



**From Family to Facebook to Foreign Fighter –
The Attraction of Young Adults to ISIS through Societal Relationships
and Social Media**

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Abstract

How, who, and why are western young adults within the United States and the European Union attracted to modern radical Islamic movements such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)? How have technology and social media aided these movements in areas such as recruitment, retention, and empathy for the organization?

At the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001, the average foreign fighter in the Middle East was 28 years old. Today, the average age is closer to 21 years old. In the modern age of technology, this current wave of inexperienced jihadists being “radicalized” is now being discussed as a “violent extremist social trend.” Radicalization is not a new concept. Extreme ideology has a long history; yet it has often required face to face exposure to have a lasting effect. These particular Islamic movements appear to inspire both active and sympathetic allegiance by a new group of young fighters via secondary interactions such as internet videos, social media applications and live chats via smart phones. ISIS is considered one of these new radical movements that employs technology to recruit and groom potential members.

As terrorist-based groups such as ISIS continue to attract young adults, it is imperative that motivation for joining such groups be researched and analyzed. A “one size fits all” approach to countering violent extremism does not appear to be a viable option for today’s modern, technologically astute society. There are many different pathways to radicalization, and the mechanisms in place that may aid in radicalization operate in different ways for different people at different points in their lives.

Through the research conducted during this thesis, I have discovered that contributing factors such as cult and gang association, mental illness, cultural and societal identity, and social media all have the potential to contribute to the radicalization of individuals. Data analysis and a deeper understanding of marginalization factors (host, parental and traditional cultures) aid in countering the recruitment, retention and empathy for groups such as ISIS.

As radicalization is considered a long, social process, governments and citizens must gain a greater understanding of the core elements that exist in these processes and be willing to acknowledge that actions on their part may contribute to the problem or to the solution.

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Introduction

Why do Individuals Volunteer?

“We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it. ... We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea.” Major General Michael K. Nagata’s, US Special Operations Commander in the Middle East, confidential memo in 2014 addressing the appeal of ISIS.

Hoda Muthana, a Yemeni-American woman from Hoover, Alabama grew up as a modest, quiet girl from a conservative household. At 17 years old, she began to immerse herself in Islamic fundamentalist literature that was freely acquired online and distanced herself from the local Muslim community. She created an alter-ego on Twitter, gaining thousands of followers and interacting with like-minded Muslims extremists across the world (Vidino and Hughes 9). Muthana communicated extensively with known ISIS supporters and individuals within the Syrian borders. She eventually planned to travel to Syria and under the pretense of going to Atlanta for a college trip; she boarded a flight to Turkey and eventually found her way to Syria (9). Her entire radicalization process was believed to have been accomplished through online radicalization.

How does a 17-year-old female from Hoover, Alabama with strong ties to her family and the local Muslim community become so enthralled with ISIS ideology that she is willing to surrender these ties and travel abroad? Is online radicalization so powerful and influential that it can overcome physical ties such as family and friends?

It is estimated that approximately 4,000 people from Western Europe alone have left their homes to become jihadist fighters in the Middle East (Cottee 1).

How, who, and why are western young adults within the United States and the European Union attracted to modern radical Islamic movements such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)? How has technology and social media aided these movements in areas such as recruitment, retention, and empathy for the organization?

At the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001, the average foreign fighter in the Middle East was 28 years old. Today, a third of the criminal cases in the United States against ISIS supporters are less than 21 years old. In the modern age of technology, experts within the European Union and surrounding areas see this current wave of young jihadists being “radicalized” as a “violent extremist social trend” (Hague 6). Radicalization is not a new concept. Fanatical ideology has a long history, yet it has often required in-person exposure to have a lasting effect. Islamic extremist movements such as ISIS appear to inspire both active and sympathetic allegiance by a new group of young fighters via secondary interactions. Internet videos, social media applications, and live chats via smartphones are just a few examples of applied methods.

Between 2001 and 2013, more than 200 U.S. citizens and permanent residents were convicted of terrorism-related activities (Vidino and Hughes 9). This figure is a clear indication that some American citizens and residents embrace an essential jihadist ideology and are committed to the causes of ISIS and its use of violence as a way to deliver its message globally.

The current form of ISIS was established in April 2013 within the borders of Syria and Iraq. Formerly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), it was renamed to ISIS once it established a presence in Syria following the Arab Spring uprising. With an al

Qaeda presence in Syria, ISIS soon separated from its ties with al Qaeda and rebranded itself into the ISIS of today. ISIS is considered a jihadist militant group that follows strict Sunni Islamic doctrine. Its goal is to create a worldwide Islamic caliphate (a theological empire) (A Brief History of ISIS 1). ISIS was deemed a new radical movement based on its use of technology to distribute propaganda outside the Middle East. Platforms including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr have been used successfully to recruit new members. Other more discrete applications include Kik, Telegram, Surespot and the dark web. These are also used to further the indoctrination process and covertly communicate with other members of the organization.

As religious-based terrorist groups such as ISIS continue to attract young adults, it is imperative that motivation for joining such groups be researched and analyzed. This information will give a better understanding as to why individuals would leave the safety and security of their home or host country to engage in a war abroad. It may be even more important to try to comprehend how individuals become so radicalized that they are willing to attack their fellow citizens within the borders of their sovereign states.

The profiles of individuals involved in ISIS-related activities in the U.S. differ widely in race, age, social class, education, criminal records and family background (Vidino and Hughes 11). While ISIS supporters come from a wide range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, they each have their own unique dynamics that associate them with radicalization.

ISIS-related mobilization has become increasingly relevant to western countries due to escalating tensions between western cultures and Muslim-based terrorist organizations. These conflicts continue to intensify as new elected and appointed governmental officials around the world adopt new policies to combat these organizations. These new strategies aimed at security for their countries may prove to enhance ISIS's message that this is a religious war based upon the perceived marginalization of Muslims within these countries.

So, why are Americans so quick to volunteer for service within terrorist organizations? Based on data compiled and research conducted, is this as significant a problem as government officials and the media portrays? Is there common ground on which to build a unified effort to combat radical extremist movements?

As data and analysis show, diversity is a common theme within members of the ISIS sympathizer community. Profiles of members show a spectrum from those that only echo the group's ideology online to those that are intimately involved in recruiting, retention, financing, and front line fighting. Supporters range in age from grown men that have experimented with jihadist ideology for decades to teenagers that have recently converted to Islam, with family backgrounds as diverse as the son of a Boston police officer or a single mother of two children. Radicalization crosses all race, age, gender, social class, education and family backgrounds (15).

Individuals with such diverse backgrounds rarely share the same motivation factors. Some root causes of radicalization are centralized on structural factors such as political tensions and cultural differences. These strong core beliefs can be in direct opposition to the shared community beliefs. Other individuals focus on

personal factors such as the shock of life-changing events (15). Matt Venhaus, United States Army Colonel and author of “Why Youth Join al-Qaeda, 2010,” was able to capture the diversity of the individuals attracted to jihadist ideology. He categorized them as revenge seekers, status seekers, identity seekers, and thrill seekers (15). These categories are not all-inclusive and fail to capture an individual’s exhibited characteristics in more than one category. It has been agreed upon by many experts “that radicalization is a highly complex and individualized process, often shaped by a poorly understood interaction of structural and personal factors” (15). With the advanced technology used by ISIS in its recruitment and radicalization process coupled with a campaign focused on younger adults, ISIS has become the new al-Qaeda.

Chapter One

ISIS Recruits in North America and Europe (Domestic Terrorists and Foreign Fighters)

On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old from Port St. Lucie, Florida who had previously claimed support for terrorist groups to his co-workers and had been investigated by the FBI twice, executed a coordinated attack at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. During the attack, Mateen killed 49 patrons and wounded 53 more in what was described as the largest mass shooting in American history. In calls to 911 during the event, Mateen told dispatchers that he was an “Islamic Soldier” while pledging his allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as IS or ISIL). He continued to show his support for ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and referred to the Boston Marathon bombers as his “homeboys.” During the standoff, Mateen told hostage negotiators that his attack was inspired by the death of an ISIS commander (League, U.S. Residents Linked to Activity Motivated by Islamic Extremist Ideology in 2016). Mateen made a series of posts and searches to Facebook both before and during the attack. On January 16th, 2017, Mateen’s wife Noor Salman was taken into custody by federal authorities in connection with the assault. Orlando Police Chief John Mina said in a statement that “Salman was facing accusations of obstruction of justice and aiding and abetting by providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization” (Tucker 1).

Violent Extremism Statistics – Where are the Common Threads

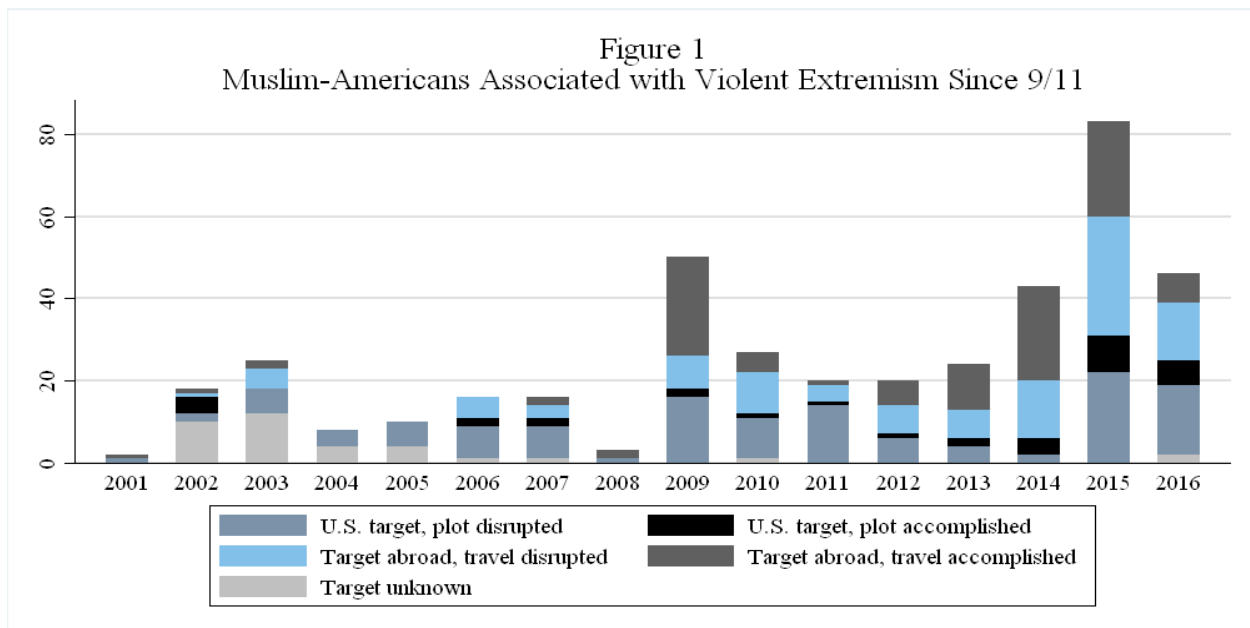
As of November 2016, United States Federal prosecutors have charged a total of 106 men and women throughout the country in connection with ISIS (Goldman, Yang and Muyskens). In 2015, 80 United States residents were either arrested, charged or otherwise publicly identified as supporting Islamic extremist ideology through “their involvement in crimes ranging from providing support, attempting to fund or traveling to join terrorist groups abroad or planning or assisting in plots here at home” (Anti-Defamation League 1). The 2015 numbers are a 180% increase over 2014. Although 2016 showed a 40 percent drop in the number of Muslim-Americans associated with violent extremism (46 Muslim-Americans) (Kurzman 2), it is still higher than the annual average since 9/11 (27 per year) and will go down in history as the deadliest year for domestic Islamic extremism in the United States since the attacks of 9/11 based on the number of citizens killed.

Dr. Charles Kurzman, a member of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, produced an annual report entitled “Muslim-American Involvement with Violent Extremism, 2016”. This data-driven report is produced annually to analyze trends in violent extremism in America.

According to his report, over the past 15 years, there have been 414 Muslim-Americans associated with violent extremism. Since 9/11, only 23 percent of Muslim-Americans involved with violent extremist plots have family backgrounds from the following seven countries: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somali, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. These are the same countries designated by President Trump for temporary immigration bans under his executive order. According to Kurzman, “There have been

no fatalities in the United States caused by extremists with family backgrounds in these countries” (2).

Figure 1 below from Kurzman’s report provides data that may be beneficial for determining the mindset of U.S. extremists when deciding whom they will target with terrorist activities. With an ever evolving world, data mining to determine extremist trends is tough at best. Variables are consistently changing and affecting daily data. Variables such as foreign terrorist organization objectives (targeting domestically or internationally) and the international communities’ response to terrorist activities (both reactive and proactive approaches) are just two areas that affect violent extremist activity data. In war, objectives are constantly realigned to take advantage of targets of opportunity. Based on the data provided in figure 1 over the past 15 years, a rise in “target abroad” and “travel” since 2011 appears to correlate with the creation of ISIS in the Middle East and their successful on-line recruiting efforts.



(Report on Muslim-American Involvement with Violent Extremism, 2016)

As past data continues to be researched and analyzed, facts and connections (or lack thereof) begin to form. The Anti-Defamation League compiled Homegrown Islamic Extremism data from 2009-2015 to create a better understanding of individuals radicalized by these groups in which extremist action was taken by the person within the United States. Data based on location, average age, gender and past criminal record were some of the areas researched to gain a better understanding of the motivations behind joining radical Islamic groups within the United States.

Location

Locations of individuals associated with ISIS are as broad as their reasoning for joining such organizations. 34 states with a total of 404 residents were identified to be the residence of individuals linked to terrorist activities between 2009 and 2015. With a high population of Muslims in New York, Minnesota, and California, it is not unexpected that these locations would produce the largest number of arrestees during this timeframe. Of these totals, 46 of these individuals were either killed or arrested abroad (Anti-Defamation League 5). Based upon their report, no clear area within the United States was determined to be a pipeline for radicalization.

Age

Although a connection with location and radicalization does not appear, age does play a role in these types of extremist activities. In the United States, the seven-year average age (2009 – 2015) of a resident linked to terror plots and other activity associated with modern radical Islamic movements is 28.3 years of age. A

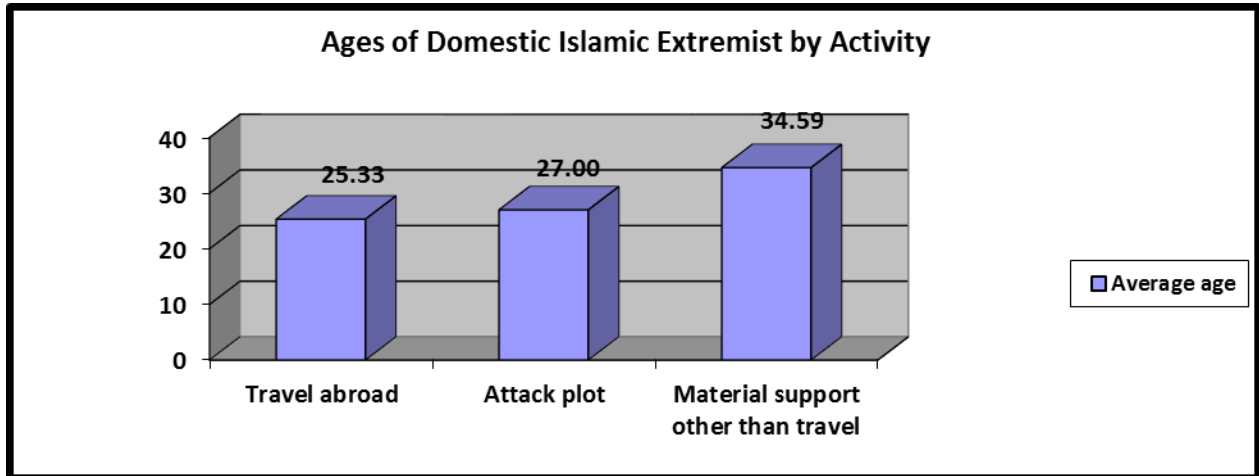
three-year average (2013 – 2015) shows a 26-year-old average with 2014 being the lowest median age of 23.9 years-old (6). The United States Assistant Attorney General John Carlin has noted, “In over 50 percent of the cases the defendants are 25 years or younger, and in over a third of the cases they are 21 years or younger...that is different than from the demographic we saw who went to support core al-Qaida in the Afghanistan FATA region” (Vidino and Hughes 17).

Age has been determined to play a vital role in the timeline for radicalization. Younger people have been found to be more impressionable and radicalize more quickly than older candidates (Coolsaet 16). They are considered less educated in religious thoughts and international politics and thus more likely motivated by personal estrangement and not injustices. As young people connect with other young radicals on the front lines through social media, they desire the same attention as these fighters are receiving. Their desire for attention through radical behavior (narcissism) is a driving force in their quest for recognition and infamy. Alain Grignard, Superintendent at the anti-terrorist division of the Belgian Federal Judicial Police, contrasts the differences with the current recruits and their predecessors by stating “Previously we were mostly dealing with “radical Islamists” – individuals radicalized toward violence by an extremist interpretation of Islam – but now we’re increasingly dealing with what are best described as “Islamized radicals” (17).

Age as a Choice in Extremist Activity

With a further breakdown of age associated with a particular domestic Islamic extremist activity, it appears that age plays a role in which activity a supporter

attempts to engage. There may be a connection between the amount of community investment such as family (wife and kids), job and other responsibilities and the degree to which an individual is willing to engage in violent extremism behavior.



(Report by Anti-Defamation League on The ISIS impact on the Domestic Islamic Extremist Threat, 2016)

In the above graph, it is noted in the research conducted by the Anti-Defamation League that non-travel material support individuals are typically older than those attempting to travel abroad and participate in frontline combat operations (Anti-Defamation League 11). This travel may be attributed to young recruits having fewer life responsibilities (family obligations) thus allowing for freedom to travel and fully expose themselves to their new found beliefs. Older recruits may have a greater sense of household responsibilities (wife, children, primary income for family) and struggle with showing their unwavering support to the organization while remaining open to their prior commitments to their family. Although age may play a role in the type of illicit activity a supporter engages in, it does not appear to play a role in whether an individual becomes radicalized.

Criminal Record

In the United States, criminal records do not appear to play a role in attraction to radical Islamic violence or other activities. Over the course of seven years (2009-2015), 22% of domestic Islamic extremists had prior convictions. When compared to the national average for all Americans of 30%, it is fair to say that a past criminal record is not a key indicator of underlying intents. However, it does suggest that ideology is a primary motivator rather than a predisposition for criminal behavior (13).

Gender

Gender has become a consideration in radicalization recruitment. Males of middle-eastern descent are no longer considered the only profile of an ISIS recruit. Women are now sought after for both material support and active operational attacks. As ISIS conducts direct recruitment efforts of women through online and offline dynamics, the number of female domestic Islamic extremists has increased. Although men exhibit a higher rate than women in engaging in activities motivated by modern radical movements, women have increased their numbers substantially starting in 2014. In 2014, 10 of the 28 U.S. residents linked to terror were female. In 2015, that number was lower with 7 out of 80 being women. With ISIS's delivered message to women showing a vision centered on a romantic, utopian life within its territory and the ability for Pro-ISIS women to interact on social media with like-minded men and women, an opportunity for radical involvement has evolved for these women. The internet has allowed these women to not only become active participants, but also leaders and activists promoting their new found extremist world views (9).

