CONTEMPORARY P/CVE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Lilah El Sayed & Dr. Jamal Barnes
EDITORS
The views expressed in these chapters are the opinions of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Hedayah and Edith Cowan University, or any of the organizers or sponsors of the International CVE Research Conference 2016.

© Hedayah and Edith Cowan University, 2017
All rights reserved.

Cover design and publication layout by Iman Badwan.
Cover image © Hedayah stock photos.

ABOUT HEDAYAH

Hedayah was created in response to the growing desire from members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and the wider international community for the establishment of an independent, multilateral center devoted to dialogue and communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations. During the ministerial-level launch of the GCTF in New York in September 2011, the U.A.E. offered to serve as the host of the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. In December 2012 Hedayah was inaugurated with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. Hedayah aims to be the premier international center for expertise and experience to counter violent extremism by promoting understanding and sharing of good practice to effectively serve as the true global center to counter violent extremism.

ABOUT EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

Edith Cowan University’s Centre for Global Issues is a multidisciplinary research centre founded in 2015. The centre has a major focus on human rights, migration and asylum seekers, and violent extremism, with a range of projects relating to counter-terrorism, right-wing extremism, and victims and survivors of terrorism. It has ongoing research collaborations with non-governmental organisations and industry partners and has co-sponsored international conferences on terrorism.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Lilah Elsayed is a Research Associate at the Department of Research and Analysis. Lilah joined the Research and Analysis Department as a Research Associate in November 2015 and supports the department by co-managing Hedayah’s Counter-Narrative Library and Hedayah’s Annual International CVE Research Conference and coordinating FTF Programs Catalogue. Lilah is the lead author to Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa: A How to Guide. She graduated with a Master’s degree in International Law, Diplomacy and International Relations from Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi in 2016. Prior to that, Lilah was supporting the Executive Director Office and conducting translation work for the Center in her capacity as an Arabic-English legal translator, certified by the U.A.E Ministry of Justice.

Dr. Jamal Barnes is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia. His research interests include terrorism, international relations, security, human rights and torture. Dr. Barnes is the author of ‘A Genealogy of the Torture Taboo’, published by Routledge (2017).

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 7

SECTION 1

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND NEW DYNAMICS IN P/CVE

1. Towards a Meaningful Integration of Brain Science Research in P/CVE Programming
   Michael Niconchuk 20

2. The Role of Volunteerism PVE in Southeast Asia
   Robert Templer, edited by Jane Lawson 42

SECTION 2

EXPLORING DISTINCT CHALLENGES IN P/CVE

3. New Dynamics of Extremism in South Asia: Case Studies from Kashmir, Bangladesh and Afghanistan
   Milo Comerford 64

4. A Geographical and Temporal Overview of Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia
   Simon Alexis Finley & Robert Templer 76

5. Critical Issues in PVE in South Asia
   Ben Schonveld 90

   Rorisang Lekalake 114

SECTION 3

P/CVE PROGRAMMING BY CASE STUDIES

   Beza Tesfaye 134
The 2016 International Countering Violent Extremism Research Conference was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 6-8 December. Co-hosted by Hedayah and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and sponsored and organised by Coventry University, Edith Cowan University, Swansea University, the Royal United Services Institute, UN Women, and the Wahid Foundation, the Conference presented pioneering research on violent extremism, preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), and radicalization.

This Conference was Hedayah’s third annual Countering Violent Extremism Conference, with the first two being held in Abu Dhabi in 2014 and 2015. As with the previous conferences, the 2016 Conference provided the opportunity for over 250 practitioners and researchers to discuss current P/CVE research and identify research gaps to advance academic and policy knowledge surrounding current P/CVE efforts. This volume provides a collection of papers presented at the Conference.

P/CVE: Recent Developments

Research into P/CVE, radicalization and violent extremism is a new area of study. In fact, “Much of the scholarship about radicalization has emerged in the wake of the September 11 attacks” (Neumann, 2013, p. 878). However, despite radicalization and violent extremism being a new area of study, P/CVE is now seen to be integral to the broader international effort to fight terrorism. In 2014, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2178, identifying the importance of countering violent extremism to prevent...
terrorism and the threat that it poses to international peace and security. The United Nations Secretary General also developed a “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism”, which complements the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Plan of Action states that “Violent extremism is an affront to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. It undermines peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. No country or region is immune from its impacts” (UN, 2015, p. 1).

What explains the rise in interest in P/CVE? One reason is that the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the “home-grown” and “lone wolf” attacks in Europe in recent years, and the international concern with foreign fighters travelling to Iraq and Syria (see The Soufan Group, 2015) has meant that counter-terrorism and national security concerns have dominated government policy making around the world. At the same time, there is also the recognition that traditional or “hard” security responses are often insufficient to deal with the extremist and terrorist threat. Because traditional security policies are often reactive to extremist groups (UNDP, n.d., p. 8), they do not address some of the underlying factors that “radicalize” individuals or prevent individuals and communities from being drawn to violent extremist narratives in the first place.

The emphasis on prevention within P/CVE research and policy has led to the study of wider contextual and societal issues that give rise to radicalization and violent extremism. Known as “push” factors, they include poor governance, such as corruption and a weak rule of law, discrimination and marginalisation of individuals and communities, human rights violations, inequalities and lack of economic opportunities, and unresolved conflicts (UN, 2015, pp. 7-8; Zeiger, 2016, p. 9). These factors create conditions that extremist and terrorist groups can exploit to garner support for their cause. Addressing these factors means that governments and organisations have had to go beyond their reliance on policing and intelligence to address radicalization and violent extremism. Although policing is still very much a part of P/CVE (see OSCE, 2014), P/CVE has been incorporated into a wider range of other policy spaces, including development policy (UNDP, n.d.), peace building in post-conflict zones, education, economics, strengthening gender equality and strengthening governance institutions (see UN, 2015, p. 12).

As many of these structural factors ignore sovereign borders, there have been efforts in recent years to enhance regional cooperation in P/CVE. The European Union has taken action against radicalization and violent extremism by supporting Member States’ P/CVE efforts. It has also established the Radicalization Awareness Network, which among other things, helps “identify best practices and develop new initiatives in tackling radicalization” (see European Commission, 2016, p. 5). Europol (n.d.) established its Internet Referral Unit in 2015, which is directed at countering violent extremist content online. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, 2014) has also developed a P/CVE policy, which emphasizes the importance that public-private partnerships between the state, community, media, and business, among others, have in preventing violent extremism. Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an organization that has traditionally been dominated by traditional, “hard” conceptions of security, has taken an interest in P/CVE research (see Page, 2014).

In addition to addressing “push” factors, recent research has also sought to understand the individual process (“pull” factors) involved in the radicalization process. Many theories have been published seeking to explain how individuals become “radicalized” (see Patel, 2011). However, what seems to be the emerging opinion amongst researchers is that there is no one model of “radicalization.” How individuals come to adopt violent extremist ideas and practices is a complex and individualized process that is influenced by, for example, a person’s history, environment, and identity (Zeiger, 2016).

P/CVE research seeks to not only identify factors that contribute to violent extremism, but as the papers in this volume show, it also seeks to build resilient individuals and communities that are able to challenge violent extremism. However, despite the increasing attention academics, researchers, policy makers, and international and regional organizations have given to the study of violent extremism, there is still a need for research in this area as well as understanding how to address some of the challenges that face contemporary P/CVE research.

**Contemporary Challenges**

One of the major challenges P/CVE research continues to face is the lack of a definition for key terms such as “radicalization”, “violent extremism” or
“extremism” (see Neumann, 2013; UN, 2016, p. 5). Definitional problems are not just academic; they have real world consequences for policy formation. As these terms are relative, ambiguity surrounding them makes it hard to distinguish and identify dangerous categories of behaviour. This does not mean that policies cannot be implemented that seek to address these issues. For example, there is no agreed upon definition of terrorism, but there are many counter-terrorism policies around the world. Further, as the papers in this volume show, researchers and practitioners have developed ideas about how to ameliorate this definitional problem in P/CVE research. However, what it does mean is that definitional problems pose challenges in terms of both identifying extremism as well as how to determine “success” in policy.

Another challenge facing P/CVE research is creating benchmarks that can help policymakers and practitioners determine what “works.” Not only is this related to the definitional problem mentioned above, but it is also related to the fact that countering violent extremism is not something that can happen overnight. P/CVE often requires long-term policies, which means that “successful” policies will be difficult to determine in the short-term. What is also difficult in assessing P/CVE policies is that what works in one part of the world will not necessarily work in another part. As the papers in this volume show, P/CVE policies and research need to be shaped to local conditions. However, even though P/CVE policies must be “localized”, it does not mean that they must discount the “global.” International norms, rules and practices surrounding P/CVE can serve as a guide as to what kinds of policies are appropriate, legal and reflect international standards of justice.

A further challenge is ensuring that P/CVE policies do not unnecessarily infringe upon, and violate, human rights. The authors of the papers in this volume reiterate that upholding human rights is integral to implementing effective P/CVE policies. However, P/CVE policies have at times done the opposite. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism argued in his 2016 report, “Though often characterised as the “soft” cousin of counter-terrorism initiatives, strategies to counter violent extremism contain their own tangible risks for human rights” (UN, 2016, p. 8). Because P/CVE encompasses such a wide range of policy spaces, including development, education, and governance, and involve actors such as the police, government and civil society, policies that are aimed at tackling radicalization or extremism are at risk of discriminating against particular groups in society, infringing upon freedom of expression, or are used by governments to clamp down on dissent (see Open Society, 2016; Patel, 2011; UN, 2016).

Undermining human rights in P/CVE policy can also undermine trust between the state and citizen. The OSCE has stated that key to P/CVE policies is establishing strong public-private partnerships whereby policing agencies, for example, work with communities to improve support for, and effectiveness of, P/CVE policies (OSCE, 2014, p. 20). When trust breaks down not only does this adversely impact on effective community policing, but it can also impact broader relationships between citizen and the state. For example, some P/CVE policies, such as the UK’s Prevent Strategy, have required teachers and doctors to mandatorily report to the state on individuals they believe are vulnerable to radicalization (Open Society, 2016). Asking professionals not trained in security policies to report on “radicalized” individuals not only undermines trust between doctors and patients and teachers and students, but it increases the risk of human rights violations and instrumentalizing these policy spaces to achieve P/CVE objectives (see Open Society, 2016). Understanding how to manage these new partnerships across policy spaces will continue to be a challenge for the future of P/CVE research (Zeiger, 2016, p. 8).

The papers in this volume examine some of these contemporary challenges to P/CVE practice and research, identify areas in need for further research and demonstrate how, despite these challenges, there are ways to overcome them. The first section examines new research methods into P/CVE. The second section explores challenges states face in tackling violent extremism in Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. The third section details the findings from three case studies conducted by the authors into programmes that have sought to implement P/CVE research into practice. The fourth section identifies the continued importance of narratives and counter-narratives against violent extremism, while the fifth section discusses the methods used to evaluate P/CVE research and some of the difficulties researchers face in doing so.

Section 1: Innovative Research and New Dynamics in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

This section explores two new areas and innovative dynamics in current preventing and countering violent extremism research. In a new and exciting area
of research, Niconchuk explores the role neuroscience can play in understanding violent extremism. In *Towards a Meaningful Integration of Brain Science Research in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) Programming*, Niconchuk argues that recent developments in brain science research has allowed scientists to research social decision making processes in the field, allowing scientists to examine the impact contextual issues, such as “marginalization, exclusion, [and] experience of violence” have on the brain. The purpose of using brain science in P/CVE helps to understand factors that lead individuals to go down the path of violent extremism and the relationship “between culture and cognition.”

Following on from Niconchuk’s paper is *The Role of Volunteerism in Preventing Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia: A policy note for the United Nations Volunteers Programme*, written by Robert Templer and edited by Jane E. Lawson. Also introducing an innovative methodology to understand and prevent violent extremism, Templer links the global with the local by identifying the importance of volunteering can play as a methodology for developing effective P/CVE policies in South East Asia. This brief was commissioned by the United Nations Volunteers programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and responds to the UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The paper argues that human rights violations, lack of trust in government institutions (such as police forces), and exclusion of groups within the wider community have been contributing factors to violent extremism. Templer makes the case that volunteerism can create a “whole of society” response that can ameliorate exclusion, improve dialogue and trust-building, and promote civic engagement within a human rights framework.

**Section 2: Exploring Distinct Challenges in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism**

This section examines four papers that focus on the need to take into account local factors when trying to understand violent extremism. Comerford’s paper, *New Dynamics of Extremism in South Asia: Case Studies from Kashmir, Bangladesh and Afghanistan* also emphasises addressing “local” factors when developing effective P/CVE policies. Comerford looks at the problem of militancy in these three countries, making the argument that P/CVE practitioners/policymakers need to understand the drivers of violent extremism in these countries in order to help build the resilience of local populations to extremist narratives and develop counter-narratives.

In *A Geographical and Temporal Overview of Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia*, Finley and Templer examine the rising problem of violent extremism in South East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. The authors argue that the reason for this increase in violent extremism is related to factors such as exclusion, violations of human rights and ongoing conflicts. To counter the rise of violent extremism in South East Asia, Finley and Templer argue more research needs to be carried out into the relationship between gender and extremism and into developing a regional knowledge base concerning violent extremism in South East Asia.

The paper, *Critical Issues in Preventing Violent Extremism* points to the need for research into violent extremism in Asia. Focusing on South Asia, Ben Schonveld argues that key drivers of violent extremism are “local and transnational conflicts”, poor governance and human rights violations, among others. Schonveld recommends a response to violent extremism that focuses heavily on improving human rights and argues that addressing violent extremism requires further research. This is especially in areas relating to gender, and clarifying key terms in the P/CVE policy space, such as “violent extremism” and “terrorism”, to reduce ambiguity and improve how local and international actors respond to violent extremism.

In *Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in North Africa: “Grassroots” Insights from the 2015 Afrobarometer Survey*, Lekalake examines a survey from 2014/2015 to examine “grassroots” perceptions of P/CVE, violent extremism and violence in the region. This paper recognises the importance of understanding local conditions and perceptions to help tailor local responses to violent extremism. Examining survey results from Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Sudan, they showed that different countries viewed security threats differently. The author calls for further comparative and “community-level” research to help inform P/CVE policies that fit local contexts.

**Section 3: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Programming by Case Studies**

Whereas the first and second section of this volume focus on methodology and understanding the importance of the “local”, this section consists of three papers that transform P/CVE research into practice. Tesfaye’s paper, *Critical Choices: Assessing the Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youths’...*
Propensity towards Violence evaluates the USAID-funded programme, “Somali Youth Leaders Initiative” (SYLI), which aims to reduce Somali youth being drawn into violent extremism by “increasing access to formal education and civic engagement.” Interestingly, the authors found that providing access to education, although helpful in reducing feelings of exclusion and providing a space for learning, is not itself sufficient. This is because young people can still feel frustrated that they cannot shape their future or contribute to their community. However, when education is combined with civic engagement in community projects, these frustrations can be ameliorated as it improves the confidence of youth that they can make a valuable contribution to their communities in a non-violent manner.

While Tesfaye’s paper examined the role of formal education in reducing violent extremism, Jovana Saracевич’s paper examines informal education methods in Sandzak, Serbia. In How Susceptible Are the Youth in Sandzak to Islamic Extremism? Saracевич details how for over four years, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia have been employing “non-formal education” such as “workshops, seminars, lectures and youth-led outreach events” to promote counter-narratives to violent extremism by “encourag[ing] critical thinking” and generating “a human rights culture.” In addition to promoting critical thinking skills, the Helsinki Committee also sought to establish trust between police agencies and the youth in Sandzak, recognising that trust is integral to implementing successful P/CVE programs. The recognition that civil society should be involved in P/CVE projects was brought to the fore, with Saracевич arguing that a P/CVE youth group has been crucial in promoting CVE narratives.

Marchland, Denov and Serna develop the important role of civil society in P/CVE research in Walking the Collective Path to Peace: A Community Engagement Strategy to Reconciliation in the Context of Armed Conflict in Colombia. In this paper, the authors examine the work of Agape for Colombia, a volunteer organisation that has used a community-engagement strategy to build counter-narratives for reconciliation in Colombia. The authors show how reconciliation gatherings that comprise of victims/survivors, perpetrators and witnesses of violence, can, through dialogue, transform narratives of violence into narratives of peace. Agape for Colombia’s reconciliation gatherings have important implications for violent extremism and the positive role that changing violent narratives that have been produced from war can have in helping reduce the risk of future radicalization and violence.

Section 4: Narratives and Counter-Narratives to Violent Extremism

Key to P/CVE research is to understand the narratives of violent extremist and terrorist groups, and develop counter-narratives to undermine terrorist and violent extremist messaging. This section comprises of two papers that address narratives and counter-narratives respectively. Building upon the important role that social media plays in disseminating violent extremism narratives and how violent extremist groups use social media to recruit, Yalcinkaya et al. analyse how Turkish speaking Daesh supporters use the social media service, Twitter, to spread violent extremist narratives. The paper, Twitter Social Network Analysis on Turkish Speaking Daesh Supporters builds bridges between security studies and computer science and identifies Twitter networks of Turkish speaking Daesh supporters, the percentage that disseminate Daesh propaganda, as well as the agenda or topic of their tweets.

Zeiger’s paper, Counter-Narratives to Violent Extremism in South East Asia: A Preliminary Assessment, examines counter-narratives in the South East Asian region, identifying key research gaps. Focusing on several countries, including “Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand”, Zeiger draws upon two projects coordinated by Hedayah: a good practice guide for counter-narratives, entitled Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in South East Asia: A How-To Guide and Hedayah’s Counter-Narrative Library. The first project identifies best practice in the counter-narrative space, while the second project seeks to undermine extremist narratives. Zeiger utilizes these resources as well as interviews with policymakers to make several key recommendations around how to move forward in strengthening counter-narratives in South-East Asia.

Section 5: Methods for P/CVE and Monitoring, Measurement and Evaluation Methods

The final section of this volume concerns how P/CVE research is measured and evaluated, and the challenges in doing so. Matthew Lawrence and Ian Jamison’s essay, Measuring the Impact of a Global Dialogue Programme links with the papers in section three by highlighting the important role education plays in P/CVE research and practice. Lawrence and Jamison examine the Tony Blair Institute’s Generation Global programme, which aims to teach students between the ages of 12-17 critical thinking skills to challenge intolerance, ste-
reotypes and cultural misunderstandings that can leave students vulnerable to extremism. The study found the programme improved students’ ability to be more open-minded. The paper also argued that more research is needed on the long-term effects of education in P/CVE policy.

Urwin highlights the importance of studying P/CVE at a local level in *Everyday CVE Indicators: A Case Study from Afghanistan*. As discussed above, the difficulty of determining what constitutes “violent extremism” and how to measure whether policies have “worked” plagues P/CVE research. Urwin argues one way around this problem is to examine what indicators everyday people use to understand whether violent extremism is increasing or decreasing in their community. The United States Institute of Peace is currently employing these everyday indicators in Afghanistan, and Urwin identifies some of the initial findings of this research. The project offers insights into how to shape P/CVE strategy to better “fit” local conditions by providing benchmarks in which to measure success.

**Conclusion**

The papers in this volume represent the forefront of P/CVE research. They identify not only the areas that are in need of further research, but the continued challenges of implementing P/CVE research. Similar to Hedayah’s previous two volumes from the 2014 and 2015 International Countering Violent Extremism Conference, this volume advances a new and important area of research and aims to inform P/CVE policy around the world.

**REFERENCES**


...belonging, like injustice or oppression, is tremendously powerful, and has a power evidenced at the biopsychosocial, and ideological levels. That power can take individuals towards or away from extremism."

- Michael Niconchuk

TOWARDS A MEANINGFUL INTEGRATION OF BRAIN SCIENCE RESEARCH IN PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (P/CVE) PROGRAMMING

Michael Niconchuk

Introduction

In September 2014, I sat across the table from a young Syrian refugee, Hamze, aged 24, whose cousin had recently returned to Syria to fight “for the homeland” with Jabhat Al-Nusra. Hamze was distraught, “why did Walid join them?” he wondered. His leg was shaking, he was confused, and deeply troubled.

After a long pause, Hamze looked at me and said, “I think heroes and terrorists are formed in the same context, and sometimes people like Walid don’t realize which choice they’re making.” He put down his tea. His legs and mind were growing restless.

Individuals decide to be extremists. Extremists are formed, not born, meaning that any individual extremist is best studied in light of his or her context, environment, and history (Moghaddam, 2005; Atran, 2010; King & Taylor, 2011). For better or worse, Hamze is correct about his cousin Walid insofar as much evidence around the circumstances that can facilitate extremism—adversity, marginalization, perceived oppression, social immobility, and the need to belong, among other circumstances—are not deterministically negative (Moghaddam, 2005). Millions of people, Hamze included, who live through circumstances similar to Walid will resist the allure of extremist groups (see also Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008; Kurzman, 2011). In the study of violent extremism, it is therefore important to explore not just which decisions youth like Walid make, but how we all make social decisions towards or away from violence. And, for all of us, social decisions start in the brain.

- Michael Niconchuk
From the start, the job of translational brain science research for P/CVE is to make some actionable link between these contextual issues that Hamze alluded to, including marginalization, exclusion, experience of violence, etc., and an understanding of how the brain works to promote certain behaviors. Indeed, brain science and its sub-fields have historically tended to strip away context in laboratory settings. Now, however, researchers are increasingly taking their science out of the laboratory and to study social decision making in dynamic field settings, including among populations more traditionally seen as “at-risk” for violent extremism (Atran 2016; Dean 2014; Dehghani et al 2010; Harris & Fiske, 2011; Kaplan, Gimbel, & Harris, 2016; Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016; Spitaletta, 2016).

The “Normalcy” of Violent Extremism

Multiple research studies, empirical and anecdotal, have confirmed that there is no link between mental illness, or psychological “abnormality” more generally, and participation in violent extremist groups (Ruby, 2002; Atran, 2003; Silke, 2008; Dean, 2014), though the relationship between psychopathology and “lone wolf” terrorists remains contested (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014). From a psychological perspective, violent extremists are generally “normal,” and their normality facilitates research into the extremist brain, as it is frighteningly similar to most other brains.

Even in the absence of psychopathology, it is usually easy to construct extremism profiles in hindsight. The cases of Walid, of Alexandre Bissonnette in Quebec, Anis Amri in Germany, and countless others show clear profiles in retrospect. Feelings of exclusion, identity threat, hopelessness, xenophobia, racism, and intolerance, are common themes in their stories. Thankfully, few move from extremist thought to extremist action (Moghaddam, 2005; see also Kurzman, 2011), but nevertheless, Walid, Alexandre, and Anis are not necessarily rare in the ways they think. It is precisely the commonality of extremist “profiles” among youth around the world that suggests an urgency for brain science researchers to study those common traits and perceptions that assist violent extremism and to address them at their start. Ultimately, the role of brain science research in P/CVE should focus less on how certain individuals move from thought and into action, but rather on exploring how we may be able to curb growing extremism, violent or not, at its inception, and at a local level.

