



## Western Multiculturalism and Islamic Terror

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Large Muslim communities have formed in Western countries in recent decades. The terror attacks in France and Austria over the past few weeks again highlight the debate over the role of a multicultural, liberal, tolerant approach to separate, alienated minority communities, a small number of whose members support or perpetrate terror attacks.

Recent weeks have seen a wave of violence and terror in France and elsewhere sparked by the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo's* republication of the Muhammad cartoons. These acts of terrorism represent a direct attack on Western values, symbols, liberalism, and belief in individual rights and freedoms.

After the murder of French history teacher Samuel Paty, President Macron expressed himself with unusual bluntness, calling it an "Islamist terrorist attack." Indeed, the recent attacks in the suburbs of Paris as well as in Lyon, Nice, and Avignon reflect an intensification of anti-Western tendencies in France as the terrorists seek to alter the country's sociopolitical agenda by force. Nor is France the only target. In early November, four Austrian citizens were murdered in an Islamist terror attack in the heart of Vienna.

These events are the continuation of a string of attacks by Muslim terrorists in Western countries in recent years (often with ISIS's support and inspiration) – from France and Belgium, to Germany and Britain, to the US, Canada, and Australia. The attacks have been carried out in conspicuous public places like airports, entertainment and tourism venues, hotels, and nightclubs. The terrorists have employed hatchets, knives, guns, and vehicles, and have caused hundreds of deaths and injuries.

These attacks are intended to sow fear among Western populations, undermine their sense of personal and public security, damage their economies and morale, and

deter them from taking part in an international anti-terror coalition (especially one directed at ISIS).

The perpetrators have mostly been young Muslim men—some of them immigrants, some second- or third-generation offspring of immigrants. In the case of the latter, the terrorists were born and educated in open and tolerant Western societies. Some had difficulty integrating into liberal society, leading them to loathe and reject the democratic values of secularization and individualism. A radical minority, exposed to preaching and incitement on the street, in mosques, on social networks and on the internet, identifies with a puritanical Salafi-jihadist stream. This minority joins terror groups, mainly ISIS, or acts under their guidance and inspiration.

A considerable portion of Muslim communities in the West are alienated from the general population and for the most part stay separate and conduct an autonomous way of life. There is a debate on the origin of this development: some accuse the majority of discriminating against Muslims and forcing them into segregation, while others maintain that the Muslim communities have isolated themselves by choice. Many of these communities are indeed socially, culturally, and geographically isolated, existing at the margins of society and beset by poverty, lack of equal opportunity, unemployment, and economic deprivation.

The Muslim minority is not only culturally and ethnically different from the local population but also distinct in terms of religious belief, which considerably influences its worldview and way of life. The Muslim communities diligently uphold their religious tradition. They speak the language of their country of origin and live in accordance with Islamic law (*sharia*) and its customs. In many locations formal education is separate and tailored to the community. This pattern of adhering to religious tradition and bequeathing it to the next generation contributes to the majority society's perception of the Muslims' "foreignness" and, in turn, to their exclusion.

These trends pose a serious problem for Western societies that advocate multiculturalism and tolerance toward the "other." That approach—conjoined with a relatively open and accommodating immigration policy—has led over the years to the cultural-religious segregation of the Muslim communities, accompanied by a distancing and lack of interaction with the non-Muslim majority. The prevailing multicultural approach has also contributed to religious radicalization and the growth of terror, including the formation of terror cells and a substantial rise in the number of "lone wolves." Multiculturalism thus appears to have only a limited capacity to assimilate and fully integrate Muslims into Western countries.

The multicultural approach essentially seeks to maintain ethnic and cultural diversity and guarantee human rights while granting full access and participation in society, upholding constitutional principles, and fostering common societal values. It

entails a public policy that takes cultural differences into account and provides support for ethnic-minority organizations. In the educational field, multiculturalism involves the creation of special curricula, instruction in mother tongues, and the establishment of religious schools for minority groups alongside the recognition of distinct religious traditions and practices, places of worship, and religious ceremonies. Advocates of multiculturalism point to positive outcomes of this approach, such as the recognition of cultural identities and the cultivation of ethnic pluralism, protection from discrimination and incitement to hatred, and socioeconomic cohesion and equality between minorities and the majority.

In recent years, however, the political, public, and media discourse has focused on the dichotomy that has emerged between the values of the absorbing society and those of the immigrants, such as gender inequality, the hijab requirement for women, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honor killings, rejection of LGBT people, and so on. The application of those cultural norms within liberal societies has been central to the debate about the relevance of multiculturalism, the prevailing integration policy, and tolerance toward Muslims, who do not always display reciprocal tolerance toward Western values. While the supporters of multiculturalism keep emphasizing its advantages, its opponents point to societal schisms, the lack of a binding social glue, and a clash between cultural values on the one hand and religious traditions on the other that can lead to revulsion, radicalization, violence, and terror. The multicultural policy that grants everyone freedom of expression, religion, and association is exploited by Islamists to set up terror groups, preach and incite in public and online, and engage in terror attacks like those to which the West is once again being subjected.

In any case, the demographic changes in Western countries over the past decades pose major challenges regarding the absorption and integration of large communities that differ from the native population in cultural and particularly religious terms.

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