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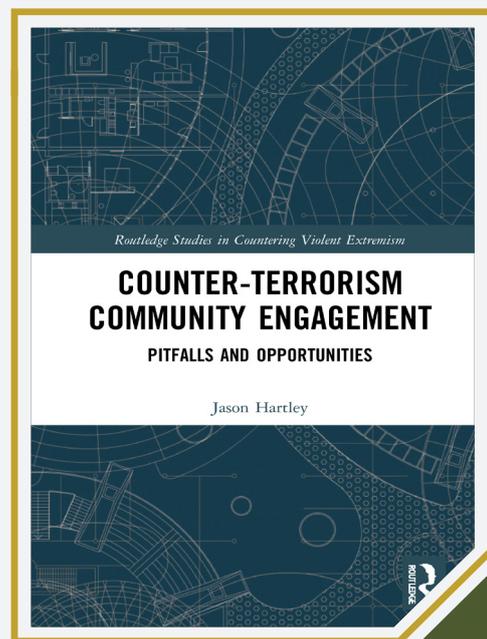
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الائتلاف العسكري الإسلامي لمحاربة الإرهاب  
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION



## BOOK REVIEW



# COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PITFALLS AND OPPORTUNITIES

JASON HARTLEY

March

2022



### **Book Review**

Monthly Issue - Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition

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March 2022



## COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PITFALLS AND OPPORTUNITIES

**The 9/11** attacks of 2001 against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC that claimed more than three thousand lives led to a widespread recognition of the threat of terrorism. All nations have realized that they are not spared from this threat that can reach them anytime, causing substantial havoc. Accordingly, the US and other countries promptly took emergency measures against critical threats. They enacted counter-terrorism laws, established special counter-terrorism security agencies, and waged war in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 9/11 attacks resulted in hostility towards Muslims, giving rise to Islamophobic attitudes, alienation or persecution by Western communities. To this end, Jason Hartley, Lecturer in Criminology at Griffith University, Australia, wrote *Counter-Terrorism Community Engagement: Pitfalls and Opportunities* published by Routledge, as comprehensive research aiming at rebuilding trust in Muslim communities through community engagement in a climate of counter-terrorism.

## Overview

The book highlights the counter-terrorism community engagement, focusing on Muslim communities in the state of Queensland, northeastern Australia. It investigates the trust rebuilt between the Queensland Police Service and Muslim communities, which in turn leads to successful counter-terrorism community engagement. It also examines the reasons behind the distrust that stands in the way of achieving proactive engagement, especially by Muslim communities.

Even though many studies discussed counter-terrorism policies and how they have fueled a wider climate of suspicion, they, unlike this book, overlooked how to fix the situation to help to integrate Muslim communities into the larger global community in the fight against such destructive threat.

Hartley was appointed State Islamic Liaison Coordinator and was tasked the role of gathering intelligence on Muslim communities, which made him understand the disrupted relations between the two parties. In order to avoid personal bias and stereotypes of Muslims, he spent a year in Hebron, Palestine in an effort to blend into the Muslim community, delve deep into their culture, objectively conduct this research based on purely scientific grounds.

The book tackles several topics related to the Muslim communities' counter-terrorism engagement. Hartley interviewed Muslim community members in Queensland and serving Queensland Police Service staff in order to form a clear vision of counter-terrorism policies, trust-building, and community engagement. The book reviews the Muslim perspective regarding relations with counter-terrorism police, the implications, trust-building instructions, as well as a cultural analysis of the nature of those relations.

The book consists of **six chapters**: the first is an introduction outlining the significance and purpose of the topic, and the research methodology; the second discusses the uncertainty amongst Muslim communities to proactively engage in countering terrorism; the third demonstrates the cultural perspective regarding trust; the fourth emphasizes the role the Islamic leadership plays in supporting police forces; the fifth discusses the outcomes of the study; the sixth includes a conclusion and key recommendations the author provides.