Back to the Start: How the Social Brain Works

Social neuroscience, social cognition, and social psychology have historically explored the phenomenon of violent extremism at individual and group levels, recognizing that individual perceptions and characteristics often merge with group dynamics to create a potent cocktail in the mind, which can translate to violent behavior (see King & Taylor, 2011, for a review; Atran, 2010, 2016; Ginges, Atran, Sachdeva, & Medin, 2011). The lowest common denominators among violent extremists leave much to be desired, but researchers have begun, through a sort of forensic hypothesizing, to identify certain key processes in the normal mind that provide useful insights for policymakers and practitioners. Processes of interest include social identity formation, perceived injustice or relative deprivation, group bonding, belonging, and intergroup dehumanization. For practitioners, understanding any of those particular issues requires at least a basic understanding of how the “social brain” functions.

First, the brain has a few basic tasks, most generally: (1) staying alive, (2) perceiving the world around us, (3) emoting, (4) thinking, and (5) acting (Sasscer-Burgos, 2014). These functions mostly operate below our conscious awareness. For example, we don’t need to calculate that we should feel thirsty. Our body and brain work together to give us a sign that we need to drink something, we feel the need. Our brain has a set of models and expectations that we only recognize as end products or feelings, feelings that range from thirst, all the way to the desire for violent retribution.

As said, many of the decisions we make and actions we take are governed by processes that we cannot access or do not make an effort to access. Small decisions and major decisions alike are processed in the brain, and certain external experiences, such as conflict, violence, stress, or love and affection, can have demonstrable effects on how our minds engage with social stimuli and encourage certain behaviors, in service of staying alive and well (Bowlby, 2005; Van Der Kolk, 2014; Macphail, Niconchuk, & Elwer, 2017). For example, the experience of social exclusion activates the human stress response (Blackhart, Eckel, & Tice, 2007; Bass, Stednitz, Simonson, Shen, & Ghatan, 2014), and can negatively affect how we process and store information (Lee et al, 2007; Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). In another example, groups of individuals that are more tightly connected, and show more physical affection with one another make more efficient organizational decisions and perform better (Kraus, Huang, & Keltner, 2010). In short, social dynamics and experiences affect us on unconscious levels. Put differently, interpersonal experiences, social context, and subjective perceptions translate into objective social and policy
challenges, insofar as such processes affect how individuals engage with the social world around them and within social groups.

There are many social psychological processes, including, but not limited to social identity, perceived threats, and the need to belong, that, if better understood, could enrich practitioners’ efforts to design interventions that diminish or counter the allure and appeal of violent extremist organizations (VEOs). A meaningful role for psychology and neuroscience in P/CVE is therefore part forensic, part theoretical, and part applied. It requires close observation and analysis, where possible, of pathological, psychological, and social cognitive patterns of known extremists, but also requires laboratory and field research to enrich understandings of mechanisms that we all share, and how these mechanisms potentially factor into violent extremist decisions. Ultimately, examining violent extremism through the lens of social cognition and social neuroscience brings us to what is truly the lowest common denominator, cells and neurons. By developing a better understanding of our shared susceptibility to extremist thinking, we may be able to better understand what drives certain people and groups to acts of violent extremism.

Identity and Threat in the Brain

There are core concepts that we know are important in understanding what drives extremist thought and, eventually, violence (King & Taylor, 2011; Ginges et al, 2011; Giordano, 2016). Two of these core issues are social identity and threats to identity. As mentioned, the brain prioritizes survival, and for that reason, the brain is constantly alert, scanning for threats to individual safety and security (LeDoux, 2000, 2003; Öhman, 2005; Neuberg, Kenrick, & Schaller, 2011). The human brain is highly developed compared to other species, and individual safety and security, in humans, encompasses physical as well as abstract elements (see Greene, 2014; LeDoux, 2015). Basically, the more primitive areas of the brain (such as the amygdala, thalamus, and hippocampus) are constantly attuned to physical or abstract threats to safety, including threats to our national, ethnic, religious, or other social group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Phelps et al, 2001; Berns & Atran, 2012; Greene, 2014; van Bavel, Hackel, & Xiao, 2014; LeDoux, 2015; Kaplan et al, 2016; Lüders, Jonas, Fritsche, & Agroskin, 2016).

Many researchers have explored extremism through the lens of social identity and identity threat (Al Raffie, 2013; van Bergen, Feddes, Doosje, & Pels, 2013; Atran, 2016; Lüders et al, 2016), and various theories converge on the notion that the human mind orients cognition and neural functioning for threat amelioration and identity maintenance, often using groups as a means to achieve those goals (see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Jonas et al, 2014).

Across contemporary theories, including social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg 2007a, 2007b), ontological security theory (Kinnvall, 2004), and the devoted actor hypothesis (see Atran, 2016), we have learned that, in the effort to protect our identities, the social brain mobilizes against perceived risks, incoming information, and social groups, even if that leads to dangerous or violent outcomes.

In an example from American politics, recent neuroscience research (Kaplan et al, 2016) has shown that the brains of individuals with entrenched political identities (i.e. Democrat or Republican) respond to the presentation of evidence in contrast to their opinions with high levels of activation of threat centers in the brain. In this way, the brain’s response to identity threats is similar to its response to physical threats (LeDoux, 2000; Ochsner & Gross, 2005; Dedovic, Duchesne, Andrews, Engert, & Pruessner, 2009). And, when the brain detects threat, it is harder for an individual to think logically, rationally, or empathetically, as it prioritizes survival over all else (Van der Kolk 2015; LeDoux 2015; Chang, Krosch, & Cikara, 2016). Importantly, across anecdotal studies of extremists (Al Raffie, 2013; Proctor, 2015), and including the story of Alexandre Bissonnette, the notion of feeling threatened at the level of personal or group identity played some role in self-reported journeys toward extremism.

Complementing research on social identity and identity threats, CVE researchers have worked to unpack possible aspects of identity protection specific to VEOs through their study of sacred values (Dehghani et al, 2010; Ginges, Atran, Sachdeva, & Medin, 2011; Sheikh, Ginges, & Atran, 2013). Sacred values, or values which are inflexible to change, and likely rooted in existential identity issues (e.g. Iran’s perceived “right” to nuclear technology, the honor of Sunni Muslim women and children, the superiority of Muslims, gun ownership in America, etc) are not just different from rational-choice decisions in their level of emotionality; they are actually represented differently in the brain. Perceptions of sacred value conflicts activate unique parts of the brain that are responsible for rules formation, above and beyond parts of the brain responsible for cost-benefit analysis (Berns et al, 2012). In other words, negotiations and narratives that include certain core sacred issues are going to be processed differently in the brain in a way that traditional cost-benefit logic does not apply (Ginges, Atran, Medin, & Shikaki, 2007).

Particularly in the context of VEO messaging, there is a clear intent to capitalize on the way individuals respond to perceived identity threats and sacred
value threats (Spitaletta 2016; Pelletier, Lundmark, Gardner, Ligon, & Kilinc, 2016). Moreover, much of Daesh (ISIS)’s worldview rests on an apocalyptic narrative which, by its nature, provokes a sense of identity or existential threat, and focuses on the violation of Muslim’s rights, values, and existence. In light of this, much effort (Baker & Canna 2010; Orlina, & Desjardins, 2012; Spitaletta, 2016) has been made to dissect the science of the threat-based engagement that has become a hallmark of VEOs.

Undoubtedly, identity struggles and sacred values are critical issues in individuals’ motivation for joining extremist groups, and VEO narratives repeatedly invoke apocalyptic, sacred rhetoric as rallying cries or justifications for brutal violence. This strategy taps into the brain’s predisposition to protect the individual against real and perceived threats, and can be quite potent, especially when combined with the appeal to humans’ deep need to belong.

The Need to Belong, to Something

Research on identity and threat is closely linked to research on group belonging and the powerful role of peer attachments. Lebanese author Amin Maalouf (2011) notes:

“For people involved in conflict arising out of identity, for those who have suffered and been afraid, nothing else exists except ‘them’ and ‘us,’ the insult and the atonement. ‘We’ are necessarily and by definition innocent victims; ‘they’ are necessarily guilty and have long been so” (p. 33)

In his text, Maalouf describes the powerful role of collective identities, group membership, and the need to belong in the perpetuation of violence. The need to belong is one of the fundamental motivations of human behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). That motivation can elevate humans to some of the most pro-social sensibilities, but can also quickly escalate inter-group violence, especially in the context of perceived threat to our real or imagined group (Jonas et al, 2014). Echoing Hamze’s view from our introduction, belonging, like injustice or oppression, is tremendously powerful, and has a power evidenced at the biopsychosocial, and ideological levels. That power can take individuals towards or away from extremism.

Generally, from a biopsychosocial perspective, bonding and peer influence matter; and, while they can facilitate radicalization, they also have a host of positive implications for an individual and his or her group. For example, bonding hormones (particularly oxytocin) within the context of social groups are linked to more efficacious group decisions (De Wilde; Ten Velden; & De Dreu, 2017), heightened in-group empathy (De Dreu & Kret, 2016), and more intra-group altruism (De Dreu et al, 2010). Furthermore, data from Jordan’s Za’atari Refugee Camp suggests that among refugees, a strong sense of belonging may orient empathy towards foreigners (Niconchuk, Guinote, & Harris, 2017), and data from youth refugees globally suggests that the presence of strong relational supports is a key factor of resilience to stress (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016).

Indeed, the need to belong is a key motivator of behavior, and group belonging can be a powerful source of resilience, as much as it can be a catalyst for violence. In the case of the attackers in Paris in November 2015, or the Boston Marathon bombing perpetrators, human, intra-group attachments and relationships played an important role in their radicalization. Scott Atran’s (2010) pioneering research in Talking to the Enemy delved deeply into the power of social bonds in facilitating radicalization, and a number of studies have confirmed the role of relationships in radicalization processes (Silke, 2008; Perliger & Pedahzur, 2011; Helfstein, 2012; Mink, 2015).

Social psychology and neuroscience have deeply explored the role of group belonging and relationships in violent extremism (Silke, 2008; Atran, 2010; 2016; Ginges et al, 2011; Perliger & Pedahzur, 2011; Berns & Atran, 2012; Helfstein, 2012; Mink, 2015), and suggest that in the context of group belonging, a sense of threat to the in-group can facilitate the intensification of in-group identity, which some scholars also explore as identity “fusion” (Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012). Intensification of group identity can lead to unquestioning ascription to group norms (Galinsky, Magee, Grunfeld, Whiston, & Liljenquist, 2008) and the dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) of out-groups (Demoulin et al, 2009; Hackel, Looser, & van Bavel, 2014). At the neural level, dehumanization is the brain’s lack of spontaneous activation of areas responsible for emotion and mental state recognition in response to specific individuals and groups (Haslam, 2006). Consequently, dehumanization can facilitate anti-social treatment of those persons (Harris & Fiske, 2011) and has been attributed as a critical mechanism facilitating inter-group conflict (Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016).

Similarly, research on collective relative deprivation, meaning the “subjective experience of unjust disadvantage” (van Zomeren et al, 2008, p. 505), has been linked to increased desire for retribution (van Bergen et al, 2015), as well as increased tendency for collective action (van Zomeren et al, 2008). Specifically, van Zomeren and colleagues (2008) found that perceived collective injustice
was a strong predictor of anti-social collective action. Furthermore, van Bergen and colleagues (2015) later showed, in a study of more than 200 Muslim Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch youth, that attitudes towards in-group defense (i.e., aggressive, retributive collective action) were a function of perceived relative deprivation of an individual’s in-group, compared to the out-group (i.e. white Dutch).

Overall, then, social psychology and neuroscience research confirm that attachments are critical for survival, and can encourage either cooperation or conflict, depending on the landscape of threats and perceptions of the in-group versus out-groups. While group belonging may catalyze our sense of place, security, and identity, intensified belonging also has potential implications for radicalization or violent extremism. Thus, the challenge for practitioners and policymakers is to leverage what is known about how identity, perceived threat, and group belonging function in the mind to design better initiatives to prevent individual and collective radicalization.

The Search for Predictive Models

The laboratory and field evidence explored above unpacks some of those lowest common denominators, including social identity, threat, and belonging, that were evident in the cases of Walid, Alexandre, Anis, the Boston Marathon attackers, and many others. Each of these denominators, on their own or in combination, can orient cognition towards cooperation in our societies, or towards intergroup violence (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Maalouf, 2005; Moghaddam, 2005; Chang et al. 2016). As noted, identity conflicts, perceived threats, and disrupted sense of belonging are experienced by millions of individuals around the world who experience systemic exclusion, relative deprivation, and are fed constant “us versus them” narratives. Not all youth who experience the biopsychosocial phenomena of perceived threat, sacred values violation, or social exclusion will become extremists (see Moghaddam, 2005; Atran, 2010). For this reason, future studies should focus on how these phenomena function in combination, and how they are experienced in different communities around the world.

Intelligence agencies and civil society would greatly benefit from diagnostics or predictive profiles of the extremist that take into account major research findings on the social brain, identity, sacred values, perceived injustice, and belonging. Indeed, there have been attempts to develop threat profiling and other predictive tools for law enforcement and intelligence to assess individuals’ and groups’ likelihood of imminently committing violence (see Borum, Bartel, & Forth, 2006; Pressman, 2009; Dean, 2014; Pressman & Flockton, 2014; Egan et al, 2016; Spitaletta, 2016). Of course, an accurate, user-friendly predictive tool able to predict either broad-spectrum risk or imminent commission of violence could potentially revolutionize P/CVE programming if it led to efficient targeting and intervention. However, such a tool could also facilitate witch hunts and punitive models of prevention that over-rely on prediction of potential, and potentially even presume guilt without the commission of a criminal act. Fundamentally, there is an important difference between a potential perpetration risk and imminent criminal action, and the preservation of that distinction is critical for the maintenance of civil liberties in the P/CVE context.

Specifically, having extremist thoughts or violent extremist tendencies is not a crime, but that understanding should not diminish the importance of data from brain sciences. Recently, terrorism expert Robert Pape and neuroscientist John Decety have been applying functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to the issue of attraction to VEOs. Pape and Decety, under the Social and Neurological Construction of Martyrdom Project (Huang & Bacher, 2015), are currently attempting to explore how different individuals’ brains react to martyrdom-oriented and extremist messaging. For example, is there activation of reward and pleasure sensors in certain individuals who belong to certain groups? Is there differential activation of empathy sensors between individuals who view certain images of extremist content? This research, and initiatives like it, may provide insight into the way certain contextual factors, such as social and political views, economic status, self-perceptions, social dominance preferences, and intergroup perceptions, among many other factors, correlate with neural activation in response to certain messaging. Such insights could be applied in multiple social policy contexts. For example, would altering individuals’ sense of belonging to different social groups affect how they respond to extremist messaging? While the answers to such questions matter, the law enforcement applications and relevance of this data should be limited.

Overall, brain and behavioral sciences will likely never be able to pinpoint with certainty a formula that delineates the line between “at-risk” to “action ready” in any given individual, given the relative commonality of the major issues discussed here, including social identity, identity threats, sacred values, and group belonging. That said, if used in combination with social network analysis, intelligence data, and demographic data from youth programming, biopsychosocial data can provide nuance to localized efforts to address root causes of violent extremism, and will help organizations design activities that target certain ways of thinking, and the social dynamics that encourage cer-
tain ways of thinking. In other words, data from the brain sciences can contribute nuance and urgency to the goal of addressing the root conditions that facilitate violent extremism.

The Challenge of Science-informed Design

In this paper we have discussed the basic functioning of the social brain as well as major lines of inquiry in the brain sciences, particularly social identity, identity threat, and the need to belong, and how these are related to the allure of violent extremism and VEOs. Overall, data from social psychology and social neuroscience studies have an important role in P/CVE, though scholars should approach such data and its integration with a healthy level of caution.

Brain science data is important for P/CVE for a number of reasons. First, such data may help confirm certain informed hunches or anecdotal evidence about what encourages individuals to join VEOs. Second, the opposite is just as true, as brain science studies can disprove dangerous assumptions about the logic, illogic, rationality, or abnormality of young people’s decisions to join VEOs. Third, brain science data can facilitate the contextualization and local adaptation of P/CVE programs, as we know there is a complex interaction between culture and cognition (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Chiao, 2009). Fourth, brain science paradigms can foster more specific measurement of impact in P/CVE programs, as it allows for the analysis of changes at the biopsychosocial level.

While researchers and practitioners will continue to innovate across sectors, and push the boundaries and agendas of each other’s disciplines, we envision six concrete avenues for healthy collaboration between P/CVE practitioners and brain science researchers:

**DESIGN** research that aims to better understand how “they” (e.g. Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, the KKK, neo-Nazi groups) work on the social, cognitive, and biological levels, in order to better design programs to “counter” them (i.e. watch your opponents’ matches before entering the playing field with them).

**FOSTER** relationships between INGOs, government agencies, and academic institutions to develop user-friendly, accessible measurement tools which perform well against fMRI, physiological, and other “traditional” measures (e.g. design survey questions that for a field setting that have proven to align with neural activation in an fMRI setting).

**GIVE** communities access to knowledge about their brains, their bodies, and the effect of social relationships, identity, perceptions of injustice, stress, and other contextual factors on their social decision-making. Put simply, give communities greater resources for self-awareness when it comes to decisions around radicalization and group membership.

**LEVERAGE** insights from brain science to advocate for high-level policy reform and initiatives. For example, as empirical data continues to show a link between perceived deprivation and increased likelihood of violent collective action, work with policymakers to explore and address the causes of these underlying perceptions in key at-risk areas.

**INCORPORATE** relevant behavioral, social-cognitive, and biological data collection tools (e.g. perception data, dehumanization metrics, stress levels, feelings of belonging to different groups) into early research, design, and targeting efforts for PVE programs.
CONSIDER the creation of “cognitive geographies” that bridge social, cognitive, psychological, and biological data with demographic data. In other words, attempt to psychically map relevant data from the brain sciences, in areas of political violence and transition (e.g., do youth in certain areas of Beirut have greater certainty in their social identities than youth in South Beirut? Does this also map on to social network or education data? How should an organization offer specialized programming in different geographic areas based on that data?)

As we have discussed, no single study or tool from the brain sciences will be able to identify, with certainty, a specific combination of factors that will lead an individual to become a violent extremist. However, data from the brain sciences can significantly enrich localized efforts to understand the psychological dynamics behind individuals and specific groups’ decisions towards, and also away from, violence. Perhaps uncomfortably in its initial stages, the marriage of brain sciences and P/CVE practice has impressive synergistic potential. Years of data from each discipline can be merged to better map and understand the allure of violent extremism as an embodied phenomenon, and to engineer solutions that take into account the depth of individuals’ interaction with the social world, from the cell, to the self, and to society.

REFERENCES


INTEGRATION OF BRAIN SCIENCE IN P/CVE


Reducing violent extremism requires an array of responses to create societies that offer peaceful means to resolve differences. Across Southeast Asia, countries most afflicted by extremism have suffered long-running conflicts. Resolving these wars, promoting open and tolerant societies, improving the status of women and minorities and addressing the underlying causes of violence are all essential ways to tackle extremism.

In light of the adoption of the Secretary General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the United Nations Volunteers programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific commissioned a discussion paper which explores and analyzes the contribution of volunteerism to the prevention of radicalization and in turn violent extremism in Asia and the Pacific. The following is an excerpt from the broader research exploring volunteerism in preventing violent extremism (PVE) within Southeast Asia.

Volunteerism, as defined within a human rights framework, has already been shown to produce stronger and more resilient communities that can address internal differences and face external stresses. Volunteerism, where perceived as an impartial force for positive change by motivated individuals, can help unite people who are otherwise divided, improve cooperation and dialogue and galvanize wider community participation.

The potential links between volunteerism and the prevention of violent extremism are complex. On the one hand, both provide options, networks to act and a
sense of purpose and community among specific groups, including young people. On the other hand, many of the grievances that fuel violent extremism are tied to exclusion and marginalization. Where volunteerism is able to promote inclusion through the development and creation of formal and informal infrastructures for civic engagement, trust-building, ownership and participation, it could form an indispensable tool in the fight against violent extremism.

This discussion paper is based on desk research and expert interviews. Research covered much of the published academic and policy work on volunteering in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. There is little research that links the two issues, furthermore, evidence of the impact of volunteering initiatives being disproportionately focused on Europe and North America. However, there is a reasonably clear understanding of the benefits of volunteerism and how that might fit into PVE policies. Given the scale and variety of both voluntary work and extremism this paper will only be able to offer a snapshot of what is a complex matrix of issues impacting on each other.

**Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia**

Much violent extremism comes out of existing conflict and this has been particularly evident in Southeast Asia (Allan, Glazzard, Jesperson, Reddy-Tumu, & Winterbotham, 2015). In the past 25 years, 88 percent of terrorist attacks have taken place in countries at war. There is also a high correlation between human rights abuses, religious intolerance and terrorism (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015).

Even while giving the appearance of international links and global reach, violent extremism is very specific to national context. Across Southeast Asia it is seen most in those countries already in some form of subnational conflict. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the Philippines saw extremism increase in the context of national liberation movements against religious and political culture, in Thailand there was an increase due to national liberation movements against political culture. Myanmar and Malaysia have until recently seen little violent extremism but may be increasingly vulnerable. Indonesia, the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world has seen the number of attacks decline markedly.

One of the greatest concerns today is the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the Middle East. So far Southeast Asia has not provided many of the recruits drawn to the organization (Rasmussen, 2016; Ramsey, 2012). However, they may yet inspire attacks in the region, possibly by those returning from the Middle East. One such event in January 2016, in Jakarta, left four civilians dead and provoked anxiety as a possible harbinger of threats to come (Institute for the Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), 2016). Several groups in the southern Philippines have pledged allegiance to ISIS although this may not make much difference to their activities or range of action, both of which are constrained by limited membership based on clan and family links.

In terms of regional responses, there is a growing realization that security and human rights are two sides of a coin and do not have to be traded off against each other in efforts to reduce extremism (“Global Terrorism Database,” n.d.-a). Abusive police forces reduce trust in communities, who are less likely to report or confront potential violent extremists in their midst. Extremist groups also often try to provoke governments into violent backlashes in order to build their support. Indonesia has seen a marked decline in the number of violent incidents over the past decade, as have Thailand and the Philippines (”Global Terrorism Database,” n.d.-b). In Indonesia, conflict resolution, improved policing, community engagement and de-radicalization programmes and also effectiveness implementation of terrorism legislation may all have contributed to declines although evidence based research is limited. But changing technologies and new forms of extremism and violence elsewhere are rapidly changing the dynamics. Long-term approaches will be key to success.

**Extremism and Youth**

It is mostly young men who join violent organizations, be they criminal gangs or jihadi groups. Motivating factors are diverse: thrill seeking; revenge for perceived wrongs; status; and membership in a group (Venhaus, 2010). What raises the risks of radicalization is a sense of exclusion from the community or the lack of a sense of mission in life. The anthropologist Scott Atran concluded from extensive interviews among jihadis around the world that they sought out what he termed “costly commitments” to their new community. People want to make sacrifices, feel part of a wider mission and give up something for their ideals. They were not recruited or brainwashed in any way but came to an understanding of their ambitions on their own. What they wanted was a sacrifice to what they saw as a higher ideal (Atran, 2010).