While a desire to build a strict Islamic society and the search for personal identity are motivators for both male and female recruits, women also see their role as wife and mother within the ISIS community. Labels such as “wife of jihadist husband” and “mother to the next generation” are considered necessary roles within the ISIS community. ISIS has been able to appeal to these nurturing traits of potential female recruits and exploit their need to care for others. As social media engagement provides opportunities not offered within a traditional, gender-segregated religion, women are able to communicate directly with both women and men that seek the same roles within the organization as they do.

One of the most publicized radicalization examples of a woman was Tafsheen Malik. On December 2nd, 2015, Tafsheen Malik, 29, from Pakistan joined with her husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, 28; in massacring 14 of his co-workers at their holiday party in San Bernardino, California. At the time, it was the worst mass shooting since the Sandy Hook rampage in December of 2012. The couple left their six-month-old daughter with Farook’s mother to carry out this attack. Farook was an American citizen and an environmental health specialist with the San Bernardino County health department. He graduated from California State University, San Bernardino, with a degree in environmental health. By all indication, he was a normal citizen with normal habits and interests. However, it is believed that he was radicalized online prior to meeting his wife. He met his wife, Malik, through an online dating service and eventually they met face to face in Saudi Arabia. They continued their relationship, and eventually, she came to the United States on a fiancée visa and became a permanent legal resident. She was believed to have been radicalized while in Pakistan, and both

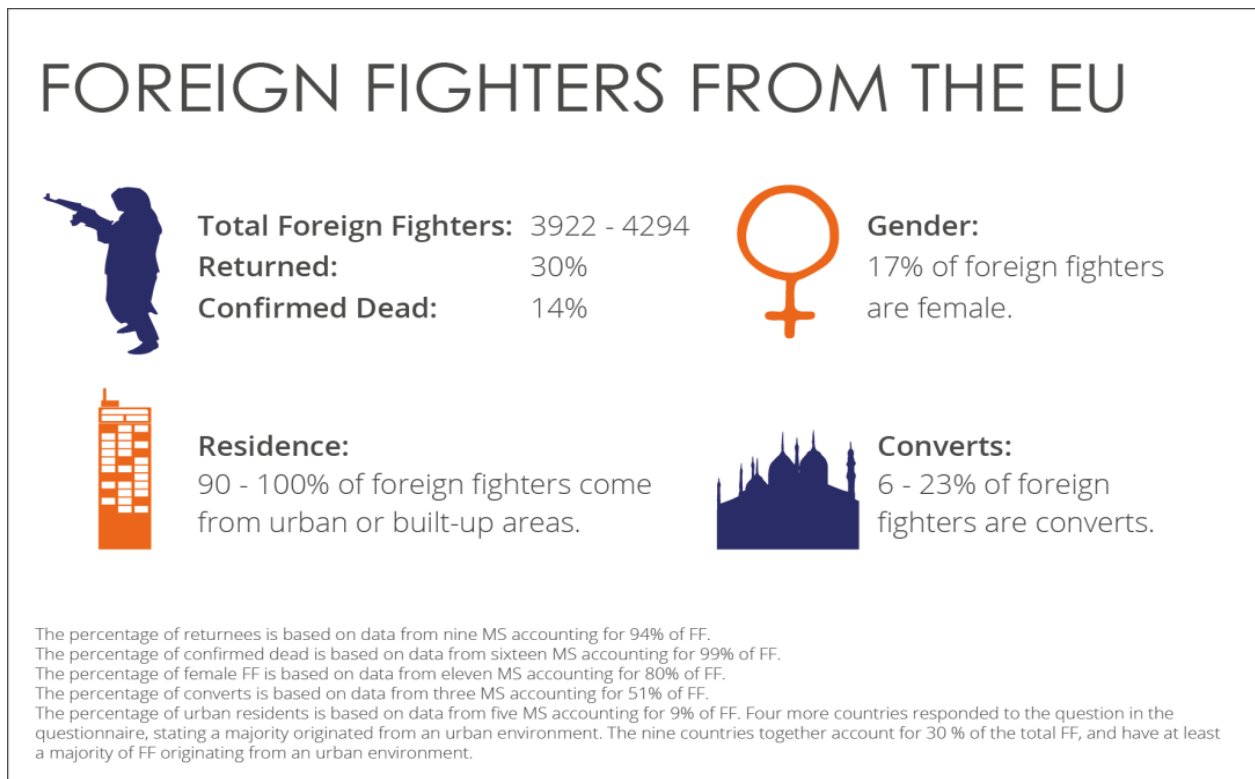
believed in Islamic extremist ideology before meeting online. On the day before the attack, she posted on Facebook her allegiance to ISIS (10).

Radicalization Networks within the United States and Europe

While the challenge of jihadist radicalization exists in the United States, its intensity and size are significantly smaller in comparison to most European countries. Factors such as integrated American Muslim-communities and the lack of radicalizing agents including radical mosques, extremist preachers, and recruiting networks has allowed for fewer radicalization dynamics than have been witnessed within the following European countries: France, Great Britain, Belgium and Denmark (Vidino and Hughes). While the American jihadist radicalization front is seen as significantly smaller, less professional and more decentralized than the European model, it is still a very competent mechanism capable of mass violence against American citizens.

Within the European Union, there is a growing concern over residents leaving their home or resident country and traveling to the Syrian and Iraqi battlefields as “foreign fighters.” From September 2014 to September 2015, the number of Foreign Fighters reportedly doubled and reached 30,000 combatants from 104 countries (Boutin, Chauzal and Dorsey 3). These figures are also confirmed by the United Nations Security Council which has estimated that more than 25,000 foreign fighters from more than 100 countries have joined ISIS and other jihadist groups in terrorist controlled territory (Vidino and Hughes 15). These foreign fighters pose an increased risk of returning to their host countries and bringing their newly acquired skills to conduct attacks in Europe and other surrounding areas. It is estimated that the European Union

has produced between 3,922 and 4,294 Foreign Fighters with a majority of these coming from four countries - Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Boutin, Chauzal and Dorsey 3). It is estimated that 30% of these fighters have returned to their countries of departure and by all accounts pose a potential security risk (3).



(Report on the Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union, 2016)

The above graphic provided by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) illustrates that almost all European Union foreign fighters come from urban or built-up areas of their host countries. With the vast majority of radicalized fighters coming from metropolitan areas or outer suburbs, often the same neighborhoods, indications are that pre-existing extremist networks are well established. These networks work to radicalize friends and form groups of extremist using the same successful practices as street gangs.

In a Belgium case study conducted in 2016, it was noted that group dynamics play a crucial role in the maturation process of Belgium youth. Areas such as schools, public parks, sports clubs and on the street are opportunities to meet and influence each other in comfortable environments (Coolsaet 16).

Typical of younger recruits, their religious knowledge base is considered more shallow and superficial than was that of their predecessors as was their understanding of international politics. While their predecessors were motivated by the geopolitical struggles between superpowers and the injustices perceived, they are driven by personal estrangement (16).

In the European Union, although no particular nationality can be seen as the leading producer of radicalization, subsets of immigrants from foreign countries are affected by their new found European culture. In communities of disaffected migrants who cannot locate employment and are unable to assimilate into the European culture, a common theme emerges among these disenfranchised members. Lack of national resources and job opportunities brings a sense of abandonment and frustration.

Identified Behaviors within Extremist Groups

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence led by the University of Maryland, conducted an Empirical Assessment of Domestic Radicalization (EADR). According to START, EADR researchers built the largest “public database on individual radicalization in the United States: Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS). The database includes 147 variables

covering demographic, background, group affiliation, and ideological information for 1,473 violent and non-violent extremists from across the ideological spectrum” (Jensen, Lafree and James 5). The following are several key findings that were concluded in the study and noted both in the report and on the START website (74):

- Significant differences in background characteristics, group affiliations, and radicalization processes exist across the ideological milieus.
- The conventional wisdom that radicalization is more common among individuals who come from low SES backgrounds and lack educational opportunities is generally not supported by the PIRUS data. Most extremists come from middle-class backgrounds and have at least some college education. That said, stable employment may decrease the risk that individuals with extreme views will engage in violent behaviors. Stable employment often leads to the development of positive social relationships and places demands on individuals’ time that depress extremist activities.
- Despite an increase in lone actor behavior in the U.S., radicalization remains a distinctly social process. Group and clique membership rates remain high across the ideological spectrum.
- Clique membership is high across the ideological spectrum and is linked to an increase in violent behaviors. As peers organize into small, insular groups, common biasing mechanisms, such as group think and in-group/out-group bias, often set in, producing increasingly extreme behaviors.
- While competition among extremist groups in the U.S. is not significantly linked to an increase in violent behavior, group rivalries exist in large numbers on the far

right. Research suggests that competition within and between groups can produce disillusionment with extremist movements for certain individuals.

- The rates of prison radicalization in the U.S. are low and even across the ideological spectrum, suggesting that it is not a common pathway for most extremists nor is it limited to a particular ideology.
- Radicalization is typically a long process, often lasting years for individuals. Recent evidence, however, suggests that online environments may be speeding up radicalization processes, reducing them to several months in many cases.
- While documented mental illness is relatively uncommon among extremists, results indicate that mental health conditions may be linked to higher propensities for violent behavior.
- Individuals who engage in pre-radicalization criminal behaviors are significantly more likely to attempt or commit acts of violence post-radicalization.
- Radicalization indicators are often the noticeable effects of underlying psychological and emotional processes. These processes are complex and are commonly driven by feelings of lost significance and community victimization, as well as the intense need for psychological and emotional rewards.
- While it is clear that there is no single pathway to violent extremism, individuals were more open to extremist narratives when they experienced trauma or developed a deep sense of community marginalization.

