



CENTRE FOR

International and Defence Policy

**SPECIAL
POLICY
REPORT**

MARCH 2017

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN CANADA AND ABROAD

Stéfanie von Hlatky, *Queen's University*

Nora Abdelrahman Ibrahim, *Queen's University*

The increasing and evolving threat of global terrorism has become a source of concern for Canada. New challenges arising from international and domestic trends related to terrorism, including the foreign fighter phenomenon, the rampant spread of violent extremist ideologies accelerated by the use of social media, and a dramatic increase in terrorist incidents worldwide, have necessitated a more holistic approach to counter violent extremism and terrorism. The focus of policy and practice in this area has shifted towards addressing the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism to curb recruitment to extremist groups to reduce the incidence of terrorist attacks. In line with these efforts, countering violent extremism (CVE) has garnered attention from both the academic and policy-making domains.

While the CVE field holds promise as a significant development in counterterrorism (CT), several policy challenges remain and undermine the success of these initiatives. To address these issues, the Centre for International and Defence Policy at Queen's University held an international, multidisciplinary workshop entitled "*Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Assessing Canada's Domestic and International Strategies*", which took place on January 18th-20th, 2017. The workshop brought together over 40 experts from a variety of professional disciplines and sectors, including academia, government officials and policy makers, the private sector and non-governmental

organizations (NGOs). Over the course of three days, participants drew on their expertise and experiences to discuss the most pressing policy challenges, with a focus on best practices for a coordinated way ahead for Canada both domestically and internationally.

Given the cross-disciplinary dialogue, it is not surprising that definitional issues were raised. There was a concerted effort to tease out how conceptual misunderstanding and related measurement issues can undermine efforts to address violent extremism. To overcome definitional traps, we propose analyzing violent extremism on a spectrum, identifying activities ranging from hate speech to physical terrorist attacks. This approach allows us to identify the very broad scope of violent extremism and is a framework that allows for ideologically agnostic analysis of those acts. Indeed, individuals and groups will be associated with violent extremism based on their rhetoric and actions, rather than any denominational identifier.

Relatedly, the Government of Canada should strive to improve public discourse surrounding violent extremism, as prevailing narratives have further perpetuated misperceptions and unfairly targeted certain communities. Public anxiety has been fueled by divisive language, as well as media coverage of terrorist attacks worldwide, which inflate threat perceptions through continuous coverage. These low



SCHOOL OF
POLICY STUDIES



Centre for International and Defence Policy
Robert Sutherland Hall, Suite 403
(613) 533-2381 | cidp@queensu.ca



MARCH 2017

occurrence terrorist events in the West have had a disproportionate impact on public discourse, leading to increasing budgets to support domestic security and intelligence organizations, without really affecting overall trends. As Canadian political scientist Frank Harvey puts it, we are stuck in a “homeland security dilemma” (Harvey, 2008). These narratives have also helped frame the Muslim community as the primary target group of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs. Targeting communities in this way, in the media and through programming, risks deepening the gulf in understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The deadly attack on a [Quebec mosque](#) on January 29, 2017, has brought these concerns to the fore. Days after, [the Globe and Mail](#) reported a spike in hate crimes committed against Muslims in Quebec. Internationally, policies such as President Trump’s Executive Order dubbed the Muslim Ban, have suspended US visas to foreign nationals of six Muslim majority countries (Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Sudan and Libya) on the basis of national security concerns. Identifying citizens from these countries as potential terrorist threats further fuels anti-Muslim rhetoric (Nowrasteh, 2017). This travel ban, though challenged by US courts, is not supported by evidence - no terrorist attack on US soil has been committed by anyone from these countries since 9/11. These damaging narratives have resonated worldwide as right wing party leaders are borrowing from the Trump playbook across Europe.

These counterproductive narratives can be challenged through more concerted efforts by the media and politicians, who are often the “first responders” when it comes to framing and reacting to acts of violent extremism. Developing best practices to ensure more responsible coverage of terrorist attacks is especially urgent. These best practices should be developed as a multi-stakeholder effort, including policymakers, security and intelligence practitioners, as well as the research community and civil society organizations.

Small changes will matter, like using the term violent extremism and avoiding the acronym CVE and related jargon that can alienate engagement with civil society and local communities, who are critical of the government’s CVE programs.

We advocate moving away from the highly-securitized approach of CVE programming to examine the applicability of public health models. Public health campaigns have been launched to sensitize the general public about the risks associated with smoking and drunk driving.

These campaigns have been supported by strong research and evaluation designs, and evidence shows that they served to substantially reduce smoking and drunk driving rates in North America. Applied to the challenge of violent extremism, this approach would involve redrawing the boundaries of what Canadians identify as violent extremism to question stereotypes and promote deeper intercultural understanding, allowing us to better leverage a “whole of society” response without overly securitizing the issue and its subsequent responses (Weine et al, 2016).