Research reveals many of those who join violent groups have been somewhat aimless; they have often existed on the fringes of society, engaged in illegal drug use and survived as petty criminals (Cottee, 2016). Very few have much education, particularly in religion, and many, particularly Europeans who have joined ISIS, have little experience of how their religion is lived on a daily basis (Cottee,
to address their needs can lead to failures in de-radicalization schemes. Their further social dislocation may cause radicalization to worsen.

**Contribution of Volunteerism**

The contribution of volunteerism to peace and development outcomes is generally under-researched. Evidence from around the world suggests both individual and wider societal benefits (UNV, 2015). Volunteerism is a universal activity. However, the nature of volunteerism, how it is expressed and organized can vary widely, and contextual differences between countries alongside differences between formal and informal institutions for volunteering, organizations, infrastructure and enabling environments requires further research and comparative analysis.

Evidence points to a number of outcomes associated with volunteerism. On an individual level, there appears to be a range of advantages depending on age and personal circumstances (Meier & Stutzer, 2008). At a societal level volunteerism can be associated with social trust. For example, in some contexts through the establishment of common goals and implementation towards those goals, volunteering creates bonds between different people and groups that are stronger than those established by simple contact in a public space (Sherif, 1958). In some cases volunteers are perceived as a neutral force for good, and can therefore unite people who are otherwise divided (UNV, 2011).

Volunteer activity can contribute to increased social capital in a number of ways, through strengthening, increasing and/or diversifying the nature of social contacts (Putnam & Bowling, 2000). For example, increased cohesion within communities through shared values and beliefs in the support of others. The idea breaks down into four components: a sense of membership; a belief that individuals matter to the group; an understanding of shared history and a belief that one’s needs will be met by the community. However, the idea of membership can be exclusionary and some research suggests volunteering does not always increase contact between different groups (Ramsey, 2012).

In terms of diversification of contacts and building networks, as volunteering often takes places within local religious and social groups, it may not necessarily result in greater interaction with members of other groups. However, when it does take place across societal boundaries it improves social trust and expands empathy as well as influencing changes in social norms through exposure to outside beliefs and practices highlighting the importance of experiencing diversity rather than understanding diversity (Little, 2016). Contact across groups can

---

1 This was the case with the Madrid Atocha Station bombers whose associations were forged in soccer and drug trafficking.

2 Marriage was part of a recruitment strategy, although this appears to be changing given the military pressure on ISIS and a growing realization of the gaps between ISIS’s presentation of life in Raqqa and Mosul and the grim reality.
have a lasting impact, even on those involved in the most intractable conflicts. The effects of contact are improved if people work together on projects, using that process to address their differences while working to a common goal.

Volunteering also proves valuable during the reintegration of former fighters. Volunteerism has been part of the peace process in Mindanao with organizations such as the Volunteers for Information and Development Assistance (VIDA) working with the families of members of the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to re-integrate into communities (Institute of Development Study, 2014). Mindanao has seen a number of volunteer groups lead part of the peace process; the Philippines has a very active civil society and many religious volunteer groups. Although violence is still a problem across the Southern Philippines, the extent of it has declined in recent years and there is a greater acceptance of the peace process. Building trust and social cohesion is a critical part of this, particularly among Muslims who still often feel marginalized from mainstream Philippines society. The peace process has been plagued with political and legal problems in Manila but on the ground in Mindanao has seen some remarkable successes led by civil society in reducing violence.

Volunteerism and associated structures can provide spaces and networks to act at a number of levels, including dialogue between different stakeholders. Evidence suggests that many volunteers are in the forefront of efforts to improve the way they and their fellow citizens are governed and engaged, playing a vital role in making governments worldwide more accountable and responsive to their citizens. However, some degree of openness and responsiveness from government is usually a prerequisite for widespread participation and widening participation through volunteerism (United Nations, 2015).

Volunteerism and Preventing Violent Extremism

As with almost all policies, it is not easy to point to a direct relationship and impact of volunteerism on extremism. The complexity of radicalization and the difficulties of research make it very hard to show direct connections. But part of a PVE strategy is about building a resistant and resilient community and, here, volunteering plays an important role by helping societies stay stable, recover and return to normal.

Risks of PVE Programming in General

The United Nations Development Programme research shows national policies and programs for the prevention of violent extremism are often placed within state controlled national security programs (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). The greatest vulnerability of PVE programming has been in the belief communities are being singled out for government action in a manner that is discriminatory and stigmatizing. Across Europe, Muslim communities have protested against PVE campaigns, saying they unfairly target innocent people and impose greater levels of surveillance on them than the society at large (Frazer & Nunnlist, 2015). This undermines the trust that is necessary for people to pass on useful information about extremism and actively participate in maintaining the security of their own communities. While security responses will always be part of the solution, these approaches cannot be the sole focus of policymakers as they need to include trust and social dimensions.

PVE are more effective once connected to citizen engagement activities. Volunteering has the potential to contribute to these factors (“Promoting Inclusion Preventing Extremism (PIPE),” 2016). Resilient, open and inclusive communities that have access to political processes and the means to address social and economic problems can combat extremism. An in depth study of volunteer initiatives from individual and community actions, small-scale, to national and international actions highlighted that volunteering has the power to break stereotypes, promote understanding and tolerance of differences (“Promoting Inclusion Preventing Extremism (PIPE),” 2016). In this way, volunteering is in an ideal position to provide a basis and a framework for inclusive communities and societies.

Volunteerism, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

There is a growing acknowledgement that peacebuilding requires local and people-centered development, of which volunteering is a vital component (United Nations, 2015). Solutions that come from within communities create a virtuous cycle towards “positive peace” — when a community can develop the ability to resolve internal conflicts without resorting to violence and adapt successfully to external shocks (Lough, 2012). As such, it may be considered that similar approaches can support communities on building resilience, cohesion and preventing forces of radicalization.

Volunteering assists in building social capital (Putnam & Bowling, 2000). This is the idea that individuals and societies benefit from face-to-face interactions among individuals in the creation of common bonds and shared aims. Social capital is often measured in terms of membership in voluntary associations. Indonesians, for example, are on average members of three civic organizations, suggesting a fairly high level of social capital (Putnam & Bowling, 2000). Volun-
Volunteerism, Voice and Governance

Across Southeast Asia there have been many different responses to violent extremism but most have focused on the deployment of security forces. Very little has been done to consider ways to immunize societies against violence or even to target young people who might be vulnerable. Governments are often eager to present extremist violence as purely criminal or externally driven. In many cases there are links to both criminality and external actors but almost always, extremist violence is driven by domestic factors.

In these cases, governments are often unwilling to engage in the self-examination necessary to move PVE away from purely security responses to an agenda of political and social change. In some situations, governments have been very quick to apply the extremist label to any opposition. PVE programs that attempt to block legitimate internally-driven political action against a government are doomed to worsen the problem.

Since violent extremism is shown to be very much rooted in the context of domestic politics in the region, the role and contribution of volunteerism in supporting open and accountable governance at different levels can be considered part of a wider and long-term strategy for challenging some of the myriad factors that contribute towards such extremism. In practice, however, the relationship between volunteerism efforts and pathways to open and participatory governance systems, including in conflict situations, is a complex one, and responses need to be context-specific.

Participation and Ownership

Programs that are explicitly developed around PVE may struggle to win community support whereas those driven by communities themselves are more likely to be successful (“Promoting Inclusion Preventing Extremism (PIPE),” 2016). Popular activities and events – sports, food festivals, music and performance – can all be effective at creating community spirit and engaging volunteers without calling too much attention to the aims. Many communities feel as though they are unfairly targeted or that their actions are not extreme but simply a defense of what they see as sustained threats to their values.

A number of trends have emerged in volunteering, all of which represent challenges to establishing effective PVE programs (“International Megatrends in Volunteering,” 2003). One is demographic. Aging populations tend to mean fewer people are able to volunteer. There is a growing need for more diversity among both volunteers and voluntary sector managers.

Countering Extremist Narratives

As people communicate through stories these narratives take on a considerable power in radicalization. The grievances generated by violent conflict provide a particularly powerful body of stories, the current conflict in Syria is a prime example of various narratives being used to stoke participation from within and outside affected communities in violent conflict.

Most narratives of grievance are grounded in some reality even if specific events may be distorted or even fabricated. Countering them is a major challenge given the extent of mistrust targeted at the media and a fragmentation of news leaving many to simply follow sources that reinforce their world view. Several states, including Indonesia and Singapore, have pushed the idea that radical Islam can...
be countered by theological challenges from moderates, although there is little evidence that this works. Moderate followers of a religion may be seen as compromised by proximity to the state or foreigners, for example, certain groups of monks in Myanmar professing their affiliation and influencing Government’s views even on non-religious issues such as the four race and religion protection bills.

PVE programming must address a number of audiences: young men and women, extremist groups, and the disaffected who are outside extremist groups but might be drawn to them. They are not necessarily interested in hearing from the sort of authority figures, religious or otherwise, that governments and non-governmental organizations select as messengers. Youth messaging has a tendency to be patronizing and unconvincing. Governments have often been reluctant to allow legitimate expressions of discontent and political opposition by young people or women.

Volunteerism provides opportunities to support effective leadership. Top-down messages from community leadership and peer networks have the potential to be harnessed to provide alternative sources of trusted information. Governments have often partnered effectively with volunteers to create safe spaces for exchanging views and addressing concerns as part of healing societal fractures. For example, truth and reconciliation commissions are largely made up of volunteers with some degree of independence from government (United Nations, 2015). Peer-led education and sensitization was a core component of HIV prevention efforts in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

"Governments have often partnered effectively with volunteers to create safe spaces for exchanging views and addressing concerns as part of healing societal fractures.

Impact of Social Media

The threat from radical extremism, particularly in the Islamic world, has stemmed from a dislocation of ideas from the social context, something that has been hastened by new technologies (Roy, 2010). Much of this communication takes place online and therefore a key space for countering these messages will involve online volunteering. This offers considerable flexibility and opportunities for new technology but also some risks. Messages need to be crafted with deep thought and by those who are close in age, experience and vision to their audience. Counter-extremism arguments from people who do not understand the radical milieu and message are wasted.

Online volunteering among young people holds some promise precisely for this reason but the design and management of these programs needs to be deeply embedded in the local context and must allow the voices of young people to come through. The need for messaging to be “authentic” means that it will almost always fail if driven by outsiders (Fink & Barclay, 2013).

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Indonesian Muslim organization, has launched online volunteering programs aimed at countering extremist messages. It encourages young people to engage in chat rooms. A concern with these programs is that extremists have adopted new technologies very rapidly, moving to new platforms if those such as Facebook or Twitter prove too open to scrutiny. The latest platforms are encrypted and participants in discussions can enter only with an invitation, something that is often offered only after a personal meeting. Face-to-face contact remains important in recruitment, as in many cases do group activities and discussions. But social media and new communication tools have improved the efficiency of fundraising and organization.

Gender, Youth and Volunteerism

Many studies on gender and volunteering have had surprising results. Women who work or are family caregivers often volunteer more than those who might be expected to have more free time. Explanations for this include the idea that volunteering might actually relieve the stress of work and family life. Extremists of many types have focused on restricting women’s economic, social and political activities, and this usually begins a process leading to severe abuses of human rights. Volunteering among women can have a significant impact on their lives, particularly if it opens up spaces for them that were previously closed.

Addressing the needs of family members of extremists is important in developing off-ramps for those who have signed up for violent groups. This is a potential area for the development of volunteering programs to ensure that families who may for example have returned from attempts to join ISIS are not further isolated but brought back into communities. Radicalization often follows family links and has emerged as a family activity. It may be just as vital to get families away from other radicals and back to normal lives as it is to provide a route out for fighters.
Young people are particularly vulnerable to extremism. They are also among those most likely to benefit from volunteering. The ability to provide support for skills improvement, economic opportunities and job training as well as a sense of personal engagement with the work means volunteering may well be a key to preventing the sense of isolation and separation that often seems to be part of radicalization. Many who join extremist groups explain their actions in similar ways to people who volunteer – that it provided meaning, social connections and a sense of making a difference (Horgan, 2014; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2013).

For the elderly, volunteering improves health, principally through increased interactions with others, and by improving a sense of self-worth (Daoud et al., 2010). It is generally accepted that volunteering bestows benefits on the volunteers themselves and on the recipients of their work. For women, volunteering can improve skills, networks, confidence and promote their role in the public sphere from which they are often excluded (Ramsey, 2012).

Assessing the Contribution of Volunteerism on PVE

The challenge with evaluation of PVE programs is that the aim is prevention, and measuring reductions in radicalization is an almost impossible task. Establishing a link between a volunteering program and a lack of radicalization is even more difficult. But we can usefully identify failure and problems with programs to ensure that they hew to the idea of “do no harm.” The benefits that volunteering may provide in the area of PVE – improving social cohesion and providing meaning and direction for young people – are hard to measure but can be captured through qualitative approaches and programs that are designed from the start to include a constant process of learning.

There is often too little funding and insufficient training of volunteers, particularly for those involved in sensitive tasks such as working with offenders or marginalized groups. Poor management, uncoordinated efforts and a lack of government support all have an impact on the extent and effectiveness of volunteering (Volunteers can: Towards a Volunteering Strategy to Reduce Re-Offending, 2007). There is insufficient evaluation of volunteering programs. They may well provide a variety of benefits to the volunteers, to communities and to the beneficiaries but they may have negative effects that might be assessed as outweighing the benefits. Capturing the nature of the intervention becomes key to understanding the impact of volunteerism within a community.

Conclusion

Volunteering is woven into the cultures and religions of many Southeast Asian societies. It has also been part of political and national development. Volunteerism builds social capital and resilience. Even if it does not directly prevent individuals from being radicalized, it can reduce the pressures in communities that may encourage the process by opening up spaces for political and social action, giving people a public and collective voice and reducing a sense of exclusion.

Volunteerism has a place in tackling violent extremism. It addresses both individual and community issues in ways that are clearly beneficial to participants and recipients. Creating community links and resilience may be the best defense against a variety of problems. While there are no policies that are guaranteed to end extremism, volunteerism creates an environment that lessens the risks and fosters a “whole of society” approach.

Recommendations for Programming

- Volunteerism should be placed within broader conflict resolution and peacebuilding programming. Volunteering may have the greatest impact on extremism when it is contributing to the reduction of risks in conflict or post-conflict situations. It is necessary to promote civic engagement while supporting and facilitating participatory, internally-driven, community-level volunteer processes. Understanding better the drivers and barriers to radicalization can help tailor such development interventions so that they contribute to overall PVE objectives.

- Online volunteer spaces among young people holds some promise of effective programming but the design and management of these programs needs to be deeply embedded in the local context and must allow the voices of young people to come through. The need for messaging to be “authentic” means that it will almost always fail if driven by outsiders.

- Volunteer programmes should be a component within reintegration programming to ensure that families who may have member(s) who have returned from attempts to join extremism groups are not further isolated but brought back into communities. Radicalization often follows family links and has emerged as a family activity. It is just as vital to get families away from other radicals and back to normal lives as it is to provide a route out for fighters.
Recommendations for Policy

- It is essential to promote and strengthen national volunteer infrastructures to create an environment responsive to the “do no harm principles.” The main approach could be to create the enabling environment for positive volunteerism to flourish in a productive way.

- Building partnerships and increasing collaboration between youth and government and women and government at all decision-making levels and across sectors, including the security sector requires a tangible shift in policy and programming.

- The empowerment of women and youth by opening spaces for formal and informal volunteering creates the eco-system for the “whole of society” to participate and engage with their communities. In the battle against extremism and radicalization it is necessary to work with these critical stakeholders on policy and programs related to: education, social cohesion, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners of ex-combatants, countering extremist messaging, entrepreneurship and job creation and implementation of national laws against terrorism.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Empirical research is needed to measure the impact of volunteerism within associated PVE intervention activities like trust-building, social cohesion, community dialogues, counter-narrative and gender equality programming. Programs with volunteer elements exist but the correlation between prevention/reduction of VE and volunteerism is not measured.

- Looking at additional metrics around civil society, social action and volunteerism is needed (proxy indicators). A lack of data limits the ability to influence drivers for tackling and challenging radicalization at a macro level. Some high level statistical correlations have been made with socio-economic and cultural factors (surrounding conflict, inequalities, political violence) but there is limited evidence on the influence of volunteering.

- Unpacking individual motivation can produce other metrics for monitoring during the implementation phase. As pathways to VE are highly contextualised as they are varied and diverse, program design must include a combination of qualitative and quantitative research to understand local patterns to radicalization (this should include looking at why people aren’t radicalized as well, rather than focusing strictly on those that are).
REFERENCES


Global Terrorism Database. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/


SECTION 2

EXPLORING DISTINCT CHALLENGES IN P/CVE
One way ISIS has distinguished itself from other *jihadi* groups is by perpetuating explicitly sectarian narratives.”

- Milo Comerford

NEW DYNAMICS OF EXTREMISM IN SOUTH ASIA: CASE STUDIES FROM KASHMIR, BANGLADESH & AFGHANISTAN

Milo Comerford

Introduction

Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Indian Kashmir face vastly different challenges from violent extremism. A resurgent Taliban fights a guerilla insurgency in districts across Afghanistan, militant violence continues to rise in Kashmir, in the context of a 70-year battle for independence from India, whilst Bangladesh has witnessed a wave of attacks targeting atheist bloggers and religious minorities.

But in all three contexts, a new brand of radical, internationalist extremism challenges a pre-existing, local and established militant base, with varying degrees of success. This phenomenon stems from both local factors and a rapidly changing global narrative, partly characterized by the success achieved by ISIS in Iraq, Syria and further afield. The group uses the transnational nature of its religious identity to universalise individual grievances as being part of a global struggle. But these new dynamics also demonstrate a parallel disenfranchisement with both government institutions, and the “traditional” militant movements opposing them.

These three snapshots show us the unique challenges faced within different contexts, but also provide insight into some of the overlapping phenomena that can explain commonalities and best practice in CVE and resilience building efforts, preventing us from unnecessarily reinventing the wheel. Before introducing these case studies, I will frame the analysis within an overall look at the broader regional landscape, through a data snapshot of the impact of extremism in the second half of 2016.
Overview of South Asian Extremism

Quarterly data from the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics’ Global Extremism Monitor recorded 1,736 extremism-related deaths in 383 separate incidents from July-September 2016. South and Central Asia made up 12 per cent of recorded global incidents of extremism. This was compared to 46 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa Region, and 38 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, despite recording just a quarter of the Middle East and North Africa’s (MENA) incident numbers, state counter-extremism activities in the South Asia region were almost as numerous as in the MENA region. In state efforts to counter the phenomenon, the regional picture was mixed. There were some examples of close international cooperation against extremism, in others, major disputes about responsibility, particularly over militancy in Kashmir, and the tribal areas on the Afghan-Pakistan border.

The case studies are situated in three different “tiers” of extremist activity (see Map 1). Comprehending these dynamics helps us to understand some of the important variables in understanding and countering extremism in different contexts across South Asia.

Kashmir: Resurgent Conflict, Shifting Militancy

The disputed province of Jammu and Kashmir has a long history of separatist conflict, both before and after the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. However, observers have expressed concern that a newly emerging brand of internationalist militancy, drawing on an unprecedented context of communal divisions, disenfranchisement and grievance, could profoundly destabilize the region.

In particular, the changing role of religious identities, exacerbated by the election of a Hindu nationalist government in New Delhi, risks perpetuating a narrative of a “war against Islam” in the Muslim-majority province, and re-framing a traditionally nationalistic and secular movement into one that is increasingly characterised along religious lines. Within the 70-year history of conflict between India and Pakistan over the region, religion is taking on an increasingly salient role as an identity marker, despite Kashmiri identity historically overwriting sectarian divisions. There are concerns that growing religious intolerance could create an environment that fosters extremism, by playing into a narrative of inevitable and intractable conflict.

The latest eruption emerged in July 2016, after the killing of a young militant prompted a cascade of violence which has destabilized Kashmir, and brought two nuclear armed neighbors to the brink of a major geopolitical crisis. Burhan Wani, a twenty-one year old member of the pro-Pakistan separatist group Hizbul Mujahideen, had popular appeal for his social media channels threatening and condemning the Indian state for its “occupation” of Kashmir. He was emblematic of a new brand of militant in the disputed territory: which is young, educated, aggrieved, spontaneous, and largely leaderless.

Wani’s killing at the hands of Indian security forces brought tens of thousands to the streets for his funeral, a situation which quickly led to a cycle of clampdowns, curfews, and violence. Battles have been low tech, with fieldwork revealing soldiers equipped with bamboo shield and cricket pads on their shins pitched against stone-pelting youth. The controversial use of pellet guns, whose permission in “exceptional circumstances” was recently upheld by the Indian supreme court, has further inflamed the situation.

Relatively few in number, about 200, Hizbul Mujahideen has widespread support from a populace that has lost faith in dialogue as a means to resolve differences with the Indian government. Simultaneously, a break down in education in the region has led to fears over a “lost generation” of Kashmiris, transplanted onto an already growing generational divide in the separatist movement.

But these profoundly local conflict dynamics have also had considerable geopolitical effects. A war of words has been reignited between India and Pakistan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s claim at the United Nations General
Assembly that an “indigenous uprising of the Kashmiris has been met, as usual, with brutal repression by India’s occupation force”, came days after India accused Pakistan of stage-managing the militant attack which left 19 soldiers dead on a base in Uri, near the line of control between India- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

These local and regional factors risk combining to create a vulnerability towards a new kind of threat. Indian controlled Kashmir hasn’t yet seen a domestic Taliban-style insurgency, but this possibility is a great concern for those in the valley. Researchers and activists worry that continued escalation of the situation will make Kashmir a breeding ground for extremism, as young people become increasingly disenfranchised with democratic routes to change, and turn to those offering a more radical agenda. These narratives are readily available, and ISIS’ message of solidarity with the people of Kashmir in its propaganda is framed in the same breath as persecuted Muslims in Palestine and Myanmar.

Whilst nationalism has in the past provided a buffer against extremist ideologies in the region, shifting generational currents in militancy and entrenched communal identities risk stimulating an increased transnational dimension to extremism in Kashmir. Government moves towards the demilitarisation of the everyday lives of Kashmiris would help to diffuse the adversarial and asymmetric “them and us” mindset that extremists thrive on in their recruitment.

The Impact of Dhaka’s Holey Bakery Attack

The attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka on 1 July 2016 shocked Bangladeshi society to the core, and like the developing situation in Kashmir, represented an altogether new challenge for the country. Three young privately educated gunmen (in league with two madrassa students) carried out a complex siege which left 20 dead, the majority foreigners, in an affluent area of the capital, with ISIS claiming responsibility.

Particularly shocking about the attack was its location at the heart of the highly secured diplomatic district, and the international demographic of its victims. This was an attack on the “far enemy,” on home turf. Whilst extremist violence has been growing since 2013, the number of casualties, the highest death toll of any terrorist atrocity in the country’s modern history, struck a contrast with previous attacks, which specifically targeted individual progressive figures or members of religious minorities.

