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Tackling Muslim Radicalization With the Price of Civil Liberties

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[\[PDF\]](#)

The Charlie Hebdo attack produced a surprising outcome: far right parties lost support, while mainstream ones regained popularity. In France, president Hollande's call for national unity along with the swift police response showed strength. Hollande's approval rating skyrocketed from 19% to 40%, while that of Prime Minister Manuel Valls rose from 45% to 61%.

By contrast, the leader of the [Front National](#), Marine Le Pen, stuck to the civilization clash narrative and tried to capitalize on the anti-Muslim sentiment. When she was not invited at the solidarity march attended by world leaders on January 11, she played again her favorite role, that of a victim. She called the "real" France (*la France profonde*) to an alternate march in Beaucaire, in Southern France. That march was poorly attended.

The moment was short lived however, as far right parties currently lead the polls in several EU states:

Country	Party	Percentage	Ranking	Poll Date
France	Marine Le Pen/Front National	31%	1*	January 23
Denmark	Danish People's Party	21.9%	1	January 29
Netherlands	PVV	27/150 seats	1	January 25
United Kingdom	UKIP	14%	3	February 3

*Presidential race

The far right uses the fear of terrorism narrative within the larger anti-EU context, exploiting the worries of the still ongoing economic crisis. Muslims are portrayed as socially backward, physically violent, who pose an economic threat (taking jobs away, or unfairly benefiting from state welfare), as well as a cultural threat (prioritizing shari'a law over state law). Europe's latest best seller is *Soumission*, a novel by Michel Houellebecq, that plays right into these fears: Houellebecq envisions a Muslim winning the French presidency in 2022, and changing French secular laws.

Far right parties portray themselves as defenders of European society and culture, against an imagined Muslim takeover. Their strategy is lucrative in attracting electorate away from the mainstream parties. Sadly, over 40% French citizens believe that the Muslim community is a threat for French identity, while only 25% think it leads to cultural enrichment.

Roots of Islamic Radicalization

A third of all Muslims in the EU live in France. The state's failure to integrate large populations from North Africa led to a "social and ethnic apartheid," admitted Prime Minister Manuel Valls. Jihadists seek their targets for radicalization among the marginalized Muslim youth from the infamous *banlieues*, ghetto-like housing projects, where unemployment and poverty are high.



Clichy-sous-Bois, a Banlieue East of Paris

Similar scenes are taking place in cities across Europe: following years of exclusion and daily discrimination, the “lost generation” of children born in EU to North African parents are finding a [purpose](#) in their lives, albeit a gruesome one. [Some](#) of them are raised in secular households, and convert to Islam later in their lives. Many, like Amedy Coulibaly and Chérif Kouachi, are radicalized in prisons, where Islam is becoming the religion of choice of the oppressed. Case in point: Coulibaly was an inmate on burglary and drug trafficking charges when he converted to radical Islam in the Fleury-Mérogis prison.

Recruiters lure their victims away by offering them an identity, acceptance, and empowerment. They are promised a world of religious purity, well paying mercenary jobs (ISIS salaries start from \$1,000 per month), and even wives. A closer look at the ISIS propaganda reveals a delusional goal – reconstructing the scene of the “original” Muslim society from the times of the prophet and his acolytes, and perpetually replicating it.

Symptoms of Islamic Radicalization

The [International Center for Study of Radicalization](#) in London estimates that 4,000 EU citizens have joined the fight in Syria and Iraq. Out of these, 1,200 are French citizens, between 500 and 600 are each German and British, 440 are Belgian, and between 200 and 250 are Dutch citizens.

Lesser-educated, radicalized young Muslims are also weighing religious war against perceived immorality at home. In the recent years, hundreds of homophobic assaults by Muslim youth gangs in the Netherlands have pushed the LGBT community [underground](#) and challenged the country’s long tradition of tolerance. Geert Wilders, the leader of the far right [Dutch Freedom Party](#), justifies his anti-Muslim attitude with the narrative of “intolerant of the intolerant.”

