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RESEARCH REPORT

No Country for a Returning Foreign Fighter?

More Reasons for Repatriating Canadian IS Member in Custody

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Abstract

What should the Canadian government do about returning extremist travellers who have been involved with the so-called Islamic State (IS)? Should the government develop a gender-informed response to deal with male and female members of IS? What are some of the major causes of radicalization leading some Canadians to join IS? What are the views of the Muslim community in Canada concerning these issues? Based on 674 responses gathered during phone interviews and face-to-face meetings with members of the Muslim community in the Greater Toronto Area, the empirical data demonstrate, among many other things, strong support for repatriating Canadian IS members in custody in Syria and Iraq — in particular, women with children.

Keywords: returning extremist travellers, foreign fighters, the Islamic State, countering violent extremist, counter terrorism

1. Introduction

Since the decline of IS in Syria and Iraq, debate has raged about the fate of thousands of individuals from 80 countries who joined — including some 7,366 persons who have returned to their home countries (Cook and Vale 2018). Among many other challenges is how and where to bring to justice returning extremist travellers, including IS members.

While Australia, France, and the United Kingdom support the view of leaving foreign fighters where they are in Iraq and Syria, hoping the battlefield will do the job of eliminating these fighters, as opposed to allowing them to return home where they might potentially commit terrorist attacks (Mathews 2018), the Canadian government seems to have a different set of priorities: to investigate, arrest, charge, and prosecute any Canadian involved in terrorism or violent extremism, in addition to refusing and revoking passports (Public Safety Canada 2018). To date, discussion around this loaded issue has almost universally been neither measured nor non-partisan, even as the creation and implementation of policies related to IS captive fighters and returnees are inherently political acts. So what are some of the risks associated with repatriating IS returning fighters?

2. The Risks of Repatriating Returning Extremist Travellers

IS fighters and returnees pose formidable legal and security challenges, and their potential arrest, charge, and prosecution are anything but straightforward. This political minefield is further complicated by the fact that, oftentimes, the efforts to curb terrorism, including the processes of “reintegrating,” “disengaging,” or “rehabilitating” terrorists, suffer critical setbacks. Usman Khan’s killing of Jack Merritt, a course coordinator for Learning Together (Ludlow and Armstrong 2018), and the recent police shooting of Sudesh Amman, are two troubling examples (Stewart 2019). In both cases, the attackers — Usman and Sudesh — were convicted terrorists released on “license” (BBC News 2020). Such setbacks are quite common in the field of counterterrorism. In July 2013, the former French prime minister Manuel Valls described returning foreign fighters as “a ticking time bomb” (Hoffman and Furlan 2020).

The jury is still out on the viability of reintegration, disengagement or rehabilitation programs. Battle-hardened foreign fighters may be tempted to utilize their deadly skills back home — and oftentimes do (ibid.). Adam Hoffman and Marta Furlan cited examples of French and Belgian IS foreign fighter returnees involved in terrorism in Europe, including the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the attack on Brussels’s Jewish Museum on May 24,

2014. Another study found that terrorist attacks carried out by returning foreign fighters in North America and Europe were quite lethal, leading to an average death toll of 35 deaths per attack (Vidino, Marone, and Entenmann 2017). The same study concluded that 18 percent of terrorist attacks were perpetrated by known IS returnees. Compounding the issue is that most returning foreign fighters do not prove to be an immediate threat upon their return to their home country — if they commit terrorist activities, they could do so anywhere from months to years after their return (CTED 2018).

Thomas Hegghammer (2013), who studied returning foreign fighters in the Middle East between 1990 and 2010, concluded otherwise. Examining the cases of 945 returnees, Hegghammer concluded that only one in nine foreign fighters returned to perpetrate attacks in the West. Another study suggested an even a lower rate: 0.0027 percent of foreign fighter returnees to North America and Europe were involved in terrorist plots, with only one terrorist attack carried out by a returnee from Iraq or Syria (Hegghammer and Nesser 2015). A study conducted in the United States found that none of the 12 known returned American fighters from Syria and Iraq had committed an attack in the United States (Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford 2018). Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, until the end of 2017, only one returnee is known to have plotted an attack following his return (ibid.). Since 9/11, 40 terrorist plots have been foiled in the United States. Only seven of those plots involved one person or more who had travelled abroad to fight within terrorist groups (Jenkins 2014).

3. The Enemy Within: The Impact of IS Crimes on the Muslim Community

The religious identity of IS combatants has placed the Muslim community worldwide at the centre of unwanted security and media attention. The extreme nature of IS crimes has also raced ahead of Muslim society's ability to reach a consensus on how to deal with returning extremist travellers. Indeed, IS has targeted and killed innocent civilians from all groups and ethnicities, tarnishing the reputation of one of the greatest religions on earth (Ammar and Xu 2017). While it is certainly true that Shia, Druze, Yazidi, and Christians represent particular targets of IS for propagandist and ideological purposes (ibid.), Sunni Muslims — especially those who have dared to challenge IS's grim and puritanical rulings — have also been swiftly eliminated by the self-proclaimed caliphate. In one case, the entire Sunni Muslim community of al-Shaitat clan in Syria was attacked, and some neighbourhoods were obliterated for confronting IS, making brutally apparent the cost of turning against IS (Sly 2014). Over a three-day period in August 2014, 700 members of the Shaitat Sunni tribe who dared to rise up against IS were shelled, beheaded, and crucified in what was the single bloodiest atrocity committed by IS to that point in time (ibid.). In

addition to being a target for potential recruits, the Muslim community is a victim of IS crimes and thus has a stake in bringing IS fighters to justice. As such, policy makers exploring viable methods of dealing with IS captive fighters and returnees would be well served to pay attention to the views of the Muslim community.

The ramifications of repatriating foreign extreme travellers and returnees who have lived willingly under the control of IS's self-proclaimed caliphate are not limited to security concerns. Rather, repatriation is a critical test for how much weight is given to the processes of countering violent extremism and, by extension, how serious these measures should be. To date, discussions around this freighted issue have, almost universally, been neither measured nor non-partisan (Slaughter 2017). In the aftermath of 9/11, the international community hastily created and implemented a number of counterterrorism policies that culminated with the passing of Resolution 1373, requiring states to implement a series of measures to combat terrorism (United Nations Security Council 2001), the cornerstone of the UN's post-9/11 counterterrorism policy. But the troubling emergence of the self-proclaimed caliphate suggests that Resolution 1373 has been a qualified failure.