A key takeaway from these findings is that both positive and negative “turning points” exist in an individual’s life and may influence the decision-making process. Key life events include military service, stable employment, and marriage

among other events. These examples have the potential to enhance one's life and alter criminal behavior. Other life events, for instance, poor living conditions, substantial periods of unemployment, lack of educational opportunities and strained family relationships can accelerate the negative behaviors (29). Bonds that form within society and family help to create and form one's collective identity. Weak family and societal bonds, combined with other factors such as religious persecution, can create the turning points needed for radicalization to form.

These key findings are important for the continued understanding of extreme radicalization within the United States. Clues such as these, along with a deeper understanding of personal inspirations may aid in shedding the needed light on the true influences of Islamic radicalization. The START report established that “Significant background, demographic and radicalization differences are present across the ideological spectrum, and the processes by which individuals and groups come to engage in extremist behaviors are complex, often resulting from a host of psychological and emotional factors that are difficult to model” (74). Although many factors may influence an individual's decision-making process when it comes to radicalization, there are no set rules for determining the identity of the next domestic terrorist. It is noted in the report that pre-radicalization criminal activity and post-radicalization clique membership are strong indicators that radicalized individuals may have a propensity towards violent actions. The report also notes that individuals motivated by Salafi jihadist ideologies are more likely to engage in violence. As discussed earlier, this report shows that those with stable employment history are significantly less likely to participate in violence (6).

The Islamic Radicalization Conversion Process - Motivation

Islamic conversion is nothing new within the Muslim world. Islam is the world's second-largest religion and the fastest-growing major religion. Muslims are also the youngest of all the key religious groups with a median age of 23 years old (Lipka). These statistics, however, do not relate to sympathy or active support for Islamic terrorist organizations. Conversion to extremist views is considered rare within the Muslim community, but it is possible. Converts that become entrenched in ISIS extremist ideology and take action on these new found ideas within the confines of the United States and Europe should also be considered when studying motivation behind these radical changes. In 2015, 20 U.S. residents that converted to Islam or claimed conversion were involved in terrorist plots or other activities considered to be motivated by radical Islamic ideology. This number represents 25% of the total residents involved in Islamic terrorist activities for 2015. The seven-year average (2009-2015) has been 30.48 percent (Anti-Defamation League p.11). Given that an estimated 23 percent of American Muslim's are converts to Islam, evidence supports that American ISIS supporters are overrepresented within the Islamic convert demographic.

[Alexander Ciccolo](#), a 23-year-old U.S. citizen and a convert to Islam, was arrested on July 4, 2015 and charged as a felon in possession of a weapon. Ciccolo had allegedly planned an attack against a popular bar frequented by university students and a college cafeteria. According to court documents, Ciccolo had initially considered an attack on civilians, military and law enforcement, for which he also allegedly considered using pressure cooker bombs. Ciccolo reportedly had a history of mental illness; his father, a Boston police captain, had alerted authorities about his son's suspicious behavior.

[Harlem Suarez](#), a 23-year-old U.S. citizen from Florida was arrested on July 28, 2015 for allegedly plotting to bomb a Florida beach in support of ISIS. Court documents indicate Suarez also allegedly discussed placing bombs in front of the houses and under the vehicles of police officers. Suarez had moved to the U.S. with his parents when he was a child as a refugee from Cuba. He apparently converted to Islam and radicalized while living in the U.S.



Alexander Ciccolo

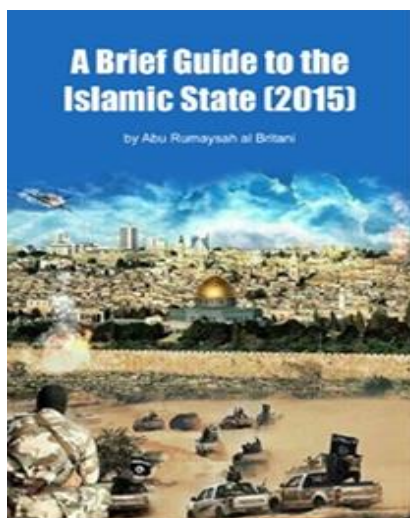


Harlem Suarez

(Report on the ISIS Impact on the Domestic Islamic Extremist Threat, 2016)

Organizations such as ISIS have been able to target new Islamic converts susceptible to radicalization by providing neatly packaged narratives that sell their territorial ambitions through far-reaching propaganda including the magazines Dabiq and Inspire along with other social media platforms.

“In May 2015 a British ISIS fighter published a guide to life within the group, presenting it as a potential-rich experience under a "blossoming empire." In it, the author stated: (Katz, ISIS's Mobile App Developers Are in Crisis Mode):



Inside the Islamic State you will have access to the usual gizmos such as laptops, tablets, mobile phones, and of course the internet. Keep in mind that mobile networks are still in the making, but apps such as Skype, Kik, WhatsApp and Telegram, to name but a few, are great alternatives.



(Siteintelgroup.com, 2016)

Easy to view guides and information on ISIS that portray a beautiful land, abundant resources and the quality of life that appeals to anyone throughout the world is the perfect recruiting postcard. ISIS has the unique ability to communicate their core message through multiple sources and platforms while appealing to an individual's fundamental religious beliefs and the notion that these beliefs are being attacked globally.

Other narratives that involve an underlying sense of sympathy and compassion appear to play a major role in the interest and investment young Americans

have in the Syrian conflict and thus form a relationship with ISIS. Many ISIS supporters were outraged by the violent suppression measures used by Bashar al Assad's regime during the Syrian rebellion and the subsequent inaction on the part of the international community (Vidino and Hughes 15). As mainstream and social media provided pictures and videos capturing the aftermath of civilian massacres perpetrated by the regime shocked the conscience globally, individuals with and without ties to the Islamic State began to take the first steps to militancy within the ranks of ISIS.

Ideological Fulfillment

Ideological motivations are deeply intertwined with personal motives. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) observes that those who embrace ISIS's ideology tend to be "disenfranchised individuals seeking ideological, religious and personal fulfillment" (16). A general need for belonging, a sense of purpose, significance within society and identity appears to be significant motivators for many Americans (and other Westerners) who embrace ISIS's ideology (16). In a 2014 video by Moner Abu Salha, a 22-year-old Florida native that traveled to Syria and died on a suicide mission, his need for a sense of purpose in life was captured when he recorded the following "I lived in America, I know how it is. You have all the fancy amusement parks and the restaurants and the food and all this crap and the cars. You think you're happy. You're not happy. You're never happy. I was never happy. I was always sad and depressed. Life sucked." In contrast, he described a life of fighting in Syria as "the best I have ever lived" (16). As individuals continue to look for identities to cling to and a purpose driven life, they encounter ISIS-inspired propaganda designed to exploit the emotions, needs,

and weaknesses of young adults, irrespective of their demographic backgrounds (17). While these same purpose-seeking motivators are true for traditional Islamic converts, other religions, or other movements within the community, there is more to the ISIS conversion process. Innovative approaches in technology combined with creative narratives have created an ISIS marketing strategy with unlimited potential.

Preventative Measures

As the threat of returning foreign fighters continues to elevate and other radicalized group members are prevented from travel to ISIS battleground areas, preventative radicalization measures must be established to contain further attacks outside the ISIS-controlled territory. Due to porous borders that affect travel throughout Europe and the Middle-east, policies and tactics that are both proactive (pre-radicalization) and reactive (post-radicalization) in nature must be implemented to succeed in eliminating these extremist groups and the radicalization process.

Chapter Two

Technology and Social Media

The internet continues to be one of the greatest technology advancements in history. Its ability to provide primary sources of information and news to a global environment can be both progressive and damaging. Propaganda for any organization can be found with a simple browser search. Active online research plays a prominent role in the radicalization of young adults within the United States.

The internet is packed with an overabundance of propaganda videos that can appeal to all walks of life interested in ISIS. They explore the spectrum from glamorizing the proposed Islamic Caliphate to shock and awe videos of brutal executions used as click bait to lure potential recruits (Callimachi). Depending on an individual's pleasure, these forms of communication can be very influential in converting individuals to a life of radical beliefs.

Organizations such as the Islamic State are considered a media conglomerate when they can produce 20-minute videos, pamphlets, audio clips, photo essays, and full-length documentaries in any language required. With the ability to average 38 new internet items per day, the virtual caliphate produced by ISIS rivals Western brand marketing firms and publishing outfits such as PepsiCo and BuzzFeed (Koerner).

Social Media and Radicalization

Social Media plays a critical role in the recruitment, radicalization, and retention of ISIS sympathizers throughout the world. The Program on Extremism,

located at George Washington University, has identified some 300 American and United States based ISIS supporters active on social media, spreading ISIS propaganda and networking with like-minded individuals (Vidino and Hughes 11).

In the years 2007 thru 2011, the rise in social media had a direct correlation with a spike in U. S. residents attempting to join radical Islamic movements throughout the world. Terror propagandists, recruiters, and activists each year increase their use of social media and other online global sources to find new ways to engage potential recruits (Anti-Defamation League 22). The use of peer-to-peer messaging apps like Telegram and Surespot, and content-sharing systems like JustPaste.it allow the Islamic State to maximize their recruiting base through social media networks (Koerner).

A 2015 Anti-Defamation League report titled “Homegrown Islamic Extremism in 2014: The Rise of ISIS and Sustained Online Recruitment” noted that “nearly all of the U.S. residents engaged in activity motivated by Islamic extremist ideology accessed propaganda materials, communicated with other extremists, or researched material support or plots online in those years” (Anti-Defamation League 22).

