

# Building Resilience to Violent Extremism Among **Somali-Americans** in Minneapolis-St. Paul

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## PURPOSE

**CHARACTERIZE** how social experiences impact involvement in violent extremism for diaspora youth and young adults.

**UNDERSTAND** how resilience could prevent violent extremism in communities under threat.

**SUPPORT** the development of prevention strategies that incorporate security and psychosocial dimensions and are based on theory, evidence, and community collaboration.

## SPECIFIC AIMS

**INTERVIEW** Somali-Americans in Minneapolis-St. Paul so as to characterize the potentially modifiable multilevel risk and protective factors that may impact young adult males' vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment.

**ENGAGE** parents, community advocates, providers, and policymakers so as to inform the development of socially and culturally appropriate strategies for preventing violent extremism.

**METHODS** This study involved ethnographic data collection in the Somali-American community in Minneapolis St. Paul including youth (n=19), parents (n=18), and providers (n=20). This study utilized a grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis using Atlas/ti software after establishing coder reliability. Findings were affirmed through team consensus and reviewed by community members.

# RISKS FOR TEENAGE BOYS & YOUNG MEN

Youth's unaccountable times & unobserved spaces

+

Perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism

+

Contact with recruiters or associates

=

**Potential for  
VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

Figure 1

## FINDINGS: RISK

**NO ONE RISK FACTOR** explained teenage boys' and young men's involvement in violent extremism. Rather it was the interaction of multiple risk factors at multiple levels.

**RISK FACTORS COMBINED** to create an opportunity structure for violent extremism (Table 1). The key opportunities were:

- 1) youths' unaccountable times and unobserved spaces;
- 2) perceived social legitimacy for violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment;
- 3) the presence of recruiters and associates.

**THE INVERTED PYRAMID** in Figure 1 indicates that:

- 1) involvement in violent extremism depended on all three opportunities;
- 2) decreasing proportions of teenage boys/young men are exposed to the mid and lower opportunities.

**RISK FACTORS** are social and psychosocial factors that may be associated with violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment.

**PROTECTIVE RESOURCES** are social and psychosocial factors that can stop, delay, or diminish negative outcomes, including violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment.

### RISKS FACTORS AND PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

1. Transnational
2. Multilevel (global, state, & societal/ community/family/youth)
3. Multitemporal (persistent or transient)

# BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

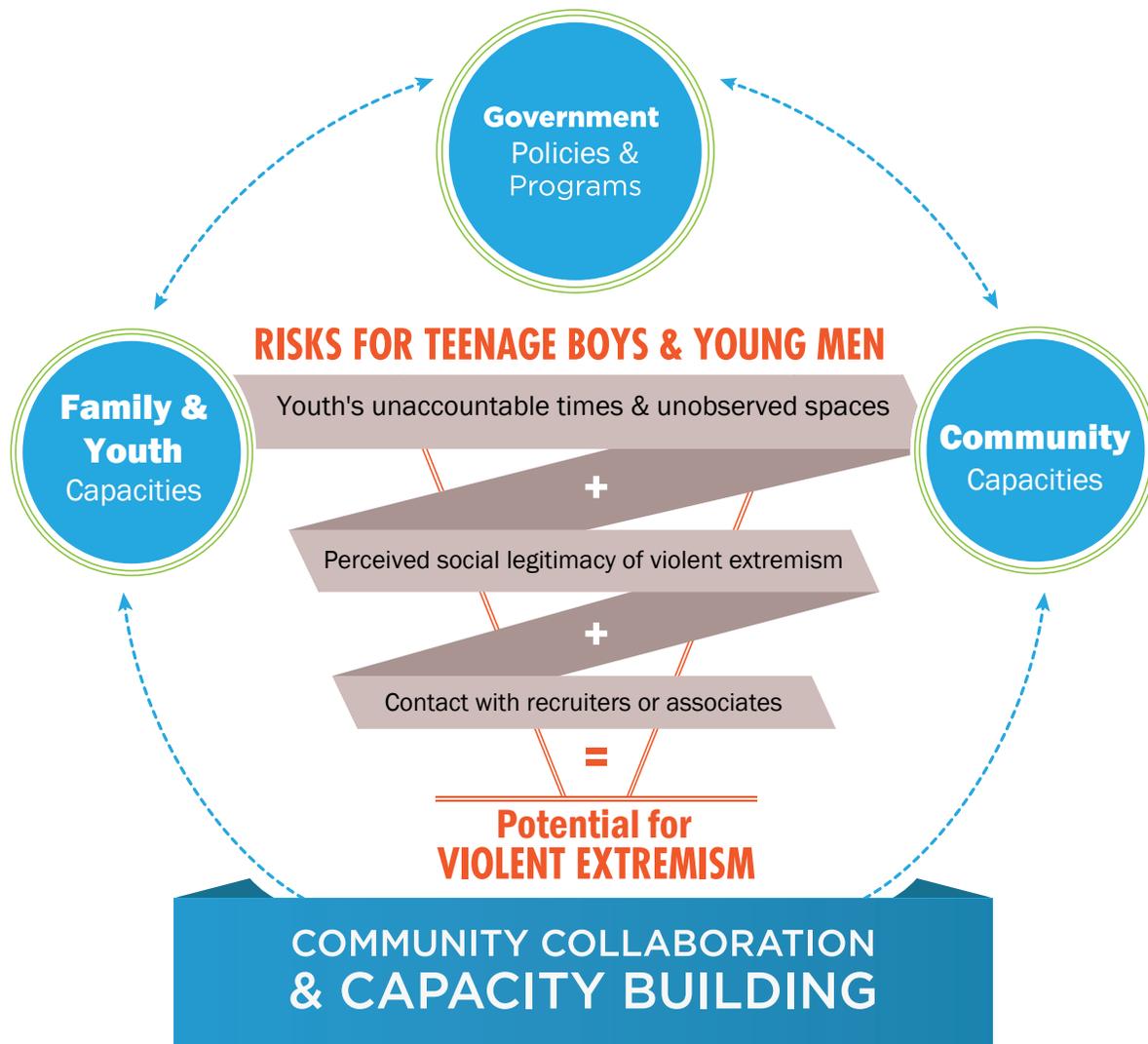


Figure 2

## FINDINGS: RESILIENCE

**PREVENTION STRATEGIES** involving government, community, family and youth are needed to strengthen opportunity-reducing capacities (Table 2). Priorities are to: 1) diminish unaccountable times and unobserved spaces; 2) diminish the perceived social legitimacy of violent extremism; 3) diminish the potential for contacts with terrorist recruiters or associates.

**BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE** to violent extremism should be approached through community collaboration and capacity building (Figure 2). Shared goals could be to: 1) collaboratively strengthen families; 2) develop community support for families and youth; 3) adopt new governmental strategies for community support and protection.

## RISK FACTORS COMBINED TO CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE FOR VIOLENT EXTREMISM

LEVELS	RISK FACTORS	OPPORTUNITIES
<b>Global, State &amp; Societal</b>  <b>Community</b>  <b>Family and Youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary migration</li> <li>• Being an underserved U.S. refugee community</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of support for youth</li> <li>• Unsafe neighborhoods</li> <li>• Social exclusion</li> <li>• Unmonitored spaces in community forums</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family separation or loss</li> <li>• Weak parental support</li> <li>• Absolute trust in everyone who attends mosque</li> <li>• Mistrust of law enforcement</li> <li>• Overemphasis on government power</li> <li>• LACK OF AWARENESS OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT</li> <li>• Lack of accurate info on violent radicalization and recruitment</li> <li>• Little parental involvement in education</li> <li>• Lack of opportunities</li> <li>• Lack of warning signs</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Youth's Unaccountable Times &amp; Unobserved Spaces</b></p>
<b>Global, State &amp; Societal</b>  <b>Community</b>  <b>Family and Youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewing Somalia as a failed state</li> <li>• Violent extremism on the Internet</li> <li>• PERCEPTION OF A NEW THREAT TO SOMALIA</li> <li>• Objections to U.S. government foreign policy</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR AL SHABAAB</li> <li>• Hearing bad news about Somalia</li> <li>• Social exclusion</li> <li>• Being a divided community</li> <li>• Remittance sending</li> <li>• Having a nomadic heritage</li> <li>• Interaction with migration brokers</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little family talk about war</li> <li>• Identity issues among members of Generation 1.5</li> <li>• Being passionate about Somalia</li> <li>• Being uninformed about Islam</li> <li>• Being uninformed about Somalia</li> <li>• Social identity challenges</li> <li>• Indirect and direct traumas</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Perceived Social Legitimacy Of Violent Extremism</b></p>
<b>Global, State &amp; Societal</b>  <b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorist organization's recruitment</li> <li>• Violent extremism on the Internet</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sources of radical ideology</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Presence Of Recruiters Or Associates</b></p>