The study of religiously linked violence often reveals a common thread: the narrative and primary issues are almost exclusively provided within a securitization frame. This excessively one-sided view is less than helpful and could stifle the counterradicalization process, since the terms "terrorists" and "terrorism" have long since lost their meanings in many parts of the world. As Grenville Byford (2002) puts it, "The use of force for political ends" is "inextricably bound up with terror." Autocratic states wage wars against their adversaries and justify their policies in the name of fighting terrorism. Even democratic countries such as the United States publicly contradict their own counterterrorism objectives when turning a blind eye to atrocities and violations committed by wealthy states. The killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a journalist and Saudi critic, and the war on Yemen are two revealing examples of America's selective attention (New York Times Editorial Board 2019). Due to the contradictions and inconsistencies of US policy, among many other reasons, the proscription of unconventional military methods, such as guerrilla warfare and suicide bombing, by conventional military powers is increasingly seen as facile within and among communities that support extremist groups. Indeed, it is quite common to hear terrorist groups and their supporters mock the notion that killing civilians using bombs and drones is somehow defensible while slaughtering them as IS does is not. Such contradictions undermine one of the major goals of counterterrorism efforts — that of winning the hearts and minds of communities targeted by Jihadi groups for potential recruits.

The dialectical relationship between the securitization of religion and countering violent extremism in the post-IS era is expressed distinctively by liberal democratic capitalist states, in particular, Europe, the United States, and

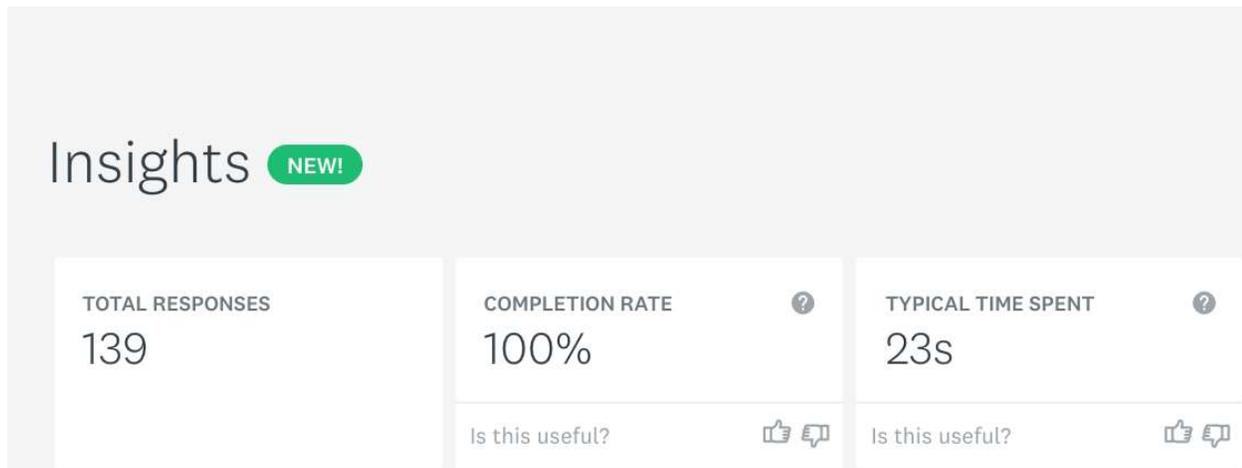
Canada, where, to varying degrees, the media privilege some and oppress others, most often indirectly (Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux 2019). One feature of this common international pattern emerges in the way that the mass media and politicians in liberal democratic capitalist states depict and articulate religious violence, specifically, in the case of IS- and Al-Qaeda-based terrorism vis-à-vis ultra-right extremism (ibid.).

IS has committed multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against many ethnic groups, including the Shaitat Sunni tribe. IS terrorists have thus placed the Muslim community at the centre of unwanted security and media attention. For this reason, effective counterterrorism and counterradicalization strategies should be broadened to include not only individuals or groups that are radicalized but also, of equal importance, individuals or groups that are the targets of radicalization. In the context of IS and al-Qaeda groups, the entire Muslim community merits attention by policy makers exploring viable methods to curb ideologically driven violence. This broader effort is particularly important given that individuals espousing and engaging in religious-based violent extremism can be inspired by a number of factors. Theology is merely one of many factors that must be collectively considered in formulating an effective counterradicalization strategy. For example, some individuals within the violent jihadi movement have glorified, promoted, and even participated in violence for personal, political, economic, and ideological reasons (Ammar 2019). Together, these factors conspire to drive individuals to violent extremism, while none of them, in and of themselves, is enough to motivate an individual to join a jihadi group. When forming policies to counter violent extremism, therefore, one ought to consider the views of the followers and supporters of extremist groups as well as of those who have not joined their ranks (ibid.). Focusing on keeping IS captive fighters and returnees away or blocking access to IS's ideology, although popular, are hardly the basis for an effective strategy. The sociology of counterradicalization cannot be ignored. This broader frame of reference is instructive for analyzing governmental initiatives to reach out to the affected population — that is, the Muslim community.

Even this broad approach, however, is complicated by Muslim society's inability to reach a consensus on how to deal with IS followers wanting to return home. Norms of behaviour and social and religious values are still being contested. Still, while the task is challenging, some conclusions need to be reached about how to deal with followers of IS. It is important to begin road-testing the acceptability of certain premises and policy options that might allow us to tackle the different components of the existing threat.

4. A Few Words on Methodology

The authors worked with dozens of people — both clergy and non-clergy — associated with mosques in the Greater Toronto Area from June 1, 2019, to July 31, 2019, to assess the views of the Muslim community on a number of issues connected with IS returnees and various remedies that might be applied to dealing with this pressing issue. Two distinct online and offline campaigns were conducted. The initial analysis of the online representative sample of 139 (aged 18+), each of whom voluntarily signed up, indicated that, on average, the time spent filling out these online surveys was 23 seconds, a time we deemed insufficient to properly answer 21 questions with multiple options related to extreme speech and IS captive fighters and returnees.



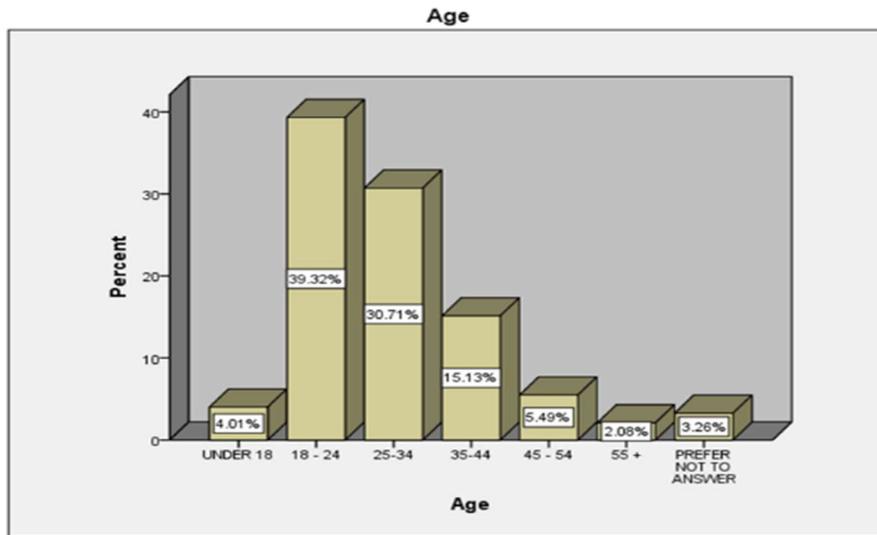
For this reason, we decided to drop these respondents’ data out of our analysis. The following discussion is thus based on the 674 responses we gathered during phone interviews and face-to-face meetings with members of the Muslim community in the Greater Toronto Area.