## Preface

**Chapter one** starts with the purpose of the book, which is measuring the capacity of police agencies to engage Muslim communities within the context of counter-terrorism, and how important that is. Working with Muslim communities remains a priority for Western countries since they are no longer fully occupied with the violent tendencies of extremist Islamic groups. Moreover, they are no longer driven by a fear from the engagement of Muslims only in terrorist crimes, at a time when efforts are geared towards fighting right-wing extremism. The pressing threat of right-wing extremism and bias-motivated violence (hate crimes) have prompted a renewed attention towards trust-building with Muslim communities, who are probably the target of far-right hate and violence, like the 2019 mass shooting that occurred at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Hartley defends the "hearts and minds" approach adopted by the police to improve relations with Muslims, develop a better understanding of their ideology, interests, and cultural nuances. Before addressing this approach, the author highlights the changes in Muslim communities after the 9/11 events, and the violent strategies undertaken by governments against Muslims under the pretext of counter-terrorism in Australia and most Western countries. This resulted in a hostile backlash against Muslims that lasted for years with yet persisting impact, as well as negative stereotyping propagated by Australian and Western media over the years.

These events are particularly important in demonstrating the societal factors that had a negative impact on Muslim communities and undermined trust relations between them and law enforcement authorities in Australia and other countries. These practices were perceived as inherently unjust, or rather oppressive and exclusionary, by Muslim communities. The situation resulted in deeper implications manifested in judging entire communities based on crimes committed by few individuals and small groupings, and even judging Islam itself and its adherents, who exceed 1.5 billion people around the world.

True Islamic teachings advocate tolerance and peaceful coexistence with all humankind—individually and collectively—and warn that perpetrators of such crimes shall be doomed in this world and the hereafter. How-

ever, Muslim communities have received mixed signals from counter-terrorism authorities; on the one hand, they have repeatedly affirmed the need for Muslims to gather intelligence on extremists who plan terrorist attacks, as well as the importance of their collaboration in fighting terrorist propaganda and new recruitment methods. On the other hand, Muslims were treated violently by the police, new laws and legislations were enacted, and harsh policies and practices were adopted against them. Hartley, as a source of information on such interactions who was ex officio in charge of gathering intelligence on Australian Muslims, outlined the reasons behind the deteriorating relationships between the Queensland Police and Muslim communities.

### Core Analysis

Hartley sums up his experience with Muslim community members in **three key observations**, which are the core of this book: **uncertainty, trust, and leadership**. The first observation was an **“increased uncertainty”** and anxiety amongst Muslims concerning an uncertain future with the potential for psychological harm. The second observation, **“trust”**, was the cultural differences between Muslim community members and the police seeking to engage with them. The third observation, **“leadership”**, was that Muslim leaders perceived to have legitimacy with the Australian police do not have legitimacy with the Muslim community, and vice versa. These observations resulted in **three main research questions** looking for detailed answers:

1. How do the dynamics of uncertainty affect the counter-terrorism community engagement and undermine the efforts of the police?
2. What are the key cultural considerations that erode trust between the police and Muslim communities?
3. How can the partnering of Muslim leaders with the police impact counter-terrorism efforts and the legitimacy of Muslim leaders within their own communities?

These questions were raised in context of the Australian police partnering with Muslim community members in countering terrorism, aiming to identify the cultural, organizational, and social factors that impact human behavior in this regard. The author resorts to theories from different academic disciplines looking for answers to the aforementioned questions. This is such an important procedure since research is not only concerned with means of developing counter-terrorism community engagement, but rather looks for answers to questions

that do not have straight answers in previous studies. Accordingly, Hartley resorts to social psychology, sociology, criminology, and cross-cultural psychology to accurately interpret complex human behaviors.

14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with police staff and 29 with Muslim community members to document their experiences and viewpoints. The need to focus on Muslim participants is probably due to Hartley’s keen interest to learn about the Muslims’ perceptions of the cause. The selection of participants ensures representation across different ethnicities, professions, and nationalities. Such diverse sample is considered an asset to the study; it prevents pre-conceived bias, represents the various Muslim communities, ensures multi-ethnicity and female participation, and raises the credibility of the results of the study.

The below table reflects the characteristics of the sample participating in the study:

Participant characteristics	
Participants	Description
Sect	2 Shiite and 27 Sunni. The number of Sunni participants is higher given the higher number of Sunni mosques: 18 mosques, as opposed to the one Shiite mosque.
Role	8 Imams; 5 academics; 2 teachers at Islamic Schools; 5 community members considered problem solvers; 4 community leaders in non-religious roles; 3 youth workers; and 2 youth (older than 18 years of age).
Ethnic Background	Palestine, Bosnia, Turkey, India, South Africa, Somalia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Anglo Australian, Yemen, and South-East Asian.
Gender	5 females and 24 males

Hartley was keen to interview police personnel of different expertise, such as Queensland police officers,



frontline constables, community engagement specialists, station managers, district officers, and assistant commissioners. The sample also included police working with Muslim community members engaging in countering terrorism. Approval was subsequently granted by the Queensland Police to interview all staff except counter-terrorism personnel on grounds of security and confidentiality related issues—they work directly with Muslim community members in the fight against terrorism. However influential that exclusion is, the researcher successfully drew a highly representative sample.

