaurant. Source: [Ministro degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#)
- **May 10, 2016:** Italian police arrest three members of a Puglia-based ISIS-linked terror cell who had allegedly been plotting to carry out attacks in Rome and London. Source: [Reuters](#)
- **April 26, 2016:** Italian police in the country’s Lombardy region arrest four Italians of Moroccan descent who had allegedly plotted to attack the Vatican and the Israeli embassy in Rome. According to authorities, the suspects had received direct orders from ISIS militants—via the messaging service WhatsApp—to carry out attacks within Italy. The suspects had also reportedly planned to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Sources: [La Repubblica](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [Newsweek](#)
- **November 12, 2015:** Sixteen suspected leaders and several members of Rawti Shax, are arrested in a joint counterterror operation across Italy, the U.K., Norway, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland. The operation was launched by the Italian ROS Carabinieri, under the direction of the Public Prosecution Office in Rome. The group was accused of using an online network to radicalize fighters to send to the Middle East. It was also suspected that members plotted to target Norwegian and British diplomats and kidnap other envoys in an attempt to free the group’s leader Mullah Krekar who has been imprisoned in Norway since early 2012. Sources: [European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation](#), [NBC News](#)
- **July 22, 2015:** Authorities in Brescia detain ISIS sympathizers Lassa Briki and Muhammad Waqas.

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

-
- The men had planned to carry out domestic attacks against military institutions and civilians, and eventually travel to Syria to join ISIS. Bikri is believed to have had online contact with Syrian-based ISIS operatives. Sources: [La Repubblica](#), [Huffington Post](#)
- **July 19, 2015:** Four Italian construction workers are abducted in Sebrata, Libya, and held hostage by ISIS operatives. Two of the men are released in March 2016, while the other two are reported to have been killed. Sources: [Chicago Tribune](#), [BBC News](#), [Il Sole, New York Times](#)
 - **July 1, 2015:** Italian and Albanian authorities jointly arrest five people—three Italians and two Albanians—on charges including planning to travel abroad to commit acts of terrorism. Among the arrested are family members of Maria Giulia Sergio, an Italian national and convert to Islam who traveled to Syria in September 2014 to join ISIS. Maria Giulia Sergio had reportedly convinced her family members to join her in Syria. Sources: [Il Sole](#), [Wall Street Journal](#)
 - **April 24, 2015:** Italian police arrest nine individuals across six cities with suspected ties to al-Qaeda on charges of “assisting in clandestine immigration” and “acts of terrorism.” The suspects are reportedly tied to the October 2009 Peshawar bombing in Pakistan. Source: [La Repubblica](#)
 - **December 22, 2015:** Italian authorities arrest members of the neo-fascist group Avanguardia Ordinovista. The suspects had allegedly stockpiled weapons and plotted to attack immigrants and members of the left-leaning political class. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Huffington Post](#)
 - Italian citizens Vanessa Marzullo, 20, and Greta Ramelli, 21, are kidnapped and taken hostage by the Nusra Front while working on humanitarian projects in Aleppo, Syria. The women are freed in January 2015 after the Italian government allegedly pays the Nusra Front to secure their release. Sources: [Guardian](#), [Telegraph](#)
 - **April 30, 2013:** Police in Puglia arrest four Tunisian men accused of planning terrorist attacks in Italy, the United States, and Israel. Investigators say the men recruited among illegal immigrants and sent those individuals to jihadist training camps in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, and Yemen. According to a police statement, the small cell was characterized by “fierce anti-Semitism and anti-Western sentiment.” Source: [Reuters](#)
 - **May 19, 2012:** Italian citizen Giovanni Vantaggiato detonates a bomb at the Morvillo Falcone high school in Brindisi, killing one student and injuring five others. Vantaggiato, a married father of two, is subsequently prosecuted and sentenced to life in prison. He has not offered a motive. Source: [New York Times](#)
 - Libyan national and long-time resident of Milan Mohammed Game detonates an explosive device outside of a military base in the Lombardy region of Italy. Investigators later discover that two Milan-based North African men had assisted Game in the planning of this attack, but that Game acted alone and was radicalized online. Source: [Combating Terrorism Center](#)
 - **March 28, 2004:** A Moroccan man dies while detonating a car bomb outside of a McDonalds in Brescia. Sources: [Global Terrorism Database](#), [Combating Terrorism Center](#)
 - Italian authorities arrest Domenico Quaranta, an Italian citizen who converted to Islam in prison. Quaranta had detonated rudimentary explosive devices in Milan and Agrigento over the span of seven months in 2001. Source: [Combating Terrorism Center](#)
 - Jihadists begin using Italy as a transit point en route to conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa. Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#)
 - **December 27, 1985:** Four gunmen belonging to the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization attack the ticket counters of American and Israeli airlines at Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport. The attackers kill 13 people and wound nearly 75 others. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)
 - **August 2, 1980:** Suspected far-right extremists bomb a crowded waiting area at the Central Station in Bologna, killing 85 people and wounding over 200 others. The government holds the neo-fascist group Armed Revolutionary Nuclei (“Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari”) responsible. Sources: [BBC News](#), [I-Italy](#)
 - Members of the Red Brigades kidnap former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro. They murder him 55 days later after the government refuses to capitulate to demands to release Red Brigades prisoners. Sources: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#), [Guardian](#)
 - **November 16, 1977:** Members of the Red Brigades shoot deputy editor of La Stampa newspaper, Carlo Casalegno, on a street in Turin. Casalegno dies from his wounds later that month. Sources: [La Stampa](#), [Mapping Militant Organizations](#)
 - **August 4, 1974:** Members of the far-right group Black Order detonate a bomb on an Italicus train traveling from Rome to Munich, killing 12 people and wounding 48 others. Source: [La Repubblica](#)
 - **May 28, 1974:** Members of the far-right group New Order detonate a bomb in a trash bin at an anti-fascist rally in the northern city of Brescia, killing eight people and injuring over 100. The Italian government later hands life sentences to two New Order members for the bombing. Sources: [La Repubblica](#), [BBC News](#)
 - **April 18, 1974:** Members of the Red Brigades kidnap Genoa Assistant State Attorney Mario Sossi in what they call an attack “on the heart of the state.”
-