Two key themes for our survey were, first, understanding the Muslim community’s attitudes about the interpretation of extremism, that is, whether physical violence encouraged or committed by followers of extremist groups such as IS or al-Qaeda could be wholly or partially justified by religion (Appendix 1, questions 9–15) and, second, what (if anything) should be done about IS captive fighters and returnees (questions 16–21)? The survey presented respondents with a range of potential policy options for dealing with IS returnees (including IS female

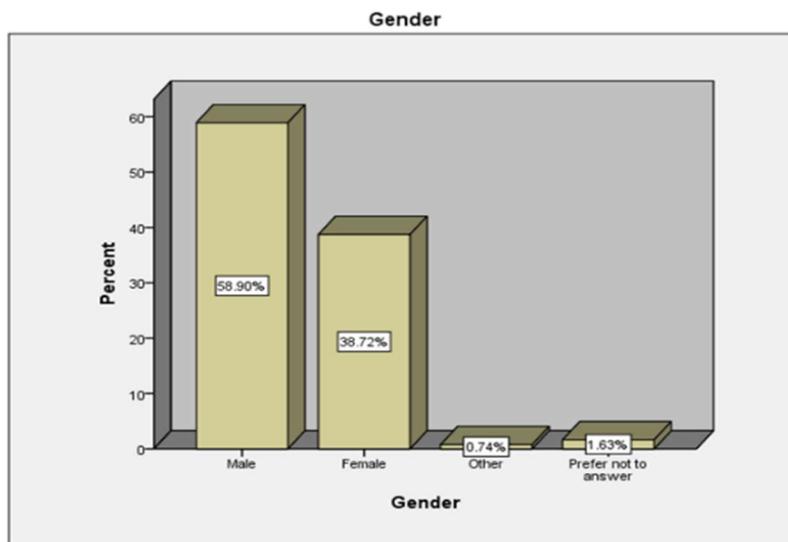
fighters and children). The aim was to establish whether there was, among other options, an appetite for repatriation as the best method for bringing justice to all IS victims.

5. Demographics of Survey Population

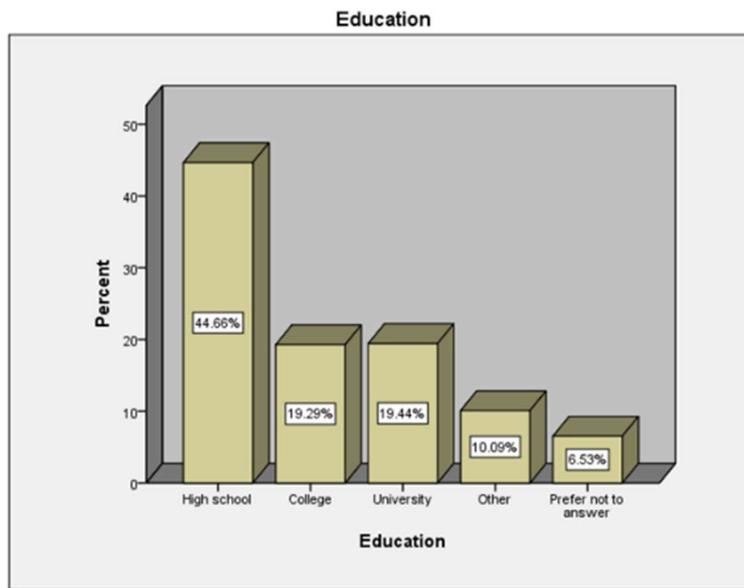
The ages of those surveyed ranged from under 18 (4.01 percent), 18–24 (39.32 percent), 25–34 (30.71 percent), 35–44 (15.13 percent), 45–54 (4.49 percent), and 55 years and above (2.08 percent).



Of those, 58.90 percent were males and 38.72 percent were females.



The education of those surveyed ranged from high school (44.66 percent) and college (19.29 percent) to university (19.44 percent).

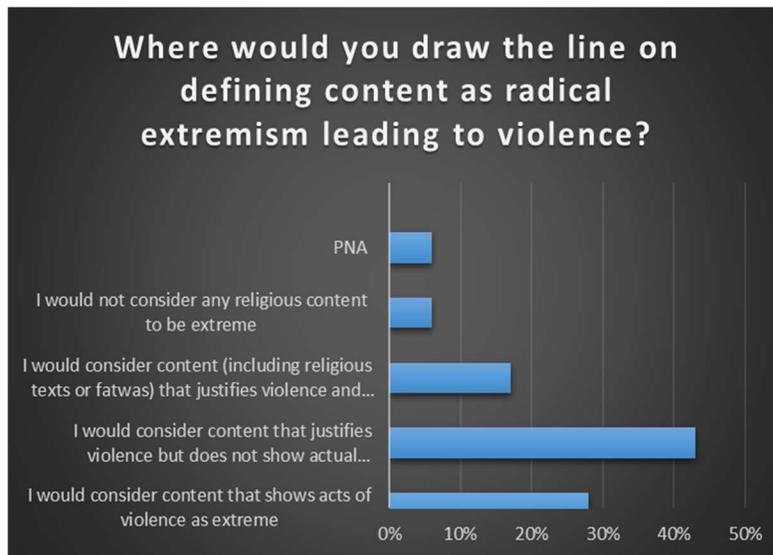


6. Causes of Extremism Leading to Violence

When asked “Where would you draw the line on defining content as radical extremism leading to violence?” (question 11), 43 percent of those polled expressed the belief that content justifying violence should be characterized as “extreme,” even in the absence of actual violence. In the same vein, 28 percent of respondents considered content (including religious texts or fatwas) that justifies violence and shows actual violence as extreme.

