

Here is what social science can tell us about the terrorist attacks in Paris

By **John Sides** November 15, 2015

We will soon feature a range of perspectives about the terrorist attacks in Paris on Friday. Here I want to highlight some of our previous content that bears on the attacks.

About Muslims in France:

1. Compared with other European nations, France is below average in whether its policies help to integrate immigrants. Nevertheless, many French liberals believe that the country is integrating Muslims well. French conservatives tend to disagree.
2. About 75 percent of French Muslims say that they feel French. Religious Muslims were less likely to say they feel French than less religious Muslims — but this was true among religious and less religious Christians, too.
3. At the same time, French Muslims are less secular than the average person in France and hold more conservative views about women's roles.
4. There is strong evidence that French Muslims face discrimination — even when other attributes (country of origin, race, education) are held constant. Comparing Senegalese Muslims and Christians in France, Senegalese Muslims are less attached to France and more attached to Senegal.
5. When you listen to French Muslims talk, they actually sound very...French. (See also [here](#).)

What about the effect of the terrorist attacks on Charlie Hebdo? [One perspective](#) is from Claire Adida, David Laitin and Marie-Anne Valfort (see also [Laitin here](#)):

Muslims and French are stuck in a vicious circle of discrimination: Muslim immigrants to France are culturally distinct from the host society in ways that are threatening to French republican ideals; such

distinction feeds anti-Muslim discrimination in France, which itself encourages greater Muslim withdrawal from French society, feeding back into French discrimination. The Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher tragedies will only exacerbate this discriminatory equilibrium.

See also their newly published book “Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies.”

Another perspective is from Jennifer Fredette:

We are sometimes told that Muslims in the West choose to segregate themselves within no-go zones where they gather to reject the values of the nation...however... the radicalization of the Charlie Hebdo attackers actually tracks with their withdrawal from most other Muslims. They met as a small group with a self-styled imam who had actually been kicked out of a local mosque for his radical views. Similarly, youths who are going to Syria to fight for ISIS are being recruited online, not in their local mosques or community centers — and their radicalization is a surprise to their distraught parents. Isolationism is real, but it is exceptional...in these instances, isolationism has meant separation from both the national community and other Muslims.

Here also are broader perspectives on integrating immigrants in Britain and Europe generally.

From our many posts about the Islamic State militant group — which is also known as ISIS and ISIL — here are several highlights:

- The Islamic State has come to dominate Islamist politics generally: “Indeed, it is through this barbarism and aggressiveness that the Islamic State can attract and persuade supporters to join its ranks and to experience its boldness themselves as if it is an entertaining game.”
- The literature on political violence can teach us a lot about the Islamic State — despite media portrayals that it is a “mystery.” One quote: “...there is little evidence supporting the claim of the Islamic State’s strategic ineptitude.”
- Censoring the Islamic State’s online propaganda hasn’t gone very well.
- What a big study of 71 counterinsurgencies can tell us about defeating the Islamic State. In short, it won’t be easy.
- On the “Islamic” in ISIS: “...analyzing the Islamic State as a revolutionary actor that happens to be Islamist is a much more promising avenue of interpretation than seeing it as either simply an Islamist actor or a sectarian one.”

For more, see this entire symposium on “Islamist Politics in the Shadow of the Islamic State.”

And because this debate is already happening and will only intensify now, here is Marc Lynch's post "[Would arming Syria's rebels have stopped the Islamic state?](#)" The short answer is: Probably not.

Had the plan to arm Syria's rebels been adopted back in 2012, the most likely scenario is that the war would still be raging and look much as it does today, except that the United States would be far more intimately and deeply involved.

Stay tuned for much more.

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