Assessing the Prevalence of Extreme Middle-Eastern Ideologies among Some New Immigrants to Canada

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Abstract

The goal of this research was to investigate whether new immigrants from the extended Middle-Eastern countries differ from each other on issues related to extreme Middle-Eastern religious beliefs based on their religious identification. The Assessment and Treatment of Radicalization Scale (ARTS; Loza, 2007a), a scale designed to assess extreme religious beliefs originating from the Middle-East, was administered to a sample of 91 participants who had recently immigrated to Canada from Pakistan. The sample was comprised of Muslims (the majority of the participants) and a small number of Christians from the same background. Due to the small number of the Christian participants, Christian responses from previous studies were included in the present comparisons. Results indicated significant differences between the religious groups and were consistent with previously obtained results. Current results also support the use of ATRS as a reliable and valid measure to help with risk assessment for beliefs supporting violence.

Keywords: assessing, radicalizations, extreme middle-eastern ideologies, immigrants to Canada

1. Introduction

Coverage of extremist political, social views and associated terrorism originating in the Middle-East has been a stable diet in the media for several years. Middle-Eastern terrorism rests upon many factors but the most potent, and we argue, paradoxically a neglected factor is the extreme belief ideologies that play a central role in radicalizing the population into believing these ideologies and in rare cases manifesting them in terrorist acts (see Loza, 2007b for a review of these factors and ideologies).

Middle-Eastern scholars have opined that the prevalence of religious thinking and ideologies in Middle-Eastern countries is paving the way toward more extremism and terrorism and is an essential stage toward building the terrorist mind (El-Bana, 2008; Yaseen, 2007a). In the same vein, it is reported that extreme religious ideologies play a central role in radicalizing young Muslims globally, recruiting and indoctrinating them into the terrorist ideology, and eventually asking them to commit terrorist acts (Ibrahim, 1980, 1988; Isam, 2006; Schwind, 2005). In fact, extreme belief ideologies are both associated with, and reliably precede violent acts perpetrated by Middle-Eastern terrorists (Pipes, 2008) and the idea that present day terrorism is the result of the prevalence of ideologies that look down upon others and consider them infidels (Shbekshy, 2004). As a result of these ideologies being widely taught, negative attitudes against non-Muslim culture are apparent in Muslim countries (Littman, 2005; Manji, 2003; Sayyed, 2005) and appear to be spreading into segments of Muslim populations that did not previously adhere to these extremist views.

There are concerns that the extreme Middle-Eastern religious ideologies are prevalent and growing among the Muslim communities in Europe (Bawer, 2006; Wicker, 2007; Yaseen, 2007b) and other western countries. Unfortunately, the prevalence of these ideologies may have contributed to the home grown terrorism in the western countries. Examples of these influences are the bombings in Madrid and London; the murder of Van

Gogh in the Netherlands; the many attempted attacks against EU countries since 2001; the many thwarted attempts in Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands; the 9/11 airplane crashes in New York; the 2009 killing of 13; and wounding of 32 USA army servicemen in Texas (Ibrahim, 2012; Lorenzo, 2007; Silke, 2008; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Wicker, 2007). Examples of the prevalence of the extreme ideologies among first or second generation Middle-Eastern emigrants are drawn from several sources. First, from the testimonies of the offenders, terrorists themselves during their interrogations, and court proceedings that are later published in police reports or news papers. Second, from surveys like that conducted in Great Britain. These surveys showed that the British Muslims reported their primary identity as being Muslims (rather than reporting their dominant identity as British); held more positive views toward jihad and martyrdom than their fellow citizens (Ansari et al., 2006); 13% of British Muslims believed that the persons who bombed the London subway system in July 2005 were Martyrs for Islam, and 49% believed that the U.S. military actions in Iraq were an attack against Islam (Wicker, 2007). Third, research results that indicated the prevalence of Middle-Eastern extremist ideologies among samples were from western countries (Loza, 2010a; Loza, 2010b; Loza, El-Fatah, Prinsloo, Hesslink, & Seidler, 2011).

It is important to investigate the prevalence of extreme Middle-Eastern belief ideologies among new immigrants from the Middle-Eastern countries because many of the immigrants to western countries come from the broader areas of the Middle-East. The goal of this study was to contribute to such investigation. It is important to be aware of the belief systems of the new immigrants to western countries from the Middle-East because the majority of terrorist acts that the world has witnessed in the last few years have been linked to extremist ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes that originated from the Middle-East.

To complete this research, we compared the responses of recently arrived immigrants from Pakistan to Canada on the Assessment and Treatment of Radicalization Scale (ARTS; Loza, 2007). We compared the responses of Pakistani Muslim participants with those of their Christian fellow counterparts. Due to the small number of Christian participants in the current sample, we compared the responses of the Pakistani Muslim participants to responses from previous research of Christians, others belonging to non-Abrahamic religions (i.e., not Judaism, Christianity or Islam), and Atheists.

