

Exploiting Identity Grievances: Al-Shabaab Propaganda Targeting Individuals Abroad

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Abstract : Groups such as Al-Shabaab have managed to radicalize many individuals abroad, including the first American citizen to ever be radicalized. Yet the pathways of radicalization for these foreign individuals are understudied. Moreover, current measures to prevent foreign radicalization are ineffective, with privacy, screening and profiling implications that render current counter-radicalization efforts counterproductive. Such measures exhibit strictness, political bias, and harshness. As confirmed by recent studies, such counter-radicalization issues exacerbate existing grievances and channel fresh recruits to Al-Shabaab. Addressing these challenges is paramount, requiring alternative strategies to effectively reduce radicalization without triggering further harm. The development of counter-narratives emerges as a potential measure with minimal risk of exacerbating grievances, yet the development of such counter-narratives necessitates a thorough understanding of the radicalization pathways of foreign individuals that are understudied. This study investigates the success of Al-Shabaab in recruiting individuals abroad by analyzing their propaganda in conjunction with analyzing identity-focused theories of radicalization, including Framing Theory and Social Identity Theory. Qualitative content analysis is used to analyze various propaganda material, including tweets, speeches, and webpages. The analysis reveals that issues of identity are of major significance in the radicalization patterns identified and that grievances of Muslims worldwide are used to exploit identity-related grievances. Based on these findings, the paper argues that such evidence enhances our understanding of potential deradicalization pathways and present counter-narratives based on Islamic scripture.

Keywords : counter-narratives, foreign radicalization, identity grievances, propaganda analysis

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