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HOW SHOULD THE NEXT PRESIDENT  
COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM

FOURTH IN A SERIES OF LIVE PODCAST TAPINGS SHOWCASING  
BROOKINGS EXPERTS' BEST IDEAS FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. LAKSHMANAN: This is the fourth in a series of live podcast tapings showcasing Brookings experts' best ideas for the next administration. Today we're going to take another issue that will be a major priority for whoever takes office on January 20<sup>th</sup>, How to Counter Violent Extremism in the U.S. and Around the World. The rise of ISIS and other extremist groups in the Middle East has dominated headlines with good reason but we sometimes forget that violent extremism has been a problem for years, both globally and in the United States. Recently both Europe and the U.S. have seen high profile attacks with mass casualties that were either directed or inspired by extremist groups.

For today's conversation we are lucky to be joined by two of Brookings top experts on the subject. Darrell West and Robert McKenzie. Darrel is a Brookings Senior Fellow and Vice President of Governance Studies and the author of a new book called Mega Change that focuses on the proliferation of major unexpected challenges around the globe including violent extremism as a social and political phenomenon. Visiting fellow Bobby McKenzie is an expert in U.S. relations with the Islamic world and he is the author of a new policy brief in the election 2016 series on how the next president can more effectively fight violent extremism in American.

Before we get started I would like to invite all of you in the room or who are watching or listening online to Tweet about the event and you can tag @Brookings inst., @Brookings FP and use can use the #counteringextremism. You can also tag @DarWest, @bobby\_McKenzie or me @Indira\_L.

So Bobby, I want to start with you. In your policy brief you focused on violent extremism in American and you critiqued the efforts of the Obama administration in working with the American Muslim community. What has this administration done

wrong in your view and what is the advice that you would give to the next president on shifting course?

MR. MCKENZIE: Sure thank you. I think the administration has a couple of a major challenges and I think the next administration is going to have similar challenges. The first challenge is just trying to understand violent extremism, what are the drivers of violent extremism. Not understanding the drivers of violent extremism has led to sort of a confused and confusing discussion around how do we counter violent extremism. With special reference to the U.S. there are 3.3 million Muslims who live in the U.S. but only a very, very small number have actually been radicalized. The evidence suggests that there is no nexus between a particular neighborhood, between a particular mosque and violent extremism. I'll give you an example. I travel around the country meeting with Muslim communities every month. I was in Flint a month ago holding a series of round tables. The Flint has around 250 Muslim families. They are very, very politically active in terms of this campaign. They raise money for the local Flint water crisis and for a whole range of efforts. I also wanted to talk to them about one of their own members who was radicalized and became a foreign fighter. I asked him about this and he said we don't even know who this guy is. He is from the community and we've seen him once at the mosque. So I offer this example because the current policy approach is to engage the community at large as if the community has solutions for this but it simply isn't the case at this time.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay I also want to ask you, there is a line in your paper which really struck me. You talked about how only since 9/11 there have only been 250 people mobilized towards violent extremism out of 3.3 million Muslims in American which is a mere the number you use is .000075 %. You said that just two neighborhoods in Brussels have produced two and half times as many foreign fighters

than all of the United States even though the United States has five times as many Muslims as Belgium. Why?

MR. MCKENZIE: Well I think it speaks to the fact that the scope, scale and complexity of the problem varies significantly from location to location and a one size fits all doesn't work. This is why I'm arguing moving forward. The next administration should jettison a community based approach and should focus entirely on interventions. Right now the FBI estimates that there are around 1000 individuals who are essentially persons of concern. These are law abiding citizens who have not yet crossed a line but given a small number of individuals and given the fact that they are not clustered in one particular neighborhood interventions makes the most sense.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So when you say interventions you mean not trying to engage the entire Muslim community and make them informants which has been the approach that Donald Trump has taken, the if you see something say something that Muslims have to speak out. You're saying that's not the approach it should be targeting individuals who law enforcement has detected online or has detected making statements that are sympathetic to radical extremist groups?

MR. MCKENZIE: Correct. Since 2012 the FBI has engaged in 2500 what they call community engagements. This is doing community meetings. There have also been three pilot projects. There is no evidence suggesting that these are working. It is not saying that they're not working but there is no evidence suggesting that they're working. A better approach is targeting these very specific individuals that we have identified and the FBI has identified as problematic. We would have a tailored intervention per person. So for some it may be engaging family members and peers or guidance counselors for others, it may be a mental health worker but it is going to require an enormous amount of innovation to get this right. To do that in my mind one of the

things that we've not yet done that the next administration certainly needs to do is think about how do we find out what Muslim American's think. One of the things I proposed in the paper is conducting a series of no less than 100 focus groups across the country with different segments of the community to hear what they think. Right now we are largely working with anecdotal evidence and I think if we want to have better policy we would be well to engage the community in a way that is not law enforcement based that is trying to understand what they think are the key issues in their community.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well I want to go deeper into your proposals but first, Darrell, I want to ask you in your recent book Megachange you write about the societal shifts that have led to extremism around the world. What have you learned that you would share with the next president that would inform his or her strategy in countering extremism.