Hartley reported that Muslim participants took the research seriously, which was evident in the results of the study. Demographically marginalized groups are often exhausted from constantly becoming subjects of research while they question the intentions of the researchers, especially those who correlate research objectivity, reality, relevance, and depth with the segment or group under research.

Such enthusiasm can be traced to the importance of the study to Muslims in general, and the sample of participants in particular, due to constant perceptions of being targeted by counter-terrorism personnel. This interpretation perhaps emphasizes the possibility of conducting research on oppressed populations and meaningful and profound interviews with them. Those vulnerable populations tend to be skeptical about researchers unless their research was as important and beneficial to their communities, too.

Hartley confirmed that he managed to overcome his own bias towards Muslims, and conducted his research with

absolute impartiality, honesty, and objectivity. That was despite his background in law enforcement and having developed negative perceptions of Muslims as well as concerns based on an opinion that every mosque had a small group of nonconformists plotting the downfall of democracy. Consequently, in order to steer clear of such perceptions, the author undertook a community internship in Hebron, Palestine and interacted with citizens and activists whom he used to distrust. He, then, developed greater awareness and deeper understanding of Muslim morality and reality. Besides, his negative perception towards Muslims has changed. This experience confirmed that the anxiety experienced by Australians towards Muslims, which is the focus of the study, is irrelevant. The author recommends that researchers, who work with Muslim communities and oppressed minorities in general, should avoid personal bias in order not to prejudice the outcomes of the research, and also engage in beneficial experiences with members of these communities.

### Impact of Uncertainty

**Chapter two** discusses the impact of “uncertainty” manifested in the reluctance of some Muslim community members to help the police in the context of counter-terrorism. Hartley analyzed the data from interviews to identify the Muslim perceptions in this regard and the patterns of their impact on society.

The author defines uncertainty as reluctance and confusion, and a lack of sure knowledge about the course of past, present and future hypothetical events. This definition is particularly important for including how human

behavior is affected by the scarcity of information concerning past events and experiences, current context and experiences, and future events, which all have an impact on the decision-making process.

In this respect, the study results have shown that uncertainty can become a strategy of terrorism leading to the divisions in Muslim communities on the one hand, and the Australian community on the other, and triggering sectarian strife. Participants suggest that uncertainty creates an environment of increased over-reaction of government officials, which appears to provoke uncertainty in the minds of the general public, and especially within the Muslim community.

The significance of these findings lies in the indication that the isolating policies adopted by counter-terrorism officials against the Muslim community help to foster terrorism. The interviews data refer to constant accusations levelled by the government, media, and community members against Muslim community members. In addition, judgements are often made on Muslims in general following terrorist incidents and before investigations are even concluded, accusing them of extremism and violence. In the meanwhile, the fact that Islam forbids violence and terrorism and how Muslims repudiate such acts is overlooked. Such circumstances provoke fear and anxiety within Muslim communities following any terrorist attack in fear of potential backlash and retaliation only on grounds of being Muslim.

Participants add that their fears have been raised since they represent a well-recognized segment of the community, especially Muslim women who wear modest clothing and hijab. This makes them target to Australian

community members who seek revenge from Muslims. These findings are consistent with many incidences of reprisals against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims following terrorist attacks in Western countries. The ensuing climate of uncertainty is deemed a serious threat to Muslim community members uninvolved in violent acts; they strongly repudiate terrorism and violence.

Retaliation against Muslims is not limited to non-Muslim individuals. However, interviews data indicate that counter-terrorism authorities also target Muslims and express clear animosity towards them, which negatively impacts the Muslim engagement in countering terrorism. Participants also assert their distrust in government officials and sense of injustice, and that they have their own reasons to dismiss the notion of community engagement. Besides, they believe that such circumstances resulted in decisions to not provide police with information, avoidance of government funding, and deterring from counter-terrorism community engagement. Although many researchers, decision makers, activists, and public safety officials have referred to such perceptions and acknowledged their negative impact on counter-terrorism efforts, Hartley's study remains unique and profound given the data that draws a number of evidence-based conclusions regarding these perceptions.