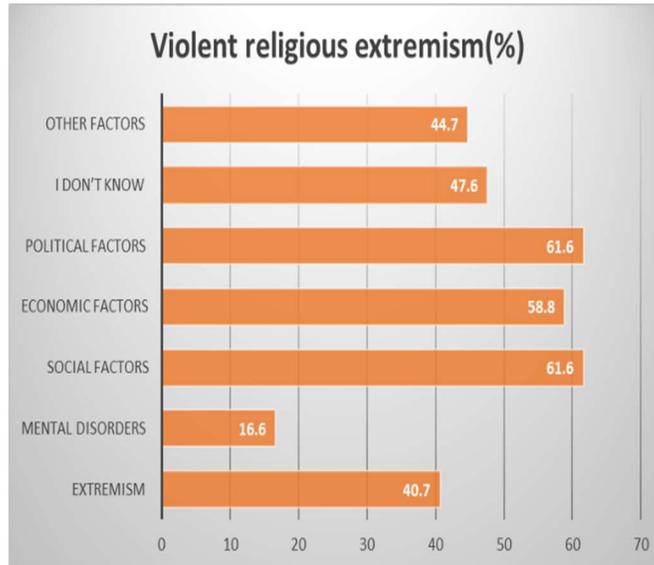
Two possible interpretations of these results present themselves. The first interpretation suggests that the Muslim community in Canada is not inclined to justify violence on religious grounds. This finding is significant for two major reasons: a significant impediment to curbing the surge of extreme speech is that the vast majority of jihadi propaganda materials are wrapped in a cloak of religious legitimacy, infusing them with an aura of divine righteousness (in other words, jihadi groups present their political goals as the will of God); and Salafi and jihadi clerics use similar ideological arguments to rally support for their causes and, in the case of jihadi groups, to rebut any criticism levelled against their violent activities (Ammar and Xu 2018). It would appear that Salafism (or the Salafi school of thought, whose adherents are often referred to as “ultraconservatives”) is not popular, or at least not dominant, in Canada (ibid.).

The second possible interpretation is that, due to the unimaginable atrocities committed by IS, the Muslim community feels pressure to disapprove not only of religious texts or fatwas that justify violence and show actual violence, but also of content justifying violence in the abstract, in the absence of actual violence.

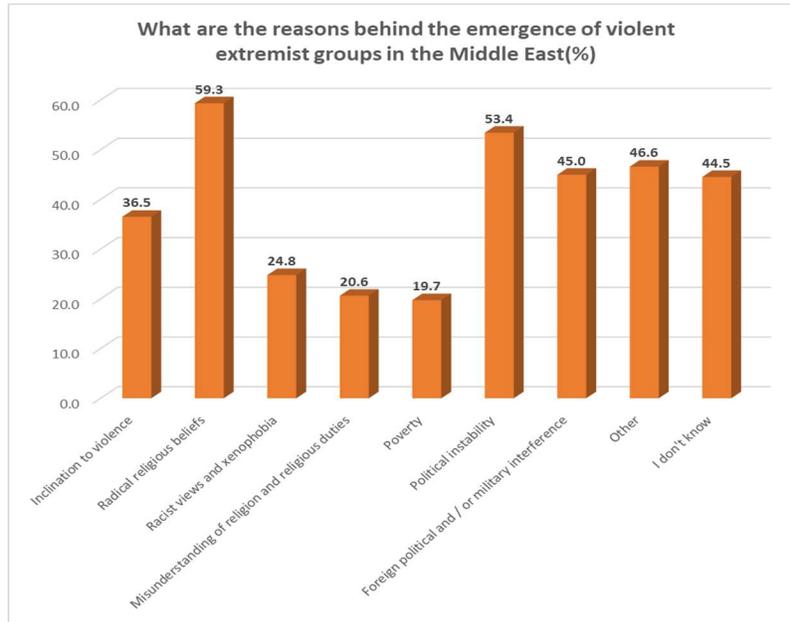


When asked broadly “how violent religious extremism is caused” (question 12), the most popular answers were political and social factors (61.6 percent). Respondents could give more than one answer. Other popular options were economic factors (58.8 percent); extremism (40.7 percent); and mental disorder (16.6 percent).

Interestingly, the impact of political and military interventions is well studied and supports the above result. Using data on international military interventions for 125 to 182 countries, Piazza and Choi (2018) demonstrate that states experience more terrorism after they engage in military interventions.

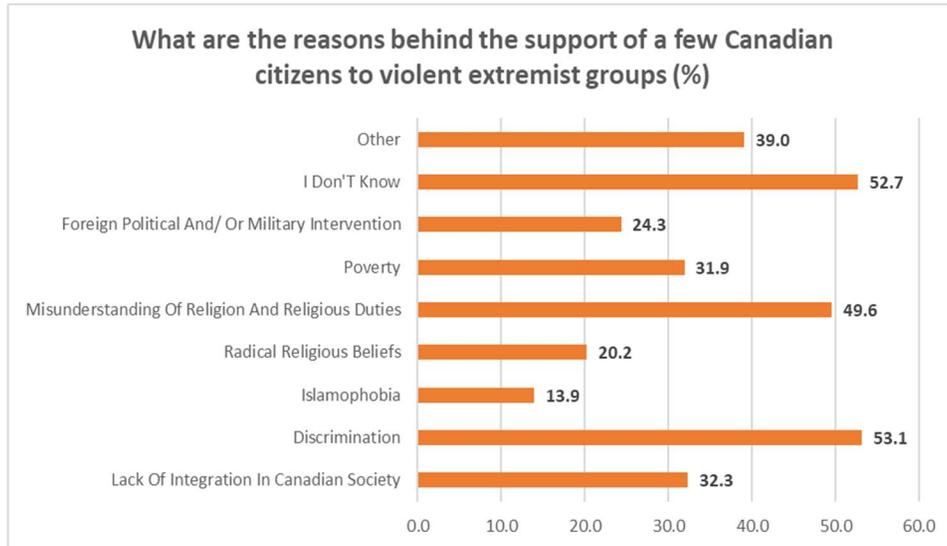


However, when asked more specifically for “the reasons behind the emergence of violent extremist groups in the Middle East in particular” (question 13), a clear majority of respondents (59.3 percent) supported the view that radical religious beliefs are a major reason behind the emergence of violent extremists in the Middle East. More specifically, 53.4 percent of respondents also chose political instability and 45 percent chose foreign political and/or military interference. As can be seen, only 20.6 percent of respondents were persuaded that a misunderstanding of religion and religious duties provoked the rise of terrorist groups in the Middle East. This number fell to just 19.7 percent among those respondents who took the view that poverty is a major cause of the spread of extremism. Since 9/11, research on the role of poverty and terrorism has mushroomed, and much of it dismisses the link between the two (Graff 2010). The results of the present survey support this position. By contrast, evidence from a host of countries contradicts this conclusion and suggests that poverty plays a role in terrorist activity and ought not be overlooked (Emozozo 2013).