MR. WEST: Thank you. So in my book Megachange I identified the issue of violent extremism as basically a fight over modernity. In doing the research for my book I discovered that many extremists refer to us in the west as the moderns meaning people who support modernization and secularization. These are issues they do not support. So we are talking about the western role of women which we accept and they don't accept, the secular nature of religion which has become very common place in both the United States and Europe but is not in many of these places in the Middle East and then also just the whole concept of the notion of personal liberty. That you can do what you want, you're gay or lesbian, you can be gay or lesbian. They obviously don't support this. So kind of in thinking about how we can deal with this issue of violent extremism there is both the military option and the economic option and we need to balance those two things. The military option is important because it is crucial to restrict the hold on geography that violent extremists have. We have seen this both in Iraq and

Syria that when they hold large tracks of land it allows them to develop supply chains, they have basically an army, they can tax people which supports violent extremist activities and so our goal is basically to restrict the geography. Because if you can restrict the geography, then you can undermine all these other things that are undergirding violent extremism.

But at the same time I don't feel that we can solve this only through military means. That there are economic roots of discontent both in the Middle East as well as in places in the United States and in Europe where people become radicalized. It is kind of the loss of hope and the loss of opportunity. This is where global inequality plays into the picture and so kind of addressing that. Like if people basically have no future they are going to become more prone I believe to this. I don't think we can kill our way to peace. We often deploy military solutions and assume that is going to take care of the problem. It is part of the arsenal but we also have to address these underline economic aspects of the discontent.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right so we've heard a lot about alienation in the sort of French suburbs of Paris and in the suburbs of Brussels and Muslims in those communities being particularly excluded economically, excluded from educational and work opportunities and that leading to this growth of extremism. Yet as Bobby has pointed out in American fortunately we don't have the same problem, the same level of problem. But is America more susceptible to homegrown violent extremism today than it has been in the past? Even if our problem is less than that in Western Europe is it on the rise and if so why?

MR. WEST: I think we are susceptible to violent extremism and we've seen a number of examples of it just in the last couple of years. I think part of the problem is that many people around the world see us deploying the military solution to

violent extremism but not the economic one and it kind of reinforces their world view that the United States is engaged in a world on Islam. So that radicalizes people here so they may not suffer the same degree of economic deprivation, the lack of social innovation that we're seeing in France and in Belgium but they are still being radicalized in that process. So part of the solution is understanding that every time we kill a terrorist that terrorist has family members and friends and we may create additional terrorists. That's the reason I say we cannot kill our way to peace, we cannot solve the problem only through military means that these issues of economic and social integration are important in Europe as well as the United States.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: That is also partly the whole question about a countering of violent extremism method that is productive rather than counterproductive. I ask because of the whole issue of alienating an entire religious community and that goes back to what Donald Trump has said about that Muslims have to speak out. He has alleged that people in the community of the San Bernardino killers knew that the house was full of guns and ammo and bombs. I don't know what the actual evidence is of that but is there a risk of alienating a religious community spurring radicalization and then the sort of the whole countering violent extremism agenda in fact creating more of a problem than it has set out to solve. Do you have thoughts on that Bobby?

MR. MCKENZIE: Yes to respond to one point here just since 2014 100 Americans have been charged in connection with the Islamic State and 43 have been convicted out of 3.3 million Muslims. That suggests to me that we don't have a problem in the U.S. with violent extremism. That being said, one incident is one incident too many. The truth is that Donald Trump is using extraordinarily inflammatory language but our current policy underneath the Obama administration views Muslim communities in the U.S. through a security lens. I hear this everywhere I travel across the country. You will

find a huge discussion in any mosque, in any community center, in any family home when you ask them, what are your thoughts about the U.S. to counter violent extremism. I hear from them why are they talking about all of the extraordinary and ordinary things that we're doing on a daily basis across the U.S.? There are doctors, there are lawyers and engineers. The focus isn't on this. The focus is on how do we identify the bad apples and I am pretty convinced the next administration is going to have a far more refined approach. The evidence suggests in the U.S. and there is no question about we can count the horrific terrorists attacks we've had but since 9/11 94 individuals have died in the U.S. at the hands of Muslim terrorism. Around 50 have died at the hands of white extremists. We're talking about comparable numbers.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And that is only after the Orlando massacre. Before Orlando it was equal. It was 46 and 48 right?

MR. MCKENZIE: That's correct and if you ask Muslims across the country that are focused on this they say why is there so much attention on this, why is the government so scope locked on this when there are a whole bunch of range of issues that affect our country and yet attention is on this. I will tell you that while Donald Trump is using the most inflammatory language there are democrats who often say Muslims are on the front lines and they say on the front lines of what? On the front lines of building strong communities? I think that this narrative is not only a republican narrative this is also -- I mean it cuts across both isles in part because we don't know what Muslims Americans think, we don't engage with them. And again not to belabor the point but I really think the next administration needs to systematically think about how to gain knowledge from Muslims. This has to happen on a very local level.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So you think the problem is essentially both parties, politicians on both sides have stigmatized and entire community by focusing on



Muslims being on the front lines. Let me ask you both a question that leads from that which is do we as American's overall exaggerate the threat from violent Islamic extremism in the United States and if so why? Darrell.

MR. WEST: We exaggerate it in the sense that as Bobby pointed out we're talking about a very small number of incidences. The problem is our risk threshold is so low as he mentioned like one incident is too many. So we've had a series of incidents over the last couple of years but that is what terrorism is about. It is design to terrify us and almost to provoke us into extreme action. The thing I worry the most about and I talk about it in my book is the danger of extremism abroad breeding extremism at home. We certainly see it in the case of Trump, Ted Cruz during the primaries his solution was we should just carpet bomb them, that will take care of the problem. When the problem is when people overseas hear American politicians overreacting in that way it confirms their view of the worst motivations on our part. So we have to be careful that we don't get into this downward spiral where we use their extremism to justify extremist reactions on our own part.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right and Bobby let me ask you because when you look at the polling on what are the main issues that American's are thinking about in this election number one is the economy but number two almost tied with number one is terrorism. Are we overly concerned about terrorism?