CAPS = Transient risk

Table 1

## RESILIENCE MEANS STRENGTHENING PROTECTIVE RESOURCES

SECTOR	AIMS	PROTECTIVE RESOURCES
<b>Family and Youth</b>	Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of risks and safeguards</li> <li>• Parental monitoring and supervision</li> <li>• Family confidants</li> <li>• Family social support</li> <li>• Family involvement in education</li> <li>• Access to services and helpers</li> <li>• Parental and youth help-seeking</li> <li>• Parental involvement in mosques &amp; religious education</li> </ul>
	Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on youth's future in the U.S.</li> <li>• Parental support for youth socialization</li> <li>• Rejecting tribalism and war</li> <li>• Parental talk with youth regarding threats</li> <li>• Youth civic engagement</li> <li>• Youth political dialogue</li> </ul>
	Diminish Recruiters and Associates Presenting Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents informing law enforcement</li> <li>• Parental messaging in community re youth protection</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusted accurate information sources</li> <li>• Increased activities in supervised community spaces</li> <li>• Mentoring of youth</li> <li>• Increased civilian liaisons to law enforcement</li> <li>• Interactions with community police</li> <li>• Social entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Interfaith dialogue</li> <li>• Social support networks</li> </ul>
	Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islamic education &amp; Imam network</li> <li>• Community support for youth socialization</li> <li>• Understanding of Islam as a peaceful religion</li> <li>• Youth civic engagement</li> <li>• Youth political dialogue</li> <li>• Youth opportunities for peace activism</li> <li>• Messaging to challenge legitimacy of violent extremism</li> </ul>
	Diminish the Potential for Contacts with Recruiters and Associates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation with law enforcement</li> <li>• Monitoring by community members</li> <li>• Messaging to warn off recruiters</li> <li>• Bloggers and websites against violent extremism</li> <li>• Critical voices in the community</li> </ul>
<b>Government</b> (in part through supporting community-based NGOs)	Diminish Youth's Unaccountable Times and Unobserved Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusted accurate information sources</li> <li>• Community policing</li> <li>• Support for parenting and parent education</li> <li>• Support for after-school programs and mentoring</li> <li>• Support for youth and family social services</li> </ul>
	Diminish the Perceived Social Legitimacy of Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering critical voices</li> <li>• Support for youth community services</li> <li>• Support for youth leadership training</li> <li>• Support for parenting and parent education</li> </ul>
	Diminish Recruiters and Associates Presenting Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community policing</li> <li>• Training for community leaders and providers</li> <li>• Support for community messaging</li> <li>• Support for bloggers and websites</li> </ul>

# Further Considerations

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## RISK AND PROTECTION

**ACKNOWLEDGE** community members' concerns that violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment will not disappear from U.S. Somali-American communities anytime soon, though over time it will change in form and intensity.

**SHIFT** from analyses overly focused on individual-level factors to multi-level analyses that include structural, social, political, economic, community, and family-level risk factors and protective resources.

**UNDERSTAND** why some communities are more at risk than others in terms of presenting more opportunities for transformative contact with recruiters and violent extremists in the everyday lives of diaspora youth.

## RESILIENCE APPROACH

**REALIZE** that community resilience is not a single factor and cannot simply be dialed up.

**ENSURE** that resilience-focused programs and policies are well supported by theory, empirical evidence, and community collaboration.

**APPRECIATE** the risks and limitations of government, communities, and families when focusing on resilience.

**INCLUDE** family resilience as an important component of community resilience and acknowledge the family as a key locus of both risk factors and protective resources.

## PREVENTION

**ACCEPT** that there is no magic bullet of prevention.

**CONCEPTUALIZE** that primary prevention in an immigrant and refugee community is more than only better cooperation with law enforcement.

**TARGET** prevention efforts towards the most vulnerable people and places.

**UTILIZE** a capacity building approach to enhance government, community, and family capacities to reduce opportunities for involvement in violent extremism.

## PARTNERSHIPS

**WORK** towards countering violent extremism through collaborative partnerships between government and community groups, organizations and leaders.

**REALIZE** that building prevention through partnership is a long-term process.

**UTILIZE** a comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism with key contributions from law enforcement, immigration, public health, social services, education and media.

**ADOPT** balanced, fair and transparent approaches to partnerships not limited by the biases of particular gatekeepers.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

**IDENTIFY** reliable short-term proximal indicators of violent radicalization and terrorist recruitment as well as community and family protective resources.

**CONDUCT** feasibility assessments of prospective interventions to demonstrate whether they are acceptable, appropriate, and practically achievable.

**PERFORM** efficacy studies of potentially effective interventions to demonstrate whether they lead to statistically significant differences in key outcomes.

**ADAPT** effective interventions that have worked under one set of circumstances, and investigate applying them to new or larger circumstances with community collaboration.

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