Today, 76 percent of all Internet users are on social media, compared to just 16 percent a decade ago and six in 10 Americans get



(Poster on Anti-Defamation League website)

news from social media. Well-known sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tumblr, Reddit, and Snapchat are part of the social media experience. These platforms and others like them are credited with spurring the growth of the internet and particularly cell phones and smartphones (Burke 4). With smartphones, the increased mobility of the web allows recruits to be targeted anywhere. No longer does the internet stop at the desktop or office space. It is now available to target potential recruits in all aspects of their lives, and at any time ideology reinforcement is needed.

This trend does not appear to be reducing. The internet plays a huge role in the radicalization process for new recruits and those individuals already influenced by groups such as ISIS. For people with radicalized predispositions, interaction with like-minded peers and exposure to on-line materials may prove to be the catalysts needed to go from passive supporter to active involvement in terrorist activities. Even those individuals in the early stage of the recruitment process may easily find themselves overwhelmed with the amount of extremist ideology provided through online materials and social media sites. On-line recruiters can quickly assist in the radicalization process through peer support and an advanced knowledge of resources available. Online socialization with ISIS sympathizers and recruiters combined with reading and watching on-line propaganda proves to be a critical element of the radicalization process.

Influence through the Internet

The attackers in San Bernardino and Orlando had expressed support for the Islamic State, and they, along with the Boston Marathon bombers, were devotees of

the significant online work of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born recruiter for Al Qaeda, who was killed in an American drone strike in 2011. According to a New York Times article entitled “‘In-Betweeners’ Are Part of a Rich Recruiting Pool for Jihadists,” Awlaki’s arguments remain highly popular on the web, where he urged Western Muslims to reject even the friendliest non-Muslim neighbors, whom he called “Sally Soccer Mom and Joe Six-Pack.” Mr. Rahami wrote in his journal that “Sheikh Anwar,” as well as Mr. Adnani of the Islamic State, “had ‘said it clearly: Attack the kuffar,’ or non-Muslims, in their backyard” (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

It is apparent that Awlaki continues to influence Jihadists around the world even after his death. The internet has the unique ability to enable former messengers to continue spreading their messages and even rekindle previous calls to action. When Awlaki’s eight-year-old daughter, Nawar al-Awlaki, was killed on February 5th, 2017 in a US-led raid in Yemen, the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), reported that her death was used by radical social media accounts to recruit new members. Strategies and campaigns created by extremists are paramount and efficient in their overall recruiting efforts and ability to spread their message of Jihadism (Singman).

The On-line Call for Support

While some radicalized supporters take the call to action by traveling abroad to fight for foreign terrorist organizations, others act as recruiters to ensure the vision and goals of the organization are met. These members encourage others to radicalize through on-line social media by emphasizing domestic support through illegal activities or by travel abroad to assist as a foreign fighter.

Indirect support of terrorist organizations can come through the internet. Sites that educate supporters in the art of target surveillance, how to conduct covert operations and how to plan attacks are a few examples of how the internet can be a resource for illicit activities. Other unlawful uses of the Internet can include material support such as money laundering, purchase and distribution of weapons, and illegal fundraising efforts.

Social media platforms are coming under fire for their perceived failure to stop terrorist activities on their websites. Lawsuits have been filed against Twitter, Facebook and Google alleging the companies provided “material support” to ISIS and helped radicalize the Pulse Nightclub shooter (Singman). Although social media giants such as Facebook have a zero tolerance for terrorists, terror propaganda, or the praising of terror activity, they rely heavily on the Facebook community to report violations of their community standards. With 1.7 billion users on Facebook alone, this can be a daunting task. Recruiters hide within an ocean of 2.3 billion live social media accounts. With social media platforms also being provided in numerous languages around the world, the average internet user lacks the knowledge or expertise to combat illicit propaganda. The lack of social media gatekeepers provides opportunities for tech-savvy terrorists to move throughout these platforms virtually undetected. By blending in and not drawing attention, these extremists can maneuver and identify potential recruits without fear of detection.

Virtual exporting of terrorism is a new concept to most of the world; however, it has been used for several years within the terrorist community. VISA restrictions, airport security, and travel bans have little consequences when a member

of the Islamic State can remotely guide the actions of a disciple in Europe, Asia or the United States. “They are virtual coaches who are providing guidance and encouragement throughout the process — from radicalization to recruitment to a specific plot,” said Nathaniel Barr, a terrorism analyst at Valens Global (Callimachi). These virtual relationships continue even during the terrorist attack by creating a direct line of communication to guide the attack and ensure their objectives are achieved.

Social Media applications continue to help shape the narrative of events and assist governments, first responders, perpetrators, victims, and eyewitnesses in telling their version of the story (Burke 4). Terrorists use smartphone apps and 24-hour live television coverage to ensure their attacks and the message they want to convey are seen immediately (2). These tactics allow a terrorist organization to be proactive in their approach yet leave government and law enforcement officials little time to react and to shape public reaction to the events. Reaching the larger human audience through real-time social media creates fear in the general populace through “shock and awe” while leaving potential recruits with a desire to be part of the experience.

A 2016 study of the murder of British Army soldier Lee Rigby, killed by two assailants claiming sympathy for Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, examined data collected from Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. It was determined that social media are a primary information source for the public. At one time, there were 800 tweets per minute regarding the Rigby murder (4). The ability to instantaneously receive and transmit relevant information is must within a virtual world.

Although on-line radicalization efforts are extremely efficient and purely web-based, individual radicalization efforts are numerous. There are cases in which the

entire radicalization process is conducted through only face to face conversations and a relationship that is built over time (Vidino and Hughes). These cases are not as numerous as on-line only, and the idea of both a personal and on-line relationship designed to complement one another is considered the ideal recruitment scenario.

Chapter Three

Cults, Gangs, and Mental Illness

Second generation Muslim immigrants, in particular, young men, are part of a rich recruiting pool for Islamic terrorist groups around the world. These recruits are known to be caught between host cultures (United States, Europe), parental cultures (Immigrant, First Generation), and traditional cultures. These struggles are exhibited through feelings of being lost or rejected from the society to which they now belong. These feelings of alienation, combined with anger towards a perceived war against their religion and an illicit organization's challenge that their loyalty is to Islam and not their new nation, provide an occasion for radicalization (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

These recruits are known as "In-betweeners" to psychologists. They are young adults whose identities have not yet solidified, and their uncertainty makes them vulnerable according to J. Reid Meloy, a forensic psychologist and clinical professor at the University of California. These individuals are searching for their identity, and a struggle ensues between their conservative religious views and their exposure to new less conservative societal views. According to Dr. Meloy, attaching identity to something that is larger allows the individual to inflate his sense of himself (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

This in-between status can be heightened with recent immigrants. According to Lorenzo Vidino, the director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, "living in two cultures at once is very enriching for most people but can be very unsettling for others" (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

Two examples of second generation immigrants that have subscribed to radicalization in the form of sensationalized violence are Ahmad Khan Rahami, 28, and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, who are accused of planting bombs in Manhattan and New Jersey. Rahami revealed a full-blown embrace of Jihadism based on “his scribbling in a notebook the names of Osama bin Laden, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani — an Islamic State leader — and Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born Al-Qaeda recruiter” (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden). Tsarnaev, the older of the Boston Marathon bombing suspects, who was killed during the attacks, turned to Islamic extremism when his professional boxing career ended. These two examples, along with the previous examples of Omar Mateen, 29, Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik (Farook’s wife) only further delves into the question of “why” when it comes to radicalization (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden). “Personal disappointment, perceptions of discrimination, anger about American foreign policy and the desire “to become a hero in one’s own story” are all at play in addition to jihadist ideology” stated Peter Bergen, the director of the security program at New America, a research group, and author of “United States of Jihad.” “Many of them just take their grievances and dress them up in the garb of Islam” (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

These feelings of not fitting in or longing to find their identity are not exclusive to young adults in the United States. European Muslims find a greater sense of rejection from their larger society. Farhad Khosrokhavar, a sociologist at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and the author of “Radicalization,” said

In France, they are blamed for not being French enough, and when they go to their parents’ country of origin, they are blamed for not

being Arab enough, that double denial can push them to adhere to a radical version of Islam, as a kind of lifeline: Since I am neither French nor Arab, neither American nor Afghan, I am Muslim and to hell with you all (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

By targeting the fears of Western Muslims from immigrant backgrounds, groups such as ISIS can introduce their radical beliefs as a religious loyalty test for potential recruits. By creating a sense of global Islam (virtual caliphate) that supersedes all nations, ISIS calls on supporters to denounce the nation in which they live. They convince them that the West is at war with Islam and Sunni Muslims throughout the world must be defended (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden). It is portrayed throughout the ISIS narrative that a Kuffar, a highly derogatory Arabic term used to refer to non-Muslims, is never to be trusted. Awlaki stated this numerous times in on-line propaganda videos that continue to be used for recruitment of extremists. For radical Islamic faithful, his lectures and videos confirm that both the United States and European countries are in a war against the religion of Islam. He asks the poignant question “How can you have your loyalty to a government that is leading the war against Islam and Muslims?” (Shane, Perez-Pena and Breeden).

This message has never been more apparent than during and since the presidential election. As perceived anti-Muslim rhetoric from elected officials continues, combined with, for example, the travel ban issued by President Trump’s executive order, groups such as ISIS use these divisive issues to fuel their hatred towards Western governments. They view these comments and actions as an opportunity to showcase this as a religious war between Islam and the West. Governmental policies that have the appearance of alienating groups based upon their religious beliefs within

predominately Muslim countries have the potential to aid the enemy during combat operations throughout the world.

