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# Norm Change in Africa – An Evaluation

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Norm Change in Africa – An Evaluation  
Extremis Project 28 January 2013  
Daniel P. Aldrich<sup>1</sup>

In the 2011-2012 academic year, I was fortunate to be selected as an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science and Technology fellow within the Africa Bureau of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). As the “resident social scientist” I was tasked with helping to collect, analyze, and then disseminate the findings of several of the in-depth analyses ongoing in Africa. One of the field studies I stumbled upon sought to evaluate the effect of a several year project focused on residents of the nations of Chad, Niger, and Mali - sites where, as we know all too clearly now, a number of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) have recruited new members, set up trafficking routes, and sought to influence the local population.

The State Department, USAID, and other U.S. government agencies sought to counteract the influence of these organizations through programs such as the Pan-Sahel Initiative (starting in 2002) and the more integrated approach of the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP, started in 2005), both of which were primarily focused on hard power and military training. The USAID component of this integrated approach, Peace through Development (PDEV, started in 2008), sought to use development tools to counter violent extremism in the region, focusing on encouraging moderate voices, deepening local civic culture, and increasing positive feelings towards the United States and its allies.

USAID approached this “soft power” strategy through a number of channels, including local radio stations, a field in which the USAID has a very long history (Aldrich 2012c). As I have argued elsewhere, the soft-side approach is “based on the recognition of the multiple pathways to radicalization and the externalities of the use of violence, may have fewer negative side effects but will require a longer time horizon and deeper connections with civilian populations in countries of interest. The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) from the U.S. Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/s/dmr/qddr/index.htm>) underscored that economic development, civil society capacity building, and other non-military approaches should take pride of place among the policy instruments applied to handling VEOs” (Aldrich 2012a).

I sought to test whether radio programming in these regions had a measurable effect on attitudes and behaviors of the local population. An independent evaluation team had already carried out roughly 1000 face-to-face interviews with residents in two types of communities: those where USAID had carried out extensive soft-side programming and those where it had not. Fortunately, the measurement and analysis teams had thought through a number of critical control variables -

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including the standard demographic features (sex, age, and so forth) which were included, but they also had added a number of questions about the economic situation in the respondents' communities, their satisfaction with services, their degree of participation in decision making, their opinion of the United States, and whether the U.S. is fighting terrorism or Islam (among others).

I began the analysis by simply seeking to understand if those residents living in communities exposed to multi-vectored U.S. programming - including educational, vocational training, and community capacity building programs - listened more often to the peace and tolerance radio programming offered on the local radios. Then, I sought to see how higher (and lower) levels of radio listening altered several outcomes of interest, including views on working with the West to combat terrorism, participation in decision making, support or opposition to the use of violence in the name of Islam, and support or opposition to the imposition of Sharia. I used several types of analyses, including bivariate chi-squared analyses, maximum likelihood analysis (with ordered probit), and then propensity score matching and average treatment effects (in an attempt to reduce the bias due to the fact that it was a quasi-experimental, observational study).

The results were striking: communities which had multi-vectored U.S. programs were far more likely to listen to peace and tolerance radio programming than similar communities without such interventions (controlling for more than 10 potential confounding conditions). Regression analysis showed that higher levels of radio listening, in turn, had strong positive correlations with two of the four outcomes of interest: support for working with the West to counter terrorism and greater participation in local decision making. Interestingly, there were no measurable connections between support for violence in the name of Islam and support for implementing Sharia and levels of radio listening. Finally, propensity score matching supported a causal argument: those who listened to higher levels of radio programming were more likely to participate in local decision making and be willing to work with the West to counter terrorism. Whilst the ultimate gold standard of a double-blind experiment was not met, the size of the pool studied along with the robust findings across multiple analytical methods showed strong support for the efficacy of radio programming.

As such, a number of implications for policy are raised. First, while some have argued that USAID and developmental agencies should take a backseat to the Department of Defense and other force-based interveners, this research supports the idea that the soft-side approach to countering violent extremism has a measurable impact on communities and should be continued. While radio programming is no panacea - it had no effect on two of the four outcomes of interest - it nonetheless did move individuals to better connect civically with their communities and to support Western efforts to stop groups such as Ansar al Dine, al Qa'eda, and others in the area. Next, radio programming is a very low-cost intervention method. Some have estimated that "a small FM station, with a 40-watt transmitter, mast, and basic studio equipment can be bought for

about US\$3,000, excluding shipping and customs duties” (Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada 2002). Given the financial and psychic costs for military interventions in the region - beyond the issue of “collateral damage” to locals who may be driven to support violent extremist organizations because of civilian casualties - radio programming seems a good investment for Western authorities. Finally, this research underscores the need for additional social science research on questions of countering violent extremism, norm change, and radio programming in the field. Given the ongoing French military intervention in Mali which seeks to uproot violent extremists who have taken over local communities in the north of that nation, decision makers should allocate additional resources for analyses like this one to hopefully prevent such events from reoccurring (see Bleck and Michelitch 2011).

For a fuller discussion see Daniel Aldrich, “Radio as the Voice of God: Peace and Tolerance Radio Programming’s Impact on Norms,” which was recently published in the journal *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Aldrich 2012b).

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