We hypothesized that participants of different faiths would differ in their responses on the ATRS, with participants of the Muslim faith scoring significantly higher on the ATRS than Atheists or participants of Other Religions. This hypothesis is based on the results of research of one of the paper's authors and the reported prevalence of extreme Middle-Eastern religious views in Canada and around the world (Loza, 2010a; Loza, 2010b; Loza et al., 2011; Littman, 2005; Manji, 2003; Sayyed, 2005).

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

Involved in this study were 91 participants, recently emigrated from Pakistan to Canada. Participants were residing in the Greater Toronto area (see Table 1 for a summary of demographic characteristics of participants.)

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of participants

Demographics	Pakistani Christians (n= 8)		Pakistani Muslims (n = 83)		Christians from other countries (n=401)		Other Religions and Atheists (n = 231)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age	45.38	4.07	37.99	8.48	35.75	12.29	35.63	12.51
	Freq (%)		Freq (%)		Freq (%)		Freq (%)	
Sex								
M	37.50		45.78		44.19		48.68	
F	62.50		54.22		55.81		51.32	
Marital Status								
Single	100.00		12.05		5.93		32.02	
Married/divorced			87.95		90.07		67.98	
Race								
Asian	100.00		100.00					
Cac, afr, asi, mix.	8.79		91.21		100.00		100.00	

Education				
< Secondary	00.00	00.00	5.05	31.86
Secondary	00.00	15.66	10.86	12.83
College	50.00	74.70	40.91	26.11
Higher education	50.00	9.64	43.18	29.21
Occupation				
Unemployed	00.00	00.00	13.20	44.98
Students	00.00	04.82	07.11	2.18
Non-professionals	50.00	86.75	55.07	35.37
Professionals	50.00	08.43	24.62	17.47

2.2 Measures

The Assessment and Treatment of Radicalization Scale (ATRS; Loza, 2007; formally the Belief Diversity Scale, BDS; Loza, 2007) is a theoretically driven, empirically validated, self-report instrument, constructed to cover the areas in the literature that are commonly reported to be indicative of or related to religious extreme beliefs (Loza, 2007). The ATRS is a 33-item scale with six content subscales, a total scale score, and a validity scale. The first subscale, Attitudes towards Israel, reflects negative attitudes towards Israel. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered to be one of the main sources of grievances that have been promoted and manipulated by extremists (Ameen, 1993; Mockaitis, 2007). The second subscale, Political views, measures the important political views that are advocated by Middle-Eastern extremists (e.g., opposing secular laws and governments, advocating for the implementation of the Sharia [Islamic] law; Ibrahim, 1988; Mockaitis, 2007). The third subscale, Attitudes towards women, assesses the individual's attitudes toward women. These current, extreme attitudes are considered repressive from a Western perspective (Kanany-Minesot, 1995). The fourth subscale, Attitudes towards Western culture, measures negative attitudes toward Western culture. Middle-Eastern extremists have been vocal in their rejection of Western culture (Mazarr, 2007; Mockaitis, 2007; Tanveer, 2005), claiming that Western civilization is corrupt (McCauley, 2002) and that the West is trying to undermine their religion (Orbach, 2001). Extremists generally emphasize the prevalent negative attitude in the Muslim countries toward non-Muslim culture (Littman, 2005; Manji, 2003; Mockaitis, 2007; Sayyed, 2005). The fifth subscale, Religiosity, assesses the respondent's commitment to his or her religion. Extremists rely on religion to advocate for their cause and to recruit new pools of extremists (Hafez, 2003; Ibrahim, 1988; Isam, 2006; Lotfi et al., 1993; Mazarr, 2007; Mockaitis, 2007; Sageman, 2004; Schwind, 2005). The sixth subscale, Condoning fighting, measures views that condone fighting and promote acts of violence as a means for the revival of religion, with the goal of destroying non-believers and achieving one world under the Islamic religion (Sageman, 2004; Schwind, 2005). A final, seventh subscale, is a validity scale that indicates whether participants misunderstood the items, answered carelessly, or deliberately attempted to conceal their true answers. The total scale score consists of answers to items included in the subscales. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate more extreme beliefs. The stages of development of the ARTS and results demonstrating the reliability and validity of the ARTS have been previously documented (Loza, 2010a; Loza, 2010b; Loza et al., 2011).