Winning the hearts and minds of locals to conduct operations in austere environments is required to ensure groups such as ISIS are ineffective throughout the world. Partnerships require trust and respect to survive. Local partners are needed to combat ISIS and hopefully liberate the local populace. These partnerships are strained when policies and public views from government officials are in direct conflict with these mutual respect relationships. These relationships have been forged through combat operations. What would motivate an Iraqi soldier to fight against ISIS if he sees that the new American president has banned him from coming to America and has told the CIA that we might take Iraq's oil in the future? Such statements only assist ISIS in their message that the West hates and is intolerant towards Muslims. Policies always have unintended second and third order effects, from incredibly effective to fatally flawed. The proper wording of statements and policies from elected officials is critical to continued partnerships. It is imperative to ensure all angles of a particular policy have been properly vetted before full implementation. Perception is a reality when fighting an enemy that has the full potential of the Internet. It is vital to ensure actions do not fuel the anger of possible unknown recruits already eager to enter a religious war.

Psychology behind Radicalization (Marginalization)

Converts to Islam have a higher rate among Americans and Europeans to be drawn to extremism. "The actual content of the ideology is secondary," said Dr. Meloy, the psychologist. "What's important is the identification and fixation" (Shane,

Perez-Pena and Breeden). Individual extremist group membership across all ideological milieus has discovered that an affiliation with a group is the norm. This finding supports the concept that radicalization should be studied as a distinctly social process, regardless of ideological preference (Jensen, Lafree and James 18). As strong social bonds between members of small informal groups form, it is a widely held view within the field of radicalization studies that these bonds can play a pivotal role in the adoption of violence-justifying ideologies. As members of these informal groups grow closer and form a collective identity, “their psychological threshold for committing violent acts for the purpose of attaining ideological goals is lowered” (19).

In reference to psychology and ISIS’ terrorist propaganda, one consistent recurring theme is the emphasis on masculinity and humiliation (Perez and Beutel). Arie Kruglanski, a University of Maryland professor of psychology, points out that the need to be respected by oneself and others is a common message within ISIS propaganda. This desire to feel important or “quest for significance,” as Kruglanski calls it, is projected by ISIS addressing the Muslims’ collective humiliation at the hands of Western powers and their Muslim allies (Perez and Beutel). For young men struggling with this desire for significance and respect, any challenge to their masculinity may be the confrontation needed to invoke terrorist behavior.

An example of ISIS appealing to the masculinity of its recruits is their latest propaganda videos featuring a French-language a cappella chant containing footage of young children dressed in military fatigues, fully armed, and marching in bombed out city streets. In another video, recruits are encouraged to join the fight

alongside ISIS militants while a picture of a young boy holding an assault rifle is shown as the words “What’s your excuse?” flash across the screen (Perez and Beutel).

These psychological tactics aimed at humiliating male recruits into action are not limited to young children. Women are also used to motivate men to act. Female ISIS supporters are also used to create narratives of shame and emasculation. Recruits that are considered “fence sitters” are targeted by females and directly propositioned to take decisive action (Perez and Beutel).

Examples of these recruitment tactics are a 2015 tweet by a user named @UsofNuh who declared, “There are women who are already here before you and look, they are already doing more than you have for the Islamic State.” A February 2016 message over Telegram, by an alleged American female ISIS recruiter named Umm Isa al Amirikiah, was, even more, berating in tone: “Stop sitting behind your screens posting [sic] couple of dawlah [ISIS] videos, getting yourself 'caught' because of it. You are not men. You are an embarrassment for the Ummah [global Muslim community]” (Perez and Beutel). It has been discovered that ISIS-sympathizing women, who were often married to Syrian fighters, would attempt to shame men into joining ISIS by claiming they were not “real men” or “real Muslims” (Perez and Beutel).

Within any community linked by cultural similarities, these are considered powerful messages that may create social and emotional blackmail for its intended audience. A counter-narrative provided by male leaders within the community focused on encouraging and firm beliefs for masculinity and manhood may mitigate the risk associated with these types of recruitment efforts. Positive role models within the

Muslim community are essential in countering the narrative being disseminated by the ISIS community.

Cult Mentality

It is commonplace to describe the Islamic State as a cult. Leaders such as Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, former United States President Barack Obama and former United States Secretary of State John Kerry have all referred to ISIS as a cult in an apparent attempt to discredit the organization (Gaub).

Does ISIS contain the defining features of a cult in the way it relates to its members and the larger society? According to an article published by Florence Gaub entitled "The Cult of ISIS," cults use religion to establish an exclusive, authoritarian, self-interested organization with total control over its adherents. Cults and religions differ on two critical points in their interpretation and implementation of faith. Cults believe in an absolute view while religions tend to gravitate towards a collective effort. They also vary in the way they treat members who differ from the direction of the group or who wish to leave the organization or religion (Gaub).

Cults treat their entire system (ideology, practices, leadership, and belief system) as beyond reproach and an absolute truth. All aspects are considered closed for debate, unlike religions that usually permit discussion, debate and personal interpretation of ideas to foster personal enlightenment. The Islamic State allows for little intellectual exchange over its interpretation of the Islamic faith. Only the highest levels of the Islamic State are authorized to debate over the organization's interpretation

of its belief. All executive power is held exclusively at the absolute pinnacle of the organization. As with a cult, ISIS leadership is not accountable to any authority and believes that the ends justify the means at any cost. These exalted ends provide for acts which cult members would have considered unethical before joining (114).

Cult techniques used for recruiting, such as brainwashing and integrating members into ideology and daily activities, are also the standard practice of the Islamic State. The same techniques that were perfected by cults of the 1960s and 1970s are effective in recent era radicalization.

Cults see recruitment as a strategic priority based on the need to maintain followers to sustain the group. Without followers, there is no group. This strategy allows for membership to grow exponentially throughout the process. The more people who have joined equates to more that will be attracted to join. Individuals prefer to validate their choice to participate in a group or organization represented by a larger number of followers rather than by a small cohort (116). ISIS plays by the same rules. Since the establishment of the caliphate in 2014, ISIS has expanded the recruitment of foreign fighters. These successful battlefield campaigns before 2016 have provided legitimacy to the organization and are vital in its recruiting efforts of foreign fighters. ISIS's ability to take their high-profile victories and market them to a large international audience through social media allows them to portray the organization as a robust and capable force. These traits are attractive to individuals already predisposed to the ideology of terrorist regimes.

As with any radical indoctrination procedure, the first step is to protect the members and potential recruits from outsiders whose goal is to undermine the process

and disrupt vital communications. This is accomplished by separating him or her from their public environment, both physically and mentally (Gaub). In the case of the Islamic State, candidates are requested to travel to the held territories of Iraq and Syria in order to fully immerse themselves in the ideology and expedite the work required to gain full control. For those that are unable to travel abroad, efforts to isolate the recruit within their community and monitor the flow of ISIS propaganda are attempted to achieve the same desired results as a foreign fighter. In either case, individuals are exposed to the core beliefs of the new ideological system to form a new vision of the world. The social context that these newcomers have been integrated within for their entire life begins to separate morally from their new found vision (Gaub).

Although the brand of indoctrination is distinct between different cults, including the Islamic State, their end goal is the same: establishing control over the individual (119). Power is gained over the recruit by ISIS's prophecy of a final battle in which only its members will be prepared. This narrative of a chosen people in an epic tale of us-versus-them doomsday scenario creates a sense of urgency to join the ranks. A definite "which side of history" choice that is perceived as an infinite life-decision does create a recipe for unwavering devotion to the ideology that drives the conclusion.

As ISIS attempts to continue its successful recruitment of foreign fighters in the Western European countries of France, Great Britain, Germany, and Belgium, it highlights the pull of existing national clusters within the organization (Gaub). As more and more citizens from a particular region join ISIS, it is highly probable that more will follow. This is evident by the fact that roughly half of the fighting force in Iraq and Syria are considered an international delegation of foreign fighters.

Just as cults are skilled at locating recruits that are prepared to receive their message, ISIS is also highly skilled at identifying individuals that are receptive to indoctrination. Counter to popular belief, it is believed that persons attracted to cults, as well as ISIS, are not considered mentally ill. Research has shown that major psychological issues do not play a role in these recruits. Cult membership indicates that two-thirds of the members are psychologically healthy while the other third are typically experiencing mild depression (116). As previously discussed, major life events tend to render recruits more receptive to the Islamic State's message rather than mental instability. These major life decision points, affecting a broad spectrum of personal issues, create the dynamics that aid in the radicalization process. This helps to explain the biographical diversity of both ISIS and cult members. Within this distinct subset, ISIS is able to bring a sense of purpose, cohesion and collective belonging while taking the confusion out of life and simplifying the structure. Like cults, a simplistic view of life is taught to increase psychological well-being and provide the structure sought by members.

ISIS's appeal is largely based on its highly social cohesiveness. As in cults, the Islamic State keeps everyone fully engaged in the group to meet the social requirements of the group. This allows ISIS to formulate a psychological appeal rather than a political or theological attraction with individuals who possess a less than sound understanding of the Islamic faith. Just like potential cult converts, ISIS candidates who are considered "lacking" in the extent of their beliefs are considered to be more easily indoctrinated (116).

For those members that are fully programmed within the ideology of a particular sect, the experience can be seen as a profoundly rewarding experience. This can be difficult for outsiders to comprehend based on the mental and physical hardships that are endured. Just as members of gangs see life outside the gang as unimaginable, cults most ardent believers hold the same beliefs (Gaub).

It is fair to say that the recruiting efforts and practices of cults and a terrorist organization such as ISIS are similar. With these groups, both the recruitment and radicalization process are considered highly individual and psychological. Due to the close bonds and cherished personal relationships that have been forged over time, close associates and family members are likely to notice the changes and development over time; however, they may be reluctant to see the changes and may be in denial over the new found ideology.

By denying the obvious, family and friends are indirectly aiding the recruitment process by approving of the ideology through silence. Although Muslim communities throughout the world feel marginalized and see governmental authority as a last resort to stop the radicalization process, they must adopt the motto "See something, say something" to assist their loved ones in the recovery process before it is too late.