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

The group frees Sossi on May 23 in exchange for a court order to release eight Red Brigades prisoners. The court order is never upheld. Source: [Mapping Militant Organizations](#)

- **December 17, 1973:** Gunmen belonging to the nationalist Palestinian group Black September enter the Leonardo Da Vinci-Fiumicino airport in Rome, killing two people. The militants then attack Pan American flight 110 on the runway, throwing phosphorus hand grenades through the front and rear doors of the aircraft. Twenty-nine passengers are killed. The militants then take five Italian hostages into a Lufthansa airliner, force the pilot to fly to Athens, and demand the release of two Arab terrorists. The plane lands in Kuwait, where the terrorists release the hostages before being taken into custody. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Global Terrorism Database](#)
- **December 12, 1969:** Suspected members of the far-right group New Order bomb the National Agrarian Bank in Milan, killing 17 people and wounding more than 100 others. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Italian Neofacism](#), [Anna Cento Bull](#)
- - : In a period known as the Years of Lead, far-right and far-left Italian extremist groups carry out acts of terrorism throughout the country. Nationalist Palestinian groups also carry out attacks within Italy. Sources: [BBC News](#), [ADST](#)

Domestic Counter-Extremism

March 2018 Counterterrorism Operations

Between March 15 and March 29, 2018, Italian police carried out four counterterrorism operations resulting in the arrest of at least eight men. Acting on a tip from the FBI, Italian police arrested Latvian-born Italian citizen Denis Illarionovs on March 15. Illarionovs was found in possession of partially constructed pipe bombs, which he had intended to use to target a kindergarten. Authorities also discovered that Illarionovs had praised a number of terrorists on social media, including Sayfullo Saipov, who killed eight people in an October 2017 New York City truck attack. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [CNN](#))

On March 27, police arrested Abdel Rahman, a 59-year old Egyptian-born Italian who ran an Islamic center in the town of Foggia. Rahman is accused of using his position to indoctrinate youth on behalf of the Islamic State and was recorded telling local children to “fight the unbelievers, with your swords cut off their heads, with your explosive belts blow up their bodies.” (Source: [Reuters](#))

