

Cyber Challenges to International Human Rights

Title: Reducing false-identifications and failure to identify of radicals on new social media: A comparative analysis of violent and non-violent radicals and human rights implications

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Abstract:

In recent years, as much as social media has become a tool for radicalization and recruitment to terrorism, it has also become a tool for surveillance, prevention and intervention. Intelligence and security agencies, especially in democratic countries, are constantly monitoring organizations, groups and individuals who they consider to be at risk of radicalization. However, most agencies know that there is a big difference between radicalization of belief and radicalization of action, and that only a very small percentage of those identified as 'radicals' will even go on to pose a physical threat. One of the challenges therefore of monitoring, forecasting and prevention on social media is to identify from this large group, those who are likely to pose a future or imminent threat. While technologies and capabilities have certainly improved, the lack of evidence upon which to build means of identification has resulted in much guess work, something arguably symptomatic of other terrorism risk assessment tools. As a result, despite the many successful preventions, many attackers continue to fly under the radar, even though the signals and signs indicating their intentions were obvious retrospectively. Failure to identify is only one of the problems stemming from the lack of evidence upon which to base approaches, since false identifications, can and do lead to the impingement of rights of completely innocent individuals. Both these unwanted outcomes have important human rights implications. This study takes a new approach to informing evidence based identification programs and hopefully improve efficiency whilst reducing negative human rights side effects. This study takes a social learning approach in comparing the social media activities of N=60 lone wolf terrorists with N=100 non-violent radicals and aims to identify similarities and differences across a range of activities and behaviors which can help to distinguish high from low risk.