The rest of chapter two outlines the cultural factors that shape uncertainty from a religious perspective. Participants believe that Islamic teachings entail that uncertainty is a synonym to doubt and suspicion—two risks that should be avoided given they are treated as forbidden in Islam. In view of this reality and its signifi-





cance, risks resulting from uncertainty should be avoided by avoiding any potential major threat to the Muslim community. Besides, participants pointed out that uncertainty may prompt sentiment towards terrorists and offer additional incentives to join them. They believe that some young Muslims joined terrorist groups like ISIS because of such uncertainty. These observations indicate cultural willingness on the part of Muslim community members to avoid uncertainty and its causes and engage in counter-terrorist efforts.

### Trust from Cultural Perspective

**Chapter three** outlines the factors critical to “trust” building between the police and Muslim community members in Queensland. Although participants in this study have confirmed positive relations with the police, they have also remarked that the adopted counter-terrorism policy pose the greatest threat to these relations and may potentially undermine trust between the two parties.

The chapter starts with a review of trust-building related topics and means. Hartley suggests that community engagement is key to trust reinforcement and is considered a solid foundation for police counter-terrorism efforts not only in Australia, but also in Canada, UK, US, and other European countries. He most importantly suggests that proactive engagement with law-enforcement officials may be adversely affected by Muslim perceptions of being targeted by the police and the hostility towards them, mostly through practices unrelated to

fighting terrorism, and rather a distorted perception of counter-terrorism.

One interview tells the story of the arrest of a young Muslim for a crime that has nothing to do with terrorism. He was treated violently by the police, and thus reciprocated the violence. However, investigations paid no heed to the violence inflicted on the young Muslim, which provoked some sort of community resentment among Muslim communities for the serious animosity they have witnessed on part of the police towards the young man given his adherence to Islam. Many Muslims feel unsafe due to perceptions of risk that the counter-terrorism forces may raid their homes any time. They confirm the maltreatment they experience whenever in contact with the police in their homes or workplaces and even at check points under the pretext of counter-terrorism.

These factors led to a state of fear within Muslim communities from any contact with the police and being perceived as informers or spies, and consequently the stigmatization of contact with the police on all levels, and not just counter-terrorism police.

Lastly, this chapter discusses actions and intentions. In this vein, participants emphasized the importance of experimenting within Muslim communities, engaging with them, learning about their culture, beliefs, and ideology up close as well as the teachings of their religion, and not conforming to the negative perceptions propagated against them. This chapter proves to public

safety officials that positive practices help significantly with trust-building, unlike violence that undermines and destroys trust.

## Muslim Leadership and Counter-Terrorism

**Chapter four** investigates the contact between the police and Muslim **leadership**, and its impact on building trust with Muslim communities. In this context, the author raises **three questions**, the answers to which are important to counter-terrorism officials:

1. How far do the Queensland Police engage with Muslim leaders who are perceived as representative of their own communities?
2. What are the religious and cultural considerations that bestow leadership legitimacy in Queensland Muslim communities, and how does it impact community engagement?
3. What are the dynamics and actions of police that can erode legitimacy, resulting in a reduced capacity to achieve sustainable outcomes?

The study results show that greater legitimacy is bestowed upon leaders should they speak out against the injustices inflicted on Muslims in those countries, and bravely and fearlessly address issues of significance to Muslims. However, a loss of legitimacy is experienced by Muslim leaders who attempt to appease the police at the expense of the Muslim community. Moreover, younger leaders enjoy higher status and legitimacy since they are driven by their enthusiasm to speak out against the

injustices and oppression inflicted on Muslims. They are even more daring when it comes to addressing pressing issues and opposing laws and policies that adversely affect Muslims.

Even though the study was conducted in Queensland, Australia, it is observed that its findings are applicable to other countries and can be beneficial to counter-terrorism officials and police in countries aiming to reinforce counter-terrorism community engagement. Public safety officials can also benefit from this study that promotes a better understanding of Muslim leadership characteristics and behaviors, and accordingly helps them to select the leaders they would engage with.

Supposedly, the cultural perspective of legitimacy should align with the Muslim community perception of it given that it shall eventually impact communication and engagement efforts. Besides, the police must realize that their engagement efforts with Muslim leaders may impact their status among their society. Accordingly, discussing such considerations with senior officials and all the way down to police personnel (frontline constables), and taking them into account when planning to use leaders within the context of counter-terrorism, helps to enhance and sustain engagement efforts, and achieve expected results.