On March 28, police arrested Elmhadi Halili and an undisclosed number of accomplices who were accused of planning a truck attack on behalf of the Islamic State. Halili, a Moroccan-born Italian man, was previously arrested on 2015 for running a website in support of the Islamic State but was only handed a suspended two-year sentence. (Source: [Reuters](#))

On March 29, Italian police arrested five Tunisians connected to the Berlin truck attacker Anis Amri, who plowed a truck into a crowd of people at a Christmas market, killing 12 people. While the men appeared to have no direct link to the December 2016 attack, they were discovered through Amri’s telephone records. Police believe Amri may have been arranging to obtain false documents from the men prior to his death in Milan. Four of the men have been charged with conspiring to aid illegal immigration while the fifth man is accused of plotting terror attacks. (Source: [Reuters](#))

Legislation

The Italian government established the Study Commission on Radicalization and Jihadi Extremism in September 2016, with the objective of recommending preventative measures in 2017. On January 5, 2017, the Commission reported to Italian Premier Paolo Gentiloni that, while Italy has been spared the extremist attacks suffered elsewhere in Europe, it must not consider itself immune and must develop strategies to prevent radicalization. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Oasis Center](#), [Associated Press](#))

The Italian government introduced its first counterterrorism legislative package on October 18, 2001, approximately five weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The legislation, dubbed Decree Law 374, codified the crime of conspiracy to commit an act of international terrorism. It also permitted authorities to use wiretaps and to prosecute any individual promoting, creating, organizing, or financing terrorism. The Italian government also passed Law 438, which permitted authorities to surveil and intercept communication of terrorist suspects. (Sources: [Legislationonline.org](#), [Counterterrorism Strategies](#), [Farnesina](#))

The Italian government passed additional counterterrorism legislation in 2005, known as Decree Law 155. The provision defined terrorism as acts that “cause serious harm to a country or international organization,” and are carried out in order to “intimidate people, coerce public authorities,” or

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

“destabilize or destroy the fundamental political, constitutional, economic and social structures of a country.” The law also amended the criminal code by adding examples of what would be considered a punishable terrorist offense. Notably, the law punishes anyone who “trains [others] to prepare or use explosive materials, firearms...hazardous chemical or bacteriological substances...for the purposes of terrorism.” The law also facilitates the detention of suspects and expedites the process for deporting non-citizens who demonstrate extremist sentiments. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

In February 2015, the Italian government passed new legislation—known as Decree Law 7—with regard to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters. Decree Law 7 imposes punishment on lone wolf terrorists and foreign fighters—making it illegal to partake in a conflict in a foreign territory in support of a terrorist organization. Authorities are also now authorized to temporarily withdraw terrorist suspects’ passports. In addition, the law permits the Ministry of the Interior to maintain a list of websites that are utilized for terrorist recruiting activities, and gives authorities permission to instruct Internet service providers to block access to such websites. In March 2017, in advance of a meeting of 40 European heads of state in Rome to mark 60 years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Italian authorities set up a special task force to monitor “suspicious” online profiles and to intercept and decode messages referring to terrorist activity. Until the meeting’s adjournment, Italian police and police in other EU member states monitored and shared any suspicious content they found. (Sources: [Normattiva](#), [Library of Congress](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Express](#))

Government Agencies

The Ministries of the Interior, Treasury, Foreign Affairs, and Justice coordinate with the police in overseeing counterterrorism activity throughout Italy. In addition, the Italian Carabinieri—Italy’s national gendarmerie—operates its own counterterrorism force, known as the Special Intervention Group. The Italian law enforcement agency *Guardia di Finanza* (“Guard of Finance”) also operates a counterterrorism unit that oversees airport and seaport security and works to counter the illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons, contraband, and illegal immigration. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#), [Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate](#), [European Parliament](#), [Guardia di Finanza](#))

In addition, the Ministry of the Interior has the authority to swiftly expel non-citizens for “seriously disrupting public order, endangering national security, or religious discrimination,” even if insufficient evidence exists to prosecute the individual. According to the U.S. Department of State, the Ministry used that authority to deport more than 60 individuals in 2016 and 100 individuals in 2017. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Government Programs