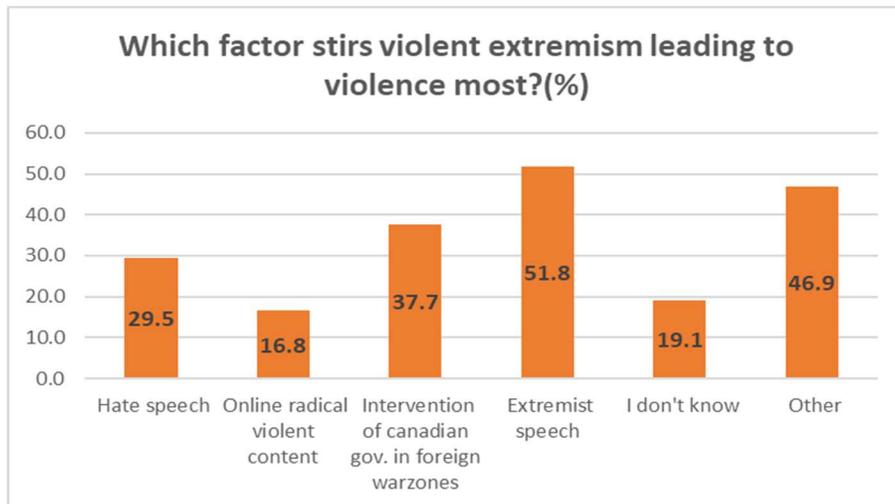


When asked “What are the reasons behind the support of some Canadian citizens to violent extremist groups?” (question 14), only 13.9 percent expressed their belief that Islamophobia is a major cause of some Canadians joining IS. By contrast, discrimination and misunderstanding of religion and religious duties scored quite high as major reasons that Canadians joined IS (53.1 percent and 49.6 percent, respectively).

Critically, however, the views of those polled in this particular context downplay the impact of Islamophobia as a major driving force of radicalization leading to violence. This position raises questions about the degree to which Islamophobia inflames radicalization leading to violence (Walton and Wilson 2019). This opinion polling suggests that Canadian Muslims widely reject violence and extremism. Given the religious identity of IS fighters, this study suggests that the Canadian Muslim community is more concerned about the threat of terrorist organizations such as IS than other communities are — a conclusion supported by the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents in this survey expressed the belief that Islamophobia does not justify violence.



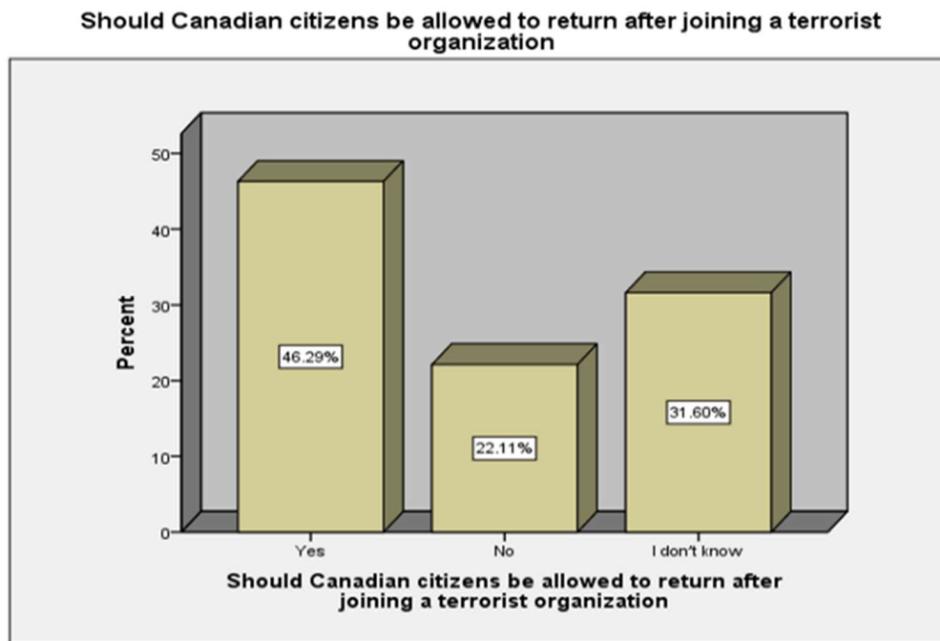
When asked specifically, “Which factor stirs violent extremism leading to violence most?” (question 15), a majority (51.8 percent) blamed extreme speech. In this particular context, as discussed in question 11, extreme speech includes religious texts or fatwas that justify violence whether or not they show actual violence. Interestingly, only 16.8 percent of respondents took the view that online radical content stirs violent extremism, cementing the view that the internet is just one of many factors that could stir extremism leading to violence.



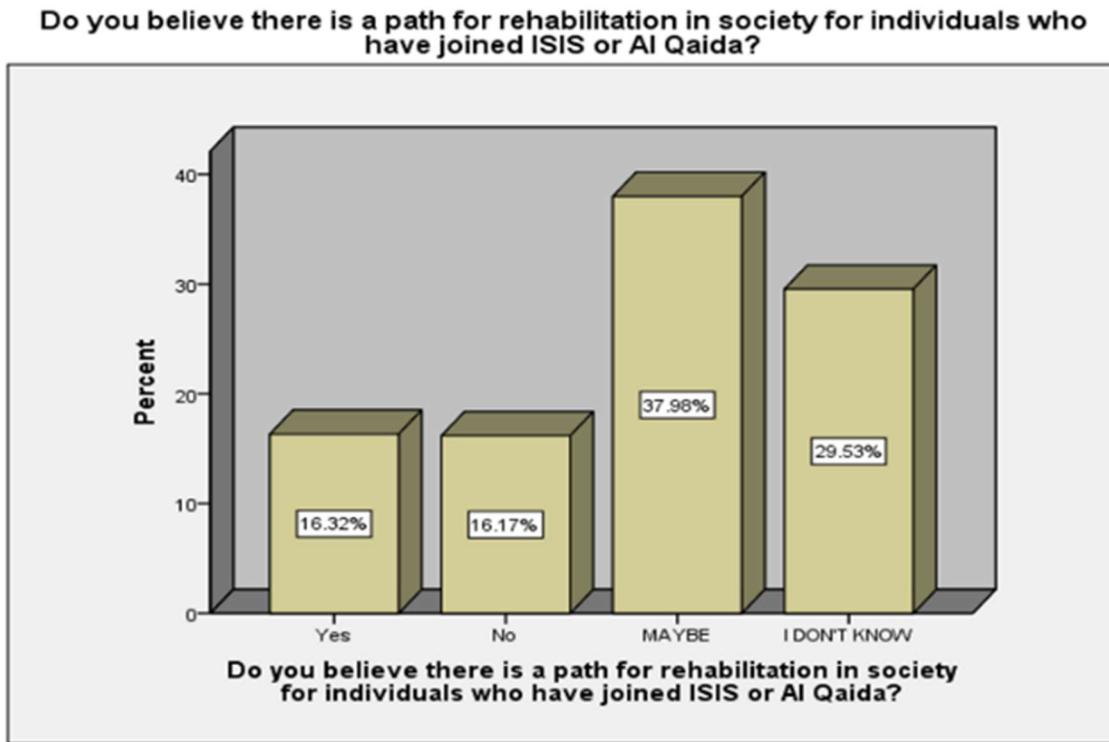
7. What Should Be Done about IS Fighters and Returnees?