ISIS own obituaries of the attackers, published in its magazine *Rumiyah*, captured the new dynamics of extremism seemingly indicated by this attack. One of the “martyrs” had declared allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi “despite being raised in a secular [apostate] family linked to the ruling [tyrannical] government of the Awami League,” while another was described as “affluent” with a “lavish lifestyle.” One had earned a degree from the Malaysian campus of Australia’s Monash University. The profile of the majority of the attackers was educated, well off, and seemingly integrated.

The government’s response shows the tension between its conception of “traditional” militancy in Bangladesh, and the new threat posed by groups such as ISIS. In responding to the immediate security threat, Dhaka was robust, with the majority of those with any close involvement in the attack either killed, imprisoned, or driven into hiding by an initial flurry of state counter-extremism operations (See Table 2). The government must now acknowledge that the battle against extremism is a longer-term one than simply extinguishing the immediate threat. This has been hindered by the deep politicisation of the issue in Bangladesh, which has prevented a coherent cross party approach to countering militancy.

Dhaka was reluctant to identify any ISIS connection to the café attack, despite the group’s claims and apparent evidence of involvement, instead exclusively blaming the “home grown” group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh. This rightly acknowledges the complex interaction between international extremist groups and local militant outfits. But it also ignores ISIS’ growing role as an “inspirer” and “director” of violence in the region, evidence of which emerged after the Holey attack, and has also been seen in Pakistan. This phenomenon is part of a growing “trans nationalization” of extremist narratives, from West Africa to the Philippines, that has come with ISIS and al-Qaeda’s universalising of local grievances across varying contexts, through its propaganda. The treatment of militancy as a purely local issue, and one largely confided to a “traditional” [and marginal] base, ignores the new challenges posed by this ideology.
ly presenting the Taliban's project as being narrow, nationalistic, and Pashtun-centric. Although the appeal of ISIS' Salafi-jihadi ideology remains marginal in Afghanistan, there has been some support among educated young people attracted to its apocalyptic vision, would-be jihadis impressed by the “purity” of its mission, and among foreign fighters.

One way ISIS has distinguished itself from other jihadi groups is by perpetuating explicitly sectarian narratives. But the group’s attempts to transplant a “Clash of Civilizations” framing of inevitable conflict along Sunni-Shia lines, through the targeting of the country’s largely-Shia Hazara minority, have had little purchase in the Afghan context. Even the Taliban has condemned such attacks as attempts “to divide the nation”, and a “plot to ignite civil war.” Whilst ISIS propaganda has shown remarkable adeptness in shifting its narratives to capitalize on potential advantageous geopolitical developments, other jihadi groups are often the most adept at identifying its ideological weaknesses. Governments and civil society organization could do much worse than exploiting such divisions to disrupt recruitment.

In contrast to some other South Asian theatres, in the Afghanistan case it appears that the Taliban’s local brand has greater appeal than ISIS’ “global” narrative. This is in part related to a historical distrust of foreign influences in Afghanistan’s conflict. But it also demonstrates the importance of nuanced understanding of different ideological draws, as well as local drivers of extremism, in efforts to curb the draw of extremist groups.

Responding to New Dynamics of Extremism

The challenges associated with countering extremism are distinct in differing contexts, not least in a region as diverse as South Asia. As such the efficacy of efforts to build resilience against extremist ideologies requires a nuanced understanding of local factors.

There are also commonalities that exist across these case studies. The first is a shifting profile of “militant,” including one that is young and well educated. This reflects recent studies that have found 46 per cent of a sample of prominent jihadis to possess a university degree, challenging the assumption that extremism correlates with a lack of education. Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir also all exhibit a tension between local and international dynamics in extremist militancy, a factor that needs to be a better understanding across the region. This includes issues related to the transnationalism of extremist networks, funding streams, and the global transfer of ideas and ideologies.
Furthermore, the various generational aspects of the new dynamics outlined in the case studies show the importance of effective educational approaches, which build resilience against extremist narratives, and empower young people. Governments should be harnessing the opportunities provided by educational establishments to build resilience against extremist worldviews, and piloting programs that test which approaches effectively build critical thinking skills that counter prejudicial and destructive ideologies.

The case studies furthermore show us the importance of driving programs of research that build local, national, and regional understanding of extremist narratives, and establish what factors breed vulnerability to, and bolster the appeal of, such ideologies. This will help in the goal of developing counter-narratives that effectively speak to the different levels of influence that extremist groups appeal to, including emotional, ideological, and material.

REFERENCES


Executive Summary

Southeast Asia has mostly been spared the worsening of extremist violence seen around the globe in the past decade but five of the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand - face serious existing problems or growing risks. In the Philippines and Thailand, these stem from long-running insurgencies. While they remain far from resolution, these conflicts have seen fewer deaths in recent years. Malaysia faces an increasing risk from international extremism due to its mix of limited political and religious space and increasing Salafi Islamist influence (Osman & Saleem, 2016). Indonesia has seen the threat of violent extremism recede significantly although high profile attacks still occur. In Myanmar, it has been violence targeted against Muslims that represents the most serious threat. In all but a handful of cases, violent events were driven by local circumstances rather than transnational extremist groups (International Crisis Group, 2016).

Overview

Most violent extremism occurs in countries in conflict and Southeast Asia is no different. Insurgencies in Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines drive much of the violence and lead to almost all deaths in the region. These conflicts have proved intractable, in part because all three highly centralized states have not

1 The Philippines ranks 11th on this index and Thailand 10th in 2015, both with slightly worsening scores. The index aims to rank terrorist activity based on the Global Terrorism Database, www.start.umd.edu/gtd/. Indonesia ranked 33, Myanmar 41 and Malaysia 49.
devolved political and economic responsibility that might have cased provincial and ethnic tensions. Peace processes in all three have faltered. In each case, the insurgencies barely impinge on the capital city, the majority of the population or the overall economy and so resolution has rarely been a priority. But conflict resolution not only has worth in itself but reduces the risks of other forms of violent extremism.

Five ASEAN countries – Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore and Vietnam – reported no casualties from terrorism in 2015 and will not be covered in this report. Of the 550 deaths reported that year, more than half were in the Philippines, a fifth in Thailand and a tenth in Myanmar. Indonesia has seen a marked decline in terrorist violence in the past decade, dousing fears that the archipelago was at high risk from Islamist extremism. Autonomy agreements in Aceh and Papua as well as the resolution of communal violence in Maluku and Poso dampened support for extremism while more effective policing led to the jailing of more than 700 people.

Amid the generally positive outlook, there are some sources of concern. It is unclear how many people from the region have gone to fight with ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Estimates range from dozens up to a total of about 500-700 (The Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015). Some 200 Indonesians, mostly women and children, have been deported from Turkey on their way to joining ISIS (Soufan Group, 2015).

ISIS has had an impact well beyond recruitment or inspiring violence. Its use of social media has spread its message very effectively and so far it has been unclear what the effect is in Southeast Asia, although it appears to be revitalizing existing radical networks. While social media has certainly had an effect, it is important not to overstate the impact of new technologies; face to face meetings are still vital in recruitment and there seems to have been few “lone wolves” signing up purely on the basis of on-line contacts (IPAC, 2015).

Most Muslims in Southeast Asian nations have not shown much interest in joining global extremist groups, even those such as the Rohingya in Myanmar who have faced exclusion from economic, social and political life. Malaysians seem to have been the most vulnerable to ISIS recruitment. The risk now is that battle-hardened, well-trained fighters might return home from the Middle East with the aim of carrying out attacks. ISIS has already called for attacks in Southeast Asia in its publications (Fealy, 2016). Much depends on what happens to fighters in the Middle East as quite a large number have been killed in recent fighting (Allford, 2016).

Violence is concentrated in geographically and socially marginal areas of Southeast Asia – in Mindanao and elsewhere in the rural Philippines, the deep south of Thailand and the mountainous borders of Myanmar. Only in a handful of cases has it impinged on the capital city. Most insurgencies have been rural and have made little headway with the increasingly urbanized population of the region. In most cases, violence is linked to demands for greater autonomy or independence for a region or people that sees themselves as excluded – Muslims from Christians in the Philippines, Muslim Malays from Buddhist Thais and often Christian members of ethnic minority groups from Buddhist Burmans in Myanmar. Only in a handful of cases has violence been linked to broader globalized extremist groups.

Despite these trends, Miss Islam and the broader context of violence and terrorism have not disappeared from the region. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have faced attacks from Muslim rebels, has been attributed in part to worse relations with Myanmar’s military. The recent increase of violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where Buddhists have face...
The gender aspects of extremism in Southeast Asia have not been well researched but it is clear from existing work that women play important but unrecognized roles in recruitment, support and ideological reproduction. Women and children are believed to have made up nearly half of those who have joined ISIS from Southeast Asia and more than 200 women and children have been deported from Turkey while trying to reach Syria. Little thought has been given on how to address the needs of returnees or those whose family members have been jailed and yet the treatment of families is a critical part of any de-radicalization process. Women also suffer from the violence generated by extremism and in some countries such as Myanmar have been the focus of attempts by extremist groups to severely restrict their rights. There has been little consideration of gender in the development of PVE policies in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

Reducing the risks of violent extremism in Southeast Asia depends on effective conflict management, itself a mix of political and development policies. Peace processes have been drawn out and often blocked by elites who are reluctant to share power. But Indonesia has shown that the risks of radicalization can be significantly reduced when the government is willing to address internal conflicts and allow some political and economic authority to move away from the capital.

**Critical Issues in Countering Violent Extremism**

In any discussion on preventing violent extremism it is important to bear in mind a few key points:

- Violent extremism has a long history, is bound closely to historical and political conditions in nations and evolves as those conditions change (Jenkins, 2014).

- Although ISIS and Al Qaeda may have global agendas, most radicalization and violence is grounded in local and sometimes national conditions.

- Little is understood about processes of radicalization: evidence to date shows little linkage to poverty, education levels, and notions of “toxic masculinity” among young men or Islamic theological training (Allan et al., 2015). There are suggestions, however, that some men find violence before they find religion, only later using it or another ideology to justify their behavior. This often seems to be the case with lone wolf attacks or recruitment among gang members. Radicalization is a non-linear process, involving push and pull factors as well as personal conditions; there are no clear predictive factors (Guide to Drivers of Violent Extremism, 2009).

- Political and social exclusion seems to play some role. People bring their grievances to the process and although many of these could not have been changed by any specific policy, creating fair and transparent societies may help, as well as being a general good in themselves. Not enough is understood about which grievances promote extremism and why (Festermacher, 2015).

- Differentiating between violent and non-violent extremism is difficult; in some cases non-violent groups offer a stepping stone to violence but in most they do not (Schmid, 2014).

- Levels of human rights violations correlate closely to the incidence of violent extremism (Human Rights First, 2015).

Extremism has often been linked to wider conflicts: war zones provide opportunities for recruitment, training and the development of strong links among extremists (Holmer, 2013). Fighting can provide meaning to young people. A focus on PVE should not mean less emphasis on more conventional conflict resolution and prevention (United Nations Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF), 2015).

Development projects mostly have worth in themselves; wrapping them in a veil of PVE activities may actually be harmful to both improving economic conditions and reducing violence (UNDP Africa launches initiative to help prevent and respond to violent extremism, 2015). There seem to be benefits in small and local projects (Berman et al., 2013).

The role of women in extremism is complicated. They not only play roles in support and indoctrination but are key participants and their motivations are varied. Women must be part of both the research into extremism and the policy responses. Women who do sign up for extremist groups often have a lifetime of compounded resentments, often due to sexual violence and social exclusion (US Institute of Peace, 2015).
Regional Responses

Southeast Asia has seen very significant progress in lifting its populations out of poverty in the past four decades. In that time, it has not seen a major war, its population growth has levelled off, economies have grown by an annual average of around 5.1 per cent since 2000 (Thompson et al., 2014). Literacy rates among the young are around 98 per cent and gender parity in primary education has been reached (ASEAN, 2013). Political development has been mixed; Freedom House ranks Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Timor-Leste as “partly free” and Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam as “not free.”

There is little evidence to suggest that extremism in the region is driven by economic deprivation or inequality, although these problems do exist. Political marginalization, the exclusion of religious and other minorities, human rights abuses and enduring violent conflicts all do seem to have some links although proving direct causation is rarely possible when it comes to violent extremism.

Gender and Extremism

The linkages between violent extremism and gender are complex and under-explored. It is clear from research in Indonesia that women have played key roles in the propagation of extremist ideologies and the creation of family links that have strengthened radical groups (Win, n.d.). Woman and children have also made up some 45 per cent of the Indonesians who are believed to have joined ISIS in Syria. Across Indonesia, women have played roles in religious indoctrination, finances, logistics and support but have rarely been involved in violent acts. Many have been involved as the wives, sisters or daughters in radicalized families but some have also sought out violent groups on their own and aided and abetted violent acts.

Women have also been the victims of violence and have suffered across the region from the imposition of restrictive laws and social views. Increasing Salafi influence in Indonesia and Malaysia has set back some of the advances women had made in recent decades (Kine, 2016). Policy development needs to ensure that they are designed with a full understanding of the role of women. This is rarely as entirely passive victims of violence, although in some cases they are exactly that. Women may have a

*See Freedom House website at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).*
significant and under-used role in de-radicalization and the prevention of radicalization.

- Develop a fuller understanding of the role of women in extremist groups across the region.
- Examine the treatment of returnees from ISIS and find ways to support these women and their families.
- Identify specific networks of women to find out more on what drives them to radicalization. For example, migrant domestic workers from Indonesia working across Asia.
- Examine the degree of support from women for radical groups in Myanmar and assess the extent of support for violence or hate speech.

Effective PVE Responses

Few countries have developed effective PVE policies; what we have seen is a mishmash of responses that have rarely been fully analyzed or monitored and so we have little empirical evidence of what works. Policies across Southeast Asia have focused almost entirely on judicial and security responses. These have their place in the face of violence but they are by no means successful on their own and can create the conditions that worsen a cycle of conflict. UNDP is likely to face resistance from governments in Southeast Asia to any PVE programs that promote conflict reduction or the improvement in human rights as a means to reduce violence, indeed the worrying trend in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand is towards extra-legal responses to social problems such as drugs and violence. Conflict resolution, peace-building and issues of human rights all touch on sensitive areas of national sovereignty and are therefore hard for an international organization to tackle. Support for civil society in many countries has become more difficult as governments increasingly view it as external interference. In this context, development agencies might consider a few principles in their programming:

- Human rights must be at the center of PVE responses. What little solid research there is on drivers of extremism points to abuses such as torture as key in worsening the situation. Programs that support such issues as administrative decentralization, governance and the rule of law should ensure that they help develop sensitivity to human rights issues.
- PVE programming must be accompanied by intensified monitoring and research processes. Our knowledge is skimpy and results to date have been poor and will remain so unless we examine this area of work more closely.
- Our understanding of the place of gender in PVE programming is weak. The fact that 40 per cent of Indonesians who have gone to join ISIS are women and children shows the importance of this in PVE work but we have little knowledge of how women are involved or what the impact is of policies designed to reduce violence. Gender analysis and further research should be a component of all UNDP responses.

PVE programming work should contribute to a regional knowledge base. PVE research has focused on Europe and the Middle East and these may not provide the best examples for Southeast Asia. Regional learning about online responses, off-ramps for returnees from ISIS and improvements in prison management would all be useful.
REFERENCES


IPAC. (2015). Online Activism and Social Media Usage Among Indonesian Extremists (Report No 24), Jakarta.


Critical Issues in Preventing Violent Extremism in South Asia

Ben Schonveld

Regional Overview

Violent extremism is a long-term regional phenomenon. Afghanistan and Pakistan account for the majority of extremist violence over the medium term (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). Extremist violence in Afghanistan has risen significantly with the return to conflict (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). With the exception of Hindu extremist violence, India has seen dramatic drops in violent extremism as a result of security operations (India Assessment, 2016). Military and para-military operations in Pakistan have led to significant drops in extremist violence (Pakistan Assessment, 2016), Nepal (Nepal Assessment, 2016) and Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Assessment, 2016), both in unstable post-conflict transitions, recorded low levels of extremist violence. The Maldives recorded no extremist violence in 2015. (Maldives Assessment, 2016). Bangladesh has seen very sharp recent rises in extremist violence albeit from a very low base (Bangladesh Assessment, 2016).

There are a wide range of violent extremist groups in the region including: religious, communal, ethnic, caste, tribal, nationalist, secessionist, left wing and right-wing extremisms. In Bangladesh, there are more than 100 violent extremist groups. In Pakistan in 2014, there were at least 25 but this has increased significantly since the break-up of the Tehrik-e-Taliban (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). Many internationally and indeed nationally proscribed terrorist groups operate with high degrees of freedom in Afghanistan, Pakistan (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2015), and Bangladesh.

Programming should invest in understanding PVE in context. Programming should draw from toolkits wider than PVE.

- Ben Schonveld
There are vast and largely unpolic ed border areas in the region enabling transnational operations.

Violent extremism is highly context and location specific. There are high levels of fluidity between groups and ideologies making defining and describing any particular group challenging. Complex overlaps exist between organised crime, violent extremists, transnational groups and proxy forces. For example, Pakistan sectarian groups are reported to provide recruits to anti-Indian groups. Anti-Indian groups reportedly work with the Afghan Taliban and have expanded violence to targets in Pakistan. Tribal militants, sectarian and regional groups provide safe haven and recruits to Afghan groups who in turn reciprocate (BFA Staatendokumentation, 2014). The nexus of violent extremism with some political parties, governments and militaries in the region complicate these issues still further.

There is very little academic study or understanding about how or why people join violent extremist groups in South Asia. What research exists suggests that the processes and motivations are very different from the much researched West. Extremist groups in South Asia often have broad support and, like other organizations, select and recruit, in many cases, openly (Allan et al., 2015).

International Terrorism and Extremism

There is particular alarm over the spread of international terror groups in the region. In January 2015, ISIL established a regional branch in Afghanistan and Pakistan, ISIL-Khorasan (ISIL-K). (Islamic State appoints leaders of Khorasan Province, 2015) Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) announced their presence in 2014 (India on Alert, 2015). It is currently unclear whether domestic violent extremists use the ISIL or AQIS “brand” as a means to generate greater levels of fear and publicity to advance national causes or whether they have actually adopted the wider cause. The research in this report suggests violent extremist groups remain deeply embedded in their local context and politics. The ISIL cause appears to have resonated with some local extremist groups and individual defectors from existing groups. (Five US Troops, 2016).

The strikingly low numbers of South Asians fighting in Syria and Iraq proportional to the population (Barrett, 2014) seems to indicate for the moment at least limited influence. The reasons behind South Asia’s low contribution to international terror are unclear. It is an important area of study. The Maldives are an anomaly in this finding. The Maldives are the largest per capita contributor to terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq in the world (Barrett, 2014). While it is too early to make calls about the strength of international terror groups, their influence on extremist strategy and tactics is a deep concern. ISIL has demonstrated that extreme violence works. It is likely that violent extremists in the region will adopt ISIL methods. This has been most worryingly demonstrated in a range of recent attacks in Bangladesh.

Analysis of Violence and Violent Extremism in South Asia

Consistent evidence examined in this report suggests that longstanding national and transnational conflicts in the region drive violent extremism in the region. (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). This is particularly evident from the analysis of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India’s North East, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The conflict in Kashmir is very visibly a central driver of transnational violent extremism. Resolving these conflicts must be a priority to address violent extremism. At country level, extremist violence is often difficult to disentangle from these wider conflicts. For example, the government of Bangladesh suggests that extremist violence being attributed to international terror is rather violence perpetrated by political opponents as a means to destabilize the government (BNP-Jamaat nexus, 2016). Certainly there are strong historical precedents that support this view. But the profile of the people involved in these attacks — all very young, many educated and middle to upper class — is markedly different than before (Riaz, 2016).

Another driver would appear to be the violent political culture of the region. As one analyst has noted in the context of Bangladesh “moreover, acts of terrorism in Bangladesh are perceived, in part, as an extension of the violent means used by political actors to secure electoral victory and intimidate, if not eliminate, opponents and their supporters” (Fink, 2010).

South Asian societies are highly politicised, polarised and dominated by patronage culture. Politics and political parties often express dissent through violence. While in opposition, in many of the region’s countries, political parties use general strikes, parliamentary boycott and often violent protest to undermine the party in government (Bhusal, 2016). Governing parties use their time in office to appoint supporters to key positions to further party interests and have politicised the judiciary, the police, the civil service, media and charities. Politicisation runs right down to the individual and community level. Religions in the region have not been exempt and civilian governments, military and royal rulers alike have used religion and cultivated and co-opted religio-political groups as well as violent religious extremist groups to buttress their power.
Sub-optimal democratic governance is also explained by a reduced regional (with the notable exception of India) civilian governance capacity and increased influence of the military in civilian governance. This can be seen for example in Sri Lanka, where despite the end of the conflict the army maintains control of the civilian police through the Ministry of Defence. Pakistan's military influence in the civilian domain is another example underlined by a UK Overseas Development Institute report: “the military has constantly sought to centralise and consolidate political power (...) the military (...) exerts significant overt and covert control over the civilian authorities in both domestic and foreign affairs” (Greenwood & Balachandran, 2014).

The continued lack of civilian democratic control of many of the regions militaries destabilises the maturation of civilian governance. It is another important driver of extremist violence: unaccountable militaries have established relationships with violent extremists and proxy forces that have undermined national and regional stability (Greenwood & Balachandran, 2014).

Governance

Poor governance in all domains of government service provision is explained in large part by endemic patronage, politicised culture and lack of accountability of the region's governance systems. Limited state capacity to provide services is another shared characteristic of the region allowing charities, some affiliated with proscribed groups, and often funded by external actors, to fill the vacuum. Humanitarian disaster in Pakistan, Nepal and the Maldives have exposed the inability of civilian governments to act. This gap has been filled in Islamic countries by Islamic charities, often with extremist links. Internally displaced people and refugees are vulnerable to extremism and again Islamic charities often with direct links to proscribed terrorist groups are often their only source of aid.

Large scale migration, again a result of under-development and in some countries economic crises, has facilitated the import of less tolerant interpretations of Islam. Addressing governance in the context of violent extremism is urgent. South Asia is currently facing the largest youth bulge in history. Thirty-five per cent of Pakistan’s population is 15 or under. Within an already violent context the failure to provide decent education and livelihoods risks increasing vulnerability to extremist violence. UNDP Pakistan’s Country Director has argued that in the context of Pakistan how the country addresses the youth bulge “will define the common future of Pakistan – whether it grows and thrives or fails and implodes.” (Broga, 2016).

Criminal justice sector reform is central to preventing violent extremism. With the exception of Afghanistan and Nepal, criminal justice across the region shares a common punitive colonial root and all the region's law enforcement agencies are in urgent and longstanding need of reform. Long term reform engagement and support from the international community has produced little result.