## Discussion and Implication

**Chapter five** sums up the main outcomes derived from overall findings of this study regarding uncertainty, trust, and leadership: only a few leaders represent Muslims in community engagement with government





officials, including police forces. Most new Muslim migrants in Queensland believe that their needs were neglected by older leaders, creating what they considered a complex situation despite their strong relations with government officials that is based on how long they have been in the country. This results in officials overlooking new migrant groups who are not accorded equal attention. This presents a serious problem given that new migrants require huge support in order to adapt to and blend into the new society. Otherwise, they shall resent this new society, feeling isolated and offended.

This issue is manifested upon exposure to extremist propaganda, especially ISIS propaganda, which always strives to convince Muslims that they are welcomed in Western countries; that Muslims who have settled in those countries for so long will not care about them, not acting like real Muslims, and that they forgot about Islamic teachings in the diaspora. If some practices by officials cause resentment among Muslims towards the government, and evoke sentiment towards terrorist groups, the same applies to Muslim leaders when they overlook the new migrants' demands.

## Conclusion

The study findings concluded that Muslim community members often shy away from community engagement

with counter-terrorism police authorities for the potential negative consequences. In this chapter, the study provides a **set of recommendations** that address these pitfalls and prompts more community engagement with counter-terrorist officials as follows:

- Narratives confirming the finger-pointing perceptions of the state, police, and government officials towards Muslims, framing them as suspicious, should be taken into account. These pitfalls should be addressed openly and transparently.
- Counter-terrorism police and police officers interested in community engagement should directly engage with Muslim citizens. These engagements reinforce trust between the two parties.
- Police efforts exerted in the shadows should be publicized. The author recommends as ex officio intelligence official that the police should also contact those experienced in the issues facing their communities.
- The study should benefit from the expertise of Muslim community members when facing existing challenges. They should be consulted on finding solutions for security and extremist issues, and their sound recommendations should be adopted.
- Muslims leaders should find innovative ways to im-

prove relations and build trust between the police and Muslim community members and find a clear way to address Muslim fears towards some police behavior.

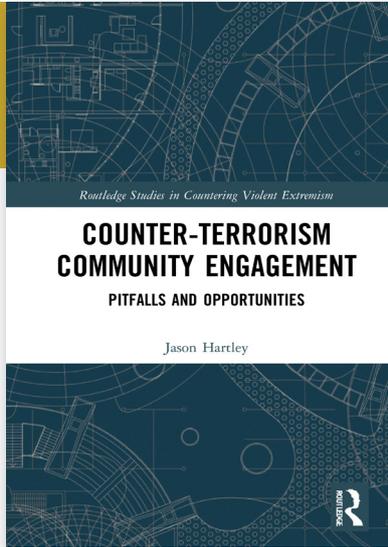
- The issue regarding police personnel drawing their guns in face of and resorting to violence towards Muslim community members should be reconsidered. This is likely to aggravate more negative perceptions of Muslims and prevent them from counter-terrorism community engagement with police authorities.
- Incidents that add to Muslims' anxiety should be proactively addressed in a rather informal manner.
- Surveys that assess how much improvement has taken place in relations between the police and Muslim community members should be conducted frequently. This provides police authorities with the opportunity to change their policies in order to sustain positive relationships.
- Characteristics of Muslim leadership within Muslim communities should align with the ones approved by police authorities.
- Cultural concerns regarding Muslim leadership should be understood. Muslim leaders should be allowed to speak publicly and address the issues of concern to Muslims without worries or fears. This means that Muslims engaging with the government are not necessarily spies as people may

think; rather, they are independent leaders who are respected within their communities as well as the police community.

- Relations with Muslim leaders should be reinforced and their legitimacy within Muslim communities should be maintained. This may require utilizing police services to assert their independence.
- More relevant research should be conducted on criminology and ethical accord coded on the basis of common notions of justice.
- Research should be conducted on developing training resources for the police based on the cultural nuances, in order to avoid engagement pitfalls and enhance skills that improve the outcomes of community engagement.

Although the author highlights some challenges he faced while conducting this study, he could not manage to reach some of those relevant to the survey (counter-terrorism police). In addition, relevant specialized research is rare. However, he conducted a solid exploratory study resulting in significant findings that are applicable to other countries. He provided recommendations for improving counter-terrorism community engagement, placing the research in a special status in counter-terrorism scientific and academic domains. Moreover, public safety officials can benefit from the findings in their efforts to improve the relations with Muslim communities and marginalized groups outside Australia.





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ENGAGEMENT  
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**Publisher**

Routledge

Avril 2021

**ISBN: 9780367680718**







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