When asked whether Canadian citizens should be allowed to return after joining a terrorist organization (question 16), survey participants showed strong support for allowing IS returnees to stand trial in Canada (46.29 percent).

Only 21.11 percent of the survey population opposed this idea. Our opinion polling suggests that Canadian Muslims support the view that the Canadian government has a legal duty to help bring justice to all victims of IS. Many scholars note that the option to stand trial is the most popular response to IS atrocities against innocent civilians. Among other scholars, Kyle Mathews (2018) and Anthony Dworkin (2019) argue that bringing IS fighters and followers home is the most feasible option for meting out justice for IS crimes.



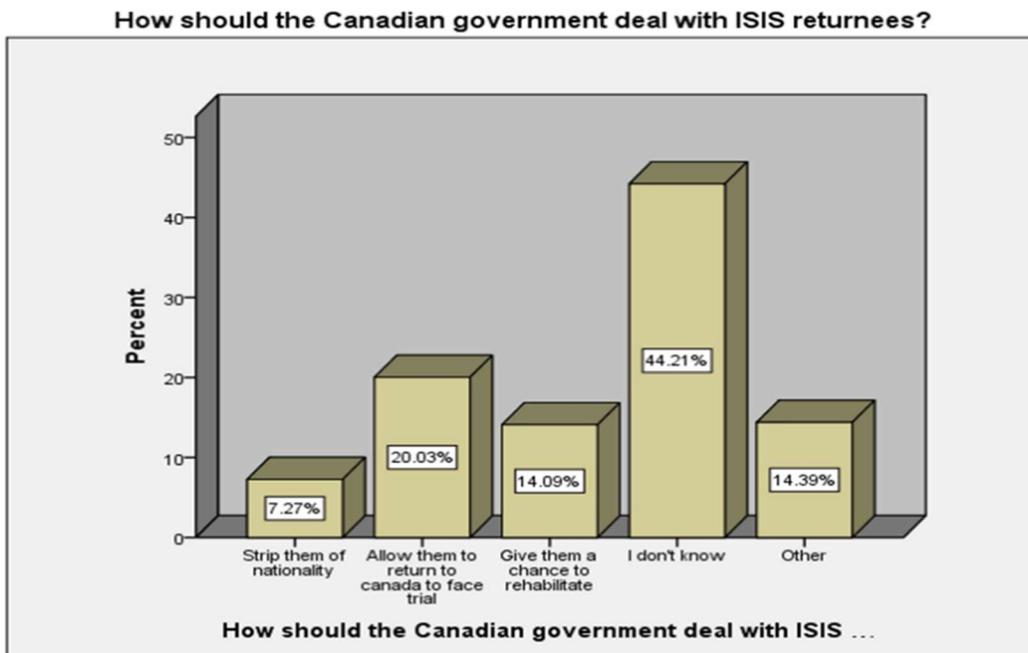
Question 17 asked, “Do you believe there is a path for rehabilitation in society for individuals who have joined IS or Al Qaeda” In the view of 37.98 percent of respondents, there “may be” a path for rehabilitation in society for individuals who joined IS. Only 16.32 percent answered the same question in the affirmative. Almost the same percentage (16.17 percent) answered the question in the negative. For reasons that will become clear when we investigate the next question (question 18), justifiable doubts in the ability of IS fighters to be successfully rehabilitated and integrated into society are likely to seriously jeopardize the repatriation process.



When presented with a host of policy options, specifically, “How should the Canadian government deal with ISIS returnees?” (question 18), the highest percentage (20.03 percent) supported the view that IS returnees should stand trial in Canada. Only 14.09 percent expressed a belief that IS returnees could be rehabilitated; 7.27 percent supported the view that IS returnees should be stripped of their passports and nationality. The latter was the least preferred policy option.

That only a small minority of those polled believe that IS returnees could be rehabilitated is critical, since collecting evidence in the context of returning foreign fighters is a major challenge. Unfortunately, despite their despicable acts, not all IS member returnees can be successfully convicted, unless there is proof beyond a reasonable doubt. If the judge or jury has any doubt and is not certain that an IS returnee is guilty after looking at the evidence, she must be acquitted. As EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove (2014) points out: “[E]vidence from the battlefields in Syria and Iraq is difficult to obtain, collection and use of internet based evidence is challenging, cross-border legal cooperation is often necessary to get access to evidence (foreign fighters transit through other countries, internet providers might be located abroad), some information originates from security services, hence the challenges of using intelligence information in judicial proceedings arise.”

Despite the increased use of self-incriminating photos, and video footage by terrorist groups and some of their followers, gathering evidence for criminal prosecution remains a challenging task because internet-related activities are oftentimes governed by a diverse and sometimes contradictory array of legislation (Bures 2020). Some countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, have broadened their criminal codes to criminalize not only direct acts of terrorism but also domestic activities that “provide support to terrorist groups through propagandizing, fund-raising, recruiting or otherwise facilitating terrorist activities” (Govier and Boutland 2020). This adjustment means that individuals can be held criminally accountable without specific evidence of acts committed in foreign territories (ibid.).

