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The GCSP policy brief series publishes papers in order to assess the policy challenges, dilemmas, and policy recommendations in *all aspects* of transnational security and globalization. The series was created and is edited by Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan, Senior Scholar in Geostrategy and Director of the Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security.

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Xenophobia, Media Stereotyping, and Their Role in Global Insecurity

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Review and Critique

As Jan Aart Scholte has commented, "The more that distance and borders have disintegrated, the more national differences have seemed precious."[1] Faced with increased migration and economic uncertainty within a globalizing economy, intolerance of non-citizens and refugees, as well as of minorities, can sometimes be pervasive as people seek to stave off perceived dangers to their national identity. In the worst-case scenario, this can lead to abuse of migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Perceived as a cause, as well as a symptom, of many such risks, globalization seems to have prompted nationalists to rally to the defense of the cherished values that are perceived as being under siege. Cris Shore even goes so far as to state that, "[l]ike decapitating the mythical hydra, the break-up of old nation-states may simply replace them with a plethora of new nationalisms often more xenophobic and ethnically exclusivist than that from which they seceded."[2]

The defense of national groups against the perceived threats of "others" is a significant source of insecurity for many. The media is central to this process of "other-ing." Bo Petersson describes images as "cognitive and affective conceptual lenses, organizing devices and information filters." These images, as Petersson notes, are socially constructed. To this end, they can be confirmed or reconstructed. Images of people may become entrenched or they be malleable, changing either in a positive or negative direction, depending on how we filter and interpret information.[3] Most stereotypes are formed on the basis of little first-hand knowledge and are often based on hearsay. This implies that negative images have very little opportunity of being deconstructed and reconstructed in a more positive light.

Exposure to stereotyping in the media influences the way that people view the groups being represented. As Katja Flückiger explains in her brief, Muslims, Sinti and Roma (often referred to as "gypsies") are often represented as constituting a threat to the security of more established populations.[4] They tend to be portrayed as sinister and often as the perpetrators of crime. In fact, the discourse on immigrant groups, as well as on refugees, is often framed almost solely in terms of their profiting from welfare systems and criminality. Images of these groups as an enemy may lead members of a national group, for example, to take pre-emptory action against what they perceive as a growing threat. Those that are the victims of stereotyping may find themselves the target of suspicion and aggression. If the media does nothing to contradict negative stereotypes, they are likely to serve to feed xenophobia and to legitimize populist policies.[5]

As Flückiger argues, the role of the media in nurturing either negative or positive images of people other than the established population must be taken into account by journalists and their representative bodies. Indeed, a number of measures have been taken by media organizations, states, international organizations, and migrant organizations in an effort to reduce xenophobic stereotyping in the media. Yet, initiatives aimed at curbing xenophobic

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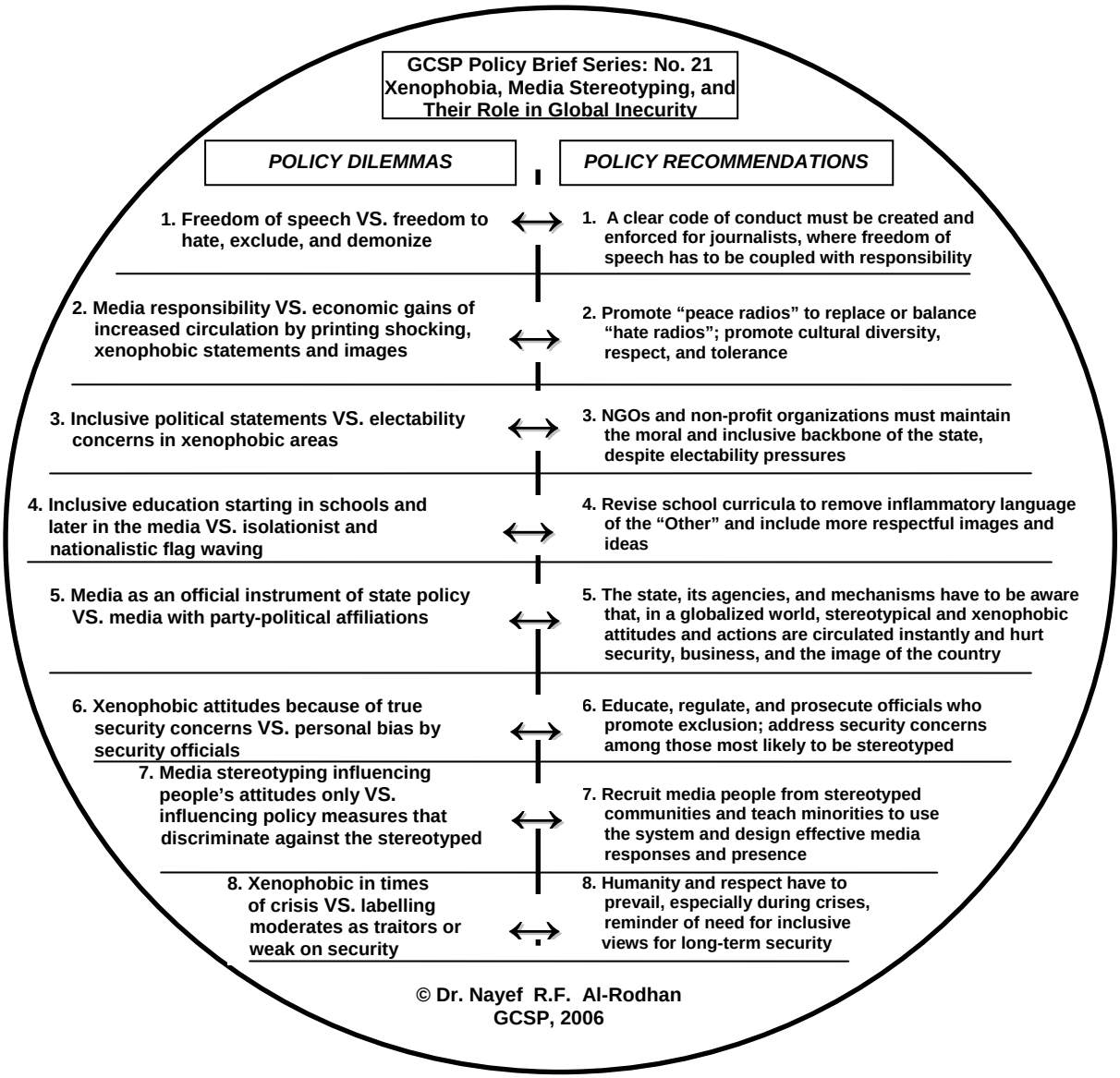
stereotyping are confronted with the dilemma of doing so without curtailing freedom of speech and expression.

