



Evidence-based Strategies for Preventing Homegrown Radicalization

In an effort to protect the United States from terrorism, many public figures are calling for the U.S. to stop admitting Syrian refugees and to monitor Muslims on American soil. Yet a growing body of research suggests that telling Muslims they are not welcome in the U.S. could reinforce ISIS' narrative that the West is anti-Islam and actually fuel support for extremism.

To prevent homegrown radicalization, American policymakers should actively discourage discrimination against Muslims and promote policies that allow Muslim Americans to cultivate their American and heritage culture identities at the same time.

What does the research tell us?

- Radical groups like ISIS prey on youth who lack clear purpose and direction by promising belongingness, status, and recognition for those who work on their behalf.^{1,2,3} And this seems to work—some Muslim Americans who feel a lack of meaning in their lives report being more attracted to radical groups and ideologies.^{4,5}
- The more Muslim Americans experience discrimination, the less purpose and meaning they feel. This is especially the case for those who feel culturally homeless—that is, belonging neither to one's heritage culture nor to American culture.^{4,5}
- The vast majority of Muslims do not hold radical views⁶ and say they *want* to combine American customs and values with those of their heritage culture.⁴ This challenges the widespread belief that American values and Islamic principles are incompatible with one another.
- Research suggests that immigrants and minorities do best when they can successfully integrate their American identities with their other cultural identities.⁷ Whether we identify as Irish Americans, Cuban Americans, or Chinese Americans, we can all embrace both our heritage cultures and American patriotism.

Policy Implications

- **Be anti-ISIS, not anti-Islam.** When public figures speak out against Islam, Muslims can start to feel excluded and insecure about their place as a Muslim in American society. This can induce the threat to one's sense of purpose that drives some toward radicalism.
- **Help Syrian refugees adjust.** A number of Syrian refugees have already entered the U.S. and more may continue to settle here. Help incomers forge an American identity by showing that Americans welcome people from all religious and cultural backgrounds.
- **Promote assimilation, but don't make people give up their culture.** Encourage Muslims, like we do all immigrant groups, to cultivate an American identity without pressuring them to abandon their own customs and values. Policymakers can do this by supporting the Muslim community's plans to build mosques or hold religious celebrations.
- **Guide at-risk Muslims toward the right path.** For young people who feel culturally homeless or excluded, policymakers can provide outlets for fostering a sense of purpose in socially adaptive ways. For example, Denmark has reintegrated foreign fighters by helping them find ways to be good Danish citizens and good Muslims at the same time.

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¹ Crenshaw, M. (2007). Explaining suicide terrorism: A review essay. *Security Studies*, 16(1), 133-162.

² Hogg, M. A. (2014). From uncertainty to extremism: Social categorization and identity processes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 338-342.

³ Kruglanski, A. W., Chen, X., Dechesne, M., Fishman, S., & Orehek, E. (2009). Fully committed: Suicide bombers' motivation and the quest for personal significance. *Political Psychology*, 30(3), 331-357.

⁴ Lyons-Padilla, S., Gelfand, M.J., Mirahmadi, H., Farooq, M., & van Egmond, M. (in press). Belonging nowhere: Marginalization and radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants. *Behavioral Science and Policy*.

⁵ Simon, B., Reichert, F., & Grabow, O. (2013). When dual identity becomes a liability: Identity and political radicalism among migrants. *Psychological Science*, 24(3), 251-257.

⁶ Pew Research Center. (2011). No signs of growth in alienation or support for extremism. *Mainstream and Moderate Attitudes*. Washington, DC.

⁷ Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5-34.