Italy’s Ministry of Justice Penitentiary Police finances counter-radicalization programs in the Italian prison system. Through these programs, the Penitentiary Police provide de-radicalization training to over 100 government agents working in the four Italian prisons where terrorists are incarcerated. Notably, prison employees are trained to recognize signs of radicalization among the prison population. These programs also focus on identifying high-risk inmates and separating them from other prisoners who are likely to be susceptible to radicalization. (Sources: [Istituto Superiore di Studi Penitenziari](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

In January 2017, the Ministry of the Interior announced that it would begin funding courses on the Italian constitution for imams throughout the country. Course participants will reportedly be taught about importance of freedom of religion and speech. Through these courses, the Ministry aims to “foster a dialogue between religions and cultures, contributing to the construction of a peaceful and non-violent society,” according to a professor who is helping to lead the program. (Sources: [La Repubblica](#), [Independent](#))

Combatting Terrorist Financing

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, the Italian government established the Committee for Financial Security (“Comitato di Sicurezza Finanziaria,” or CFS) within its Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs. The CFS—led by the Director General of the Treasury—works with Italy’s government agencies to combat terrorism financing. These agencies include the Italian Ministry of the Interior, the Italian Ministry of Justice and Foreign Affairs, the Bank of Italy, the Italian police, the Italian Guard of Finance, and the Italian National Anti-Mafia Direction. The CFS is authorized to freeze the assets of individuals and groups associated with terrorist organizations. (Sources: [Ministerio degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#), [Parlamento Italiano](#))

Italy participates in a number of international bodies that seek to counter terrorist financing, including the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (Moneyval). The FATF—an

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

intergovernmental organization that works to combat the financing of terrorism—has recommended the adoption of various measures including the criminalization of terrorist financing, the freezing of terrorist assets, and policies designed to ensure that terrorists cannot exploit non-governmental organizations. Moneyval, a monitoring body and part of the Council of Europe, is responsible for “assessing compliance...to counter money laundering and the financing of terrorism,” according to the Council of Europe website. Italy co-chairs, with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS’s Counter-ISIS Finance Group, which seeks to enhance information-sharing among its 37 members and observer groups and to develop coordinated countermeasures to disrupt ISIS financing. (Sources: [FATF](#), [Council of Europe](#), [Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#), [FAFT](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [Financial Action Task Force](#))

International Counter-Extremism

Italy complies with all EU counterterrorism regulations and is a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. Italy also ratifies all international United Nations conventions against terrorism. (Sources: [Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#), [Council of Europe](#))

Regional Cooperation

Italy cooperates with other European countries on counterterrorism efforts. In January 2015, for example—following the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris—Italy and Albania created a joint-counterterrorism task force. Albania claims to have the largest counterterrorism center in the Balkans, a region that has reportedly seen hundreds of foreign fighters travel to Syria. The Italian-Albanian task force will train experts and police, exchange valuable information in real-time, and create an anti-terrorism database. (Sources: [InfoBalkans](#), [ABC News](#))

Global Cooperation

Italy is one of 30 countries that founded the Global Counterterrorism Forum, an intergovernmental organization that convenes international counterterrorism experts and practitioners in order to reduce the threat from terrorism worldwide. Italy has also participated in counterterrorism efforts through the G-8 Roma-Lyon Group, an international body comprised of the G8 partners which convenes annually to develop strategies to combat terrorism and transnational crime. (Sources: [GCTF](#), [G8 Italia](#))

Italy is believed to cooperate on matters related to counterterrorism with countries in the Middle East, including Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Italy and Pakistan have shared a defense agreement since 2009 and exchange information concerning the fight against terrorism. In April 2016, Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni said that Italy would continue to cooperate with Pakistan on counterterrorism issues. Italy is also reported to work with Saudi Arabia in this field. In November 2016, Italy and Saudi Arabia pledged to cooperate closely on new security, police training, and counterterrorism initiatives. Italy pledged to provide counterterrorism training to Saudi police officers. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#), [European Affairs](#))

