



Boston Children's Hospital



Pathways to and away from Violent Extremism among Somalis in North America

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

While the vast majority of Somali refugees living in North America do not support violent extremism, those who do tend to feel *disconnected from the country they live in and like they don't belong to American or Somali communities*. The effort to build resilience to violent extremism within refugee communities may benefit from programs and policies that contribute to stronger bonds between refugees and the communities/countries in which they live.



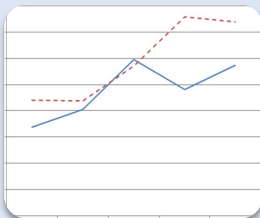
Who We Are

- Researchers from Boston Children's Hospital/Harvard Medical School and partnering academic institutions, in collaboration with community partners from Somali community agencies in Boston MA, Minneapolis MN, Lewiston and Portland ME, and Toronto Canada.
- We are funded by the National Institute of Justice/Department of Justice, and the Minerva Research Initiative/Department of Defense.



What We Did

- We conducted structured interviews with 465 Somali young adults living in Minneapolis, Boston, Lewiston and Portland ME, and Toronto Canada. These interviews assessed experiences of trauma and discrimination, social bonds, delinquency, violence, openness to violent extremism, and constructive civic and political engagement.
- We also conducted In-depth qualitative interviews with 36 youth drawn from the larger sample.



How We Analyzed the Data

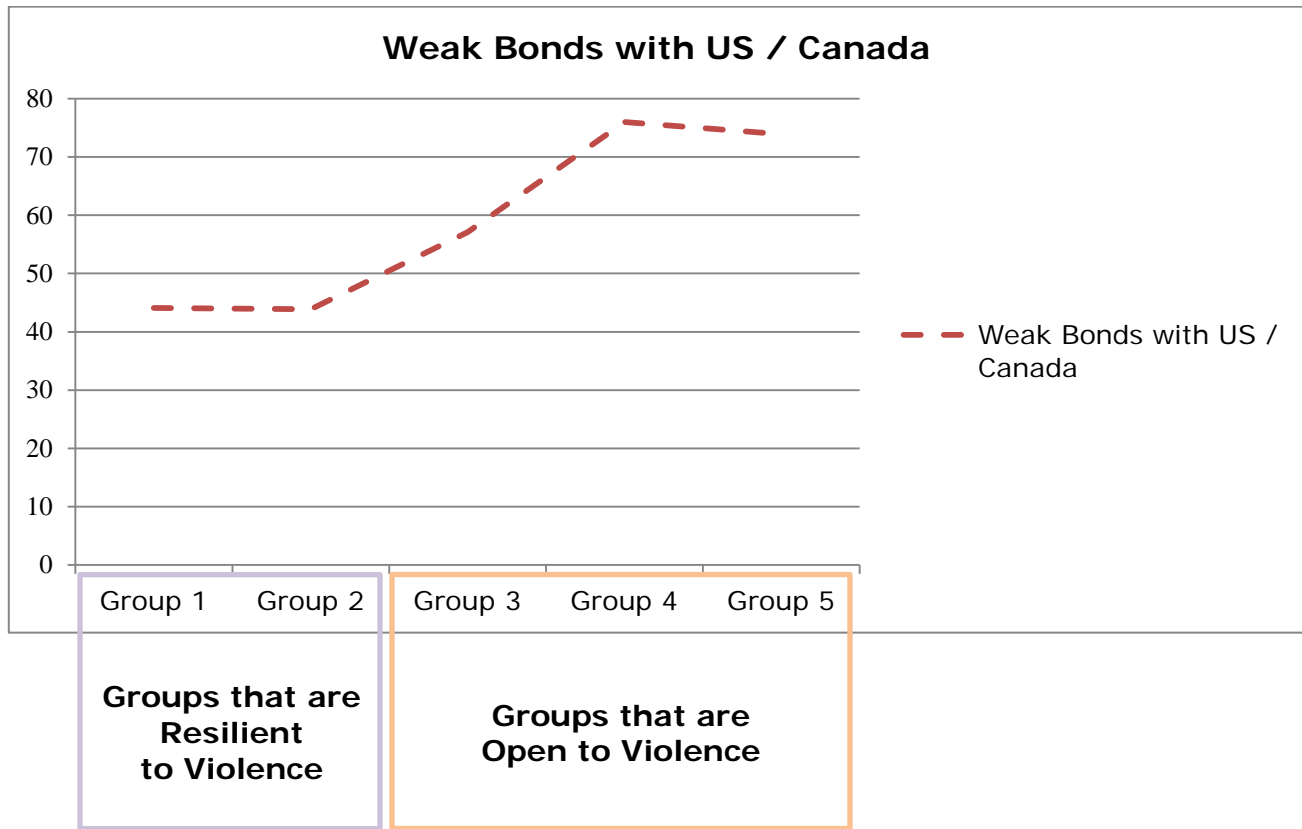
- We used Latent Class Analysis to examine patterns within the data; these patterns show whether there are identifiable 'groups' of participants who tend to share similar beliefs or behaviors. We then used Multiple Regression analysis to examine whether certain experiences predicted which 'group' a participant falls in.

WHAT WE FOUND

Looking at behaviors and/or attitudes related to violent extremism, civic engagement, and gangs/delinquency, we found that there were five distinct groups in the sample. Members of the largest group were opposed to violent extremism and gangs, and actively engaged both civically and politically. However, the second largest group was composed of people who were civically and politically engaged, but also reported that they were open to the use of violence in support of a cause. Compared to those in the group that said they did not support violent extremism, those in the latter group were **more likely to say they felt marginalized from both the country they live in as well as the Somali community**.

Social Bonds by Class

Figure 1. Percentage of class observed to have weak bonds with country of resettlement.



LOOKING AHEAD

Implications for Countering Violent Extremism

- Efforts to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism must **engage communities** as central partners in the process.
- Activities that **strengthen social bonds** between alienated youth and either the community of resettlement OR the Somali community could be helpful.
- The majority of young Somalis are civically and politically engaged: build on this strength by **ensuring their actions and voices are heard and integrated** into the political process.
- Efforts to identify youth as 'radicalized' or 'as a threat to the US' may further alienate them from society and Somali community; **avoid labels or actions that might further alienate** the most vulnerable youth.

We are currently conducting a second wave of interviews with study participants, and will return to conduct a third wave of interviews beginning in May of 2015. We anticipate looking at how attitudes towards violence change over time, and what kinds of experiences in resettlement are associated with these changes. Our goal is to make these findings available to community members, policy makers and practitioners so that preventive interventions and policies that promote Somali youth well-being, and that increase the types of experiences associated with decreased support for violent extremism, can be put in place.

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