In France, a wave of assaults by Muslim perpetrators on the Jewish communities has prompted many to [leave](#) for Israel. Over 7,000 French Jews moved to Israel in 2014 alone, twice as many as in the previous year. Acknowledging the rise in anti-Semitic attacks, president Francois Hollande told representatives of the Jewish community: “[France is your homeland](#).” Still, following Amédy Coulibaly’s attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris, paratroopers guard Jewish schools and temples.

France’s Response

The French executive has to conduct a delicate balancing act when devising a strategy to stop further jihadist attacks: it has to address the cultural rift in the Muslim communities and tackle Muslim alienation, fight Islamic radicalism, while avoiding Islamophobia. Another jihadist attack would further boost electoral support for the far right.

The French executive announced so far new measures that range from education to antiterrorism:

- Education measures (€250m increased spending over three years)
 - Institute “civic and morality lessons” in schools, to include civility, politeness, and “media instruction”
 - Establish Secularity Day every December 9
 - Train teachers to “transmit republican values”
- Antiterrorism measures (€425m over three years)
 - Hire 2,600 new personnel, boost number of counter-terrorism officers
 - Purchase better equipment for police
 - Improve the legal framework for prosecutors to bring terrorists to justice
 - Create a new terror watch list:
 - Database will contain the names of all arrested or questioned in connection to terrorism
 - Authorities will keep track of addresses and foreign travel of those listed
 - Improve communication between government agencies
- Radicalization prevention:
 - Hire more Muslim chaplains in French jails, to prevent radicalization of inmates
 - Set up channels for families to signal worrying behavior to authorities
 - Support the work of community organizations

EU Response

EU leaders will discuss new anti-terrorism measures at the Brussels summit on February 12. The proposals disseminated so far are bold, and have the potential to transform the union. More and more Europeans are ready give up privacy and other civil liberties for the sake of security. The proposals include:

- Set up a network of European [security agents](#) abroad, within EU's [foreign delegations](#) (EU's Foreign Policy chief, Federica Mogherini, insists this is not the creation of an embryonic EU espionage agency)
- Withdraw travel documents of EU citizens looking to go to Syria or Iraq, or of those seen as a threat in Europe
- Adopt the [Passenger Name Record](#) (PNR), a EU-wide list to collect and store passenger data from flights to and from the EU. The list would contain:
 - Passenger names
 - Phone numbers
 - Credit card details
- Increase [intelligence sharing](#) with Arab states

A previous PNR proposal was struck down by the European Parliament in 2011 over privacy concerns. If adopted, the law will impact the rights to privacy, freedom of movement, and data protection. Among others, the law would enhance the possibility of refusing exit or re-entry to potential or known fighters. While the current proposal applies only to flights to and from the EU, the Council is also considering the possibility to extend it to internal flights.

Member states are discussing their own anti-terrorism measures. Belgium plans to strip citizenship and withdraw identity cards to people who travel abroad to commit terrorist acts. Britain has already stripped citizenship to 27 individuals in the past few years. In one case, the UK left [stateless](#) a Muslim convert, originally from Vietnam.

The German cabinet approved a new anti-terror law that criminalizes travel or [intent](#) to travel abroad to receive military training with the goal of committing “an attack that would endanger the state.” The law drew furious criticism from civil rights advocates from the Left party and the Greens. “The constitutional principle that clearly differentiates between punitive and legal behavior, is being damaged. Initial suspicion regarding a criminal offense as a precondition to intervention from security forces, should be adhered with absolutely. Anyone who wants to interfere with this, is holding an axe to the foundations of our society,” explained Jan Korte, Left Party MP and member of the Home Affairs Committee in the Bundestag. The law now goes to the Bundestag for further debate.

EuroPoint: Muslim radicalization has socio-economic causes. The narrative of the far right fringe will further isolate Muslim communities, strengthen nationalism among the non-Muslims, and slowly lead to further weakening of civil liberties. Thus, the European project is closer to backpedaling on its most important historical feats: moving beyond nationalism, transforming former enemies into allies, and building free open societies.

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