

Propaganda is only as powerful as the cracks in society.



The Psychology of Propaganda

THE STORIES

- 20 year old Abu Huzaifa from Canada
- 23-year-old Sunday school teacher in Washington
- A young woman from Scotland
- 19 year old Bilal Hadfi

These young people from four different countries and backgrounds joined the Islamic State (IS) between 2014 to 2016 and they were not alone. News outlets covered many similar stories as young people with dreams and opportunities deserted their families and homes to join an extreme, terrorist organization. How did IS get this powerful? What drew these young people in?

THE HISTORY OF PROPAGANDA

Propaganda is not new, and it was not created by non-state actors. As psychologist William Biddle laid out in 1931, propaganda is most effective when it follows these steps: 1. Avoid argument, appeal to emotion; 2. Fit the situation into a pattern of “we” versus “enemy”; 3. Reach social groups as well as individuals; and 4. Hide the propagandist. While almost a century old, this framework is still used to analyze modern propaganda, and is incredibly effective.

THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

One major difference is social media. These platforms, still relatively new, allow groups to mobilize massive information campaigns that are inexpensive and use algorithms to target individuals. Groups such as IS can reach and communicate with young people around the world with little effort and can focus on effective messaging. Combining the strategies identified by Biddle with new modes of communication makes this propaganda increasingly dangerous.

WHAT TO AVOID

The rise in misinformation is dramatic. There are, however, some strategies that help recipients avoid believing propaganda:

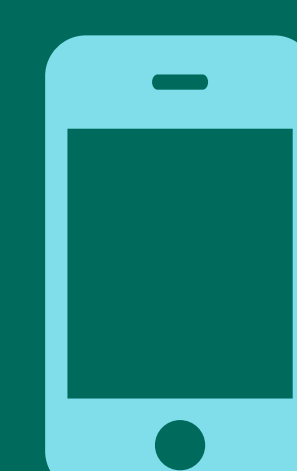
- Question the motivations of the sender
- Confirm that the information is repeated by multiple, trusted sources
- Talk to someone who is an expert in the area
- Look for counter arguments

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Learn more about the Canadian's story by
listening to *Caliphate* by Rukmini Callimachi



Have questions? We will be live
on Slack during the poster
session