PVE is a sector with very little agreement and low levels of empiricism. Human rights is an exception to this rule. Econometric analysis demonstrates that violations of human rights are the most reliable predictor of terrorism identified so far (Allan et al., 2015). As a USAID report concludes: “Controlling for other variables, the more a political system restricts civil liberties, the more it is unresponsive to citizens’ demands, and the more it constrains opportunities for open, broad-based political participation, the more vulnerable to VE it seems to be. Exclusionary regimes that violate civil liberties easily can feed the belief that violence represents the only viable option for bringing about genuine political change.” (USAID, 2013)

The countries of South Asia share very poor human rights records. There is very well documented evidence of widespread and systematic violations of human rights as part of civilian policing and security operations (Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, 2014). Legislation across the region has provided for a high level of latitude of action as well as impunity for law enforcement and security agencies contributing to strong public distrust of the police and a strong sense of injustice against the state (Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, 2014). High levels of corruption are another common feature of the region (Corruption Perception Index 2015, 2015). Corruption is endemic in criminal justice and is one of the sources of impunity within criminal justice (Corruption Perception Index 2015, 2015). Impunity is embedded within criminal justice across the region and is key to the reform failure. This failure in a context of growing demand for law enforcement service has meant an increasing inability to provide public security. Lawlessness has flourished in many areas of South Asia, nourishing extremist violence.

Places of detention are another concern. Their role in enabling extremism is well documented elsewhere: “Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Islamic state of Iraq (ISI) weren’t only using U.S.-run prisons as “jihadi universities,” according to Major General Doug Stone; they were actively trying to infiltrate those prisons to cultivate new recruits” (Weiss & Hassan, 2015). Selective enforcement of laws and harassment of vulnerable and marginalized groups,
combined with prison overcrowding, harsh detention conditions and the very high incidence of long pre-trial detention in the context of radicalization is another significant concern, especially pertaining to juvenile offenders. In South Asian states detained extremists mix freely with other criminals, as mass arrests, some more legitimate than others - fill already overfull detention centers. Overcrowding and conditions that often amount to ill treatment are likely to provide an enabling environment to radicalization.

For the most part, states in the region appear to have been able to successfully contain violent extremism through force. The response of South Asian states to violent extremism has been based in traditional security responses, primarily military led. These have generated grievances based on unresolved human rights violations as discussed above.

Beyond these security operations, there is little evidence of attempts to address underlying drivers, development infrastructure is often destroyed and the limited capacity of the South Asian states to provide services in normal settings may in part explain this failure. Grievances that result from widespread abuse feed conflict over time. People displaced by the conflict are often under served by the state and particularly vulnerable to extremism. Islamic extremist groups have charity wings who are often able to provide far greater levels of humanitarian assistance than the state. Violent extremism is contained with force but root causes are not addressed explaining the cyclical character to violent extremism.

The 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA and the West’s responses have added to the security narrative and diminished the influence of international norms and their moderating influence. Governments in the region have echoed this global narrative that security can only be achieved by violating the rights of others. The mainstream media has perpetuated this narrative just as it has elsewhere. The anti-terror narrative is subverted and political opposition, independent voices expressing concern about due process, violation and human rights safeguards are stifled by accusations of defending terrorism.

The very violent killings of a range of civil society actors in Bangladesh by violent extremists are powerful symbols of the worsening conditions facing civil society, particularly those working in human rights and democracy domains. Governments across the region have used soft powers to tighten administrative and financial regulations that have made it increasingly difficult to operate. Governments in the region openly attack the work of NGOs in the seeking to undercut their domestic legitimacy (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). The media too is under increasing attack particularly with regard to threats, killings and other abuse by extremist groups but also government action including criminal defamation and sedition cases (Carothers, 2015). Of particular concern is the recognition that: “this is a new trend: is of a different kind. Dozens of countries that had previously allowed or even welcomed democracy and rights support activities inside their borders are now working to stop it. In other words, pushback today often represents the loss of access that had already been achieved, rather than the ongoing struggle over access that has traditionally been denied.” (Carothers, 2015).

Gender and Violent Extremism

The issues, themes and implications of gender and its relationship to violent extremism have often been overlooked and understudied despite its particular concern and significance. United Nations Security Council Resolutions have previously underscored the importance of women’s roles in peace and conflict,most notably through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subject resolutions on women, peace and security. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 noted that women and children in particular “account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict” and are increasingly “targeted by combatants and armed elements.” (UN Security Council, 2000).

In South Asia, this is especially true, and women and children often find themselves at the forefront of the fight against violent extremism. Additionally, the region hosts a range of social, economic and developmental challenges, including poverty, inequality, gender-based violence, repressive legislation, and a culture of impunity for crimes against women. For example, in Pakistan women have been specifically targeted to limit women’s participation in the public sphere (Frink, 2013) (Khan, 2013) (Afghanistan: MP Fariba Ahmadi Kakar Abducted in Ghazni, 2013)

For example, “[t]he Taliban has used radio broadcasts to threaten girls with acid attacks and death, causing many parents in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to withdraw their daughters from school. The targeting of girls and women is part of a deliberate, well thought-out strategy to generate fear and prevent an open and inclusive society” (International Civil Society Action Network, 2014).

In an effort to address this, the United Nations Secretary-General’s report on women, peace and security provided a specific “call for action” to “include
women, peace and security issues in all thematic debates, such as those relating to terrorism, counter-terrorism measures, transnational organized crime and conflict prevention and natural resources.” (UN Security Council, 2013, para. 75(e)). Resolution 2122 further underscored this point by calling to “increase its attention to women, peace and security issues in all relevant thematic areas [including] threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.” (UN Security Council, 2013, para. 3).

However, the discussion of gender and PVE must take note of the larger human rights and rule of law country specific frameworks. “Practical integration of women and girls into all aspects of CVE [PVE] programming can only occur in the context of broader guarantees of the human rights of women and girls in particular; these include addressing the causes of gender inequality such as the subordination of women and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other factors.” (Global Counterterrorism Forum, n.d.).

The particular vulnerability and impact of “[w]omen and girls’ inequalities, sexual and gender based violence, marginalization, and lack of opportunities, may make them more susceptible to the appeal of terrorism. Grievances may also arise where women and girls feel they have been adversely impacted by counterterrorism policies, such as when they are part of a group that feels disproportionately targeted, or if they lost a relative in the context of counter-terrorism.” (Global Counterterrorism Forum, n.d.). A 2011 study of terrorism, political violence and governance in Bangladesh suggested evidence of Bangladeshi women supporting or encouraging jihad, with women targeted in recruitment drives, as they arouse less suspicion and can engage in community outreach efforts with greater access to families (Fink, 2010).

Specifically, in Pakistan, “[w]omen are proverbial bellwethers of Pakistani society. How they fare — their status and mobility within society, their treatment by authorities [state, religious or local], their legal protections, and their protections in the social, political, economic and cultural spaces — is indicative of the direction in which the country is heading.” (International Civil Society Action Network, 2014).

PVE in South Asia

There have been a number of civilian PVE measures taken in countries in the region. These have tended to coalesce around particularly large attacks for example the December 2014 terror attack on a school in Pakistan that resulted in 141 deaths, primarily school children. This resulted in the announcement of a National Action Plan, which contained a range of PVE-like actions. Most analysts would suggest the civilian elements of the plan have not been implemented (Gul, 2016). The prospects for civilian PVE return to the issue of governance. There is cause for real concern about the capacity of states in the region to respond to external shocks including violent extremism. Afghanistan is the leading example. Another is Nepal: the Nepal government’s response to 2015 earthquake was and continues to be subject to international concern (Herman, 2015). Its transitional justice and government reforms that were supposed to address causes of the conflict have been grounded (Baral, 2016). Similarly, much of Bangladesh’s development and governance capacity has been outsourced to the non-governmental sector (Sarker, 2009). Sri Lanka’s ambitious post conflict transition programme too is slipping in the face of politicised opposition (Dibbert, 2016).

Mitigation Tools

This section examines the development of effective mitigation tools to tackle violent extremism in South Asia within the UNDP PVE framework and the wider goal of “Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity.” Based on the country research and the available literature this study recommends three main mitigation tools:

1. Development interventions support the resolution of conflict in the region; as the primary driver of violent extremism in South Asia these have enormous value and should continue without direct association with PVE. Similarly, good governance supports PVE allowing civilian governments to better deliver services and respond to civilian PVE tasks;

2. UNDP should consider PVE audits for their country programmes. Drivers of extremism are complex and development activities can have unforeseen outcomes. UNDP should be confident that its development work is not contributing to violent extremism particularly in the domain of security sector reform and criminal justice reform; and

3. Limited PVE programming is proposed to support gaps identified by PVE audits. This report recommends priority should be given to work supporting human rights and civil society because of the strong empirical basis for human rights violations as a driver of extremism, the strong empirical evidence that deteriorating human rights are the best currently early warning system of violent extremism and the clear evidence that human rights should be a regional priority. Civil society action is proposed as the
sector is essential for meaningful PVE interventions, that human rights monitoring is a key task of civil society and much of the space for civil society has been increasingly restricted throughout the region.

Conceptual Challenges

The task of developing mitigation tools is complicated by basic problems with PVE:

“Despite its impressive growth, CVE [PVE and CVE are largely interchangeable] has struggled to establish a clear and compelling definition as a field; has evolved into a catch-all category that lacks precision and focus; reflects problematic assumptions about the conditions that promote violent extremism; and has not been able to draw clear boundaries that distinguish CVE programs from those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education.” (Heydemann, 2014)

There are particular problems with PVE vocabulary. There is very limited agreement about the PVE lexicon in academia, donor or policy circles. Member states of the United Nations cannot agree on a definition for “terrorist”, “terrorism”, “violent extremism”, and “radicalization” amongst others. There is very little agreement on how to or what differentiates one from another. Violent extremism, terrorism and extremism are frequently used as synonyms. These terms have been left to individual member states to define. In the South Asian context these terms are contentious and politicized. It is unsurprising that individual member states have developed legislative tools that deploy vague and overly broad definitions of these terms; allowing a latitude to undermine due process, and their use as tools to prosecute and intimidate political opponents, the media and civil society.

These terms are also often seen as western imports associated with geopolitics and external political and military interference including the use of drones that are often unpopular at the national level. Moreover, they are often unsuitable for discussing often highly localized issues, often serving to obscure more than they illuminate. There is a strong case for developing clear definitions/terminology and tools in the country-specific context and language.

International Coordination

Limited agreement about definition and approach raises issues over the limits of donor coordination. Many international donors conceptualize PVE differently from UNDP, often with a greater focus on security and individual motivation. These are not semantic but substantive differences. Differences of view in the donor community are not unusual but dissonance is likely to be significantly greater in the PVE domain.

Regional Resistance to UNDP’s Approach towards PVE

There will also be dissonance between UNDP’s approach to PVE and the more security/military focus of the region’s governments. The region’s response to violent extremism approach is deeply embedded in history, criminal justice sector legislation, institution and practice. This underlines local ownership over the language but also recognition of the need to build agreement and local ownership for PVE in the UNDP sense of the word. This implies political capacity within UNDP, iteration and caution.

PVE Audits, Risks, and Unintended Consequences

PVE is significantly riskier than other development interventions. And as has been underlined in a Danish government study, PVE is even riskier in non-permissive environments (Brett, Eriksen & Sørensen, 2015). As noted elsewhere in the report, South Asia is highly politicized. From a programmatic perspective this suggests risk and design concerns. Interventions to these stakeholders may result in improvements in their performance, politicization will subvert outcomes to political purposes. This is a particular risk in the domain of security and criminal justice sector reform. PVE audit should examine unintended consequences with a particular focus on human rights because in a sector with many unknowns, as a Danish PVE study concluded:

“The evidence strongly suggests that CVE programming must prioritize human rights and be conscious of peripheral actions (for example from law enforcement) that may inadvertently undermine them. There is evidence that violent extremists draw upon heavy-handed responses from law enforcement that undermine human rights in their narratives to justify violence and recruit others. This observation underlines the need for a Whole of Government approach within an overall framework of “Do No Harm” that covers not only CVE but also other antiterrorism and law enforcement initiatives and is based
on legislation that is clearly defined, includes due process guarantees and is otherwise in line with international human rights standards. Without this, there is a risk that the activities of one arm of the state may undermine those of another, thus undermining the overall effort. Where such standards are not in place or cannot be guaranteed, the risks for CVE interventions obviously increase.” (Brett, Eriksen & Sørensen, 2015)

Development actions have also had other unintended consequences as the following example demonstrates. Social learning theorists have increasingly suggested that individual attitudes to external messaging are shaped around social networks. In other words, an individual may hear a radio or television message on tolerance or other ethical position but the individual’s interpretation of that may be shaped by discussing it with others in their social milieu (Watson & Nobbel, 2007). There is strong empirical evidence to suggest that rather than bring about change, media reinforces pre-existing audience belief (Bratic, 2016). When applied to the Pakistan context a joint 2010 Asian Development Bank, European Union, United Nation and World Bank study concluded:

“Militant propaganda has paid particular attention to reinforcing barriers to women’s mobility and other freedoms, not only by forceful promotion of extreme segregation practices but also playing on sensitive Pakhtun cultural values concerning honor and using rhetoric about external attempts to pollute Pakhtun religious and moral values. Any initiative promoting women’s active participation or benefitting women in any way is transformed by such rhetoric into something from which women’s honor must be protected. This places a particular constraint on approaches to include women and address their needs, which must be seen to respect Pakhtun values and religion.” (World Bank, 2010)

PVE Programming

If gaps and useful PVE intervention are identified, programmatic work in PVE is challenging as the conceptual, political and complexity issues make clear. This section looks at the various elements of project cycle management from analysis to monitoring and evaluation. There is a strong consensus among academics and practitioners that programming for PVE means developing strong contextual understanding.

Problem Analysis

Much of the literature on PVE stresses that PVE programme design has often prioritized policy and implementation, often at the expense of research, learning and monitoring and evaluation. More resources need to be invested in problem analysis to grasp the complexity of drivers of conflict in local contexts to situate the programme response.

UNDP Drivers of Extremism as Problem Analysis Tools

There are a range of academic and practitioner views on the priority, function and empirical support of individual UNDP drivers. However, it is clear from the national analyses contained in this policy paper that UNDP’s drivers are useful in framing an analysis and relevant recurrent factors in examining the South Asian context. However, it is also important to recognize that UNDP drivers operate and interact with each in highly complex, non-linear, dynamic and contextualized ways, as a Royal United Services Institute report notes:

“It is increasingly recognized that the notion of simple linear relationships between potential causes (such as unemployment) and effects (such as involvement in violence) succumbs to a reality of tipping points, feedback loops, path dependencies and other complexities. In addition, pairs of variables do not interact in isolation, but instead interrelate in equally elaborate manners with a potentially infinite range of additional factors, including many of the other structural drivers, individual incentives and enabling factors list.” (Khalil & Zeuten, 2016)

Driver complexity also underlines that PVE is not rebranded development programming but equally development programming can contribute significantly to PVE efforts. Governance, the equitable delivery of services and accountability, underpin the capacity of civilian government to respond to violent extremism. Branding these interventions as PVE would be likely to add unnecessary political dimension to the work. But the failure to deliver services is strongly correlated with increased violent extremism (Allan et al., 2015).

Absence or Low Levels of Violent Extremism

The individual country research does raise one significant question for the issue of UNDP drivers. India’s drivers of violent extremism are comparable to those of many other countries in the region. They share the same colonial legacies, systems of governance, administration, law enforcement and legisla-
Moreover, claims of positive programme results have tended to be “derived from small samples and few case studies, making comparison and generalizations problematic, and findings provisional”, (Schmid, 2013). There has been increasing examination of work in developing countries but they tend to suffer from similar failings.

The problem for a great deal of PVE programming is that it was and is often still derived from flawed concepts and assumptions that derive from the period post 9/11 where terrorism was treated as a new phenomenon and experts tried to conceive and understand terrorism as a unique behavior in isolation of past learning (Schmid, 2013). Academics are increasingly rejecting this approach. They underline seeking answers in comparable phenomenon where study and empiricism is much richer. This would appear to be pertinent to UNDP PVE programming (Lynch, 2016). The current tool boxes of development, counter crime, migration, conflict and peacebuilding tools can be relevant to addressing PVE in any given context (Lynch, 2016).

Monitoring and Evaluation

As has been discussed at length in this study there is little robust evidence of “what works” in terms of strengthening resilience to extremism, radicalization, and violence, and what does not, and why. The need to know has led to a great deal of attention on monitoring and evaluation. An overemphasis on monitoring and evaluation is understandable but the experience from elsewhere as the highly respected democracy expert Carothers1 notes “often produces artificial and reductionist program indicators, rigid implementation frameworks, and unrealistic goals—all things that work directly against key lessons from experience about the need for flexible, adaptive programming.” (Carothers, 2015).

The monitoring and evaluation methodology must be designed, once again with regard for the operating context. For example, wide population surveys might sit uneasily against the efforts to export Western institutional model which have had little success.

Programme Response

The PVE field provides very little guidance on “what works” from elsewhere. Most available literature examines Western government domestic efforts to address violent extremism. The exportability of these initiatives would appear sit uneasily against the efforts to export Western institutional model which have had little success.

Well respected practitioners have in case questioned the success of these efforts as a whole noting the rising numbers of foreign fighters joining radical groups in Syria and Iraq, which raise “questions about the effectiveness of the work that has gone into undermining the appeal of terrorism since 2001, and the general understanding of its causes.” (Barrett, 2016)

Moreover, claims of positive programme results have tended to be “derived from small samples and few case studies, making comparison and generalizations problematic, and findings provisional”, (Schmid, 2013). There has been increasing examination of work in developing countries but they tend to suffer from similar failings.

The problem for a great deal of PVE programming is that it was and is often still derived from flawed concepts and assumptions that derive from the period post 9/11 where terrorism was treated as a new phenomenon and experts tried to conceive and understand terrorism as a unique behavior in isolation of past learning (Schmid, 2013). Academics are increasingly rejecting this approach. They underline seeking answers in comparable phenomenon where study and empiricism is much richer. This would appear to be pertinent to UNDP PVE programming (Lynch, 2016). The current tool boxes of development, counter crime, migration, conflict and peacebuilding tools can be relevant to addressing PVE in any given context (Lynch, 2016).

Theory of Change

Theories of change also need to be re-conceptualized. If the problem is non-linear then it follows the theory of change is likely to be non-linear. In this regard this report recommends the concept proposed in the UNDP PVE project document that proposes:

“Theory of Change in the form of a clear roadmap leading from one particular set of social conditions to another, desired outcome. The way UNDP and other partners address the prevention of violent extremisms is not a linear process; rather it is to be seen as an ongoing, incremental process of consultation and reflection to explore means of inducing positive change, developing preventive mechanisms and making communities resilient to future extremist narratives for mobilizations. Therefore, the operationalization of UNDP’s PVE agenda has to rely on continuing critical reflection and an adaptive approach to a variety of development solutions, in a variety of development settings, involving many development actors.” (UNDP PVE Project Document, 2016)

Theory of Change

As has been discussed at length in this study there is little robust evidence of “what works” in terms of strengthening resilience to extremism, radicalization, and violence, and what does not, and why. The need to know has led to a great deal of attention on monitoring and evaluation. An overemphasis on monitoring and evaluation is understandable but the experience from elsewhere as the highly respected democracy expert Carothers1 notes “often produces artificial and reductionist program indicators, rigid implementation frameworks, and unrealistic goals—all things that work directly against key lessons from experience about the need for flexible, adaptive programming.” (Carothers, 2015).

The monitoring and evaluation methodology must be designed, once again with regard for the operating context. For example, wide population surveys might normally be considered a useful means to establish attitudinal change but are challenging in poor security operating environments. From the point of view of seeking to understand “what works”, a “hard” scientific approach may not many of the operating contexts or the need to provide guidance to the project as it rolls out in often unstable and fluid operating environments.

---

1 Thomas Carothers is vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He directs the Democracy and Rule of Law Program and is a leading authority on international support for democracy, human rights, governance, comparative democratization, and U.S. foreign policy relating to democracy and human rights.
Regional Recommendations

Local Political Ownership is Fundamental

There is dissonance between UNDP PVE agenda and the current approach to violent extremism in South Asia. The political task is significant. Changing the approach to violent extremism in South Asia should be cautious, iterative and small scale.

Develop a Local Lexicon for Local Contexts

The PVE are often politically laden in local contexts and their use makes PVE a harder “sell” than it need be. Terrorism is emotive and highly political. It can detract from objective analysis. This report recommends the adoption, where appropriate, of a local lexicon appropriate and sensitive to local context.

Invest more Resources in Political Capacity

Academic and practitioners agree that developing understanding of local context has been hitherto undervalued in PVE work. UNDP should work toward developing sophisticated and adaptive political economy analysis of violent extremism and dynamics at the national level. UNDP should develop political economy capacity to support its PVE work.

PVE Audit for UNDP Country Programmes

Unintended consequences particularly in the domains of security sector reform and criminal justice reform appear to be real risks in the operating context. This report recommends “PVE audits” of UNDP development programmes as a whole. The potential unintended consequences of programming on human rights should be examined as a priority given the strong empirical evidence of rights violation as a driver of violent extremism.

PVE Programming

Programming should invest in understanding PVE in context. Programming should draw from toolkits wider than PVE. There are strong lessons learned in prison reform. Monitoring and evaluation should be adaptive and flexible and designed to operate in context.
Human Rights be a PVE Programming Priority

Limited PVE programming is proposed to support gaps identified by PVE audits. This report recommends priority should be given to work supporting human rights and civil society because of the strong empirical basis for human rights violations as a driver of extremism, the strong empirical evidence that deteriorating human rights are the best currently early warning system of violent extremism and the clear evidence that human rights should be a regional priority. Civil society action is proposed as the sector is essential for meaningful PVE interventions, that human rights monitoring is a key task of civil society and much of the space for civil society has been increasingly restricted throughout the region.

PVE Successes are Conditional on a Strong Civil Society Sector

PVE cannot be a realistic proposition without a functioning civil society. In all South Asian states as elsewhere the sector is under threat. Enabling space for civil society to any PVE strategy sufficient institutional resources are needed to assess the full scale of the issue at the national level and develop clear policy responses. Responses need to be strengthened and extended to a wider set of development and political actors. The issue would appear pertinent for regional and global policy work.

Gender

There is an urgent need for research on gender and PVE in the region. UNDP should seek to ensure the involvement of women in programming and implementation.

REFERENCES


Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the world region most affected by violent extremism in terms of the total number of terrorism-related attacks, fatalities, and injuries, and the economic impact of these actions (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). North Africa, in particular, has become a focus of extremist activity in recent years partly as a result of the political upheaval following the overthrow of Libya’s long-time ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, during the Arab Spring protests of 2011 (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, Willcoxon & Basuni, 2015). Since then, Libya has experienced an exponential growth in extremism: the number of fatalities from related attacks increased from none (0) in 2010/2011 to 460 in 2015 (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, START, 2016).