It is going to take a true partnership with the Islamic community to counter this radicalization of youth. The current narrative of separation between state agents and the Islamic community will only continue to fuel the recruitment efforts of ISIS.

Gang Mentality

Although ISIS is not considered a gang, it does have some unique characteristics of gang life and activities. Similarities between ISIS and gang life are relatively prominent when compared with each other. Tools, techniques, and procedures employed by gangs, to ensure continued attainment of their recruiting goals, are the same ones used by Islamic extremists to enhance recruiting efforts.

Criminal activities including human trafficking, prostitution, drug and weapon sales are a few of the illegal activities used to fund gangs and extremist groups such as ISIS. Criminal organizations tend to run in the same groups and use the same resources to further their end states. Core motivations for gangs may not be similar to radical extremists; however, the need for funds remains the same. Illicit activities are no more than an avenue to achieve their result. Recruits that are familiar with gang activities prove to be easily converted to radicalization based on their familiarity with this lifestyle and the need to fulfill their desire for criminal behavior.

The use of social media and other forms of technology to recruit prospects, facilitate communications, target the enemy and thwart efforts to counter their message are common traits of both parties. The same common platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) used to engage potential recruits, and current members of gangs are universally used by ISIS.

Islamic extremists that belong to gangs have opportunities to spread their religious ideology with other members in a controlled environment without fear of reprisal. Common ground such as perceived injustices between these groups is mutually beneficial and can increase recruiting efforts on both sides of the relationship.

According to the EADR report:

Psychological models of radicalization emphasize the complex cognitive and emotional processes that motivate individuals' involvement in extremism (Jensen; Borum). In particular, psychologists who study extremism highlight the importance of cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities, which are often the products of identity-seeking behavior in adolescence or early adulthood. In order to fulfill a search for personal identity, or to overcome a sense of vulnerability or diminished self-worth; individuals derive personal meaning and value through group membership or identification with a cause greater than themselves (Jensen; Borum).

Within the European Union, youth attracted to ISIS have been categorized into two groups – those with pre-existing gang relationships and those with no pre-existing connections. The first group has pre-existing kinships and friendship through gang affiliation or association with known gang members. For them, joining ISIS is merely a shift to another form of deviant behavior. They are attracted to membership in street gangs, rioting, drug trafficking and juvenile delinquency. They view ISIS as a super-gang, an extension of their inner-city gang. Joining an organization such as ISIS adds a thrilling, larger-than-life dimension to their way of life. It transforms them from delinquents without a future into mujahedeen with a cause and purpose (Coolsaet 19).

The second group is comprised of those with no pre-existing connections to gangs. These individuals have no prior deviant behavior and nothing to distinguish them from their peers. They refer to an absence of future, personal difficulties, exclusion and absence of belonging as motivation. They are often solitary; isolated adolescents considered loners. They are frequently at odds with family and friends with a constant search for belonging and a cause to embrace (20).

These two groups do share some common characteristics. They see “No Future” as the essence of the youth subculture that drives the majority of foreign fighters

from the West. They make decisions on how they feel and not on how they think. They see traveling to the ISIS-held territory as an escape from everyday life with no future. A common theme is “Nothing to lose and everything to gain” among both groups. They also believe that religion is not of the essence. The “belonging” to a group is the power of attraction (20).

With the power of the social media aiding in their need for “belonging,” the current wave of young foreign fighters are more accurately discussed as a ‘violent extremist social trend’ rather than using the term ‘radicalization.’ The term ‘No future’ best encapsulates the subculture of these foreign fighters.

These psychological models of radicalization are also the same motivators for membership in gangs. It is seen time and time again within communities prone to gang activity and recruitment. These same characteristics are evident throughout the entire gang population. Individuals that are drawn to a life of gangs, and the entire perceived glamor that is associated with it, are the same people that could be fascinated with the thrill of radicalization and the allure of a perceived family mindset that only wants the best for them. Recruits that have a realized need to fulfill cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities are highly susceptible to these groups. In the past, recruits would have to be living in vulnerable communities to be targeted for recruitment. Today, recruitment efforts are available in the most protected areas of the community. If a person has a desire to gain greater knowledge of criminal groups, the information is available 24 hours a day for consumption.

The allure of violence and criminal activity is also a characteristic of gang membership that transcends into the radicalization world. Thrill seekers and those with

a propensity for violence are attracted to groups that enable these desires to become a reality. The need for destructive action by groups such as ISIS combined with the aspirations of violence-seeking recruits who wish to be a participant in such actions, creates a potentially devastating coalition capable of vicious attacks on innocent people.

While gangs and their associates continue to be one of the largest criminal enterprises in the United States and throughout the world, their influence and recruiting efforts are extremely successful. Failure by law enforcement to adequately respond to these societal and criminal threats has only increased their appeal to recruits. With a societal shift away from supporting law enforcement and the appeal of social change, radical groups such as gangs not only appeal to fringe groups but are becoming increasingly popular with a larger demographic and becoming culturally acceptable within certain communities throughout the world.

The Role of Mental Illness in Radicalization

As discussed previously in the Pulse nightclub shooting, Omar Mateen displayed signs of mental instability prior to the attack. Since the incident, several researchers and journalists have noted his lack of basic Islamic principles coupled with a propensity for violence as possible signs of mental illness. Researchers have emphasized that “radicalization to violent extremism is a complex; psycho-social process that belies a simple explanation and the role played by mental illness in the radicalization process is not well understood” (James and PISOIU).

Historical terrorism studies have shown that most terrorists are considered psychologically normal and deem individuals with mental illness as unreliable and

uncontrollable within their structured terrorist groups (James and Psoiu). This style of organizational preference has created a paradigm shift within ISIS. Mental stability does not factor into their rationale, and they are willing to recruit from any source to achieve their end state of a global caliphate. Research suggests that factors such as emotional trauma, extremist narratives and even substance abuse combined with mental illness may contribute to an individual's violent extremist actions (James and Psoiu). Although there is a relationship between mental illness and violent behavior, and an association between extremist groups and violent behavior, this does not create a correlation between mental illness and radical Islamic extremists.

Conclusion

In October of 2015, James B. Comey, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) stated that the FBI had “Islamic State” –related “investigations in all 50 states, over 900 of them” (Comey). In September of 2016, Comey spoke in front of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in which he further stated “We still have about a thousand open investigations on the “Islamic State” – related extremism.”

During the 2016 election campaign, domestic Islamic extremism within the United States was a constant topic of discussion. Considered a top concern of citizens throughout the election process, it contributed to the outcome of the elections. At the Republican National Convention, Senator Joni Ernst of Iowa stated, “According to the FBI, ISIS is present in all 50 states. Think about it for a moment. Terrorists from ISIS are in every one of our 50 states” (Kurzman 3). After the mass shooting in Orlando, in which the shooter displayed an affection for ISIS, then presidential candidate Donald Trump stated, “You have thousands of shooters like this, with the same mentality, out there in this country, and we are bringing thousands and thousands of them back into this country every year” (3).

Perception versus Reality

According to Dr. Charles Kurzman of UNC, “over the past year, the number of indictments and acts of violent extremism was less than 5 percent of the number of investigations reported by FBI Director Comey” (3). This statement correlates that 95 percent of the individuals that were targets of the investigation but not indicted,

were sometimes treated as proven terrorists during the election (3). With homeland security being at the top of the list of national concerns for the average American, a common political strategy for all political parties is to invoke fear of imminent domestic terrorism within the citizens to secure votes.

Researchers and investigators have proposed many theories as to why people join terrorist organizations. As discussed, explanations often span a range of social, geopolitical, ideological/religious, and psychological reasons (Perez and Beutel).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts must create an individualized approach to achieve their desired results. We cannot assume that a specific ideology drives the violence. Interruption of the radicalization process must take on a combined partnership approach. We must be willing to accept that the cause of these motivations may be part of a bigger societal issue. Marginalization does appear to be a factor in young adults' incentive to move towards radicalization. When members of society feel as outcasts within their larger societal whole, they will gravitate towards areas that provide them with security and self-worth. In today's modern world, this is possible through the internet. A vast new world that is accepting of their differences is only a click away. The ability to converse with like-minded individuals and discuss issues and concerns is desired by everyone.

A "one size fits all" approach to countering violent extremism does not appear to be a viable option for today's modern technologically astute society. There are many different pathways to radicalization, and the mechanisms in place that may aid in radicalization operate in different ways for different people at different points in their lives. Timing has the potential to be the biggest mechanism in radicalization for

young adults. The compounding pressures that young Islamic adults attempt to contextualize may result in a withdrawal from their known societal connections (family, friends, loved ones) and move towards something that appears to embrace their current need of self-worth and belonging to something bigger than oneself. Feelings of isolation and marginalization of Islamic youth within a community may create mechanisms for radicalization but appear to be only a marginal precursor to extremism. The timing of other events such as lack of employment opportunities, other cognitive and emotional desires, the compelling pressure to belong to a group (identity), may have a profound impact on these “triggers” associated with radicalization and ultimately violent extremism. The final ingredient needed in the recipe is the ability to communicate with others that understand an individual’s struggles and concerns. Modern technology affords individuals the opportunity to encounter such others within the confines of their isolated world. Through virtual reality, individuals can create the personal identity they have sought and construct new relationships with like-minded individuals.

It is crucial for policymakers and those governmental agencies tasked with countering violent extremism and illegal extremist activities to use empirical data such as the information provided by START combined with a community-based approach in confronting the challenges faced with young recruits. It must be extremely flexible in its methodology to accommodate for changes in recruiting tools, techniques, and procedures. With scarce resources for law enforcement within the counterterrorism sphere, cutting edge practices must be incorporated to be proactive. A broad-brush approach to counter-radicalization might be less effective or even counterproductive due to the complexity of extremist’s movements (Jensen, Lafree and James 15).