MR. MCKENZIE: The short answer is we should certainly be concerned about it. We need to keep it in context and I use some of the numbers here. There are 1.4 million gang members in the U.S. compared to 1000 individuals who are considered people of concern to the FBI. In Chicago alone there are 70 gangs with 150,000 gang members. 31,000 alcohol induced deaths every year. 33,000 people die from firearm injuries compared to 94 total since 9/11. That is 94 too many but I do think we need to

keep it in context.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And that is over 15 years of course. 94 over 15 years versus 33,000 gun deaths a year.

MR. MCKENZIE: Yes it is staggering. And yet we're focused on violent extremism in a way that suggests, it overshadows gun violence. Now I think a contrarian would argue that the reason we haven't seen more deaths is because we have all this community outreach. I would argue there is no evidence that suggests that and that we really should jettison that, we should focus on individuals that there is a clear enthusiasm on their part to support ISIS or related groups and think about what target interventions are doing. When there are other countries in Europe that are working on this we should think about what they're doing and we should adapt and refine based on our own local context here.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well, Darrell, let me ask you. Part of the reason that we've had thankfully fewer than 100 Islamic terrorism related deaths in the United States in the last 15 years since 9/11 isn't that partly because the federal government including intelligent agencies, the FBI, law enforcement, have been incredibly effective in either rooting out threats before they take place and being able to stop incidents before they happen. Is that not part of it and what can they be doing to be even better and more nimble. As soon as something like Orlando happens or San Bernardino happens we all become hysterical and say this is terrible and it is terrible but they have also prevented so many other incidents like that from happening correct?

MR. WEST: Certainly law enforcement has been very effective in recent years in thwarting a number of attacks and kind of preventing the numbers from rising even beyond what we see here. It doesn't mean it is not having an effect on our psyche. There have been public opinion surveys that have asked Americans in the aftermath of

9/11 have you changed any of the following behaviors. A third of American's say they don't like to travel abroad because they are worried about terrorism. People worry about congregating in malls and places where there are going to be lots of individuals. So even though we're talking about a small number of incidents it has had a disproportionate impact on our psyche. It obviously has contributed to the whole atmosphere of this presidential campaign, it has allowed politicians to put extreme measures on the table so it is having a large impact on us. Technology is part of the solution to this in the sense of what law enforcement has done is engage in much broader data sharing to kind of track people and identify people of interest but the flip side of that is technology also enables extremism, digital technology. Because in the good old days before the digital world let's say if you harbored violent feelings and you lived in some rural or suburban area it was hard to find like-minded people. On the internet and through social media it is easy to find like-minded people.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And they can be 10,000 miles away, it doesn't matter.

MR. WEST: Yes we have basically repealed geography as a limitation on extremism. So in the digital world and I think the thing a lot of people worry about is even though our current numbers of deaths resulting from terrorism remain fairly low. There are conditions that actually could lead those numbers to rise. The existence of digital technology, the fact that social media often accentuates and enables extremist's rhetoric and sometimes extremist actions so I think that's the reason people feel worried about the current situation even though are current numbers are relatively low.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Bobby.

MR. MCKENZIE: Just a couple of points here and I completely agree. I think the best way forward is with social media and this is happening is when the

accounts go up that the social media companies bring you down. I just want to follow up on one other point.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So you mean ISIS related accounts on Twitter or Facebook or anything.

MR. MCKENZIE: Yes somebody gets up and starts tweeting this stuff and posting the stuff bring down the accounts as fast as possible.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And have the social media companies been good about doing that or have they been too slow in your view?

MR. MCKENZIE: They have been getting better. This is far better than trying to engage online with counter-narratives. Post 9/11 the U.S., many governments are interested in counter-narratives and again if we want to look at the data we don't know whether these counter-narratives work.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: When you say counter-narratives do you mean the government, the State Department putting out its own Twitter account in which it is tweeting out things that are against ISIS.

MR. MCKENZIE: Or third party saying American is good, Islam is good, ISIS is bad. Show me the evidence that it works.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So you don't think the counter-narrative does not work.

MR. MCKENZIE: Absolutely not. What I think does work is bring down these accounts super-fast.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: But what about things like Snap Chat? I mean we've heard more and more about social medial being used not just Twitter which was used a few years ago and before the takeover of Mosul which by the way the newsflash is coming out right now that the Iraqi generals are saying that their special forces have

taken over Mosul State TV buildings. So in the two years since Mosul was first taken over and now it looks like it is going to be taken back we saw those Twitter accounts at the beginning but we we're hearing about recently is sort of secret messaging apps being used to communicate between loan wolf terrorists or influenced terrorists and sort of home base folks.

MR. MCKENZIE: And I don't deny that but what I would say is in the U.S. if you've got a 13-year-old kid looking for ISIS related material let's not let that kid find it and they way to do that is to bring this stuff down as soon as it goes up. I just want to touch on one other thing so we focus on the data and think about really what is policy relevant. I mentioned 1000 people where you can interventions with these people --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So 1000 people means people that the FBI has targeted as being specifically engaged with radical Islamic ideology?

MR. MCKENZIE: Correct. 300 people have been arrested since 9/11. A good number of these people will be leaving prison at some time. To date, we do not have a rehabilitation program, we don't have a reintegration program, we should focus on these folks. These folks will be leaving prison and it should concern us deeply that as it stands there is no rehab program with these offenders as there is with other kinds of offenders. I think that that's something that the next administration can actually do. We can count these people, we can look at recidivism rates and we can see if we can move the needle with different programs.