As the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in May 2018, Italy hosted “The Reverse Flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Challenges for the OSCE Area and Beyond.” The counterterrorism conference offered OSCE subject matter experts the opportunity to exchange the best practices on tracing Foreign Terrorist Fighters and for strengthening counterterrorism cooperation. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

ISIS

Italy is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. According to the coalition’s website, Italy plays “a key role in training Iraqi forces, countering [ISIS’s] financial flows, supporting the Mosul Dam project, helping civilian population[s] and protecting cultural heritage.” The U.S. government estimates that Italy deployed approximately 1,400 personnel to Iraq in 2017. Italy has also supported the coalition in “aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and re-fueling capabilities from Kuwait,” according to the U.S. Department of State. (Source: [Global Coalition](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Italy: Extremism and Terrorism

In January 2016, Italy began allowing the United States to fly armed drones out of the Sigonella Air Base in Sicily in order to launch defensive attacks against ISIS in Libya. (Source: [Guardian](#))

Foreign Military Engagement and the United Nations

The Italian armed forces participate in 42 military missions on three continents, including those spearheaded by the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO. Italy took part in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan, which launched on January 1, 2015, after the stand-down of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In February 2021, there were 895 Italian troops stationed in Afghanistan—the third-largest contingency of 36 countries, after the United States and Germany. On May 1, 2021, U.S. and NATO forces officially began their drawdown process in Afghanistan ahead of a September 11 deadline set by U.S. President Joe Biden. Italian Defense Minister Lorenzo Guerini announced the end of Italy's military mission to Afghanistan at the end of June 2021, after the last remaining Italian troops flew out of the western Afghan city of Herat. All told, Italy contributed 50,000 of its soldiers to the mission in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021. Italian officials reported that 53 troops died and 723 were injured in the same period. (Sources: [Ministero della Difesa](#), [NATO](#), [Voice of America](#))

In 2018, Italy enhanced counterterrorism capacity building efforts in Libya. The building efforts included coast guard cooperation, investigative training for law enforcement, and amended border security measures. Furthermore, in 2018, the Italian military worked with local security forces in Niger to assist with training activities in support of G5 Sahel Member States. The training activities provided Nigerian-based local and international troops with methods of strengthening border security, countering illicit trafficking, and combating threats to regional security. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Italy was listed seventh among the top 10 providers of financial contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations for 2020-2021, contributing 3.30 percent of the budget or more than \$210 million. As of August 2021, Italy contributes 933 military and police personnel to U.N. peacekeeping missions. (Sources: [United Nations](#), [United Nations](#))

Public Opinion

In October 2015, the center-right Italian political group Forza Italia conducted a series of interviews in Tuscany, asking residents to offer their opinions on terrorism and immigration. Approximately 84 percent of those interviewed said they feared that terrorists might arrive in Italy from Libya, and 76 percent indicated that they believed unemployed immigrants would be easily recruited by terrorist organizations. (Source: [Citta di Firenze](#))

The percentage of the Italian population that feels threatened by Islamic extremism appears to be on the rise. In 2015, a study conducted by Statistica found that 53 percent of Italians were worried about Islamic extremism. A Pew Research Center survey that was conducted from February to April 2017 found that 89 percent of the Italians in the study were “very” or “somewhat” concerned about the threat of Islamic extremism in their country. By contrast, polls conducted in 2012 and 2014 indicated that the primary concerns of Italians had to do with poor economic conditions within the country. (Sources: [Statistica](#), [Pew Research Center](#), [Guardian](#))

Additionally, in 2018, the Pew Research Center conducted a poll in which 32 percent of Italian respondents claimed that they felt like a stranger in their country due to the rising number of Muslim immigrants throughout Italy. The same poll revealed that out of Europe, Italy scored the highest in terms of expressing Nationalist, anti-Immigrant, and anti-religious Minority views (NIM). The NIM scale, which is measured from 1-10, showcased a median score of 1.2 across Europe, whereas Italy scored 4.1. Furthermore, over 53 percent of Italian respondents claimed that “Islam is fundamentally incompatible” with their country's culture and values. (Source: [Pew Research Center](#))