Extremist organizations have also taken advantage of the power vacuum in Libya in order to increase their geographic scope and the intensity of their activities throughout North Africa and other regions on the continent (e.g. Sahel, Lake Chad region). In 2015, Egypt and Libya were ranked among the top 10 countries most affected by extremism (ninth and tenth, respectively), while Tunisia experienced its highest number of related deaths since 2000 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). Despite this trend, North African countries tend to be underrepresented in the leading English-language literature on preventing and countering violent extremism (henceforth P/CVE) (Douglass & Rondeaux, 2017).
P/CVE initiatives largely grew from the recognition that development-oriented processes are required in conjunction with security-led approaches in order to fully address the root causes of extremism. They consequently place greater emphasis on the political and socioeconomic contexts in which extremism thrives in order to promote community resilience. This paper draws on previous reports on public opinion research conducted by Afrobarometer in 2014/2015, which argue that citizen perceptions, attitudes, and policy preferences provide important “grassroots-level” insights for P/CVE programming and policy (Bentley, Lekalake & Buchanan-Clarke, 2016; Buchanan-Clarke & Lekalake, 2016). When used in conjunction with objective data (e.g. incidence data on frequency of attacks and related casualties), these results provide a more nuanced understanding of violent extremism’s impact on the general public. Furthermore, surveys can be used to gauge levels of satisfaction with existing policies and preferences, and can help shape future ones.

To what extent do citizens prioritize national security? How active are violent extremist organizations in a given country or region? To what extent do they pose a threat to national security? What motivates ordinary citizens to join or support these movements? How well are governments doing at addressing violent extremism? How can these efforts be improved? Should governments in countries affected by violent extremism focus their attention on P/CVE efforts, even if it is to the detriment of democratization and protecting human rights?

These are some of the questions posed by Afrobarometer in selected countries affected by violent extremism. The following sections will highlight the key findings from the research in North Africa, while highlighting the potential role of this type of research in informing future P/CVE research, programming, and policy formulation.

About the Afrobarometer Study in North Africa

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network founded in 1999 that measures public attitudes toward democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in more than 30 African countries. Six rounds of surveys have been conducted in a growing number of countries, increasing from 12 in 1999/2000 to 36 in 2014/2015. Round 7 surveys were ongoing at the time of this paper’s publication. Afrobarometer surveys are conducted by national partners in each country via face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice. Samples are representative of adult citizens (i.e. aged 18 years and above), yielding country-level results with margins of error of +/-2% (for samples of 2,400) or +/-3% (for samples of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level (for full details of the survey and network, including sampling principles, see www.afrobarometer.org).

In 2015, 5,998 Arabic-language interviews were conducted in five North African countries: Algeria (May-June), Egypt (June-July), Morocco (November), Sudan (June), and Tunisia (April-May). These countries were first surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2013. Afrobarometer does not currently conduct surveys in Libya.

The majority of items in Afrobarometer’s questionnaire are asked in all countries, allowing for comparison across countries and (in most cases) across time. In addition, a limited number of “country-specific questions” are included in order to gauge public opinion toward topical issues in each national context at the time of the research. Questions related to violent extremism were included among these questions in a number of countries affected by this form of violence at the time of survey preparation.

Citizens in the North African countries were asked a standardized series of questions in order to allow for regional comparison:

1. How active do you think each of the following Islamic movements are in [your country]:
   a. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIL/Daesh?
   b. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, known as AQIM?

2. In your opinion, to what extent do ISIL/Daesh or AQIM pose a threat to [your country’s] security?

3. There is much talk about the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL/Daesh, which is attracting members and fighters from a number of countries.
   a. In your opinion, what is the main reason that some [people from your country] join this group?
   b. What is the second most important reason?

4. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
   - Statement 1: Government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.
   - Statement 2: Government should never violate individuals’ human rights, even when it comes to ensuring peace and security for the country.
2. If the government of this country could increase its spending, which of the following areas do you think should be the top priority for additional investment? And which would be your second priority? (% naming security as first or second priority)

Source: Afrobarometer Data (2016)

While further investment into security infrastructure in the region is necessary, given the escalating threats to national security, the success of P/CVE initiatives also depends on the relations between the general public and the agencies charged with these efforts. A lack of trust in these institutions could deter citizens from engaging with these programs and therefore deprive them of vital intelligence. Measures of citizen confidence in public institutions is consequently another vital potential contribution of opinion data in P/CVE policymaking and programming (Buchanan-Clarke & Lekalale, 2016). In general, Afrobarometer surveys indicate that North Africans tend to be more trusting of security agencies than their counterparts in other African regions, but there is wide variation in these levels. Trust in the army is highest in Tunisia (94%) and lowest in Morocco (56%), while the proportion of citizens who trust the police at least “somewhat” ranges from just under half (48%) of Sudanese and Moroccan citizens to 68% of those in Tunisia.

Extremist Activity and Recruitment in North Africa

Two organizations account for the majority of extremist activity in the North Africa region: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as IS, ISIS or Daesh) and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Their regional reach is amplified by their organizational structure, as a relatively high proportion of attacks perpetrated in their name are conducted by official affiliates or by organizations or individuals that are inspired by their ideologies. Daesh is currently the world’s most deadly extremist organization, accounting for over 4,900 attacks across numerous regions throughout the world that have resulted in over 33,000 fatalities and 41,000 injuries since 2002 (Miller, 2016). Three of the organization’s most active affiliates in 2014/2015 are operational in North Africa.

These figures include attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram, which pledged allegiance to Daesh in March 2015. Daesh and Boko Haram are ranked the first and second most deadly groups in 2015 if the figures are disaggregated (see Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016).
There has been extensive research into the drivers of violent extremism, including on the various push and pull factors that promote radicalization and eventual recruitment into these groups. The findings above are not intended to replace such research and cannot match the accuracy of empirical research conducted among current or former members of these movements. However, they provide insight into how P/CVE policies and programs can shape effective messaging aimed at the general public in order to prevent further recruitment in future.

**Citizen Assessment of the Threat Posed by Violent Extremism**

Civilians are generally the primary targets of extremist organizations, therefore it is important to gauge public perceptions of the threat that they pose to national security in order to identify which population groups feel most vulnerable to these attacks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the results shown in previous sections, Tunisians were more likely to say that these groups are a significant threat to the country’s security than respondents elsewhere in the region. Comparison of these findings with incidence data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) indicates, however, that citizen responses to these issues do not necessarily correspond to objective data on the frequency and severity of related activities in the region (Table 1). Public concern regarding the levels of activity of and the threat posed by Daesh and AQIM in Tunisia appears to be elevated relative to that in Egypt and Sudan based on the available incidence data.

**Figure 2: Activity of Extremist Movements in North African countries | 2015**

![Graph showing activity levels of extremist movements in North African countries]

**Respondents were asked:** How active do you think each of the following Islamic movements are in [your country]: The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIL/Daesh? Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, known as AQIM? (% who said “somewhat active” or “very active”)

**Source:** Afrobarometer Data (2016)

North African countries have provided thousands of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria in the past decade – most notably from Tunisia (The Soufan Group, 2015; Dodwell, Milton & Rassler, 2016). When respondents were asked about the attraction of extremist organizations, poverty was cited as the leading reason that their fellow citizens join these groups (25%), followed by religious beliefs (18%), unemployment (15%), and a lack of education (10%), government ineffectiveness or corruption (5%), and that these movements “stand up to the West” (2%). A further quarter of respondents either cited other reasons (13%) or said that they don’t know (11%) (Bentley, Lekalake & Buchanan-Clarke, 2016).
could lead to inaccuracies or the underrepresentation of attacks in areas with little to no press coverage (de Alberquerque, 2017). It is therefore important to acknowledge the limitations of both approaches.

Analysis of citizen perceptions of the threat posed by Daesh or AQIM to national security by key demographic indicators shows that, on average, there are no differences in responses by urban-rural location or gender, and that this perceived threat increases with both age and levels of socioeconomic insecurity as measured by Afrobarometer’s measure of “lived poverty” (for more information, see Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 29, available at www.afrobarometer.org). However, comparison of these responses by the same variables within each country shows varying patterns depending on the context (Table 2).

### Table 2: Perceived threat posed by Daesh and AQIM by urban-rural residence, gender, age, and lived poverty level | 5 North African countries | 2015

| Source: Afrobarameter Data (2016) (% who said “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Public opinion research is time bound while violent extremism is a rapidly evolving phenomenon, therefore one possible explanation of the apparent discrepancy between objective and subjective data may be related to the timing of these surveys. The Afrobarometer survey in Tunisia, for example, took place in April/May 2015—only a month after a major extremist attack at the Bardo Museum in the capital, Tunis, by a Daesh affiliate on 18 March (Afrobarometer, 2016). The Tunisian government subsequently declared a state of emergency, which may have led to heightened citizen concern with extremist activity and with national security in general compared to the other four countries surveyed in the region.

Alternatively, these differences could be the result ofmethodological shortcomings within the “objective” data. Although the Institute for Economics and Peace (2016) notes that the vast majority of extremist activity occurs in countries with high levels of violent conflict and state inflicted human rights abuses, its rankings are based on data from the GTD, whose definition of terrorism restricts the number of incidents included in its database to actions conducted by non-state or sub-national actors. This exclusion of government actions provides a partial picture of the extent to which violent extremism affects civilian populations. Moreover, the GTD’s reliance on media sources

---

**Table 1: Citizen Threat Assessment and Terrorism Data in North Africa**

| Source: adapted from Bentley, Lekalale & Buchanan-Clarke (2016) to provide updated GTD data and GTI score (START, 2016).
Violent Extremism, Human Rights and Democratization in North Africa

In addition to its human and economic costs, violent extremism poses a significant threat to political stability in general and to democratic norms and institutions in particular. Existing literature on its impact on public opinion suggests that heightened levels of insecurity lead to increased support for the “strong leadership” of authoritarian regimes (Merolla & Zeichmeister, 2011). Furthermore, other studies warn that the usage of heavy-handed responses to growing insecurity that contradict democratic principles among leading democracies could threaten the legitimacy of these values worldwide (Freeman, 2003; Crenshaw, 2010).

Freedom House’s most recent assessment of the global state of political rights and civil liberties cites violent extremism as one of the leading factors in undermining democratic standards in both the United States and Europe (Freedom House, 2017). The report further identifies insecurity as a driver of worsening conditions for human rights in Libya, which experienced the third largest one-year decline on Freedom House’s measure of political freedoms.

In 2015, Afrobarometer explored the tension between respecting individual citizens’ rights on one hand and assuring collective peace and security on the other. Overall, public opinion was split in the four countries in which this question was asked: 47% of survey respondents agreed that governments should be free to treat individuals suspected of extremist activity “in any way necessary to ensure peace and security,” while 43%, conversely, stated that human rights should be inviolable even in the case of national security. Citizens in Egypt were most likely to prioritize ensuring peace and security over suspected extremists’ rights (59%), followed by those in Morocco (55%), Sudan (41%), and Algeria (34%) (Figure 3).

Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

- Statement 1: Government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.
- Statement 2: Government should never violate individuals’ human rights, even when it comes to ensuring peace and security for the country.

Source: Afrobarometer Data (2016)

Despite initial optimism about the prospects of liberalization in the MENA region following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, Tunisia became the only country to experience a full transition to democracy during this period. Most states affected by the protests have either become more repressive or have plunged into civil conflict, as in Libya (Diamond, 2015). Freedom House (2017) finds that 83% of the region’s population live in countries classified as “not free,” which includes Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and Sudan. Tunisia, in contrast, is currently rated “free” and Morocco “partly free.”

Afrobarometer asked Tunisians whether their government should prioritize ensuring security and fighting terrorism or focus on further strengthening democracy and protecting human rights in the country. As with the question above, the findings suggest that public opinion is divided on the appropriate balance between ensuring security and individuals’ rights. A slight majority of survey respondents in Tunisia (53%) agreed that the government should prioritize security and counter-extremist efforts, while 44% said that supporting
democracy and human rights should be its main priority “even if this undermines security and the fight against terrorism” (Lekalake, 2017).

This finding indicates some cause for concern about the prospects for further democratization, given the persistent threat of violent extremism in the country. A recent report alleging severe human rights violations committed since Tunisia’s state of emergency was declared in 2015 highlights existing tensions between the government’s counter-extremist efforts and its constitutional obligations to promote political and human rights (Amnesty International, 2017). Furthermore, human rights activists have also criticized the country’s antiterrorism legislation (passed in July 2015) due to the wide range of powers granted to state security agencies (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Further analysis of Tunisians’ stated preferences by key social and demographic indicators shows higher support for prioritizing security among rural residents, women and citizens with no formal education or primary schooling. Furthermore, this view increases with age (Figure 4). As previously shown, these are the social groups that perceive a higher threat to national security from Daesh and AQIM. More sophisticated statistical analysis could therefore be conducted to evaluate the relationship between the various attitudes and evaluations explored throughout this essay.

**Figure 4:** Citizen prioritization of security and counter-extremist efforts in Tunisia | by urban-rural residence, gender, age, education, and lived poverty level | 2015

---

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

- **Statement 1:** Government should prioritize ensuring security and fighting terrorism, even if it undermines democracy and human rights.
- **Statement 2:** Government should prioritize strengthening democracy and protecting human rights, even if this undermines security and the fight against terrorism. (% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with statement 1)

**Source:** Afrobarometer Data (2016)

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Nationally representative surveys are useful for providing a broad overview of citizen attitudes and evaluations on a given issue, but should be used in conjunction with other forms of empirical research in order to gain a nuanced understanding of an issue as complex as that of violent extremism. Security and violent extremism are not core themes of the Afrobarometer questionnaire, therefore future research in North Africa should include surveys that provide a wider range of questions on these issues. The research should be conducted in as many countries in the region as possible using standardized questions for full comparability across countries. Ideally, it should also be repeated frequently over time to allow for longitudinal analysis, given the often rapidly evolving nature of extremism.

Alternative questions on violent extremism that were asked in other Afrobarometer surveys in 2014/2015 are listed below:

**Support for violent extremism:**

1. How many of the following people do you think are involved in supporting and assisting the extremist groups that have launched attacks and kidnappings in [country], or haven’t you heard enough about them to say? (Nigeria and Cameroon)

2. Do you disagree or agree with the following statements concerning the Islamist group Boko Haram: Certain Western countries support and assist Boko Haram? Certain _______ in this country support and assist Boko Haram? (Niger)

3. In your opinion, what is the main reason why some people in [country] support and assist these armed extremist groups? (Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger)
Effectiveness of government P/CVE initiatives:

4. How effective do you think the [country] government has been in its efforts to address the problem of armed extremists in this country? (Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger)

5. How effective do you think the government was in its efforts to address the problem of armed groups in northern Mali? (Mali)

6. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say: Fighting terrorism in [country]? (Kenya and Uganda)

7. In your opinion, what do you think would be the best way for the government to be more effective in addressing the problem of armed extremists in our country? And what would be the second-best way? (Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Mali)

In addition to providing an example for future surveys, these results can also be employed in justifying the need for further, community-level research in the region. Survey findings can be used to identify specific target communities (whether geographic or demographic groups) for further qualitative or quantitative research, although it is important to take account of the size of these sub-samples when reporting and interpreting findings. Results from public opinion research can also be used as prompts for discussion with focus groups or experts in the field, particularly if they confound assumptions about public attitudes.

Conclusion

This essay presents key findings from nationally representative surveys in five North African countries, which provide a “snapshot” of citizen attitudes, perceptions and evaluations on security issues and violent extremism across the region. Firstly, the results show a wide variation in citizen attitudes, with a heightened concern about security related issues in Tunisia. Tunisians are significantly more likely to cite security-related issues as a policy priority than those in the other four countries and to report that organizations like Daesh and AQIM are active in the country. Furthermore, a strong majority of citizens in Tunisia perceive these organizations as a threat to national security. This is most likely a reflection of the timing of the survey relative to that in the countries, as data collection in the country took place relatively soon after a major attack in the capital city and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency.

Secondly, the essay shows that the perceived threat posed by Daesh and AQIM varies by key demographic indicators and by geographic location. However, caution must be taken in interpreting results that are based on small subsamples. This provides an opportunity for further research in specific areas or among certain population groups in order to provide a more accurate understanding of public attitudes.

Thirdly, the findings explore the tension between security initiatives and protecting political and human rights in North Africa. A majority of citizens in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia endorse prioritizing security and counter-extremist efforts, even if they come at the expense of these rights. The findings in Tunisia are of particular concern for the prospects of democratization in the region due to its status as the Arab Spring movements’ only successful case. These findings do, however, reflect evidence from other regions of the world on the impact that heightened insecurity from extremist activity has had on the support for democratic principles.

These results have important implications for our understanding of the impact of violent extremism on ordinary citizens in these countries and can be used to formulate more effective P/CVE programming and policies in order to promote community resilience. They should, however, be employed in conjunction with objective data from incidence reports. Further empirical research (whether quantitative or qualitative) is also required to better represent the needs of specific communities.
REFERENCES


Amnesty International (2017). ‘We want an end to the fear’: Abuses under Tunisia’s State of Emergency.


SECTION 3
P/CVE PROGRAMMING BY CASE STUDIES
Continued dissatisfaction with the education system may fuel frustrations towards the government and contribute to support for violence among youth." - Beza Tesfaye

CRITICAL CHOICES: ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON SOMALI YOUTHS’ PROPENSITY TOWARDS VIOLENCE
Beza Tesfaye

Introduction
For far too long, evidence on “what works” has evaded practitioners working on violence reduction, particularly Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Many existing strategies and programs are based on conventional wisdom or anecdotal information on what are perceived to be the drivers of violence. Among these, lack of equitable, quality education and political marginalization are often cited as drivers for youth joining violent groups (Hassan, 2012) (Hilker & Fraser, 2009). However, to be able to effectively address the growing threat of political violence and violent extremism in fragile and conflict-affected areas, empirical research to measure the impact of programs intended to reduce violence is needed.

In response to this evidence gap, Mercy Corps carried out a rigorous mixed-methods impact evaluation of a youth-focused stability program in Somaliland, funded by USAID, known as the Somali Youth Leaders Initiative (SYLI). The research tested the impact of increasing access to formal education and civic engagement opportunities on youth participation in, and support for violent extremism. Both of these types of interventions are prominent priorities in the Somali National Strategy and Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, 2016).

As the government of Somalia moves towards actualizing its strategy on CVE, there is a need to understand the effectiveness of specific interventions and approaches to reducing support and participation in violence. This study aims...
to contribute to the refinement and effective implementation of this policy. It does so by presenting evidence on the impact of increasing access to secondary education and civic engagement opportunities designed to reduce propensity towards violence amongst youth. By evaluating an ongoing youth-focused stability program, this research helps shed light on what types of CVE interventions are empirically proven to work in places like Somalia and thereby worthy of further investment.

Research Gaps

Conflict and instability have plagued Somalia for the past three decades. Lawlessness and the disintegration of the Somali state have made it possible for violent extremist groups, like Al Shabaab, to emerge and take control of large parts of the country (Yan, 2015). Effectively responding to and addressing the root causes of all forms of violence, including violent extremism, requires an understanding of its drivers and antidotes, particularly for Somali youth. Existing research on violence and conversations with Somali youth have provided insights as to what the key drivers are (Hassan, 2012; Mercy Corps, 2015). However, causal evidence on what policies and programs work to address these drivers remains sparse. To fill this gap, this study evaluated the effectiveness of two youth-focused development interventions—education and civic engagement—in reducing violent extremism. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the impact of providing access to secondary education on support and participation in violent extremism amongst youth?

2. What is the impact of providing access to secondary education and civic engagement opportunities on support and participation in violent extremism amongst youth? In other words, is there a marginal effect of civic engagement activities when added to secondary education?

Existing Theories on Education and Violent Extremism

Research globally has proliferated theories around the drivers of violent extremism, particularly around what leads young people—who form the majority of recruits—to participate in this form of violence (Denoeux, 2009) (Bo rum, 2011). The lack of access to equitable, quality education is amongst the most commonly cited drivers of violent extremism (Denoeux, 2009) (Hassan, 2012) (Hilker & Fraser, 2009). However, evidence on the relationship between education and violent extremism, is mixed, and most research demonstrates that demographic profiles of youth who join violent groups globally are diverse in terms of education and socioeconomic levels (Dalgaard-Nielsen).

Three theories linking education to a reduction in violent extremism have been explored in the literature. First, evidence strongly supports the theory that government’s inability to provide education (and other basic services), may decrease populations’ perceptions of government legitimacy and effectiveness (Allan, Glazzard, Jerperson, Reddy-Tumu, & Winterbotham, 2015). The second theory linking education to a reduction in violent extremism is that youth with an education have more opportunities for economic and social advancement, and thus are less vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists. In Somalia, while research showed that few members of Al Shabaab mentioned education as a driving factor, many cited missed career opportunities as factors in their joining the group (Hassan, 2012). However, the education-as-opportunity theory also has negative implications for vulnerability to violent extremism. If youth increase their expectations of career opportunities but these are not met, they risk disillusionment, which could be a push factor for participation in violent extremism (Allan, Glazzard, Jerperson, Reddy-Tumu, & Winterbotham, 2015). The third theory connecting education and violence is group belonging and isolation. In this pathway, Venhaus (2010) describes the need for community and group membership as a catalyst for youth who may feel isolated to join violent groups. Being in school reduces isolation among youth by allowing them to form positive social bonds with students, teachers and others in their community or by giving them social standing and acceptance and according to Venhaus this may be able to undermine recruitment and participation in violent extremist groups.

Existing Theories on Civic Engagement and Violent Extremism

Similarly, research on the links between civil society-led civic engagement activities and violence outcomes is mixed and warrants further study. Political self-efficacy is one mechanism that has been shown to connect civic engagement to decreased propensity towards violence and broader political stability. Where youth feel alienated from political processes and believe they cannot influence government decisions, they may turn to violence to have a voice (Hilker & Fraser, 2009). Alternatively, citizens’ belief that they can influence the political process through nonviolent means can support stability. Mercy Corps’ research among youth in Kenya demonstrates that youth who were civically engaged and took action to try to address local or national governance problems were less likely to engage in or be disposed towards violent extremism (Kurtz, 2011).
Despite evidence supporting a positive correlation between civic engagement and lowered propensity towards political violence, other research points to an opposite relationship. Mercy Corps’ analysis of survey data from Somalia in 2013 revealed that youth who were more civically engaged were more likely to have participated in political violence, probably because they had a better sense of their political goals and higher expectations for their government (Wolfe & Kurtz, 2013). Other research has indicated that some non-violent civil society organizations turn violent when their political objectives are not met; similarly, if non-violent groups are met with repressive tactics by the government, then they are more likely to radicalize in the face of such opposition (Allan, Glazard, Jerperson, Reddy-Tumu, & Winterbotham, 2015). As with education, the risk of increasing youth’s expectations—specifically around government response and participation in the political processes—could exacerbate, rather than reduce, grievances that can contribute to violent extremism.

Hypotheses Tested

Mercy Corps’ youth programming in Somalia, founded on the theory that both improved access to education and civic engagement can contribute to stability, provides a promising case study for research to fill this evidence gap. Specifically, this study sought to compare and contrast the degree to which access to secondary education alone and coupled with civic engagement activities can contribute to reduced participation and support for violent extremism. In doing so, the research sheds light on what types of youth-focused interventions can help promote stability in places like Somalia and beyond.

The study tested the following hypothesis around the possible impact of the SYLI program:

- **H1**: Participation in and support for violent extremism among Somali youth will **decrease** as a result of increased access to formal education if youth perceive their government is satisfactorily providing basic services.

- **H2**: Participation in and support for violent extremism among Somali youth will **decrease** as a result of increased access to formal education if youth are less isolated and excluded in their community.

