

Islamic Extremist Groups' Usage of Populism in Social Media to Radicalize Muslim Migrants in Europe

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Abstract : The rise of radicalization within Islam has spawned a new era of global terror. The battlefield Successes of ISIS and the Taliban are fuelled by an ideological war waged, largely and successfully, in the media arena. This research will examine how Islamic extremist groups are using media modalities and populist narratives to influence migrant Muslim populations in Europe towards extremism. In 2014, ISIS shocked the world in exporting horrifically graphic forms of violence on social media. Their Muslim support base was largely disgusted and reviled. In response, they reconfigured their narrative by introducing populist 'hooks', astutely portraying the Muslim populous as oppressed and exploited by unjust, corrupt autocratic regimes and Western power structures. Within this crucible of real and perceived oppression, hundreds of thousands of the most desperate, vulnerable and abused migrants left their homelands, risking their lives in the hope of finding peace, justice, and prosperity in Europe. Instead, many encountered social stigmatization, detention and/or discrimination for being illegal migrants, for lacking resources and for simply being Muslim. This research will examine how Islamic extremist groups are exploiting the disenfranchisement of these migrant populations and using populist messaging on social media to influence them towards violent extremism. ISIS, in particular, formulates specific encoded messages for newly-arriving Muslims in Europe, preying upon their vulnerability. Violence is posited, as a populist response, to the tyranny of European oppression. This research will analyze the factors and indicators which propel Muslim migrants along the spectrum from resilience to violence extremism. Expected outcomes are identification of factors which influence vulnerability towards violent extremism; an early-warning detection framework; predictive analysis models; and de-radicalization frameworks. This research will provide valuable tools (practical and policy level) for European governments, security stakeholders, communities, policy-makers, and educators; it is anticipated to contribute to a de-escalation of Islamic extremism globally.

Keywords : populism, radicalization, de-radicalization, social media, ISIS, Taliban, shariah, jihad, Islam, Europe, political communication, terrorism, migrants, refugees, extremism, global terror, predictive analysis, early warning detection, models, strategic communication, populist narratives, Islamic extremism

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