2.3 Procedure

Participants were informally approached in a mall outside of a mosque in Toronto. They were asked if they are willing to participate in a research project about their beliefs. They were assured anonymity and advised not to identify themselves in any form. However, they were asked to indicate their place of birth, age, gender, race, religion, marital status, educational level, and occupation. They were also advised that they were free to decline participation at any time. Only a few participants declined participation. Since the majority of respondents have recently emigrated from Pakistan to Canada, respondents emigrating from other countries were not included in this study. The majority of the participants were Muslims and there was a small number of Christians from the same background. Muslims and Christian responses were compared to each other. Due to the small number of the Pakistani Christians, the Pakistani Muslim responses were compared to responses of participants of Other Religions from other countries. The responses of the participants from other countries were obtained from the data collected from previous studies (Loza, 2010a; Loza, 2010b; Loza, et al., 2011).

3. Results

In terms of psychometric properties, the range of Coefficient Alphas (CA) for the ATRS subscales was .77 to 89 (see Table 2, column 4). The Attitudes towards women subscale, however, had a CA of .43.   All items correlated strongly and significantly with their respective subscales (see Table 2, column 5). The correlations between ATRS subscale scores and the total score ranged from .67 to .93 (see Table 2, column 6). The correlations among the subscales ranged from .31 to .84 (see Table 3). The comparisons of mean scores among the ATRS scores of Muslim and Christian participants from Pakistan are shown in Table 4. Muslims scored higher than the Christians on all subscales and the total scale. All comparisons were statistically significant. The comparisons of the mean ATRS scores among Pakistani Muslims, Christians, and participants of Other Religions and Atheists are shown in Table 5. Results indicated that the Muslim participants always scored higher and were significantly different from Christians and participants of Other Religions and Atheists group on all subscales and the total scale.

Table 2. Psychometric Properties of the Assessment and Treatment of Radicalization Scale (ATRS) - n=91

ATRS Subscales (number of items)	Sample Means	Sample SDs	Coefficient Alpha	Ranges of Item-to-Subscale Correlations	Total /subscale correlations and Confidence Intervalles	
					r	(95% CI)
Attitude towards Israel(4)	7.58	1.90	.79	.73 - .85*	0.67	(.54 -.77)
Politics views (5)	13.25	2.18	.77	.63 - .81*	0. 80	(.71 – .86)
Attitudes toward women(5)	12.07	1.68	.43	.33 - .82*	0.77	(.67 – .84)
Attitude towards western culture (5)	11.52	2.40	.82	.63 - .87*	0.90	(.85 - .93)
Religiosity (6)	17.01	3.32	.88	.71 .86*	0.90	(.85 – .93)
Condoning fighting(8)	20.69	4.20	.89	69 - .86*	0.93	(.90 –.95)
Total ATRS	82.12	13.45				

*p < .0001.

Table 3. Correlations Among ATRS Scale and Subscales for the Pakistani Study

	Israel	Politics views	Women	Western Culture	Religiosity	Fighting
Israel	-					
Politics views	.31*	-				
Women	.71*	.45*	-			
Western Culture	.64*	.64*	.78*	-		
Religiosity	.39*	.81*	.53*	.76*	-	
Fighting	.57*	.71*	.65*	.78*	.84*	-
Total ATRS	.67*	.80*	.77*	.90*	.90*	.93*

*p < .0001.

Table 4. Comparison of Means (SDs) Among Christians and Muslims Pakistani on ATRS

ATRS Subscale	Muslims (n = 83) M (SD)	Christians (n = 8) M (SD	F value (df= 1, 89)
Attitudes towards Israel	7.84 (1.78)	4.88 (.64)	7.75*
Politics views	13.30 (2.28)	12.75 (.46)	24.33***
Attitudes toward women	12.20 (1.69)	10.63 (.74)	5.14***
Attitudes towards western culture	11.75 (2.38)	9.13 (.83)	8.15*
Religiosity	17.19 (3.41)	15.13 (.99)	11.86**
Condoning fighting	21.10 (4.17)	16.50 (1.20)	12.18**
Total ATRS	83.39 (13.40)	69.00 (2.88)	21.66***

Note. *p < .01, **p < .001, ***p < .0001.

Table 5. Comparison of Means (*SD*s) Among Religious Groups Muslim Pakistani vs. Sample on ATRS

ATRS Subscale	Pakistani Muslims ($n = 83$)	Christians from other countries (401)	Other Religions and Atheists ($n = 231$)	F value (df=2, 712)
Attitudes towards Israel	7.84 (1.78)[a]	6.66 (2.18)[b]	5.22 (2.49)[c]	39.74[*]
Politics views	13.30 (2.28)[a]	10.46 (3.75)[b]	9.32 (4.09)[c]	34.64[*]
Attitudes toward women	12.20 (1.69)[a]	9.95(2.07)[c]	2.60 (5.00)[b]	35.71[*]
Attitudes towards western culture	11.75 (2.38)[a]	10.24 (2.85)[b]	11.33 (3.30)[c]	11.21[*]
Religiosity	17.19 (3.41)[a]	13.87(4.79)[b]	12.07 (5.29)[c]	35.18[*]
Condoning fighting	21.10 (4.17)[a]	15.71(5.47)[b]	15.71(6.41)[c]	33.17[*]
Total ATRS	83.39 (13.40)[a]	66.89(17.73)[b]	63.55 (19.21)[c]	38.93[*]

Note. Means with different subscripts differ significantly, at probability indicated, by post hoc Scheffe̓s paired comparisons.