- **H3**: Participation in and support for violent extremism among Somali youth will **decrease** as a result of increased access to formal education if youth are more optimistic about future employment opportunities.

- **H4**: Participation in and support for violent extremism among Somali youth will **decrease** as a result of increased access to formal education and civic engagement activities if youth feel they can make a difference in their community.

- **H5**: Participation in and support for violent extremism among Somali youth will **decrease** as a result of increased access to formal education and civic engagement activities if youth gain confidence in the effectiveness of nonviolent means to affect change.

Program Overview

Since 2011, Mercy Corps has been implementing the youth-focused stability program in Somalia, SYLI. This program directly supports USAID/East Africa’s Assistance Objective: Somalia’s stability increased through targeted interventions that foster good governance, economic recovery, and reduce the appeal of extremism (USAID, 2013). To achieve this, the program sets out as its goal to reduce instability through increased education and civic participation opportunities for Somali youth. The program targets youth ages 15 to 24 years in Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia. The existence of this program offers a unique opportunity to test the impact of youth-focused programming on stability outcomes. Though the program has several inter-related components, the evaluation was focused on two interventions:

- **Increased access to formal secondary education**: Under this component, the SYLI program has expanded secondary school access to youth across Somalia, through the construction and rehabilitation of schools, training of teachers and development of Community Education Committees. In total, the program will have opened 60 secondary schools in Somaliland over 5 years, Puntland and South Central Somalia, which would provide access to education for an estimated 45,000 Somali youth.

- **Youth empowered to contribute positively and productively to society through civic engagement**: This component of the program focuses on helping youth in schools to be leaders in their community through skills building and organizing community action campaigns.
Specifically, the program identified 22 youth leaders in each of the new secondary schools, to serve as peer mobilizers. These youth were trained in the areas of conflict analysis, peacebuilding, teambuilding and leadership. Youth leaders then apply their leadership skills to work on concrete issues by mobilizing their peers in school to plan together and carry out student-led community action projects.

Methodology

We employed a mixed-methods impact evaluation design to test the above-mentioned hypotheses and generate robust evidence on what, if any, impact the SYLI program has had on stability. Specifically, we used an ex-post quasi-experimental matched design, relying on survey data from youth in Somaliland, supplemented by Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with in and out of school youth (both males and females), teachers, Ministry of Education officials, and members of Community Education Committees. The study focused on Somaliland where SYLI had been implemented the longest, making the interventions most ready to evaluate. In addition, due to logistical and security constraints, the study was unable to collect data from areas in Puntland and South Central Somalia.

For the quantitative survey, participants were selected through a two-stage sampling process. First, we purposively sampled schools that were built or reconstructed through the SYLI program in three different regions: Hargeisa, Burao and Sanaag. The schools were selected based on: (1) intervention type—i.e. educational activities alone or educational and civic engagement activities and (2) location—rural vs. urban settings. Given the preponderance of work in urban areas in Somaliland, five schools in urban areas and two in rural areas were originally selected to provide a representative view of the participants in Somaliland. Once schools were identified, students were randomly selected within the schools and out of school youth in the same communities, to serve as the treatment and control groups, respectively. A total of 802 youth were surveyed, including 504 in school youth (treatment) and 298 out of school youth (control).

In order to estimate the average treatment effect of the interventions, we used stabilized Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighting (s-IPTW) to achieve balance between the treatment and control units, which allows us to mimic a Randomized Control Trial. Using this technique, we matched the treatment and control participants based on outcomes that influenced participation in the program and the key outcomes, including: age, poverty, exposure to violence, marital status, number of children, experience of displacement, and household characteristics, as well as baseline levels of political engagement (i.e. interest in politics). Once balance was achieved, we relied on a linear regression to estimate the difference-in-means for the treatment versus control group, using weights estimated by s-IPTW. In addition to these covariates, we controlled for whether someone was a trained student leaders in the analysis, thereby improving comparability between the treatment and control group.

Given the sensitive nature of the survey, which touched on issues such as an individuals’ attitudes and behaviors towards violent extremism social desirability bias presented a concern. To avoid this problem, in addition to direct questions, we employed a survey experiment known as a random response experiment, to reveal attitudes around sensitive issues in an indirect way. This approach asks respondents to use a randomized device (in our case, a spinner) whose outcome is unobserved by the enumerator. By introducing random noise, the method conceals individual responses and consequently protects respondent privacy, thus increasing the likelihood of respondents reporting on their true beliefs or actions on sensitive issues (Blair, 2015).

To test the above mentioned hypotheses around why the program may or may not have impacted on violence outcomes, the use of mediation analysis would have been ideal. However, the design of our evaluation did not meet the requirements necessary for conducting a mediation analysis. As such, we simply examine whether participation in one of the two interventions impacts the violence outcome variables, and whether participation in one of the two interventions impacts the intermediate variables hypothesized to be the mechanisms. If we see program impact on both types of variables in the manner that we expected for each hypothesis, we surmise that there is support for our hypothesis. If we do not see both impacts in the direction we expect, we question the validity of the hypothesis.

The qualitative component of the research consisted of Key Informant Interviews. Twenty-five key informants, fifteen of whom were youth, were interviewed to understand the perceptions of people engaged in the project at its different phases of implementation. The key informants described the realities on the ground and social barriers, as well as structural challenges that hampered access to education and undermined stability in the region. Qualitative interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The transcriptions were analyzed using thematic coding through an inductive approach. Key themes that were explored include experiences in school, future aspirations and concerns, perceptions of the government, and engagement in violence.
Key Findings: Program Effects on Stability

I. Does Improved Access to Secondary Education Impact Youth Propensity Towards Violence?

To understand the impact of the SYLI program on stability related outcomes, we compared youth who were enrolled in schools reconstructed, equipped and capacitated through SYLI with similar youth who were out of school, as described in the methodology section. We first tested this component’s (education alone) impact on attitudes and behaviors related to violence using both direct and indirect (random response) questions. Our analysis produced mixed results across these outcomes. When examining direct violence questions, we find that the program decreased the likelihood of youth reporting participating in violence by 15% while it had no impact on support for violent extremism. The indirect (random response) questions, however, revealed that youth’s access to secondary education increased their likelihood of supporting the use of violence for a political cause by 11%, while having no statistically significant impact on having used violence against another person for reasons that might have been political, tribal, or other. The latter finding corresponds with what we found in our baseline study of youth in Somalia in 2013—youth who were in school were more likely to express support for the use of violence (Wolfe & Kurtz, 2013).

Figure 1: Effect of Education on Violent Outcomes

The seemingly divergent findings around participation and support for violence are not wholly counterintuitive. Our theory of change on how education may reduce propensity towards violence and other forms of negative and harmful behaviors centered on three mechanisms: (1) via an improvement in perceptions of government responsiveness, (2) via a reduction in isolation and exclusion, and (3) via an increase in optimism about future employment prospects. We observe that the educational component of the SYLI program increased youth’s perceptions of government doing a good job in providing services like water and electricity and healthcare, but decreased the perception that government is performing well in its provision of education. Compared to out of school youth, those in the program were over 30% less likely to be satisfied with the government’s provision of education. One reason why satisfaction with government provision of education is low is due to the poor quality of education; as one teacher from Burao put it “Access to education is not a problem but access to good quality education is the problem.” Continued dissatisfaction with the education system may fuel frustrations towards the government and contribute to support for violence among youth.

Figure 2: Treatment Effect of Access to Education on Favorable Rating of Government Performance

“Continued dissatisfaction with the education system may fuel frustrations towards the government and contribute to support for violence among youth.”
II. How Does the Provision of Civic Engagement Opportunities and Access to Secondary Education Impact Youth Propensity Towards Violence?

We now turn to assessing the effects of adding civic engagement activities to formal education in the SYLI program on violence reduction outcomes. The civic engagement activities examined in this study encompass student-led community action campaigns involving youth in schools built or reconstructed by the SYLI program. According to our findings, the combination of these student-led community action projects and access to secondary education reduced the likelihood of youth reporting participating in violence by 14% and decreased the likelihood that youth think violence is “sometimes necessary” by 20%. The indirect survey questions validated this positive impact on stability outcomes. Specifically, the combined interventions decreased the likelihood of youth supporting violence by 16%.
Another important mechanism through which civic engagement activities can help reduce support for violence is by building young people’s faith in the effectiveness of non-violent actions. Youth who were involved in student-led community action projects were more likely than the control group to believe in the effectiveness of lodging a complaint with local officials, raising an issue in a group, or discussing concerns with community leaders in bringing about a desired change. For example, youth in civic engagement activities were 17% more likely to believe that lodging a complaint with a local official was an effective way of bringing about a desired change. The program not only increased the perceptions that these nonviolent actions were effective, but also the likelihood of youth actually employing them. These findings indicate that participating in student-led community action projects can increase the belief that nonviolent alternatives to address concerns exist and can be effective, thereby reducing the likelihood of youth supporting the use of violence.

“Both the qualitative and quantitative data show that increased youth agency is an important mechanism connecting civic engagement with impacts on violence reduction.”
CRITICAL CHOICES

CONTEMPORARY P/CVE RESEARCH & PRACTICE

young people’s vulnerability to being drawn into violent groups, as well as address their frustrations about not being able to make a difference in their lives and in their communities, which for some can be a motivator for supporting the use of violent extremism.

Lessons from this study can be extracted and applied to settings beyond Somaliland to development and programs focused on promoting stability and CVE in other fragile and conflict-affected places. First, the addition of civic engagement activities can amplify the benefits of educational and other youth-focused programs. Youth development programs can have greater impact on promoting stability by building young people’s internal assets through formal and informal education and other skills-building programs while also providing them with opportunities to use these skills to be active and productive citizens. Essentially, to reduce violence, youth development programs must address both the demand (lack of capacity, including knowledge and skills) and the supply (lack of opportunities, including for civic engagement) sides of challenges that face youth.

As policymakers, donors, and the governments of Somaliland and Somalia embark on charting a strategic roadmap for the country’s future, youth must be considered as a critical partner in peace and development. The Government of Somalia has recognized this, putting youth at the center of its National CVE plan and recognizing that “we should not only work for young people—we should work with them” to address violent extremism (National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, 2016). Our research shows that young people desire to be positively engaged in social, economic and political life. Expanding opportunities for young people to play a role in these key sectors such as those provided in the SYLI program model—is fundamental to strengthening stability. Failing to do so, however, may lead this generation of youth to take desperate risks and use violence as a means to be heard. Young people will inevitably make an impact in their countries—the question is what type of impact will it be?

**Figure 6: Treatment Effect of Access to Civic Engagement Opportunities and Secondary Education on Belief and Efficacy of Civic Actions**

![Bar chart showing the treatment effect of access to civic engagement opportunities and secondary education on belief and efficacy of civic actions.](image)

**Conclusions**

This study set out to generate evidence of the impacts of a youth-focused stability program on reducing youth engagement in violence and improving stability through education and civic engagement. Using the Mercy Corps’ SYLI program as an example, we tested the effects of improving access to education and civic engagement opportunities on young people’s propensity toward violence. Our results show that when education is combined with student-led community action projects, it can promote stability more than just education by itself. School plays a critical role in creating an environment where youth are engaged in learning, and feel less isolated and excluded. However, this by itself does not address young people’s frustrations about being unable to realize their future aspirations and ability to make a positive difference in their communities. We found that the addition of civic engagement activities to formal education opportunities alleviates some of this frustration by giving youth opportunities to engage positively in their communities and increasing confidence in their ability to achieve change through nonviolent means. Hence, a combination of formal education and civic engagement activities that focus on community action projects appear to be effective pathways to support stability-related outcomes. Importantly, these interventions were found to reduce
Recommendations

Mercy Corps urges international donors, development agencies, and the Government of Somalia to:

1. **Put political will and investment into the youth education and civic engagement pillars of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism:** Donors and aid agencies should support the implementation of this plan, specifically, by increasing funding for programs that address the drivers of violence rather than responding to its symptoms, using the data from this study as an example of effective programming. This recommendation is in line with Mercy Corps’ call to increase investments as a percentage of overall aid spending in targeted violence reduction and peacebuilding programming at least two fold within the next two years (Aviles, 2016).

2. **Ensure that youth education programs with violence reduction goals work to simultaneously improve access to school, enhance the quality of education, and increase access to community or civic engagement opportunities:** Donors, national governments, and operational agencies should design youth-focused violence reduction and CVE programs to take multi-pronged approaches that: (a) reduce feelings of hopelessness, isolation, and exclusion that can increase youth’s likelihood of engaging in violent organizations; (b) reduce the drivers of grievance related to governance - be they government provision of quality education, corruption, or biased service delivery; and (c) provide platforms for youth to engage in their communities and with governments in order to transform their perception of grievance. The Government of Somalia should incorporate civic engagement activities into its education strategy and curriculum.

3. **Provide greater support to initiatives to improve the quality of education in Somaliland, and other transitional parts of Somalia:** There is a strong link between the quality of education schools offer, the graduates it produces, and the potential for education to be a stabilizing force. To date, investments in education have focused primarily on increasing access, but our research indicates that resources must shift towards improving quality. Donors and the government can do this by investing more in training teachers, improving salaries, and addressing teacher absenteeism, for example, through camera monitoring which has been successful in places like rural India (Duflo, Hanna, & Ryan, 2012).

4. **Increase government investment, engagement, and visibility in development projects, particularly in education:** Donors should ensure local and national ownership of all development projects that seek to reduce violence or improve state-society relations, including by eliminating donor and NGO branding on development projects and prioritizing partner capacity building. The Somalia government should improve the vertical linkage of education programs with investments in good governance, improved service delivery, and corruption reduction.
REFERENCES


Introduction

This paper will present the main findings of the research that the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia conducted among the youth in Sandzak in 2016 and present its activities focused on P/CVE since 2012.

Background Information

Sandzak is a geographical area in South West Serbia with a majority Muslim population. The biggest towns in Sandzak have a high percentage of persons under the age of 30, which is an important fact to consider in the context of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). According to the 2011 population census in Serbia, young people make up 48% of the population of Novi Pazar – the biggest town in Sandzak. This is also the case in its two other most populated municipalities Tutin and Sjenica, whereby the youth make up 51% and 42% of the population respectively.

The most numerous ethnic group in Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin are Bosniaks, virtually all of whom follow Islam. It should be pointed out that ethnic Bosniak identity is almost entirely equated with the religious Muslim identity. The Muslim community in Sandzak is very polarized on several levels, particularly on political and religious level. It is characterized by conflicts between different political parties, which sometimes lead to violent incidents between their activists. Since 2007, two Islamic communities are functioning in parallel in Sandzak, and a “third option” formed by the Salafi movement also exists.

HOW SUSCEPTIBLE ARE THE YOUTH IN SANDZAK TO ISLAMIC EXTREMISM?

Jovana Saračević
Today’s societies, including the Western Balkans societies, are characterized by a plurality of extremisms. Extremist groups are interconnected and have partners on a global level. Therefore, local initiatives cannot be analyzed outside of the global context. A common characteristic for different forms of extremism is that they focus on young people. Such is also the case in Sandzak, where it is mostly the young who get recruited by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other violent extremist groups. In addition to political and religious tensions, a poor economic situation is another problem in Sandzak, which is also one of the most underdeveloped and economically devastated regions of Serbia. Prospects for young people to find employment are low and the latest records of the Novi Pazar branch of the National Employment Service show that the most represented age group among the unemployed are people under the age of 30. This was also confirmed by the fieldwork and research in Sandzak - when asked about their biggest problems, young respondents most frequently indicated unemployment.

One of the most important issues not only in Serbia, but in the Western Balkans as a whole, is the identity of the Bosniak community and the relationship between secularism and religion in the formation of the modern Bosniak identity. It should be mentioned that the anti-Muslim campaign was an important element of the mainstream narrative in Serbia during wars in the 1990’s which led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and stereotypes about Muslims have still not been fully deconstructed (Biserko, 2006). This is a factor contributing to the stigmatization of the Muslim community today.

The question of identity is important, given that young people who are recruited by violent extremist groups often come from poor families, they are unemployed and frustrated with their economic, social and political realities, searching for some identity and self-realization. Given the low economic and living standards, inter- and intra-ethnic frictions and political instability, the youth easily become disillusioned and potentially susceptible to recruitment of violent radical groups. The relationship between the state and Bosniak minority is additionally complicated by the fact that individuals from the Western Balkans joined ISIL and other violent Islamic groups. While economic development and infrastructure investments in Sandzak are needed, they alone are not sufficient to successfully address the problem of violent extremism. As noted in the study of the Regional Cooperation Council on P/CVE in the Western Balkans, although officials tend to state that these investments are needed most to prevent and counter violent extremism, “there is recognition that there is an ideological/worldview factor and deeper inclusion/alienation issues that must be addressed as well” (Perry, 2016).

When speaking frankly with the youth about their perception of extremism in their local communities, the majority agree that individuals with extremist views exist in Sandzak, but they find it disturbing when mainstream media depict the entire Sandzak population as susceptible to Islamic extremism and a threat to the security of Serbia. Such generalization can lead to the youth’s further isolation and radicalization, and it would be best if the media refrained from presenting Sandzak as a powder keg.

The majority of people spoken with throughout the project implementation period said that “persons who went to war to a foreign country did not properly understand Islam and they simply wanted to belong to a group and feel important.” Additionally, they said that some individuals went because of the money promised to them, which has nothing to do with religion. These factors should be considered when analyzing the motivation of young people to join violent extremist groups.

Fieldwork

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia has been working with the youth in Sandzak for more than four years, focusing on preventing and countering extremist ideologies through non-formal education methods – workshops, seminars, lectures and youth-led outreach events. In addition, the youth organized a strong social media campaign raising awareness of their peers about the importance of P/CVE, and promoting values such as tolerance, diversity and equality. The main goal of these activities was to encourage critical thinking of the youth and promotion of a human rights culture and fundamental freedoms as a counter-narrative to radicalization. All activities were designed in such a way as to promote gender balance and all working groups had both male and female members.

Another set of activities aimed at building trust between the youth and the police by “breaking” stereotypes. Restoring trust in institutions, wherever that trust has been diminished, is crucial in P/CVE efforts. The police have a particularly important role in this respect, in improving the overall security situation, “awareness-raising initiatives directed at youth about staying safe” (OSCE, 2014) and supporting cohesion in the society. Over the course of the project implementation in Sandzak, the police was actively involved through participation in open talks with the youth about the most pressing issues in the local communities, and in supporting the youth-led outreach events. Regular communication with the police provided an important opportunity for the youth to learn more about the activities of the police in Sandzak, including...
One of the most important outputs of the activities implemented in Sandzak over the past four years is the forming of a youth group active in P/CVE in Sandzak, consisting of members who participated in the mentioned project activities. They gained knowledge, skills and motivation to continue with P/CVE efforts in their local communities, while also encouraging their peers and friends to join them in these efforts. This significantly contributed to the sustainability of P/CVE efforts, as the network of young people capable of recognizing the threats of violent extremism grew considerably. The group was empowered to quickly mobilize the youth for a wide spectrum of activities against extremism, work with their peers and recruit new activists. The youth group remained active in Sandzak after the end of the project implementation period, continuing to promote human rights and organize on a volunteer basis several lectures on countering extremist ideologies in secondary schools in Novi Pazar.

The youth-led outreach campaigns are what brought cohesion to the group, whose members planned and organized musical concerts, sports games, performances and public debates aiming to promote tolerance and non-violence and to raise awareness of their fellow citizens about countering extremist ideologies. An event that particularly contributed to the development of the critical thinking of the youth was the “Pedagogical Decision-Making Show” which the youth group members prepared under the mentorship of a professional theatre director, and performed before the Novi Pazar audience. This was an important analysis of extremism and personal exercise of democratic and free decision-making. After the performance of the play, one young participant said that “the play allowed us to enter the world of adults and see how they make decisions, but also to motivate adults to reassess their own attitudes” (Danas, 2016). Most importantly, this outreach event and the process of its preparation motivated the youth to critically think about the social, political and religious norms, and to form informed opinions.

The Opinion Poll

In addition to organizing youth seminars and youth-led outreach events in the local communities in Sandzak, the Helsinki Committee also conducted an opinion poll on the attitudes of the youth, assessing their susceptibility to extremist ideologies. The opinion poll was conducted in May 2016 in four towns in Sandzak, on a sample of more than 600 respondents, aged 16 – 27.

The questionnaire was developed by the Helsinki Committee, and the findings were analyzed by Prof. Dr. Vladimir Ilić, the author of the study, “How Susceptible Are the Youth in Sandzak to Islamic Extremism” (Ilić, 2016).

Respondents were asked to assess on a scale from 1—4 their confidence in their families, friends, religious dignitaries and other social structures and institutions. Their answers indicate that 88% trust their families the most, but have little to no confidence in other social structures and institutions. Only 25% of respondents fully trust their friends and 3.5% their neighbours. When it comes to Sandzak, the society is reduced to its smallest level – the family.

The low level of trust in the state institutions indicates the necessity to continue with the activities aiming to restore this shattered trust, such as the activities organized with the police in Sandzak. But what is particularly worrisome is the social isolation of young people, most of whom have little to no trust in social structures other than their closest families. As noted by Ilić, “[…] there is no institutional or social support mechanism to alleviate their feeling of ‘loneliness.’ As they have no confidence in institutions, even the network of closer social relations is to them an outside, non-interiorized factor” (Ilić, 2016).

Therefore, an important step would be to include families in P/CVE activities – not only because of the level of trust that the youth have in their closest social structures, but also because the family is the last and the most difficult tie to break for the radicalized youth having decided to join extremist groups. So far, the Helsinki Committee has been including parents and siblings of the youth in Sandzak through their attendance in and support of the outreach events designed and planned by the youth group members. Schools, parents
and social services still lack adequate mechanisms to address the radicalization of the youth, and additional educational activities are needed in this respect. Some young people are for the first time informed about the means for preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalism through non-formal education, at P/CVE seminars and trainings. Therefore, future P/CVE efforts should focus on the strengthening of family networks and working together with parents, educational institutions and religious communities to create a counter-narrative and a broader P/CVE effort in the Western Balkans.

As previously mentioned, identity of Bosniaks is closely related to their religious identity. Findings of the opinion poll indicate that young Bosniaks in Sandzak identify themselves with religion more than with ethnicity. Belonging to the Islamic world is most important for 64% of respondents, while belonging to a religious community is most important to 57%. In other words, young Muslims in Sandzak more or less identify themselves with the Islamic world.

Another important characteristic to be considered is conservatism of opinion and attitudes of the youth in Sandzak. Young people are raised in highly conservative communities subject to strong re-traditionalization, which is also supported by the findings of the research. For example, when choosing a partner “a girl’s virginity is most important to 50% of boys, and important to another 18%. As for girls the percentages are 39 and 24 respectively” (Ilić, 2016). Religious affiliation is most important in the selection of a partner for 51% while another 26% said that it is important. Furthermore, more than a half of respondents said that they would feel bad – or very bad - if a homosexual couple moved to their neighborhood. However, conservative attitudes should not only be ascribed to the youth in Sandzak, given that their peers from other parts of Serbia also demonstrate a high level of conservatism. For example, in the opinion poll conducted in different regions of Serbia in 2015 on a sample of 1,200 young people (15-29 years old), 40% of respondents said that they would feel (very) bad if a homosexual couple moved in to their neighborhood (Tomanović, 2015). Also the findings of research conducted by the Helsinki Committee in six different towns in Serbia in 2011, aiming to analyze attitudes and values of secondary school students, indicate that 57% of respondents demonstrate homophobia (Radoman, 2011). It is thus very important to keep raising awareness about the human rights culture, promote tolerance and strengthen civic education. In so doing, active partnerships with educators (secondary school teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and principals) and parents of the youth are of great importance.