Extremism is as varied as right-wing and left-wing radicalization, with Islamic radicalization mixed within the spectrum. Again, a one size fits all policy for countering these efforts fails to account for the essential details associated with such movements and to provide the needed flexibility required in a world that moves at the speed of light.

Empirical research must continue to be analyzed to ensure current and future countermeasures are being concentrated in the right areas to achieve the desired results. Again, with radicalization continuing to be a moving target for CVE efforts, programmatic design and evaluation of efforts must be continuously monitored for effectiveness and focused on the root causes of radicalization.

It is clear that further analysis into the areas discussed in this research paper must be accomplished to gain a greater understanding of fundamental motivations and the role technology plays in aiding this ideology. Due to limited English transcribed documents available during this examination, additional Arabic research may shed a greater light on individuals drawn to these organizations.

Most people that hold radical ideas do not engage in terrorism (Borum). It is further noted in the EADR report that there are weak connections between extreme beliefs and extreme actions. “Surveys and experimental research has consistently found strong support for radical ideologies across the political spectrum – and even for the use of violence in support of them – but very few people engage in such behavior” (Jensen, Lafree and James 27).

David Schanzer, director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, said, “First, it is flatly untrue that America is deeply threatened by violent extremism by Muslim-Americans; attacks by Muslims accounted for only one-

third of one percent of all murders in America last year.” Schanzer continued, “Second, it is also untrue that violent extremism can be ignored as a problem within the Muslim-American community. Collaborative efforts between government agencies and Muslim-Americans to address this issue are justified and needed” (Fanning).

Perception is a reality. If Muslim-American communities are perceived as the breeding grounds for radical Islamic movements, then the Muslim community must address these stereotypes and become proactive in their approach to radical movements that attempt to hijack their religion.

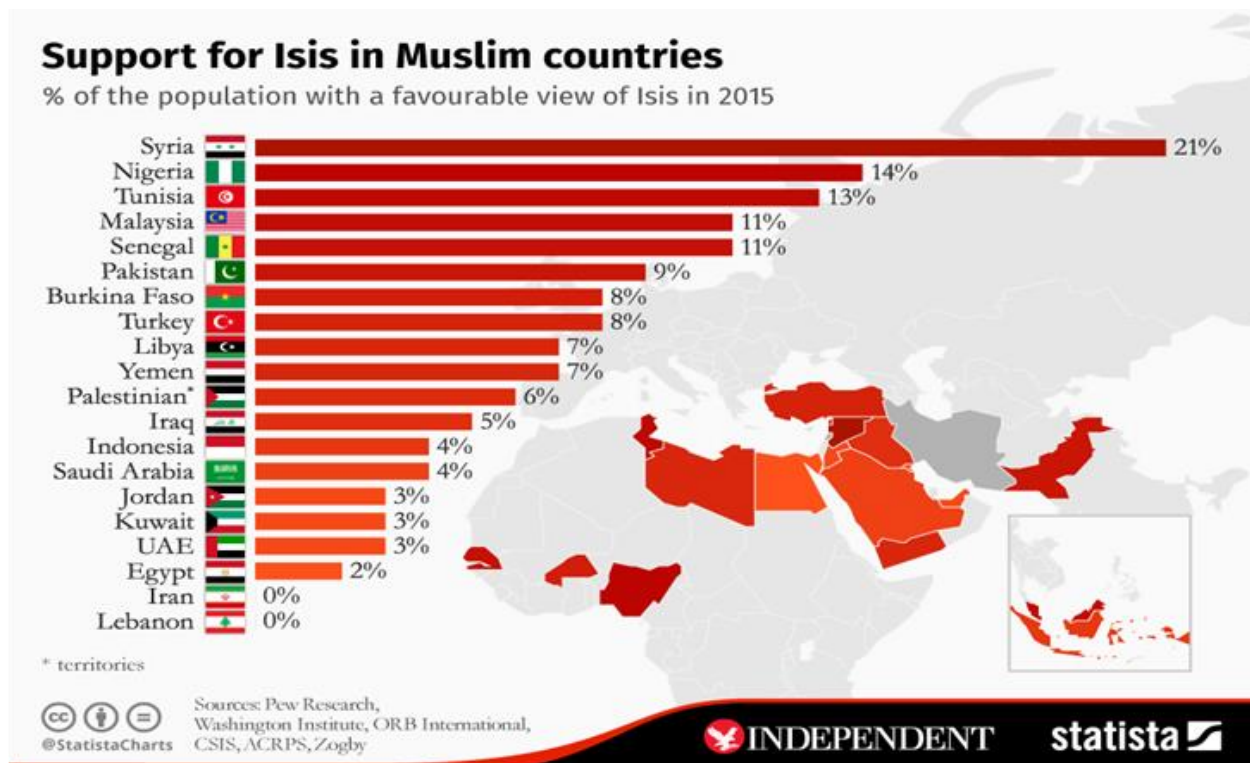
More cases studies need to be accomplished in order to drill down on underlying issues or motivations.

“Contrary to alarmist political rhetoric, the appeal of revolutionary violence has remained very limited among Muslim-Americans,” said Charles Kurzman, a professor of sociology at UNC-Chapel Hill’s College of Arts and Sciences and author of the report. “Let’s use this empirical evidence to guide our policy-making and public debates on violent extremism” (Fanning).

Perhaps an honest debate is needed to overcome perceptions that exist throughout government and the general populace about Muslim communities and their propensity for radicalization. Honest assessments and evaluations of all extremists groups must be conducted. Although a macro view may prove enlightening to all invested groups and policymakers, it will require a micro approach to identify the root causes associated with individual motivations for radicalization. This can only be accomplished at the most basic “boots on the ground” levels of government and religious community establishments.

California-based Imam Marc Manley noted that all communities, including Muslims, are “in desperate need of a new model of manhood as well as an uplifting theology. A model that allows for men to be strong without feeling the only means of expressing that strength is through violence” (Perez and Beutel).

Research facilities have been established throughout the world for the sole purpose of obtaining statistics of extremist groups and analyzing this data to determine any trends that can aid in countering violent extremism. This information, combined with the study of social and emotional motivators involved in inspiring allegiance to terrorist groups, may be able to help in the formulation of strategic plans capable of combating these efforts at the most fundamental levels needed to win the hearts and minds of these recruits.



(Pew Research Center Report, 2016)

It is noted in the above illustration that even in countries with the highest population of Muslims there is not a great deal of support or a favorable view of ISIS. This data displays that a majority of Muslims in predominantly Muslim countries view their religion as peaceful and renounce organization such as ISIS that conduct atrocious acts in the name of Islam.

As the current situation in the Syrian-Iraqi region is rapidly evolving through new and powerful counter-insurgency tactics, recruitment may be affected. Reports continue to surface on foreign fighters in the region refusing to fight based on superficial injuries suffered or simply refusing to fight with no explanation (Morris and Salim). Mosul, once the biggest city the Islamic State controls, and its proclaimed caliphate, is now on the verge of being overtaken by Iraqi and United States soldiers. Such losses on the part of ISIS may disillusion foreign fighters both in the region and those outside the region being recruited to fight. As it is yet to be determined how such battlefield losses may affect recruitment, a key insight is how these losses affect current fighters. Iraqi forces found several ISIS documents after taking over parts of Mosul in January of 2017. These documents outlined issues and concerns of ISIS fighters within the Tariq Bin Ziyad Battalion. Examples of correspondence include “He doesn’t want to fight, wants to return to France,” and “Claims his will is a martyrdom operation in France. Claims sick but doesn’t have a medical report” (Morris and Salim). As more and more Islamic State sensitive information is released for public consumption, a reduction in recruitment may take place. The French government has reported a sharp decrease in its citizens traveling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS through the first half of 2016 (Morris and Salim). It is hard for ISIS to continue to promote an Islamic utopia in a region where

it is unable to maintain a footprint. If ISIS is perceived to falter, perhaps recruits will be disenchanted with this particular call to a greater purpose.

Although the current administration's strategic plan for combating Islamic terrorist organizations is to take a hardline stance that can appear to be anti-Muslim in its approach, not all senior officials within the Administration are in agreement with this important ideological view of the Islamic world. President Trump's newly appointed national security adviser, Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, spoke to the National Security Council and explained that the label "radical Islamic terrorism" was not helpful because terrorists are "un-Islamic" (Landler and Schmitt). Views such as these of high-ranking administration officials give hope that the policy-making process for dealing with Islamic militancy will attempt to separate acts of terrorism from Islamic teachings to gain assistance from the Muslim community to combat these groups. Governments must fight the jihadist propaganda war that is proclaiming this is a religious war. It is felt that as more and more military leaders are positioned within the President's inner circles, their in-depth understanding of the enemy and its attempt to pervert the Muslim religion will aid greatly in forming the new policies and practices for combating this enemy.

Based on the research encountered throughout this project, countering violent extremism measures must include a top to bottom approach. Again, individualized approaches coupled with an in-depth understanding that marginalization exists within Islamic communities around the world may be the best approach in de-radicalizing potential and current recruits. A counter-narrative based on firsthand accounts of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq broadcast via social media and other marketing tactics may aid in the overall approach used to combat the Islamic State.

As there are many different options to radicalization, there should also be many options to countering the recruitment, retention, and empathy for ISIS. As radicalization is considered a long, social process, governments and citizens must gain a greater understanding of the core elements that exist in these processes and be willing to acknowledge that actions on their part may contribute to the problem. Speaking on counterterrorism, former Boston Chief of Police Edward Davis testified before Congress in January 2017 stating “More than ever before, relationships between law enforcement partners, stakeholders and community members need to be in place to prevent attacks” (Jones).

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