

Understanding Communities' Attitudes towards CVE

OVERVIEW

This research investigates the ways in which advocates for Muslim American communities in Los Angeles characterize the premise, practices, and impact of countering violent extremism, including community policing.

The overall goal of CVE is, “to stop those most at risk of radicalization from becoming terrorists.” Generally speaking, CVE can be understood as “a realm of policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups.” The White House Strategic Implementation Plan for CVE recommends that law enforcement and other agencies “foster community-led partnerships and prevention programming through expanding community-based solutions.” This study was designed to better understand and identify the attitudes of communities’ advocates and members towards the practices, discourses and values of countering violent extremism, including community policing.

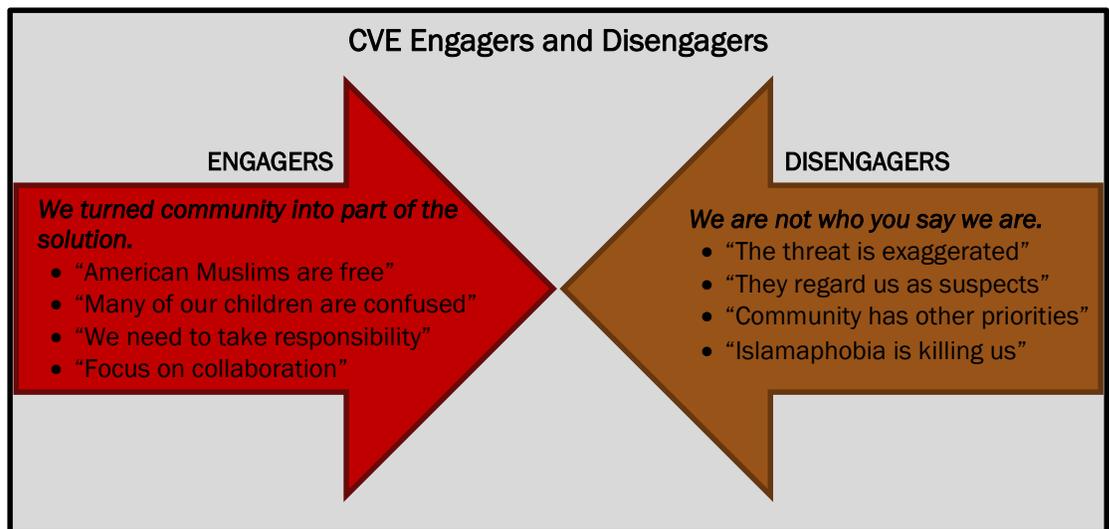
INTERIM FINDINGS

The findings describe and contrast what community advocates call CVE “engagers” and “disengagers.” Overall, CVE engagers believe, “we turned the community into the solution” whereas disengagers question the premise of CVE, asserting “we are not who you say we are.” The engagers describe the terrorist threat as real and cite examples that show the benefits of cooperation. The disengagers focus on surveillance and stings, and cite the low prevalence of Muslims committing terrorist acts.

Most disengagers appear no less law abiding than the engagers. They care about their communities and about the United States as much as any other American. Some are even contributing to CVE, directly or indirectly, but always by another name.

Even many engagers don't like how the CVE discourse “puts us in a box where we don't want to be.” There is widespread concern regarding CVE discourse and policies that:

- Use language that is primitive, developing, and not articulated in a clear way to the community;
- Reinforce negative identities of Muslim Americans;
- Demonstrate a lack of respect and trust of Muslim Americans by law enforcement/government;
- Demonstrate that Muslims aren't being treated as equal citizens;
- Exacerbate historical trauma from countries of origin;
- Are based on misinformation spread by media;
- Endanger civil rights, especially related to surveillance and stings.



Advocacy groups, from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), to Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), to Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, are well practiced in channeling these grassroots suspicions, and outrage over actual civil rights violations, into challenging CVE policies and practices. Some example statements from recent interviews with community advocates follow:

The Threat is Exaggerated.

“A lot of people look at violent extremism as something that is really a media phenomenon. This is something that, you know, we just don't really have. It's not a problem for us and for that reason the media is putting this thing on us.”
(Community advocate)

They Regard Us As Suspects.

“Government agencies, specifically the FBI, have created more extremists than Al Qaeda and ISIS. FBI exploits these people's sickness to manufacture terrorism cases. We won't work with the government until they stop treating us as suspects.”(Community advocate)

The Community has Other Priorities.

“Even keeping radicalization in mind that's not even Top 10 on the priority list. I would say one for sure is youth leaving Islam. Sometimes you have girls marrying outside of religion. Sometimes you have guys partaking in drugs and end up keeping them away from their religion and just doing their own thing. So I would say losing our youth should be one of our biggest priorities, because if you lose your youth you lose your future.” (Community youth leader)

Islamophobia Will Kill Us.

“The Islamophobia industry will kill us if we don't stand up...We need to defend our religion. Everything they do defiles everything that is dear to us. The reality is that there is an Islamophobia industry. We owe it to the Prophet to clear his name.”(Community advocate)

METHOD

A study of the LAPD and Muslim-American community in Los Angeles using ethnographic interviews and observations with the LAPD police officers and with community leaders, parents, and youth (n=100), and analysis using grounded theory and Atlas/ti 7.0 software.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Community policing approaches have found enough willing engagers that they have not had to focus much on the disengagers. However, as the CVE agenda advances beyond community policing driven engagement and partnership – the community pushback against CVE has become more of an issue. Our interim findings reveal that pushback to CVE appears multifactoral, widespread, and dynamic. What helpful strategies could be adapted to mitigate this pushback?

- Law enforcement and other government agencies can rein in questionable surveillance or use of force practices, maximize transparency, and actively oppose anti-Muslim sentiment in their communities.
- Law enforcement and other government agencies can facilitate communities developing community-led prevention, focus on the strengths of youth, families, community, culture, and empirically demonstrate the benefits of CVE for communities.
- Communities can advocate for community policing approaches and for multicultural and interfaith framing of the strategies, and can develop community-led prevention and intervention programs that achieve some of the same goals as CVE but are framed in ways that are potentially less stigmatizing.

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