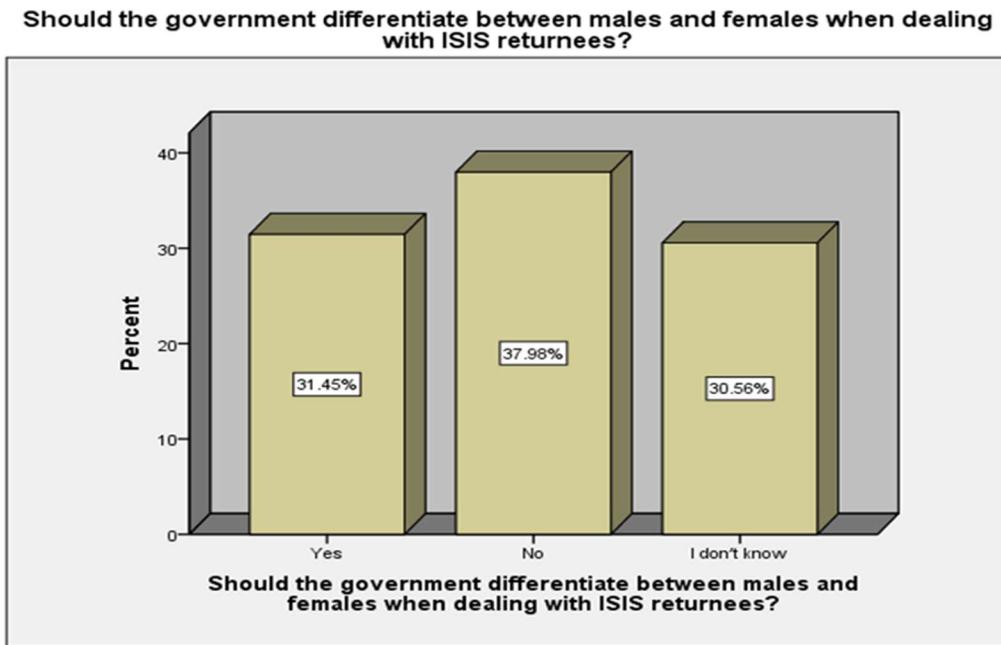


8. Feminism and Global Jihad

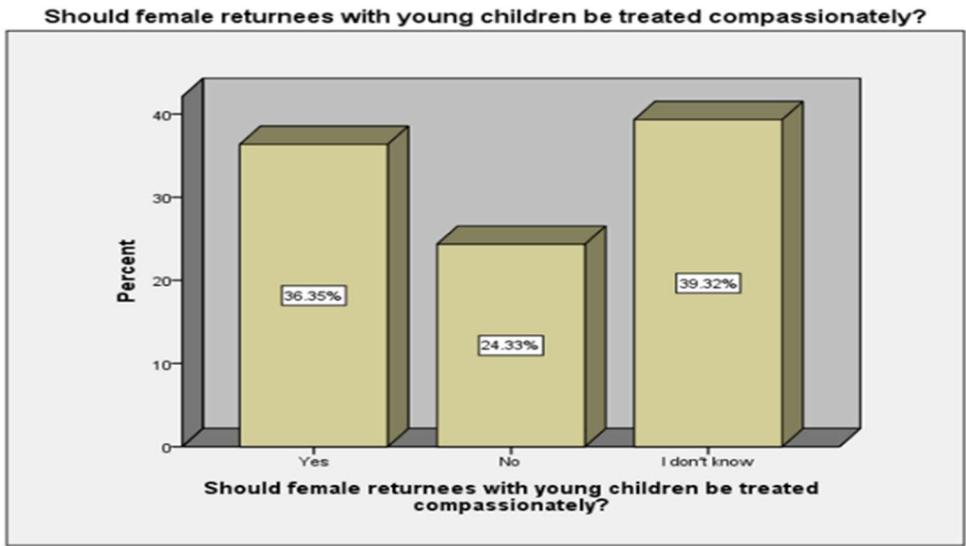
Women IS fighters have played an important role in the process of radicalization to violence and have often willingly and actively partaken in violence. Meaningful engagement of the gender dynamic in counterterrorism policy and practice is long overdue (Cook 2020). The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) guidelines for good practices suggest that women experience violent extremism in significantly different ways than men (GCTF 2014). The motivations of women who have willingly travelled with male fighters may not be the same as those of their

male counterparts (ibid). For this reason, the GCTF guidelines call for the development of gender-informed responses (ibid).

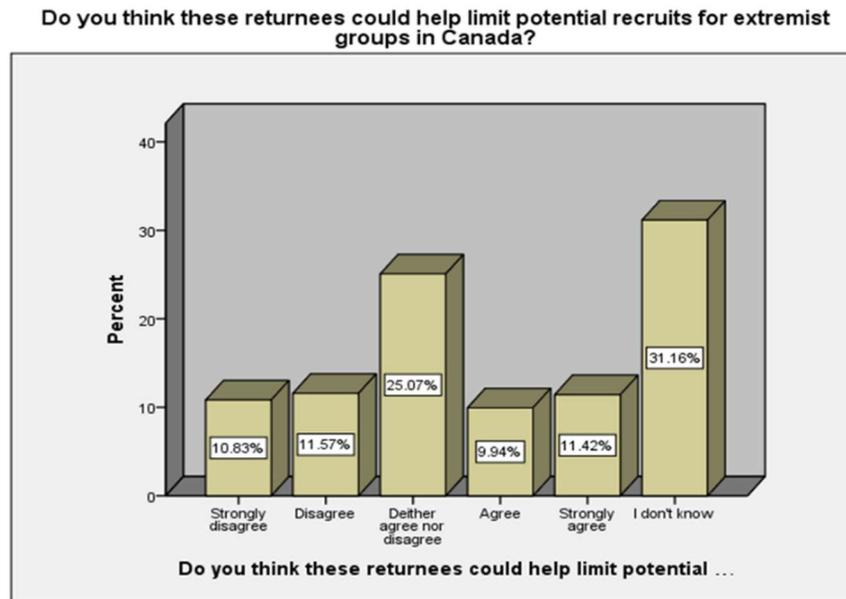
However, with one exception — IS female fighters with young children — our opinion polling downplays the difference between male and female jihadi fighters. While acknowledging the danger to female IS fighters, the majority of respondents did not support the idea of treating male and female returnees differently (37.98 percent; question 19). This result should not be interpreted as a rejection of the importance of meaningful engagement of the gender dynamic in counterterrorism policy and practice. After all, this polling is not about how females are recruited, radicalized, and deradicalized, but rather about how to treat female fighters who have already been involved with violence in some shape or form. Rejecting the idea of treating IS female fighters more leniently shows a departure from the global Islamic tradition of treating women compassionately and therefore is another powerful indication as to how resentful the Canadian Muslim community is of IS crimes.



Female returnees with young children, however, are viewed through a different lens. According to 36.35 percent of respondents, female returnees with young children ought to be treated compassionately (question 20).



The final question (question 21) in the survey study probes the extent to which IS returnees could be used to limit recruiting for terrorist groups. Only 11.42 percent of respondents strongly supported the view that IS returnees could help to limit recruitment for terrorist groups; 10.83 percent strongly disagreed with the same statement. These results cast serious doubts on the idea that IS members can be used as assets for gaining information and intelligence about how the groups recruit and function, which could, in turn, be used to implement policies to mitigate the number of Westerners following extremist paths (Dworkin 2019). The Muslim community in Canada appears to have grown weary of IS followers and has little faith in their ability to become positive members of society.



9. Key Findings from Participant Responses

From participant interviews and responses, the following findings emerged.

1. Despite their undisputed role, poverty, Islamophobia, and the internet are not seen as “major” radicalization factors leading to violence.
2. Discrimination, extreme speech (including religious texts, along with misunderstandings of religion and religious duties) are seen respectively as the most significant drivers of extremism leading to violence.
3. The Muslim community in Canada is not inclined to justify violence on religious grounds.
4. The Muslim community in Canada is more concerned about the threat of terrorist organizations such as IS than other communities are.
5. For the Muslim community in Canada, repatriating IS returnees is a priority.
6. The principle of rehabilitating individuals who joined IS is not seen as a tenable counterterrorism policy.
7. IS returnees are not seen as helpful in limiting potential recruits for extremist groups in Canada.

