GENERAL STRAIN THEORY, ISLAMOPHOBIA, RADICALIZATION, AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

By: JULIA SCHOONOVER, DR. KRISTEN SCHULTZ LEE, AND DR. RICHARD STRAHAN

INTRODUCTION:
The objective of this research is to identify the major strains that Muslims are subjected to in Western societies. I will be analyzing Islamophobia in context and then applying Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (2001) to best understand the ways in which certain social strains may increase an individual's likelihood of radicalization. I will also explore the role that social media plays in the mobilization and radicalization of individuals who experience social strain.

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIMS:
Media plays a powerful role in shaping society. Saleem et. Al. (2015) found that negative images overwhelmingly portray Muslims as violent, evil terrorists. Ogan et. Al (2014) found that around 2/3 of news stories focus on Muslims as a threat.

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the Islamic Religion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very favorable</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat favorable</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unfavorable</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unfavorable</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Muslims residing in Western Nations are more likely to experience discrimination because these nations hold unfavorable views of Muslims.

Rationalizing negative actions against Muslims has broader social impacts, including increased social strain experienced by Muslims and the increased likelihood of deviance, in this case joining terrorist organizations.

GENERAL STRAIN THEORY:
Agnew (2001) defined strain as, “the relationship in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated.” The stronger individual’s experiences of social strains the more likely they are to deviate.

Strains are likely to increase delinquency if they are: (Agnew 2001)
1. High in magnitude
2. Seen as unjust
3. Associated with low social control
4. Incentive for coping in delinquent ways.

Crime is a way in which individuals seek to alleviate strain. Strain also creates negative emotions, including negative emotions, including anger, humiliation, and hopelessness, which Agnew (2010) finds are conducive to terrorism.

CONCLUSION:
Muslims are experiencing social strains in Western Societies. Agnew (2010) identified the following strains: inability to achieve goals, peer abuse, and experiences with prejudice and discrimination as major sources of social strain. These strains can be experienced, anticipated, and/or felt vicariously. Social support plays a key role in the deterrence of those who may deviate as a result of social strains.

There is need for future research to identify social strains specifically. Future research is needed to not only identify sources of strain but ways in which communities are coping with and neutralizing these strains.

There is also a need to create spaces where Muslim immigrants and refugees are given opportunities to speak out against their perceived grievances and experiences of discrimination. These opportunities to have their voices heard need to happen more in public forums, government, and public broadcasts so they are able to better represent themselves in context.

REFERENCES: