

Title: (Mis)Understanding Muslim Converts in Canada: A Critical Discussion of Muslim Converts in the Contexts of Security and Society

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Research Question:

This research seeks to understand the causes and processes of Islamic conversion in Canada through this initial study of Islamic conversion in Ontario. It attempts to contextualize Islamic conversion within Canada's national security debate.

Importance:

Canadian census data shows that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the country, and that although most of the Muslim population growth is related Muslim birth rates and migration, since 2001 the Muslim population has also increased as a result of religious conversions by non-Muslim Canadians. Canadian converts are interesting because there are literally no published studies on Canada's Muslim convert population to date. Our research essentially explores how social contexts affect converts' beliefs, experiences, attitudes and behavior.

Research Findings:

Our small dataset of 25 converts in Ontario allows us to make the following initial observations and inferences about Muslim converts in Canada: a) The number of converts in Canada is increasing although it is difficult to establish a reliable aggregate figure of total converts or annual conversion rates (No formal records of converts kept); b) Average age of Muslim converts in Canada is early to mid-20s; c) The gender ratio of converts is generally in-line with the wider Canadian population; d) Converts have no discernable pattern of socio-economic, educational or religious background; e) Media (despite being largely negative) and missionary activity is stimulating interest in Islam; and f), "Unmosqued" phenomenon – converts are generally disconnected from mosque activities.

Implications:

To date, two terror plots involving converts have been disrupted in Canada (2006 and 2013), and a handful of Canadian converts have been active as foreign fighters. Despite these events the reality is that the vast majority of converts do not become radicalized let alone turn to violence. Understanding the causes and processes of Islamic conversion in Canada is essential to avoid demonizing an entire group of people as potential terrorists on the basis of their religious choice. The reality is that the majority of Muslim converts report improved sociability and self-esteem as a result of practicing their new religion.