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

February 1, 2017

Arrest made after hate crimes spike following Quebec mosque attack

By LES PERREAUX and COLIN FREEZE

Police in Quebec have made an arrest amid a spike in Islamophobic hate speech after a massacre inside a mosque in the province's capital.



CENTRE FOR

International and Defence Policy

SPECIAL POLICY REPORT

MARCH 2017

Within a public health framework, we recommend a comprehensive public awareness campaign on the positive contributions of all immigrants and refugees, past and present, highlighting the value of diversity without targeting specific groups. Within this space, public-private partnerships could be strengthened as the private sector remains a largely untapped resource (Rosand et al, 2016). The private sector has a unique advantage in reaching a variety of audiences with targeted messages through marketing and advertising, and companies such as Coca Cola and Airbnb have previously used this advantage to associate their brands with narratives that promote diversity and tolerance.

Beyond public-private partnerships, the federal, provincial and municipal governments should continue to build partnerships with practitioners, the research community, and civil society. Governments should take on an enabling role when partnering with community actors, as it is these actors that are likely having the best impact at the local level. This means increasing the funding and support for civil society actors that are committed to addressing violent extremism across the spectrum. Local “buy in” depends on long-term trust-building and the strength of these networks can greatly enhance collaboration and coordination across sectors and levels of governance.

With respect to existing CVE programming, the federal government should ensure that the national strategy is balanced with respect to different phases of the CVE cycle. While prevention has received considerable attention, the intervention and rehabilitation phases remain underdeveloped and underfunded. Evaluation remains a challenge for a host of government programs, but appears particularly acute in the CVE realm, especially for impact evaluation. Conducting

evaluations regularly will build the evidence base needed to continuously improve practices.

Evaluation guidelines should:

- **Be multi-tiered:** The first layer should be a set of foundational/standard indicators that can support comparisons across models and serve as tools for process evaluation. The second layer should consist of more context specific indicators (needs oriented, behavioral, and social indicators) that are ideologically agnostic. Indicators related to demographics and typographies should be avoided.
- **Include multiple levels of analysis:** to serve different stakeholders, who look for different types of information/data, and to provide a more thorough evaluation of different aspects of the program.
- **Evaluate across various points in time:** evaluate in the short term to keep up with the rapidly evolving trends of violent extremism, while also evaluating in the longer term to identify the long-term impacts and patterns of success that can inform program replication.

Finally, to enhance greater interagency coordination and cooperation, we suggest a greater role for the Cabinet Committee on Canada in the World and Public Security to include the oversight of initiatives related to violent extremism across stakeholder groups and various levels of governance. This cabinet committee could facilitate the collection of and access to data across multiple agencies and streamline the policymaking process by making the Government of Canada more responsive to trends in violent extremism.



SCHOOL OF
POLICY STUDIES



Centre for International and Defence Policy
Robert Sutherland Hall, Suite 403
(613) 533-2381 | cidp@queensu.ca



CENTRE FOR International and Defence Policy

SPECIAL POLICY REPORT

MARCH 2017

References

Gould, Kevin. "Shooting at a Quebec City Mosque, Multiple Dead." *CTV News*, January 30, 2017.
<http://montreal.ctvnews.ca/shooting-at-a-quebec-city-mosque-multiple-dead-1.3262477>.

Harvey, Frank P. "The Homeland Security Dilemma: Imagination, Failure and the Escalating Costs of Perfecting Security." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 02 (2007): 283-316.

Nowrasteh, Alex. "Little National Security Benefit to Trump's Executive Order on Immigration." *CATO At Liberty: CATO Institute*. January 2017.
<https://www.cato.org/blog/little-national-security-benefit-trumps-executive-order-immigration>.

Perreux, Les and Colin Freeze. "Arrest Made After Hate Crimes Spike Following Quebec Mosque Attack". *The Globe and Mail*, February 2, 2017.
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/police-report-rise-in-hate-crimes-after-quebec-city-mosque-attack/article33856702/>

Rosand, Eric and Alistair Millar. "How the Private Sector Can Be Harnessed to Stop Violent Extremism." *Brookings Institute*. February 8, 2017.
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/01/31/how-the-private-sector-can-be-harnessed-to-stop-violent-extremism/>

Weine, Stevan, David P. Eisenman, Janni Kinsler, Deborah C. Glik, and Chloe Polutnik. "Addressing Violent Extremism as Public Health Policy and Practice." *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2016): 1-14.

The Countering Violent Extremism workshop was made possible by support from the following sponsors:



CENTRE FOR THE
STUDY OF
DEMOCRACY &
DIVERSITY



Public Safety
Canada

Sécurité publique
Canada



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



SCHOOL OF
POLICY STUDIES



Centre for International and Defence Policy
Robert Sutherland Hall, Suite 403
(613) 533-2381 | cidp@queensu.ca