*p < .0001.

4. Discussion

The goal of this research was to investigate whether new Muslim immigrants to Canada coming from the extended Middle-Eastern countries differ from their Christian countrymen and countrywomen, Christians from other countries, and participants of other religious backgrounds from other countries on issues related to Middle-Eastern based extreme religious beliefs. We hypothesized that participants of different faiths would differ in their responses to the ATRS, with participants of the Muslim faith scoring significantly higher on the ATRS than Christians and participants of Other Religions and Atheists.

Consistent with results of previous studies (Ahmed, Audu, & Loza, *in press*; Loza, 2010a; Loza, 2010b; Loza et al., 2011), the reliability of the ATRS was demonstrated by adequate CA for the subscales, strong correlations between items of each subscale and their respective subscales, and strong correlations between the total ATRS score and the ATRS subscale scores. The discriminant validity of the ATRS was demonstrated by the predicted differences among the scores of participants of Muslims and participants from other religious backgrounds, with Muslim participants scoring significantly higher than Christians, and participants from Other Religions and Atheists.

Like some other western countries, Canada has been welcoming immigrants from the extended Middle-Eastern countries. Assessing the prevalence of Extreme Middle-Eastern Ideologies among new Immigrants to Canada, as one of the western countries, is important for understanding and dealing with individuals who may have extremist ideologies in western societies. The data collected from this study may be instrumental for policy and decision makers in considering the cultural beliefs and practices for these communities.

This study is important because it provides further validation of a measure that could be used to assess Middle-Eastern religious extremist beliefs. To our knowledge, we are not aware of any other scales designed specifically to measure extreme Middle-Eastern ideologies.

There are practical implications of using the ATRS, the most important one being the assistance it can provide in identifying individuals with extreme Middle-Eastern ideologies or individuals who have beliefs supporting Middle-Eastern ideology-related violence. In fact, currently available data enables us to establish norms, cut off scores, and percentile tables that will help in predicting respondents as low, moderate, or high in terms of their potential for extreme acts according to the ATRS. Also, the ATRS could be used to guide and inform policies related to the prevention of these violent acts or responses to terrorist threats and violence. The ATRS has several advantages. First, because the ATRS is a self-report scale, it ensures maximal objectivity by avoiding possible misinterpretation of participants' responses, and reduces the possibility of assessor biases, which is important in this sensitive area of assessment. Second, the ATRS is more convenient and economical to use as a screening tool than utilizing lengthy interviews. Participants simply provide numeric responses indicating agreement or disagreement with the items, and the scale usually takes only a few minutes to complete. Scoring the test is straightforward, as the basic interpretation requires minimal professional involvement. A third advantage of the ATRS is the large proportion of dynamic statements that could be used to measure the effect of any changes over time, following exposure to contrary information, or intervention. The forth advantage is that the ATRS could be used to identify those at risk for escalation to terrorism and could potentially be used as part of individualized intervention programs. For example, extreme erroneous thoughts indicated by the endorsement of particular statements could be addressed during rehabilitative interventions.

Some of the limitations of the present study are similar to previously reported limitations in studies completed on the ATRS. First, caution has to be exercised when reporting the results of such research due to the sensitive nature of the research area. Second, the sample included a small number of Christian participants from Pakistan. However, this was compensated for by comparing the results obtained from the Pakistani Muslims with data already available in one of the co-authors' database. Third, because participants were volunteers who were recruited based on their religious identification, this was not a random sample of the population. A fourth limitation is the lack of other measures available to further assess the concurrent or external validity of the ATRS. Additionally, because we assured participants of their anonymity, we are not able to use their scores and responses for future predictive studies (i.e., to assess whether high scores on the ATRS will predict acts of aggression motivated by extreme beliefs, which could include terrorist acts), as we cannot identify participants for follow-up studies. Predictive studies are also very difficult to conduct when the target behavior has a very low base rate (e.g., extremism-motivated violence), which is a limitation of many predictive studies.

In spite of the limitations of this research, the results are encouraging, considering the enormous task of designing a scale that could reliably measure Middle-Eastern extreme beliefs. Future research should focus on further validating the ATRS with groups of known ranges of Middle-Eastern extremist views, in different cultures, countries, and settings.

Acknowledgements

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