So rather than getting into does counter messaging work lets focus on 1000 people that the FBI knows that are people of concern across the U.S. that have shown enthusiasm for the Islamic state and related groups and let's focus on the 300 people that are in prison. These are two very manageable numbers. This is policy that makes sense because you can actually see what works and what doesn't over time. It

certainly is far better than trying to engage 3.3 million Muslims at large.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well let me ask you Darrell, you've looked I think at what some other countries are doing to counter violent extremism. Is there anything that has been effective that the U.S. should emulate or anything that has been an abject failure that we should run away screaming from?

MR. WEST: There are a number of other countries that are much more proactive in dealing with this pretty much along the lines that Bobby was just proposing. France, for example, has just set up what it calls de-radicalization centers. You have countries such as Saudi Arabia, Denmark, Netherlands, Yemen, Singapore and Malaysia that are doing other types of things. These are programs designed either for people who are in prison so they've been convicted of some types of violent extremism acts or others who have been identified as people who have engaged in this kind of behavior. So it is devoting special efforts to these people to try and reintegrate them economically and socially, get a better understanding of why they are leaning towards violent extremism and try to counter that type of thing. Now do these programs work? We don't really have evidence on that.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I was going to ask you that because France has had more attacks than we have and for that matter Saudi Arabia has had a number of attacks. So one wonders just because they have these programs so what. We are lucky that we have had fewer attacks than they have.

MR. WEST: Yes and we actually don't know whether those programs are working but we should encourage them to do all that they can to fight this either through military means, intelligence gathering, addressing the underlying economic and social discontent that Jihadist have or basically trying to de-radicalize them in other ways.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Bobby, I'd like to hear about your experience

studying some of these programs and ways in which you think the U.S. government would better engage with Muslim Americans on this issue.

MR. MCKENZIE: Sure I think there is one thing just to follow up on Darrell's last point which I think is an important one is trying to get again let's get as much data as we can. There are a lot of mapping exercises out there. Governments love to do mapping exercises. I helped establish a DIA center with two or three people that are in this room right now. It is an international center for counter violent extremism in Abu Dhabi and we did a mapping exercise out there trying to see what is going on. But what doesn't exist is sort of a clearing house for measurement and evaluation and this is sorely needed. The international community would really sharpen and refine its thinking if we had a better sense of what is working in Denmark and what is not working. What is going on in Minneapolis but we don't store this anywhere. You have experts and practitioners that focus on this but there is no clearing house and this is something that really is needed.

In terms of engaging American Muslims as a CBE policy I know I'm harping on this but I think we should just completely jettison it. If someone can show me that there is any evidence, fact based evidence that the community approach works in the U.S. then I'm game, let's do it. If someone can show me that there is a city or a mosque and there is a nexus between that place and violent extremism, then okay let's have a community based approach there. But show me that place. It doesn't exist in the U.S. I don't want to conflate the U.S. with Europe and North Africa and the wider Middle East --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: It sounds like your point is engage extremist individuals but don't try to engage and entire religious community.

MR. MCKENZIE: In the U.S. If we're talking about Nairobi where you

have Somali communities living in visible poverty and you've got real evidence of violent extremism, it is a different game. If we're talking about Brussels, it is a different game. If we're talking about the U.S. though we should be focused very specifically on two things: interventions with the 1000-person population I mentioned and the 300 prisoners. These are the two things we should go after.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And as you say 1300 people sounds extremely manageable if you look at it that way.

MR. MCKENZIE: It is and I think that muscle memory has led us to continue to think that community engagement might help.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Maybe that is because it is based on the policing model that when you're talking about gang violence I actually was a reporter covering the police beat and covering the anti-gang violence units and the whole philosophy was not just engage gang members, the philosophy is engage the entire community so that they will prevent their kids from becoming gang members. That churches and schools will point kids out and it was a whole different approach which sounds like the basis of what you're talking about our approach is to Muslim communities now.

MR. MCKENZIE: What I've heard in round tables that we've convened here, what I've heard traveling across the country is if the U.S. government -- in their own words. If the U.S. government was really interested in real engagement, it would not be led by the Department of Justice or Homeland Security. It would be led at a local level by municipal authorities, it would be led by schools or health workers it would not be led by law enforcement. And Muslims are concerned that this is just camouflage for trying to get the community to deputize individuals to identify the so called bad apples. Whether this is true or not is irrelevant. The fact that this is firing up Muslim communities saying why aren't we being respected as law abiding communities they are saying 1300 out of 3.3



million Muslims have been wrapped up in this.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well, Darrell, let me ask you because we tend to equate the words violent extremism with Islamic terrorism in this country. What other sources of extremism are there in the United States that we need to be aware of that we need to be dealing with that could get very dangerous if left unchecked. I obviously am thinking of the Oklahoma City bombings. They were white nationalist's supremacists. The church killing in South Carolina was also a white supremacist. So what about those concerns, the groups that have been identified as hate groups, white supremacists and also we've seen a lot of support for Donald Trump from the white supremacist community.

