Evidence-based Strategies for Preventing Homegrown Radicalization

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Paris attacks

Photo credit: Reuters/Charles Platiau
April 15, 2013
Boston Marathon Bombing

Photo credit: Rex
Why would someone ever become a terrorist?
Myths about radicalization

Terrorists are...
... Uneducated
... Economically disadvantaged
... Psychologically unstable
... Extremely religious
The reality of radicalization

• Not a “good guy, bad guy” issue
• Religion not a main motivator
  – Many religious novices, converts
• No consistent role of personality traits or psychological disorders
• Many terrorists are college-educated, middle-class

Then what is it?
Psychology of radicalization

• Theories of radicalization highlight identity issues (e.g., Moghaddam, 2005; Silber & Bhatt, 2007)

• Triggered by threats to one’s sense of significance or feeling that one matters (Kruglanski et al., 2009)
  – Humiliation, shame, personal trauma, maltreatment by society
What do radical groups have to offer?

• **Certainty for those who lack direction** (Hogg, 2007)
  – Clear ideology, strong norms, “us” versus “them” mentality
  – Know what to believe and what to expect

• **Status and recognition** (Crenshaw, 2007)
  – Dying as a martyr

• **Belongingness** (Schaafsma & Williams, 2012)
  – Immigrant cultural identities
Born+raised in th West,
Ive never felt more safe+protected thn n #IS.
Even w/ all th strikes, crazy drivers + impending World War.
IS = <3
Example: Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

Photo credit: AP/Lowell Sun
Immigrants do best when they:

A) Assimilate
B) Integrate
C) Is there actually a difference between A and B?
D) I give up.
Immigrant acculturation

Identify with larger society culture?
- YES
- NO

Identify with heritage culture?
- YES
- NO

Integration

Separation

Assimilation

Marginalization

(Berry, 1970; 1997; 2003)
Integration

Assimilation

Photo credit: Regentsprep.org
Immigrant acculturation

Identify with larger society culture?

YES

Identify with heritage culture?

YES

Integration

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Assimilation

Marginalization

NO

(Berry, 1970; 1997; 2003)
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Integration
Assimilation
Marginalization
Separation

“Culturally homeless”

(Berry, 1970; 1997; 2003)
Our study

- Interviews with Muslim Americans (immigrant and US-born)
- Survey of 198 Muslim Americans
- In collaboration with WORDE: World Organization for Resource Development and Education

WORDE | THE WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION
The questions we asked

- American and other cultural identities
- Experiences of discrimination/exclusion
- Feelings of significance loss
- Support for radical groups, ideologies, and behavior
Lack of personal significance → support for radical groups, ideologies, and behavior
Who lacked significance?

People who felt...
- Culturally homeless
- Discriminated against

→ Especially those who felt both
Discrimination experiences

“I am a recording artist and I’ve had the opportunity to sign to a major label on the conditions that I shred my Muslim identity and refrain from talking about my ethnicity in order to win over appeal from demographics that regularly wouldn’t approve of a Pakistani-Muslim singer.

I have a Muslim stage name and their conditions were strict in a contract stating that I would have to change my name. I was unable to complete the contract.”
Discrimination experiences

“I’ve been called a ‘terrorist’ on numerous occasions. I’ve been asked to apologize for 9/11. I’ve been asked if I have a visa to be here, though I have an American accent. As an artist, I am expected to make a certain type of artwork because I am brown. Often people are disappointed that work isn’t ‘more Eastern,’ that I have a Western approach... I don’t experience as much discrimination as others because I ‘act,’ dress, and speak in a more Americanized way. But I see it, hear it, and see it happening around me. Very disheartening.”
The good news

- Muslim Americans who felt integrated were less likely to lack significance and less affected by discrimination.
- Discrimination is harmful, but integrated immigrants are better able to deal with it.
  - Important for Muslim Americans to feel like they have a foot in both cultures.
“I believe that balancing two different cultural identities is extremely hard because you will never be able to achieve one hundred percent of either of them, while people who have lived in just any one culture would be able to automatically do that. So what I’ve learned is that I should never really strive for that hundred percent—“I’m pure Afghan” or “Oh, I’ve become Americanized.” Instead, have the core components of an Afghan culture and then decorate that with stuff I’ve learned over here. I think that’s how I define myself.”
Policy implications

Photo credit: YouTube BENIstream
Muslim Americans want to integrate. Let them.

• Most Muslims want to combine American customs and values with those of their heritage culture (Pew Research Center, 2011)
  – 90% of our study participants felt this way
• Embrace American multiculturalism; encourage sharing cultural practices
• The U.S. will benefit from having well-integrated immigrants
“I think part of the reason I wear [the headscarf] like that is because Americans need to know that it isn’t something that’s ancient, limiting, or oppressing. It’s still fashionable, it’s still a way to express yourself, and you can still love yourself when you wear the hijab and love the way you wear it. And you can make the scarf look more American and still show that you’re proud to be American but you’re still proud to be a Muslim at the same time.”
Help Syrian refugees integrate

• Measures to slow or halt the refugee resettlement process can communicate that refugees are not welcome
  – Also sends a negative message to the Muslim American community

• Focus on efforts to integrate refugees: encourage adoption of American identity, preservation of heritage culture identity
Anti-Muslim rhetoric is counterproductive

- Reinforces ISIS’ narrative that the West is anti-Islam
- Some polices engender community distrust
- Can make it difficult for American Muslims to become integrated, putting them at risk for cultural homelessness

Discrimination and cultural homelessness can produce the psychological conditions that increase the appeal of radical groups
Promising directions

Photo credit: James Brickwood
Great puns! To your point it's "why we need to reject politics that targets people because of race/religion" - @POTUS

SPARQ @StanfordSPARQ

.@Price44 Briesearch shows anti-Muslim rhetoric is likely to fuel support for ISIS, not squelch it. Can you whey in? #BigBlockOfCheeseDay
White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism

Emphasis on role of local communities
- E.g., Strong Cities Network, Aarhus Model, Montgomery County Model

Addressing social grievances that radical groups exploit

Strengthening protection for religious and ethnic minorities
The Montgomery County Model

- WORDE has developed an innovative community-led public safety model
- Core focus on countering violent extremism through engagement, education, and targeted interventions
- Evidence-based and undergone an independent, scientific evaluation
Next steps

$ Partner with academics and fund evidence-based interventions

🔍 Support evaluations of promising programs

🏆 Promote programs that:

• Help immigrants and refugees reconcile their cultural identities and become better integrated

• Provide services for immigrant youth who feel culturally homeless or excluded

• Increase contact and cooperation between Muslim and non-Muslim communities to reduce discrimination
Marginalized immigrants are at greater risk for radicalization.

Be anti-ISIS, not anti-Islam.

Help Syrian refugees adjust.

Promote integration, and don’t make people give up their culture.

Guide at-risk immigrants toward the right path.
“You fit in here, right here. You’re right where you belong. You’re part of America, too. You aren’t Muslim or American. You are Muslim and American.”
Thank you!