Our opinion poll shows the Canadian Muslim community supports repatriating IS members. Despite the complications involved, bringing Canadian IS fighters home seems to be the most feasible option for delivering justice for IS crimes. This conclusion is interesting given that, according to Amanda Connolly (2019), repatriating foreign “fighters and their families is not a priority.” Canada would not prioritize going into a “dangerous and

dysfunctional part of the world,” according to Canadian Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale (ibid.). Setting aside for the moment the moral and legal duties of the Canadian government, Goodale’s prudent position is at least partially justifiable, given the difficulty of collecting evidence against IS members from Syria and Iraq. It is feared that, upon their return, foreign fighters could use their combat expertise to commit attacks on their own countries (Public Safety Canada 2018). Such concerns ought not to be taken lightly, especially given the fact that reintegrating IS members into society is anything but certain.

The 2018 National Strategy on Countering Radicalization to Violence identifies “early prevention” as one of Canada’s main counterradicalization strategies (Public Safety Canada 2018). The “disengagement” pillar of the strategy, which seeks to engage individuals who have become directly involved in ideologically motivated violence, however, seems to exclude returnees from conflict zones, such as IS returnees. In this context, the Canadian government’s priority is to investigate, arrest, charge, and prosecute Canadians involved in terrorism in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of northern and eastern Africa (Public Safety Canada 2018). Some of this study’s findings seem to support the government’s hard-nosed strategy toward returning IS fighters. At this point, however, due to logistical challenges (CBC News 2020), keeping those individuals from re-entering Canada is the only tenable strategy.

From a security point of view, some aspects of our survey seem to justify the Canadian government’s prudent position on returning IS fighters. Repatriation is very costly and poses formidable legal challenges for the government, casting further doubt on the fate of IS returnees who do not meet the stringent legal threshold for proof of terrorism-related charges in Canada. This security viewpoint is especially potent given that, contrary to conventional wisdom (Jenkins 2019), the overwhelming majority of respondents dismissed the notion that some IS returnees could be rehabilitated or turned into assets that would help discourage others from following their course.

This being said, from the standpoint of countering radicalization, responding to — or at least considering — the views of the Muslim community in Canada is an important factor that should not be ignored. As a growing field, counterradicalization is intertwined and connected with security operations. In the context of fighting terrorism, the term “security” ought to go beyond services offered by security forces, the military, or the police. Taking a manageable risk is part of the learning and developing process, and Canada is a suitable place for such experimentation because the Muslim community in Canada is not inclined to justify violence on religious grounds. Forty-three percent of the respondents in this study expressed the belief that any content justifying violence

should be characterized as “extreme,” even in the absence of actual violence — an indication that, at least according to the findings of this study, the Muslim community in the Greater Toronto Area does not seem to adopt the Salafists’ literal interpretation of the faith as justifying physical violence in the context of jihad. For these reasons, we believe the views of the Muslim community in Canada regarding the repatriation of IS fighters merit consideration.

The prosecution of IS returnees may not always be an option, given the potential lack of evidence. Repatriation, therefore, should be tailored to the specific circumstances of the individual returnee (GCTF 2016). With this in mind, this empirically based study can serve, at minimum, two crucial purposes: to provide quantitative metrics of the Muslim community’s views on how the Canadian government ought to deal with returning IS fighters; and to develop and implement appropriate legislation and implementing procedures to enable criminal accountability for returning IS fighters.

10. Policy Recommendations for the Canadian Government

While it is recommended that all returning extremist travellers be repatriated, the Canadian government ought to develop a priority list. Children and IS female fighters with children should be the first group to be considered for repatriation. Concerning other returning extremist travellers, the response of the government should be made on a case-by-case basis, with priority given to cases that can be safely prosecuted.

11. Conclusion

In this report, our conclusions and policy proposals are based on empirical data that we gathered and analyzed, surveying dozens of members at mosques in the Greater Toronto Area in the period of June 1 to July 31, 2019. This offered the opportunity to road-test the acceptability of certain premises and policy options, in particular, repatriation. The aim was to examine the extent to which the most popular policy (repatriation) and security concerns are aligned, to highlight the parameters of public opinion, and to gain insight into a broader range of views. Simply focusing on keeping IS captive fighters and returnees away is hardly an effective strategy. In this context, ignoring the sociology of counterradicalization could be costly.

**APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONDENTS**

1. **What is your gender?** Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to answer
2. **What is your age?** under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+, prefer not to answer
3. **What is your occupation?** student, employed, non-employed, prefer not to answer
4. **Do you identify yourself as a Muslim?** Yes, No, Prefer not to answer
5. **Are you a Canadian/permanent resident living in the Greater Toronto Area?** Yes, No, prefer not to answer
6. **What is your ethnicity?** East Asian, South Asian, Black/African, White, Indigenous Canadian, Other, Prefer not to answer
7. **What is your highest level of completed education?** High School, College, University, Other, Prefer not to answer
8. **Which part of the city do you live in?** Toronto, Peel, Halton, York, Durham
9. **Islam rejects all types of radicalization. Do you agree with this statement?** Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree disagree, strongly disagree, I do not know
10. **Violent extremism is a sign of ignorance and represents a lack of understanding of Islam. Do you agree with this statement?** Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, I don't know
11. **Where would you draw the line on defining content as radical extremism leading to violence?** I would consider content that shows acts of violence as extreme, I would consider content that justifies violence but does not show actual violence as extreme, I would consider content (including religious texts or fatwas) that justifies violence and shows actual violence as extreme, I would not consider any religious content to be extreme
12. **Violent religious extremism is caused by** (You may choose more than one answer): Religion, Mental disorders, Social factors, Economic factors, Political factors, I don't know, Other factors
13. **What are the reasons behind the emergence of violent extremist groups in the Middle East, such as al-Qaeda, ISIS and the like?** (You may choose more than one answer): Inclination to violence, Radical religious beliefs, Racist views and xenophobia towards others, Misunderstanding of religion and religious duties, Poverty, Political instability, Foreign political and/or military interference, Other, I don't know
14. **What are the reasons behind the support of a few Canadian citizens to violent extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the like?** (You may choose more than one answer): Lack of integration in Canadian society, Discrimination, Islamophobia, Radical religious beliefs, Misunderstanding of religion and religious duties, Poverty, Foreign political and/or military intervention, I don't know, Other reasons
15. **Which factor stirs violent extremism leading to violence most?** Hate speech, Online radical violent content, Intervention of the Canadian government in foreign warzones, extremist speech, I don't know, Other factors



16. **Should Canadian citizens be allowed to return after joining a terrorist organization (to stand trial in Canada)?** Yes, No, I don't know
17. **Do you believe there is a path for rehabilitation in society for individuals who have joined ISIS or al-Qaeda?** Yes, No, Maybe, I don't know
18. **How should the Canadian government deal with ISIS returnees?** Strip them from their nationality, Allow them to come back to Canada and face trial, Give them a chance to rehabilitate, I don't know, Other
19. **Should the government differentiate between males and females when dealing with ISIS returnees?** Yes, No, I don't know
20. **Should female returnees with young children be treated compassionately?** Yes, No, I don't know
21. **Do you think these returnees could help limit potential recruits for extremist groups in Canada?** Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, I don't know

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