MR. WEST: Yes now we certainly have other examples that are non-Islamic in origins of people engaging in violent extremism, taking actions into their own hands killing people and so on. So that's something that we have to get a handle on as well. Certainly there has been very little in this campaign to make any of us feel better about that because it seems like just a whole device of rhetoric that we've seen in this campaign has further encouraged some of those people to come out of the woodwork. So that is something we have to worry about. I think all of us are wondering what happens after election day how do we kind of put our country back together after having gone through this very divisive exercise. I think people do kind of ignore our own history in this area even though it is not as prevalent as what we're seeing in other countries it is something that we have seen here before and continue to see.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So with the other hate groups like white supremacist hate groups are there specific things that the next administration should be doing to monitor those different from what we're doing now?

MR. WEST: I think the types of programs that are in place right now are

the types of things the next president is likely to continue. So certainly some of the surveillance activities, the use of informant's kind of other ways to draw on community resources to try and identify potential people, those are the types of things I would think the next administration would use.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay well, Bobby, Darrell is using terms community, surveillance, some of the approaches that you are critical of. I want you to talk about how --

MR. MCKENZIE: Hypercritical.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So you're critical of some of the things that Darrell is recommending that we should be doing in a larger scale. So let's take it in a different direction. Do you think the U.S. government should be engaging with the private sector technology companies in a specific way, monitor the internet, specifically for radicalization? You mentioned that they need to be shutting down accounts but is there something that we need to be doing differently?

MR. MCKENZIE: Absolutely. I definitely think the U.S. government should be engaging with the private sector.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: But what about free speech?

MR. MCKENZIE: This is the pushback that will say doesn't someone have the right to say what he or she wants to and I would say the short answer is yes but I would also say when we have identified an individual who is an enthusiastic supporter of ISIS this is where we need to think about the targeted interventions. I think that in many cases many of these families don't know that their youth are doing this until someone actually shows up on their doorstep to arrest them. The other problem we currently have right now with regard to interventions and I hear this across the countries Muslims say okay our real concern is if our son or daughter is engaging with this and we call the local

authorities that could be 20 to 25 years in prison right there. There needs to be some sort of middle ground where these interventions can take place.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: We have heard in the case of some of the perpetrators that their families had actually reported suspicious activities. I think if I'm not wrong hadn't Omar Martine's father actually and he was of course an American-born Afghan and his dad had reported suspicions about him.

MR. MCKENZIE: Correct and that was with him on the far end of the scale. If you want to think about this continuum there are people that are not nearly that far gone and you have a mother, father, uncle someone seeing that this kid is interested in ISIS. If they want to call the police, they could open a case that puts that kid in prison for the rest of his or her life. So the laws need to be loosened in a way to ensure that doesn't happen. Another problem with the way the laws currently are is that if one wants to engage in an intervention that person can be arrested for material support. So if you talk --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So you're talking about social service groups.

MR. MCKENZIE: Yes so there is well-known man in Virginia named Iman Mejid and he says he is very concerned about doing these interventions because if the kid goes on and commits a crime he could be --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And is he liable for not having stopped him in some way or another.

MR. MCKENZIE: Yes that's right for providing material support.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Simply because he has engaged him in an after school youth group or something like that.

MR. MCKENZIE: Correct. So the laws need to be refined to take this into account. I just want to follow up on one other point that I think has been covered

here quite well. You're talking about all of the toxic discourse and I think the next administration presuming one particular candidate wins needs to think in a very purposeful way about how do we engage in healing? The level of hate crimes because of this toxic discourse has just spiked incredibly. There is no question that whether --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: You mean just in this calendar year?

MR. MCKENZIE: Just in this calendar year. And whether we're talking about I don't want to conflate the U.S. and Europe but there is one thing that probably is very similar between the two places is that populism, xenophobia and violent extremism are natural allies. The toxic discourse this election cycle is pushing people who are already on the fringes whether we're talking about white extremists or Sunni Muslims, if they're on the fringes all of this is pushing them further out. I think the next administration after the 100 days needs to think about how do we engage a whole range of communities to try and bring down this level of toxic discourse.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right fair point buy Darrell, let me ask you because toxic discourse is a good way of putting it but the toxic discourse is also something that has politicized it to the point that whether you're a democrat or whether you're a republican, politicians feel that they have to be tough. They have to be tough on extremism, they have to be tough on radicalization and as Bobby said at the beginning it is not just republican politicians who are using this tough language, democrats very much are as well. I wonder whether the next administration could overreact to violent extremism over the next four years and particularly in the early part of the administration and in that couldn't that also be counterproductive and what do you see as the possible ramifications of that? Particularly if it is Hillary Clinton she will have the whole Donald Trump wing of America pushing her and saying she's weak, she's not tough enough on terrorism, accusing her of she wants the number he gave was something like allow 650

million, there aren't even 650 million Syrians out there but 650 million people come into this country, triple the population of our country in three weeks is what Donald Trump said. So might she not have to try to show herself to be strong and tuff against violent extremism, couldn't that cause a backlash? What are the risks.

MR. WEST: Absolutely. The risk of an overreaction regardless of who wins is likely to be present and that is something that could actually make the problem worse then what we have today because it could just radicalize people beyond the 1300 individuals that you've been talking about to a much larger group. I think just as I was arguing overseas we need to think about social and economic integration. I think that is a key here as well because when you look at individual cases it is people who seem disconnected, alienated, don't feel a part of their local community wherever it happens to be, these are often the types of people who are getting radicalized and then engage in violent actions. So it is where kind of the larger political agenda of thinking about the role of education, provide more social and economic opportunities for people like these are the things they don't necessarily solve the problem in the short run but in the long run these are exactly the types of things that we need to do. When you look abroad at places like in France and some of the Brussels suburbs it seems like those countries have done a terrible job of social and economic integration. So the communities that don't take this seriously often end up having the worst kinds of problems.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: All right I want to bring in some of the questions from our audience who submitted some great questions. There is one here from Nate Wilson who asks who is doing the most promising research in the CVE field regarding the relationship between ideas and behavior. In other words, what brings someone from having extremist and radical ideas to actually operationalizing that into violence as a way to achieve those goals. Bobby, you first.

