Identity Crises:
France’s Greatest Security Challenge in 2030, and Ways to Mitigate It

Introduction
Within the past 18 months, France has suffered four deadly terrorist attacks, two in Paris and one each in Nice and Rouen, which saw collectively the deaths of 226 people. This paper will discuss how, in 2030, terrorism will continue to be the greatest security challenge for France, and more specifically, Paris. Furthermore, it will suggest ways to tackle terrorism through a series of societal measures to stop radicalization through a more entrenched and holistic process of integration.

The research undertaken for this paper was solely focused on radicalization as a process which can lead to an individual committing an act of terror. The radicalization process is multifaceted, with many causes and triggers. This paper focuses on just one of these causes of radicalization: identity crisis, defined as a sense of a lack of belonging to one’s country of domicile and one’s country of origin. This will be explained further later on in this paper.

As already mentioned, terrorism will be the greatest security challenge for France in 2030 and therefore certain measures must be taken to combat the radicalization processes that lead some individuals to commit acts of terror. It is known that one of the men who unleashed a deadly attack on Parisians in November 2015, Samy Amimour, was from the so-called ‘banlieue’ which are the suburbs of Paris. ‘La banlieue’ are notorious for high-levels of crime, unemployment, and are where many immigrant families live. This paper will suggest a series of measures to be undertaken to allow for better integration of these families so that individuals in these communities are more likely to feel a sense of belonging to France, which may ultimately curb rates of radicalization and acts of terrorism.

Radicalization-integration dilemma
France has increasingly become a main target for Islamist terrorist attacks and this is likely to persist in the coming years. Many are questioning how this has come about. One possible answer is ‘la banlieue’, the Parisian suburbs. France is home to many immigrant communities, many of whom live in France’s main cities, but in ways that isolate them from other French citizens. In Paris, immigrants tend to live in the suburbs, Seine-Saint-Denis for example. Immigrant families tend to be situated in ‘la banlieue’ due to the low cost of living. Unfortunately, these suburbs have become infamous for being riddled with poverty, unemployment, substandard educational opportunities, and crime. Unemployment in the suburbs is at a record 40%, which is far higher than the average in France.¹

Young adults living in these suburbs face a significant amount of social discrimination. From a young age, education is a challenge since schools in la banlieue are unable to perform to a high

¹ F. Keane “Charlie Hebdo attack: the suburbs and the suspects” BBC News (Jan 2015)
standard. Teachers would rather not be sent to these schools and so the quality of education is low, with class sizes well exceeding 30 pupils per class. This leads to a lack of incentive to want to learn. Due to poor schooling, achieving a place at university is near impossible which means that young adults in the suburbs are put on the back foot compared to French citizens who do not live in la banlieue.

Discrimination can also be found when residents from the suburbs look for work. Addresses from la banlieue are often viewed in a negative manner and this puts these candidates at a disadvantage. As mentioned previously, throughout France the suburbs have a bad reputation, with the French media only reporting on them when there is a murder, a car on fire, or riots.\footnote{G. Packer “The Other France: Are the suburbs of Paris incubators of terrorism?” The New Yorker (Aug 2015)} Not only do immigrants’ postcodes hinder them from accessing the job market, but employers have also been known to discriminate against individuals with Arabic or African sounding names. This form of social discrimination brings about an identity crisis, whereby people living in the suburbs feel constantly shunned by French society and do not want, or feel unable, to fully adopt a French identity.\footnote{A Hayes et al “Migration and Security Citizenship and Social Inclusion in a transnational Era” (2013)} To complicate their identity crisis, children of immigrants may have had very little contact with their family’s country of origin and feel unable or unwilling to belong to that society either.

When a terrorist organization recruits individuals, they are able to provide a sense of belonging to people who are suffering from just such an identity crisis. Recruiters will entice people by offering them solidarity and a feeling of comradery. Through a process of radicalization, these suburban residents may turn to terrorism.

Ways to mitigate this threat

It is essential to tackle the issue of the French identity crisis through a series of societal measures to allow for a better integration process, thereby curbing the desire of certain individuals to commit acts of terror. This paper first provides a serious of short-term suggestions which will ultimately provide more opportunities for young adults living in the suburbs of Paris. It then goes on to describe how these solutions will create better long-term conditions and how these measures will eventually help lower the threat of terrorism in France in 2030.

Investment is key for successful integration which is why it is important for sufficient funds to be put towards the upkeep of ‘la banlieue’. Of course better housing will not put an end to terrorism, but by creating a nice environment for all French citizens and recent arrivals to live in, morale will improve and may encourage the residents of the suburbs to look after the buildings and green spaces which are known for being run-down and bleak.

Furthermore, funds should go towards the establishment of programs for youths living in the suburbs. Whether they may be sport, such as rugby clubs, community work, or working with government authorities, youngsters will feel part of a community if there is frequent interaction with others, combined with a sense of working together in a team. Currently, levels of criminality and the selling of drugs are high, and many youths partake in such activities as a
means of income. Having youth programs will encourage individuals to ‘stay off the streets’ and engage in legal activities. With regards to working with government authorities, this may help to put an end to the feeling of ‘us versus them’. Young adults from immigrant families may feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are being targeted by police because of their religion or race, and this may push them towards radicalization. By working with police and being exposed to the authorities in a positive manner, they may build a more constructive relationship with the police. Alongside this, police will need sensitivity training when approaching immigrant communities within the suburbs and make efforts to engage in more positive dialogue with the residents of ‘la banlieue’.

With regards to job opportunities, France should ensure anonymous résumés so that employers do not judge prospective job applicants based on their names or addresses. This will go some way towards putting a stop to this form of social discrimination whereby employers have been known to not take on individuals with African or Arabic sounding names and whose addresses show that they reside in ‘la banlieue’.

Another measure which could be taken would involve the French media. As mentioned above, the suburbs of Paris tend to be broadcast in a negative fashion. The French government should take steps to create a dialogue with media companies to encourage less biased reporting of ‘la banlieue’. This will allow a wider French audience to be exposed to the suburbs in a more positive way, helping to shift social perceptions of the residents of ‘la banlieue’.

These short-term measures will aim to change societal perceptions of the individuals who live in ‘la banlieue’ by allowing for there to be more social and economic opportunities for young adults from immigrant families. By creating an environment in which they feel accepted and able to thrive, individuals will have more of an affinity towards France. This will go some way towards tackling the identity crisis that so many young adults face, and may ultimately help towards curbing violent acts of terrorism from happening in the future.

**Conclusion**

This research paper has addressed the issue of terrorism as the greatest security challenge for France in 2030 and has suggested measures to mitigate this. Terrorism is likely to persist in France due to the manifestation of radicalization in the suburbs of major cities, such as Paris. This is due to the environment in which young adults from immigrant families find themselves whilst growing up. A more holistic form of integration of immigrant families will go a long way towards putting an end to the identity crisis which is one trigger that can cause radicalization and lead in some instances to violence. It is of course hard to achieve these results instantly, as full integration takes many years. However, it will be necessary to persist if France is to be safer in 2030.

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Works Consulted

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