

Understanding Radicalisation

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Bill Durodié of Chatham House in London talks about how minority groups in Britain became militant radicals and how the U.S. is different from Europe.

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Twenty years ago, young radicals in Britain were political and secular. Today, those of concern to the authorities are driven more by culture and religion. We need to understand this shift if we are to address radicalization successfully. How did British youths of Pakistani descent go from calling themselves "Asian," or even "black," a generation ago, to "Muslim" today?

Unlike the U.S., Europe struggled to integrate minority communities after World War II. Tarnished by imperialism and lacking a universalist outlook, like that expressed through the "American Dream," immigrant groups in Britain were discriminated against, and marginalized, through the social and economic policies of successive administrations.

While the first generation sought to keep a low profile, their children grew up to fight racism, rejecting their elders and adopting the secular outlook of the left. Fearing this, governments sought to foster religious and community leaders with a view toward depoliticizing their opponents.

These leaders espoused more traditional and conservative ideas and as long as they encouraged cultural identity, they became conduits for financial largess. It became easier to obtain government money to build a mosque than to coordinate a challenge against inner-city poverty.

Then, with the failure and collapse of the left, domestically and internationally, at the end of the Cold War, a generation of militants, now well-versed in the language of identity and victimhood, began organizing itself. In the case of Europe, and Britain specifically, it is not what attracts a few to extreme outlooks that we ought to be focusing on, but rather our failure to inspire and integrate bright and energetic individuals.

In contrast to Europe, America's sense of optimistic opportunity has acted as a bulwark to these trends. But the growing emphasis on security over freedom in the U.S. could lead to a new generation of disconnected youths in search of something more to life than just safety. If you want to know what not to do, look to Europe's past.