MR. MCKENZIE: Who is doing the best research on this?

MS. LAKSHMANAN: I think what the questioner is asking is what do we know about the relationship between someone having a radicle idea versus actually coming violent.

MR. MCKENZIE: I was going to say Brookings but of course I'm biased. This gets back with reference to the U.S. there is no one single path. This is why it is so hard to try and understand what is it that energizes, mobilizes someone into action. To belabor my point, it is rather than try and figure out things that we're not going to be able to figure out. You talked about covering the gang beat, we don't know in inner city Detroit or on the south side of Chicago what drives one young man or woman to join a gang and another not to. In some instances, you have brothers or relatives who mobilize but in other instances you have more recently one of the ring leaders from Belgium. His brother was an Olympian recently. So it is very, very hard to understand why is it that one gets mobilized and one does not. Just back to my point that I think is really worth thinking about 1300 people in the U.S. around 1000 that are considered persons of concern and 300 are in prison, we should focus with laser precision on these individuals.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay. Sasha Gosh-Siminoff has a question which I want to direct to you, Darrell, which is the U.S. often sees countering violent extremism through the lens of drone it and we're done with it. So 15 years on says Sasha this approach does not work. How can we move from CVE, countering violent extremism and terrorism through a simple military lens and look at it as a sociological problem with multiple factors including the environment that someone has grown up in, poverty, lack of choices and lack of access to accountable governance. This I think plays back to the point you were making at the beginning about economic solutions not just military ones.

MR. WEST: We do tend very much to lean towards military solutions,

kind of the drone approach or sending special forces in as a way to deal with that. I do think that is part of it but that alone is not going to solve the problem. If we don't address the underlying social, economic and cultural discontent than there is no way we're going to get a handle on it. So in my Megachange book I talk about we need to take issues very seriously that are creating the environment for these types of violent extremism that when we're talking about converting the idea into an actual behavior, if people are alienated, if they have no hope, if they feel like there is no future they're probably going to be much more likely to engage in violent extremism.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay.

MR. MCKENZIE: One point that perhaps we should have started with is that there is a fundamental difference between counterterrorism policy and countering violent extremism policy. Countering violent extremism is best thought of how can we use non-cohesive means to mitigate, counter prevent violent extremism. Very, very different than what the questioner had asked.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Yes good point and you're right that people can fight countering terrorism, CT policy with CVE policy so fair to make the definitional point.

Okay I want to combine two questions here from audience members, Mark Goodfriend is talking about how news channels and the growth of social media have basically facilitated segregated blogospheres and increasing polarization and extremism. And Mark wants to know how the next administration should navigate this really segregated and self-reinforcing echo chamber environment where there are bots and distrust. How do you deal with that when you're trying to counter extremism? I want to combine it with Greg Hubler who has a similar question about the role of social media channels as media for the propagation versus the fight against extremism and radicalization. Bobby, why don't you start.

MR. MCKENZIE: Sure if we're talking about online groups I would offer that one could again let's shut down these accounts as soon as we can. If one wanted to take an intervention approach online, I think you could try that and again you could try and see what happens but I just think the best approach is to shut down these accounts. Especially if we're talking the U.S. what we know is that there are youth across the country who are looking for things online and social media. Shut down accounts, shut down the accounts, shut down the accounts. It works. It keeps a 13 and 15-year-old from trying to engage with this material. For the online communities that already exist there is no evidence that the counter messaging, that the counter narratives work. A better approach would be we could try online interventions. I think those are the two things we should think about.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Darrell.

MR. WEST: I do think and we haven't talked very much about the news media role in this but I do think it is absolutely crucial. It is part of the broader argument I make in my book about digital technology and how because it is nano and micro targeting allows very small groups to find other people who share a similar philosophy and they take solace in the fact that I'm not the only one who feels these things, there are other people out there who share my views. So it is a way in which we gather information can legitimize viewpoints that are far outside the mainstream. So I do think the issue of eqichambers we're seeing in this campaign, people no longer agree on basic facts in the United States. I argue no democracy can ever function where there is not a basic agreement on facts. Like the whole basis of compromising, bargaining and negotiation assumes that there is some common factual basis and then we're compromising based on things that come out of that. So in all these ways I think digital technology as well as the structure of the current news media are making a lot of these problems worse and



making it more difficult for our society to come together, make people feel that they're involved and make them think that violent extremism is not a viable alternative.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Charles Rogan says that recently a report came out suggesting or showing according to Charles, no direct correlation between socioeconomic status and radicalization. I don't know which report he's referring to but his question is what actually makes a person susceptible to a radicle movement?

MR. MCKENZIE: We don't know is the short of it. The wider point here is there is no question that if you look at and I travel back -- my talk today is focused on the U.S. but I travel back and forth to Europe quite a bit and I'm looking at particularly in Germany the recent arrive of 1.1 million people in 2015.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: You mean in terms of refugees from Syria largely? Also Afghanistan and Iraq.

