**Do The Crime, Your Data Is Mine**

**INTRODUCTION**

Violent extremism plagues the entire world disrupting cultures, economies, and harming individuals on a daily basis. The motivations to organize and execute these acts vary widely, making the solution elusive. Combating the radicalization of individuals is complex, as there is not a single variable or identifier. Once radicalized, there has been little success in rehabilitation and restricting the recruitment of others. The following document discusses a two-part approach to stopping the spread of violent extremism within the United States prison systems and better understanding the mechanisms of radicalization in order to potentially identify those who are susceptible to violent ideology conversion.

**GROWTH OF EXTREMISM**

Although the United States has pursued significant efforts in counterterrorism since the events of 9/11, extremist ideology continues to spread and threaten Western nations. In June 2015 the FBI released a report which stated that nearly 250 Americans traveled, or attempted to travel to Syria to participate in the conflict.[[1]](#endnote-1) According to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, dozens were able to join the ranks of ISIS and some 20 had died.[[2]](#endnote-2) American foreign fighters are not the only threat our country faces. There are many extremists across the country who embrace and sympathize with this violent ideology. In October 2015, Director Comey revealed that the FBI had a staggering 900 active investigations targeting homegrown violent extremists.[[3]](#endnote-3) Since March 2014, 164 individuals have been charged in the U.S. on offenses related to the Islamic state.[[4]](#endnote-4) A total of 113 of them have been found guilty, averaging a sentence of thirteen years imprisonment.[[5]](#endnote-5)

**COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROGRAMS**

In August 2011, the United States released its first domestic Counter Violent Extremism strategy, entitled Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism. The three goals of this program were to enhance community engagement, improve upon state and local expertise on the subject, and to counter extremist messaging.[[6]](#endnote-6) Boston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Los Angeles were selected as pilot cities for this approach. Minneapolis-St. Paul focused on societal-level concerns, Boston placed an emphasis on interventions for radicalized individuals, and Los Angeles targeted community engagement.[[7]](#endnote-7) However, these implementations did not go without challenges. There was a lack of funding, lead agency, and transparency.[[8]](#endnote-8) Far too often, CVE programs have a singular focus on one ideology leading to resistance from Muslim communities.[[9]](#endnote-9)

A root issue in countering extremist ideology in the U.S. goes further than failure in community programs. There is a lack of deradicalization programs within the U.S. prison systems. Inmates who were initially arrested for terrorism have little incentive or opportunity to reject their former ideology, and now have a platform to proactively recruit those who have never been exposed to these ideologies.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**PRISONER RADICALIZATION**

Radical ideology is spread throughout many avenues. In recent years there has been a troubling increase in terrorist propaganda and recruitment over social media platforms. However, there is now growing evidence of domestic radicalization within prison systems. General population prisoners are easy targets to extremist ideology. Their isolation from mainstream society and vulnerability to prison life makes them more susceptible to the recruitment of those offering a sense of belonging and kindness which, in this setting, can easily sway the inmate’s beliefs.[[11]](#endnote-11) These

individuals are naturally receptive to a cause that glorifies anti-social and anti-state violence and that appears to offer a way to discover identity and belonging.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Although not every terrorist plot is being formulated in prison, there still lies a great risk in inmates becoming radicalized and committing acts of terror once they are released. For example, in 2009 Kevin James, founder of the Jami`at al-Islam al-Sahih terrorist group, was convicted for planning attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets in Los Angeles. Lamar developed this plan while serving a ten-year sentence in a California prison for robbery.[[13]](#endnote-13) It should also be noted that those involved in terrorist attacks in Barcelona, Brussels, London, Nice, and Jakarta, were initially imprisoned for non-terrorist offenses and were radicalized and directed towards these acts while incarcerated.[[14]](#endnote-14) In October 2006, the Bureau of Prisons activated the Counter-Terrorism Unit in an attempt to identify inmates involved in terrorist activities and provide the coordination of translation services and analysis of terrorist inmate communications, but further action must be taken to combat the use of prisons as recruitment platforms.[[15]](#endnote-15)

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION, Segregation**

The first step in combating the infection of extremist ideology throughout our prison systems is to separate prisoners convicted of acts of terror or who have been flagged as extremists from general population, eliminating the ability to recruit and expand networks. After a segregation has been implemented an aggressive deradicalization program must be established to alter their way of thinking and thwart future plots. This is crucial for progress to be made, because all it takes for imprisoned extremists to be motivated is a single charismatic individual. These individuals regard radicalizing others as a religious duty and a way to fight back against the West, continuing their jihad within prison.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Eric Rosand, a former State Department official who runs the Prevention Project, a group that focuses on countering extremism in communities, said it is difficult to gauge the extent of radicalization in U.S. prisons. “We just don’t know, because we aren’t tracking this category of prisoner, authorities are reluctant to target individuals based on their religion.”[[17]](#endnote-17) By tracking these prisoners via big data based on their offenses, we can reduce the radicalization of prisoners and potentially find a correlation between extremists outside of religion.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION, Big Data**

The next proactive step to mitigate inmate recruitment and radicalization is using big data analytics, taking advantage of its predictive power to better understand the mechanisms of radicalization. Big data collects large amounts of data, compares and analyzes the vast amount of data points through an automated program, and then reveals hidden relationships and patterns to provide new insights and behavioral predictions.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Once an individual is convicted of an act of terrorism or flagged as being radicalized in prison, they must render their information for big data predictive analysis. The information collected would be a person’s neurological data, genetic information, psychological profile, digital and online activity, behavioral data, and cultural data. By analyzing these aspects, it’s possible that a key commonality or correlation will be found. American prisons currently hold 443 convicted terrorists.[[19]](#endnote-19) By collecting data on these specific inmates, it could reveal an identifier for individuals who may potentially be more susceptible to violent ideologies. This information would be used to legitimize preventative tactics, identifying those posing a greater risk to our nation.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION, Data Warehousing**

Lastly, with all of the data that is to be collected from extremist prisoners it is necessary to have a secure location to store this information. An organization must be tasked with running big data analytics and safely storing the information that is collected along with the predictions that are made. The FBI would be an ideal organization to take on these responsibilities as they have the ability and technology. Additionally, the FBI would be able to compare results from the analysis to flagged individuals on their “Terrorist Watch List” and use certain matchups to conduct enhanced investigations.

**CONCLUSION**

Acquiring a better understanding of the mechanisms of the radicalization process is a crucial factor in making any CVE program successful. Unfortunately, there is not a “one size fits all” solution to radicalization within the United States. However, there are preventative steps to halt the spread of violent ideologies. Separating general population prisoners from those with known extremist views reduces a historically susceptible recruiting pool. The implementation of deradicalization programs in prisons changes ideology and behavior. Running big data analytics on probable extremist inmates is a step towards identifying who is more likely to adopt extremist ideologies and act on them. Information that identifies these individuals early on can potentially thwart numerous threats to our nation.

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