Dilemmas and Our Recommendations

The policy challenges posed by the role of the media in either promoting negative or positive images of people are primarily associated with encouraging the media to take steps to curtail xenophobic stereotyping, while at the same time preserving freedom of speech. We suggest eight dilemmas or challenges facing policy makers, as well as eight corresponding recommendations.



The principal dilemma related to responding appropriately to xenophobic stereotyping is limiting the freedom to hate, demonize, and exclude without curbing freedom of speech. We suggest that a clear code of conduct for journalists should be created and enforced, coupling freedom of speech with responsibility.

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Some commentators argue that xenophobic stereotyping simply reflects dominant views within societies. This being the case, it represents a considerable challenge. Media responsibility effectively competes with the economic gains of increased circulation as a result of printing shocking, xenophobic statements or images. Ultimately, underlying prejudices within societies need to be confronted and changed. Long-term measures should be taken to promote more inclusive societies. In order to balance "hate radios," for example, "peace radios" should be promoted, along with cultural diversity, respect, and tolerance.

Another balance that needs to be struck is between making the media an official instrument of state policy or an entity with specific political-party affiliations. Both of these extremes render the media incapable of serving the people effectively. The state, its agencies, and mechanisms have to be aware that, in a globalized world, stereotypical and xenophobic attitudes and actions are circulated instantly and hurt security, business, and the image of the country.

Xenophobic sentiments may increase in times of crisis. This has been perceptible in many countries in relation to immigration and asylum seekers, as well as international terrorism, for example. In such instances, moderates who speak out against this may be labeled as either traitors or weak on security. Yet, humanity and respect must prevail, especially during times of crisis. We need to be reminded of the need for inclusivity as an investment in long-term security. Xenophobia and racism are only likely to generate alienation and frustration, which can only lead to further problems of security and stability.

An additional challenge is to distinguish between xenophobic attitudes related to true security concerns and those generated from the personal bias of security officials. While both are equally reprehensible and ought to be minimized, the latter should be treated separately. Officials who promote exclusion should be educated, regulated, and prosecuted. The security concerns of those most likely to be stereotyped should also be addressed.

The problem is that media stereotyping influences not only people's attitudes but also policies that discriminate against the stereotyped. One way to address this issue is to better represent the cultural diversity of societies in the media establishment itself. Journalists and those working in media organizations ought to be recruited from stereotyped communities. Minorities should also be encouraged and taught how to use the system and to design effective media responses and presence.

Conclusion

Xenophobic media stereotyping should be taken seriously, since it increases insecurity among targeted groups. This can lead to discriminatory policies, tension, and even physical

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violence and genocide. A decrease in opportunities for xenophobic stereotyping needs to be accompanied by long-term educational measures that encourage tolerance and inclusivity within societies, even during times of crisis.

References

[1] J.A. Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000), p. 226.
[2] C. Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 232.
[3] B. Petersson, "Combating Uncertainty, Combating the Global: Scapegoating, Xenophobia and the National-Local Nexus," accessed at http://ask.lub.lu.se/archive/00026066/01/Petersson.htm, p. 3.
[4] For the brief in its entirety, please see the policy brief series as a part of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy's Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security at http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Globalisation/index.htm.
[5] Petersson, *op. cit.*, note 3.

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