MR. MCKENZIE: Yes and Kosovo and coming from Nigeria which complicates the picture. But the long and the short of it is what Germany is concerned about doing is unintentionally creating parallel societies and trying to ensure that you don't have communities of 10, 15, 20 years down the road are producing violent extremists or worse yet terrorists. So there is no question socioeconomic status plays a role but again there are so many varied pasts to mobilization. One can't say that that alone is the driving factor. It is a whole range of social integration issues. It is housing, education, healthcare, skills training and the kind of welcoming feeling or lack thereof that folks are feeling. Germany is really trying to ensure that they don't suffer the consequences of some of the failed policies we've seen elsewhere in Europe.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Darrell.

MR. WEST: I agree with everything that Bobby just said but I'll add one more point. I think when you look around the world at countries and societies and

communities where violent extremism is becoming a big problem often times you can see just a basic lack of economic opportunity in these places. These are places where often times the youth unemployment rate is 30 to 40 % or even higher. And so in that type of situation you can understand why people might look for alternatives because they conventional ways that people might advance themselves seem to be missing.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: So that sounds like you're rejecting the premise of whatever this report was saying no direct correlation between socioeconomic status and radicalization.

MR. WEST: Definitely. I have a friend, Steven Coltae who has a book at from Brookings on entrepreneurship and he basically argues that especially in the Middle East like here we have, if you have an entrepreneurial spirit and you want to do things and kind of build your life there are lots of entrepreneurial opportunities. In many of these other countries around the world there is no entrepreneurial-ship. They don't have the opportunity to develop ideas, build businesses and advance themselves that way. So he proposes that the State Department should take much more seriously opportunities to build entrepreneurship around the world and that a side benefit of that is a way to reduce radical extremists.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay. You mentioned the State Department. One of our questions here from Brian VonKrause is specifically about is there a way to better integrate the work the of the State Department, U.S. AID, the Defense Department and private enterprise, both for profit and non-profit companies as a way to defeat and counter violent extremism. Any quick thoughts?

MR. MCKENZIE: I have quite a few thoughts. Having worked as a senior advisor on CVE for the government it sounds great. We love to use the expression whole of government but I can tell you that each bureaucracy is large and

unyielding at times and it is hard get everybody on the same page but there are also good reasons to keep some of this separate. If we are talking about using non-coercive means to counter violent extremism, we don't want to be talking with the DOD and the CIA about it. They need to be working on their own lines of effort and this is internationally but here domestically it is the same point why the FBI and law enforcement shouldn't be leading on countering violent extremism.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And so nor Homeland Security in your view.

MR. MCKENZIE: No. This does not mean they don't have a policing role, this does not mean they don't have an intelligence collection role but it is very, very different if we're talking about using non-coercive means to try and counter violent extremism. Very, very different.

MR. WEST: But this question also shows why our current policy is so far out of balance. If you look at the budgets of the U.S. State Department versus DOD it is like all the money is going to military solutions. In fact, our Defense Department now is the unit of government that actually is engaging people on the ground because they're engaging in the peacekeeping activities. The building of what is going on in those communities, building infrastructure and so on.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: You're talking about in other countries.

MR. WEST: Yes. Because there used to be a better balance here in the sense of the State Department had a budget to do a lot of this kind of outreach abroad. Today they don't have the budget and the Department of Defense is doing it and I agree with you, soldiers are not trained to do community building. It is not what they do best.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And yet this is not a new problem. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 after the fall of the Taliban the State Department and AID wanted to be community building programs in Afghanistan. They did some but they did

not have the budget and DOD was the one in there with the so called PRT's provincial reconstruction teams that were run by soldiers. As you say, the soldiers felt that it was giving them the access to sort of soft community work but they also said this wasn't what they were trained to do and this is a discussion that Bob Gates and Hillary Clinton had when he was Secretary of Defense and she was Secretary of State. They were on the same page of him saying I want less money in my budget, give more money to her budget because she needs to be doing this kind of work but it is not the way we've seen Congress do the allocations and the appropriations.

All right Thara Latife, an audience member, wants to know what is the worst mistake that the next president can make. Darrell, you first.

MR. WEST: Overreact to the problem of domestic terrorism and homegrown terrorism. Because the way in which we could make our current problem much worse is to react to their extremist behavior by overreacting and engaging in extremist either rhetoric or actual policies on our own. I think --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And that would be due to political pressure because the country is in such a place that people are so worried and this is bipartisan that the concern about violent extremism is a bipartisan concern. So you mean that a president might reacting to public pressure crackdown in some way that is inappropriate?

MR. WEST: There is domestic public pressure to get tougher but we're also in a world where information is globalized. It used to be there were local grievances everywhere around the world that stayed local grievances. Today local grievances go viral. We're aware of injustice in many different places. People want the United States to get involved in every local grievance. So I think kind of understanding that there are many pressures domestically and internationally that push us to take actions that sometimes are not appropriate for that local context is a great risk for the next

administration.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Bobby, biggest mistake the next president can make.

MR. MCKENZIE: The biggest mistake would be to not recognize the concerns of a whole range of Americans and that I think as we've seen with Brexit I think it is a big mistake to not take seriously concerns of some of the populism politics. That doesn't mean we should like it or we should agree with it but I think the next president should make sure that she engages with some of these concerns. Otherwise you're going to see violent extremism and populism just grinding against each other. I think out of the gate in a very purposeful way the next administration really needs to address concerns of all of these parties otherwise we're going to continue down the same path.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: That's a scary thought. So in a few moments then tell us what is the single thing that the next president could do to effectively engage with all of these groups. It is countering violent extremism as we said you want to counter it from potential white supremacist groups, from Islamic extremists influenced people so what is the best thing that the next president could do?

MR. MCKENZIE: I think the federal government certainly will play a role but I think also on a very local level some of these issues need to be addressed. If there is one silver lining in some of the recent terrorist attacks and the rhetoric by some of the candidates it is that we have now seen voices of gay Muslim Americans coming out and I think that is positive. I think --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: You mean in the aftermath of the pulse attack?

MR. MCKENZIE: Absolutely. You also hear can you hear us now, that hashtag with Muslim women wanted to have their voices heard. So I think trying to amplify the diversity of voices and the diversity of experiences on both sides is really

important. But I think that there are Muslim Americans that are doing all kinds things across the country that nobody knows about. So for example in Flint when the water crisis happened there in Michigan not just in Flint, Muslims raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy water. A year and half before that in Detroit when water was being shut off for poor Detroiters Muslims across Michigan raised over \$100,000 to make sure that poor Detroiters didn't lose their water. I was in Orlando two years ago and I was at an event that was organized by Muslim community leaders where they raised some money and they bought 1000 used bicycles and gave to poor kids who live in the inner city. Nobody knows about these kinds of stories. What we hear about are these horrific attacks and I get why but I think the next administration should really try and identify some of these stories trying to amplify them because I think it will break down a lot of the misinformation that we've heard throughout this entire toxic campaign. I mean looking at some of the hate crimes across the U.S. I mean you had a man in California, a Sikh who was attacked because they thought he was Muslim.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well that happened after 9/11 as well of course.

MR. MCKENZIE: We have a colleague here at Brookings right down the street who was punched in the throat on the way to Friday prayer. He was dressed in traditional attire and someone walked up and punched him in his throat. This rhetoric has consequences and so I think the next administration really in a very purposeful way should try and think about how to break down a lot of the misinformation but should not look at some of the populism and brush this aside. We've seen what that has done in the UK and we certainly don't want to see a very divided country. Otherwise it will be impossible to govern. So I think trying to address as many of these concerns at a local level is very important.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Darrell, what is the one single thing the next

president could do to best counter violent extremism?

MR. WEST: I think the most important thing we can do is de-radicalizing our own civil society. We're often focusing on government and what government can do and a lot of our discussion has talked about public policy in this regard but we also need to be paying attention to what is going on in our schools, churches, the mosques, and the synagogue just in terms of those are the breeding grounds in some cases for violent actions. There are philosophies and approaches and behaviors that are being legitimized for people at a young age so we have to be careful that our civil society doesn't end up making these problems much worse. So it is not necessarily a matter of what governments should be doing it is how we should be thinking about the local organizations that we deal with in making sure they don't become a breeding ground for violent extremism.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Well one last thought tying this back to the headlines of today is again ISIS was something that only became part of our consciousness a little over two years ago in June 2014 when they rode into Mosul practically unopposed and took over Iraq's second largest city and then within a short period of time were controlling taxes and oil wells and all sorts of stuff. As now we look at the table turning on ISIS I think that while there is a lot of view like ISIS is terrible I actually think ISIS is losing. They are losing the caliphate, they've lost 50% of their territory in Iraq, 25% of their territory in Syria compared with two years ago but isn't it naturally true that they're going to lash out by trying to plan or inspire attacks in places like the United States or Europe where you don't have to control a caliphate but you can inspire one mentally unbalanced person with access to weaponry and cause a huge stink and make it seem like you're really powerful. How do we address that in this country?

MR. WEST: We have to separate the problem on violent extremism from

ISIS. Like even if ISIS went away and was completely defeated there are all these other elements around the world that are still going to be there. But I think if we make the advance of taking geography and land away from them, their capacity to wreak havoc on society and the world as a whole is going to be much more limited. So that will be a very important advance. We're not going to eliminate terrorism. There is always going to be small cells of violent extremists who want to harm other people because of this battle over modernity in which we are engaging. But it is a very different matter dealing with small cells here and there who can kill a small number of people versus a much more organized enterprise that controls land, taxes people and has a much bigger capacity to wreak havoc on the world.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Bobby what about the backlash effect at least trying to inspire lone wolves or followers?

MR. MCKENZIE: There is no question but I mean --

MS. LAKSHMANAN: And I agree I don't just mean ISIS I mean any radical group.

MR. MCKENZIE: There is a broader question though about U.S. intervention and this administration talked about a redline some years ago and that red line came and went. What we've with a lack of intervention in this particular case is the displacement of half the Syrian population, 5 million Syrian refugees, the torture of children, nearly a million people making the move to Europe. The rise of fascism in Europe and this is the consequence of an action. So we're not just talking about ISIS here we're talking about an outgrowth of all kinds of really bad things. And so I think the next administration needs to think long and hard about not having the same sort of policy that we currently have had. Because I think that this inaction has allowed for ISIS along with all the other things I just mentioned to really develop and grow



in ways that are dangerous not only to Syria but to the region and the entire world.

MS. LAKSHMANAN: Okay I want to thank you Bobby and Darrell and I want to thank all of you for coming in person today or listening and watching online. It has been a pleasure moderating this series and getting to hear the best ideas from Brookings experts on the major issues the next president is going to navigate both at home and around the world. The next time we meet there will be a next president and I know that we're going to be hearing more from Brookings fellows about what should be at the top of his or her to do list in the first one hundred days and beyond. If you missed any of the talks from our series Election 2016 Americas future and you want to listen to the past events, just search for Brookings in your pod cast app or you can go to [Brookings.edu/events](http://Brookings.edu/events). Do stay tuned for more upcoming events focused on the transition and the first one of those is going to come the day after the election on November 9 at 2 pm right here. Thanks again for joining us and have a great day.

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