**Susceptibility to Extremist Ideologies**

This topic was approached by asking more general and delicate questions at first, and then more specific questions were asked in order to analyze the susceptibility to extremist ideologies. Respondents were asked, “is it acceptable to defend one’s faith with violence?” and 19.8% gave a positive response. Findings of the research thus indicate that close to one fifth of the respondents are potentially open to religious extremism. It should be pointed out that violence usually stems from fear, regardless of whether it is a real or perceived fear. Respondents’ answers indicate that they feel Islam is threatened both in Serbia and in the world, which is one of the generators of violence of young Muslims in Sandzak.

Another question was asked: “Is it justified to go to some other country (ies) for a war?” and 10.8% of respondents replied affirmatively. Their answers as to why it is acceptable were: “Yes, if you are defending your rights and faith and saving your people”, “Yes, if you are defending innocent Muslims and warring in the name of justice and truth”, which points to the conclusion that the perception of a certain percent-
age of the youth in Sandzak is that Islam and Muslims are threatened. Here two summarized arguments prevail: protection (real or alleged) of threatened Muslims and exercise of the rights.

When speaking with the people in Sandzak about their perception of the youth’s reasons for joining violent extremist groups, the majority said that, “the youth most susceptible to extremist ideologies are those with an insufficiently developed value system, the youth wanting to belong to some group and individuals who do not know much about Islam which is why they believe everything they are told.” Clearly, most people in Sandzak do not support violent extremist ideologies. However, not an insignificant part of young people in Sandzak do justify the use of violence in defending one’s faith and would go to war to a foreign country. Therefore, initiatives of the state, civil society, educational institutions, families and other relevant actors are needed in order to address the causes of radicalization and to offer counter-narratives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Violent extremism and radicalism are a global phenomenon, so local initiatives should be analyzed in relation to the global context. In the case of Sandzak, further research would benefit from a wider approach, inclusive of cases in all of the countries in the Western Balkans, which share similar experiences, context and past. Devising joint strategies, counter-narratives and P/CVE initiatives would also prevent the negative “spillover” effect in the Western Balkans region. However, even though it is a global phenomenon, P/CVE activities should be designed in a way that best fits the local context.

It is also important to continue with educational outreaches contributing to the development of the critical thinking of the youth and encourage youth activism, awareness raising campaigns, and similar activities. Educated youth are more likely to critically analyze violent extremist ideologies and to resist them. Also, active and empowered youth are more likely to engage their peers in similar activities and to ensure continuity of such programs and knowledge transfer.

Cooperation between formal educational institutions and civil society specialized in providing non-formal education on P/CVE is crucial. In this respect, inclusion of pedagogues, psychologists, teachers and other school staff in the activities of civil society is important, as well as the introduction of P/CVE topics in the formal education system.

Restoring trust in institutions, wherever that trust has been diminished, is also essential. It is a long-lasting process requiring efforts from all the stakeholders – the government, civil society, educational institutions, the police, etc. Engaging these actors in joint P/CVE activities would produce long-term effects. In this respect, it is important to advocate for inclusive policies, contributing to further integration of the Bosniak community in a wider political, economic and cultural community of Serbia.
REFERENCES


The testimonies of former combatants, whether adults or children, constitute valuable counter-narratives to prevent recruitment and radicalization.”  

- Ines Marchand, Myriam Denov and Daniel Ruiz Serna
1. Armed Conflict and the Search for Peace in Colombia

On November 24th 2016, the Colombian government and the leftist guerrilla group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) signed a peace agreement to end more than 50 years of armed conflict. This is a significant achievement but it does not put an end to armed conflict in Colombia. Other illegal armed groups such as ELN (National Liberation Army) - a Marxist guerrilla group, the BACRIM (criminal gangs), and right-wing paramilitary groups, continue to be active and operate in several regions of the country. According to the National Centre for Historical Memory, the Colombian armed conflict is considered the longest and more enduring conflict in Latin America. It has produced more than 220,000 casualties (81% of them civilians), forcibly displaced an estimated 5.4 million, while 60,630 have been victims of forced disappearances. An estimated 4,000 women have been victims of sexual violence (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013).

In the aftermath of signing the peace accord with FARC, the Colombian government now faces the challenge of implementing the agreement to recognize and respect the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparation. Furthermore, in search of lasting peace, Colombian society must instigate significant changes to strengthen the social fabric through the re-establishment of relationships of trust and through reconciliation efforts, not only among victims and former combatants, but also among multiple sectors of Colombian society.

2. Agape for Colombia: A Strategy of Reconciliation

Agape for Colombia is a non-governmental organization run entirely by volunteers. Many of its members have been victims of the armed conflict and reside in either Colombia, or in Canada, having moved to Canada as refugees and/or immigrants. Others are members of civil society living in one of the two countries. As a non-government organization, Agape has been working with victims, former combatants, and members of civil society since 2007. At its inception, Agape’s program was geared exclusively towards support for victims, former combatants, and members of civil society since 2007. At its inception, Agape’s program was geared exclusively towards support for victims, former combatants, and members of civil society since 2007. At its inception, Agape’s program was geared exclusively towards support for victims, former combatants, and members of civil society since 2007. At its inception, Agape’s program was geared exclusively towards support for victims, former combatants, and members of civil society since 2007. At its inception, Agape’s program was geared exclusively towards support for victims, former combatants, and members of civil society since 2007.

Agape’s activities through word of mouth, alongside their personal interest in reconciliation. Preliminary interviews with victims (which are conducted over the telephone due to the remote locations of most participants) are conducted in order assess their position and status along the path of healing and to determine their readiness to participate in a program where they are to come face to face with former combatants and members of illegal armed groups, often for the first time. In many cases, individuals who were not yet ready to undertake an often demanding and taxing personal process, left through attrition.

Importantly, during the reconciliation gatherings, participants (former combatants, victims and civil society members) live together under one roof for several days, and later they participate in meetings planned by the participants themselves. These different encounters, both formal and informal, help to build trust, rapport and significant relationships amongst participants, and over time, they gradually consider themselves members of the Agape organization. Over the course of several years, these members have assumed the role of reconciliation. Following the success of this initiative, Agape continued to facilitate spaces where gatherings and dialogue between victims and participants of the armed conflict, in the presence of members of civil society, could take place. However, the organization’s initiative came to a halt in 2010, when the Canadian government denied visas to former child soldiers because of their former affiliation with armed groups. In response, Agape decided to replicate the Canadian initiative within Colombia, obtaining similar powerful results in terms of reconciliation. In Colombia, the reconciliation gatherings expanded to include not only former child soldiers, but also other victims of the armed conflict, such as police officers (who were kidnapped, and held in captivity within armed groups up to twelve years), victims of forced displacement, victims of disappearances, and victims of sexual violence. Members of civil society also participated in the gatherings and are a key aspect of Agape’s program. Members of civil society bear witness to the transformation of former victims into peace promoters, a process through which victims (re)build a sense of personal power, agency and promote forgiveness as a cornerstone towards reconciliation. Many of these civil society participants came to be a part of Agape’s activities through word of mouth, alongside their personal interest in reconciliation. Preliminary interviews with victims (which are conducted over the telephone due to the remote locations of most participants) are conducted in order assess their position and status along the path of healing and to determine their readiness to participate in a program where they are to come face to face with former combatants and members of illegal armed groups, often for the first time. In many cases, individuals who were not yet ready to undertake an often demanding and taxing personal process, left through attrition.

In order to assess their position and status along the path of healing and to determine their readiness to participate in a program where they are to come face to face with former combatants and members of illegal armed groups, often for the first time. In many cases, individuals who were not yet ready to undertake an often demanding and taxing personal process, left through attrition.

In the aftermath of signing the peace accord with FARC, the Colombian government now faces the challenge of implementing the accord aiming to recognize and respect the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparation. In turn, the victims learned of the painful reality of child soldiers, and attempted multiple forms of reconciliation with them.

Following the success of this initiative, Agape continued to facilitate spaces where gatherings and dialogue between victims and participants of the armed conflict, in the presence of members of civil society, could take place. However, the organization’s initiative came to a halt in 2010, when the Canadian government denied visas to former child soldiers because of their former affiliation with armed groups. In response, Agape decided to replicate the Canadian initiative within Colombia, obtaining similar powerful results in terms of reconciliation. In Colombia, the reconciliation gatherings expanded to include not only former child soldiers, but also other victims of the armed conflict, such as police officers (who were kidnapped, and held in captivity within armed groups up to twelve years), victims of forced displacement, victims of disappearances, and victims of sexual violence. Members of civil society also participated in the gatherings and are a key aspect of Agape’s program. Members of civil society bear witness to the transformation of former victims into peace promoters, a process through which victims (re)build a sense of personal power, agency and promote forgiveness as a cornerstone towards reconciliation. Many of these civil society participants came to be a part of Agape’s activities through word of mouth, alongside their personal interest in reconciliation. Preliminary interviews with victims (which are conducted over the telephone due to the remote locations of most participants) are conducted in order assess their position and status along the path of healing and to determine their readiness to participate in a program where they are to come face to face with former combatants and members of illegal armed groups, often for the first time. In many cases, individuals who were not yet ready to undertake an often demanding and taxing personal process, left through attrition.
of facilitators with regards to the inclusion and integration of new members. In this way, Agape has a core team of facilitators (the founders of the organization), but also has the spontaneous participation of long-term members, many of them former victims, who have assigned themselves the tasks of welcoming newcomers and ensuring that they are accepted and carefully integrated into the larger group. Facilitators are encouraged (though not forced) to share their own reintegration and reconciliation experiences with new members, spend leisure time together and encourage a sense of belonging. In this way, Agape continues to expand its range of community-based activities and participants. Since 2011, Agape has organized a total of eight reconciliation gatherings alongside two workshops to deal with issues of the healing and recovery path of victims and perpetrators. These activities have taken place in different of Colombian cities and towns including Armenia, Cali, Villavicencio, Tocancipá and Bogotá.

3. “Supervivientes”: The Impact of the Gatherings

The majority of the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia come from rural areas. In most cases, for safety reasons and the ongoing presence of armed groups, victims were forced to abandon their natal homes and were forcibly relocated to safer urban areas. As a consequence of forced displacement, these individuals and families have suffered family fragmentation, loss of their communities, traditional practices, rural way of life, and have faced a profound lack of employment opportunities, alongside stigmatization in their new urban contexts. Government support has been made available, but has been slow to arrive. In many cases, displaced populations have relied on the solidarity and support of others who have faced similar circumstances.

During reconciliation gatherings held in 2013, victims who had progressed in their healing process declared to the core group of facilitators, that as a result of the ongoing workshops and reconciliation process, they began to identify themselves no longer as “victims” of the conflict, but instead as members of civil society. The core group of facilitators recorded these findings and presented them back to the former victims in order to verify the content of what had they shared. Some members of Agape who were not victims of the conflict suggested the term “sobrevivientes” to connote their experience, literally meaning “survivors.” However, participants responded that this term was insufficient, as it suggested that, as a noun, the term insinuated that they were “barely making it.” Instead, they wanted to be recognized as “supervivientes” which captured that they had conquered their victimization and highlighted their sense of power and agency. Furthermore, participants asserted that the term was better suited to their belief that they had overcome resentment, forgiven their aggressors, abandoned their status as victims, and that they were committed to building new lives. Many of them reported that they were no longer exhibiting a passive position of helplessness and dependency. Instead, they reported having renewed energy and capacity to positively affect the course of their lives towards healing. Obviously, the pace and level of healing was unique to each participant. Those victims who attended the workshops and were in the beginning stages of healing, benefitted from the experience of the victims who had moved ahead in such a powerful manner.

Key factors that appeared to facilitate participants’ healing proved to be linked to the social dynamics fostered during the Agape reconciliation gatherings. This included the social support provided by other group members: members of civil society, other victims, Agape’s facilitators, many of whom are skilled clinicians, as well as the common awareness of reconciliation as a healing tool.

Art and Social Drama as a Reconciliation Tool

The use of social drama, which emerged spontaneously from group members themselves, has proved an important reconciliation tool during the workshops/gatherings. For example, a widow and Colombian refugee living in Canada travelled to attend the Agape gathering in Colombia. During a reconciliation gathering, she stood up and began to act out what she called “the Andes Climber.” This participant began to mimic and embody the difficult and dangerous climb of a mountaineer. Through pantomime, she drew attention to the tools she needed for her journey and arduous climb: a solid rock on which to step securely, a small tree solidly embedded on the mountain’s side, the need to look up (ahead of her) instead of down (behind or below her), the need to indicate to those following her (her family) the dangerous points along her route, and finally, her arrival to the mountain’s summit. She then turned around towards her audience, indicating that those are the challenges the victims face in overcoming violence, shame, guilt, loss and anger brought forward by years of armed conflict. Perhaps inspired by her creativity and commitment, that very same day, four more socio-dramas were created and performed by former victims, who, over time, began to consider themselves as peace promoters. The themes enacted included: victims of sexual violence, victims of kidnapping, the indifference of civil society, and multiple issues around the theme of reconciliation.

Agape for Colombia has provided venues where these new “peace promoters” are encouraged to find their voices, and present their socio-dramas to other mem-

---

**RECONCILIATION IN COLOMBIA**

---

**CONTEMPORARY P/CVE RESEARCH & PRACTICE**
borders of civil society. These performances are then followed by a group discussion with the audience. In this way, the socio-dramas enable victims to present their stories of recovery in a symbolic, accessible and meaningful language, and at the same time, their performances help to sensitize members of civil society about victims’ experiences of the conflict. These performances have also been powerful tools for breaking social barriers and prejudices. During these presentations, there have been significant moments of closeness and connection where members of civil society are able to learn of the realities of armed conflict in their own country and generate empathy towards those who have suffered. There have been instances in which members of civil society have asked for forgiveness for their indifference and have engaged in peacebuilding efforts. In this way, the path of healing for victims has evolved into what Agape has called the “Peace Promoters Program.”

4. The Path from Former Combatant to Civilian

In Colombia, many of the former combatants joined illegal armed groups as children, becoming fighters and combatants at a young age and living within the context of an armed group over extended periods of time (ranging from months to years). With little education, having spent most of their lives away from family, community, traditional culture, urban contexts, and having suffered the physical and emotional effects of their participation in the war, they experience enormous difficulties coping and adjusting to civilian life after leaving the armed groups. In spite of government efforts to facilitate demobilization, resources are often slow to reach these former combatants as they face a society that rejects them. Displacement from rural to urban areas, family fragmentation, loss of community, lack of education, lack of resources and opportunities, and stigmatization are common factors among the demobilized - often many of the same issues faced by victims of armed conflict.

Many of the former child soldiers that have participated in Agape’s reconciliation workshops recognize their dual identity as both victims and perpetrators of violence and armed conflict. Through the reconciliation gatherings, and the support of victims of the conflict – the very population that former child soldiers often harmed during participation in armed group – former combatants have ventured towards reconciliation. However, former combatants continue to express immense guilt, shame and responsibility for their violent actions within the groups. Responding to their desire to understand their own healing path as perpetrators of violence, Agape conducted a series of workshops where former child soldiers were able to express their needs in a safe and secure context. These former child soldiers identified the following key needs and challenges to their reintegration into the community: 1) the need to hide their identities and former affiliation with an armed group; 2) The need to blend in within the community; 3) the need to carry their guilt in silence; and 4) they identified a lack of trust and fear of community stigmatization as key challenges to their reintegration.

The former child soldiers who participated in the reconciliation gatherings reported that they had forgiven those who recruited them illegally and who were responsible for the actions they had committed as children. And yet, they expressed their own need to find forgiveness, which they accomplished through their reconciliation work with other victims. It was during these workshops that former combatants realized that most of them had not been able to forgive themselves. As these participants noted:

“I will have to live with what I did”
“I could not forgive myself.”
“I wondered if there was a God to forgive me.”
“I can’t believe they (the victims attending the workshop) have forgiven me”
“I had never talked about what I did and I feel so relieved.”

During the workshops, the former combatants reported that it was the first time they addressed their feelings of guilt and shame, and that self-forgiveness was only possible due to the level of trust generated by the presence and support of the reconciliation process. In this sense, Agape members had become role models for others attempting to walk the path of healing. The “supervivientes” had been able to inspire victims and former combatants, providing them with hope and courage in the reconciliation process. Agape members who were former adult combatants are also participants in the Peace Promoter Program and they take their poignant message to those unaware of the realities that these young people (former child soldiers) have to face upon demobilization and reintegration. The testimonies of former combatants, whether adults or children, constitute valuable counter-narratives to prevent recruitment and radicalization.”
5. The Significant Role of Civil Society

In Colombia, large segments of civil society live in urban areas, have not been directly affected by armed conflict and have remained largely neutral to the plight of victims (Basta ya, 2013). And yet, Agape’s workshops have highlighted the significant role that civil society can play in the development of counter-narratives of violence and armed conflict. As witnesses, members of civil society play a powerful role in validating the experiences of victims and provide recognition and support, which is of immense value in a victim’s healing process. The presence of civil society has facilitated the acknowledgement of their own contribution to the armed conflict, even if it is through their neutrality. More importantly, members of civil society can facilitate the inclusion and integration of victims and of former combatants and they can provide vital recognition, validation, support, acceptance and belonging. Through their involvement, members of civil society are able to communicate and make visible the lessons learned from both victims and former combatants.

6. Community Building and Leadership

A significant aspect of the Agape experience is that the victims and former combatants, perhaps unwittingly, have become the leaders in the process of reconciliation. They have taught others how to reconcile, how to overcome resentment, and ultimately how to be at peace and make peace with others. It is for this reason that Agape does not bring outside experts, nor does it offer courses and/or training. Agape observes, collects the accumulated experiences and knowledge and returns to its participants in a systematic manner. In Agape, the experts on overcoming victimhood are the victims themselves. Agape has, over time, thus built a community around the common interests of reconciliation and peace. Members who participated initially as “beneficiaries” are now leaders who actively facilitate reconciliation. Group members have established lasting personal bonds and fostered a sense of belonging in other marginalized, war-affected individuals and families. They have participated and initiated activities and have taken ownership of the program. The community and its members have provided and continue to provide support and solidarity to one another. This approach to community-building and leadership aims to champion empowerment and defeat traumatization and re-victimization.

Importantly, the Agape community transcends borders and physical locations, as its members live in two different countries. Participants and new members – regardless of their status as victims, combatants, or civil society members - come from diverse realities: differing regions, both urban and rural, ages, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses. Ultimately, the Agape community welcomes and encourages participants’ diverse identities and social locations and the integration of these diversities into the reconciliation process is an important goal.

7. Key Steps in the Reconciliation Process

A core set of values and steps have been key to Agape’s community engagement strategy. These values and steps have included: creating a common and safe space, using a bottom-up approach in its practices, the use of action and reflection, and horizontal and participatory communication, all of which are addressed below.

(i) Creating a Common and Safe Space

Since the beginning of its activities in Canada, Agape sought to create safe, secure and optimal conditions in which refugees of the Colombian armed conflict and former child soldiers could come together in peace. Through a number of gatherings in small groups, the sharing of experiences among participants became the main objective. Participants exchanged life stories and shared meals under the same roof – something largely unheard of in Colombia. When the program moved to Colombia in 2011, the gatherings were organized discretely and cautiously given the serious security concerns. For this reason, the idea of creating a safe space, which was one of the conditions that facilitated the Canadian experience, became central. Sharing a common space of coexistence and acceptance (Bloomfield, 2003), participants have been able to understand each other’s emotional realities, realizing they have gone through similar experiences both during and following armed conflict. The creation of a safe space has been central to Agape’s work.

(ii) Ensuring a Bottom-up Approach

A bottom-up approach (Freire, 1970) has been a core value and commitment of Agape, ensuring that the voices and realities of participants – who are largely marginalized populations affected by armed violence - are central, not peripheral, to the reconciliation process. This community-based approach was evidenced in the fact that former child soldiers became the agents of reconciliation for refugees living in Canada, as well as for the other victims who participated in the Colombian program. Agape’s efforts to facilitate spaces where understanding and the transformation of prejudices can occur have allowed the facilitators to see reconciliation as a process in which civil society, victims,
and former combatants search for common ground and mutual recognition. In this sense, reconciliation in Agape is conceived of as a gradual and inclusive process that begins with its core members and that over time, facilitates community building and searches to promote understanding and engagement in search of peace among victims and former victimizers, in the presence of members of civil society as witnesses and participants.

(iii) The Use of Action and Reflection

Identification of the social processes witnessed through the activities of the organization and the presentation of these findings to the participants themselves for corroboration, have become a source of new action and further reflection. For this reason, the program in Agape is conceived as open-ended, and the process of healing has evolved organically. The organization at first did not have a precise idea or process through which reconciliation would be carried out. Agape was instead following the lead of victims and former child soldiers, understood the process of reconciliation, and began to facilitate venues in which this process could take place. These actions and gatherings led to further reflection and modifications of the way the gatherings were carried out. In this sense, the core process that Agape has developed, coincides with the idea of Action and Reflection coined by Freire (Freire, 1970).

(iv) Horizontal and Participatory Communication

The sense of belonging, involvement, and ownership of the program among all participants regardless of geographical locations, age, socio-economic status, race, and gender has yielded a horizontal and participatory style of communication. As such, Agape’s program and methodology has evolved over time and continues to change according to the demands, challenges, creativity, and ideas of members and new participants, but also in view of the new and emerging political context now that Colombia’s peace agreement has been signed. Agape works to respond to the demands that the end of the conflict imposes, yet through a non-hierarchical, participatory and open process in the hopes to contribute to integration and reconciliation.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

The accumulated knowledge and the sense of community fostered throughout the reconciliation gatherings and workshops are the foundation from which other communities affected by war, violent extremism, and terrorism might find a path towards reconciliation and peace. For the future, Agape hopes to actively participate in the peacebuilding process that the country has embarked upon after signing a Peace agreement with FARC, bringing the Agape community to many others to facilitate the process of reconciliation.

The collective work of Agape has provided important knowledge regarding community-based reconciliation processes. Through our ongoing workshops and gatherings, and through careful engagement with community members to ensure a safe and secure space, a bottom-up approach, the use of action and reflection, and horizontal and participatory communication, we have been able to generate positive interactions and lasting bonds among former enemies, all of whom have been marred by the brutality of armed violence in Colombia. Our work has not only underscored that reconciliation between multiple and often opposing groups is possible, but also the important role that civil society has to play as collective and responsible witnesses, participants and healers in reconciliation processes.

Following 50 years of armed conflict, a collective narrative of violence, fear, and insecurity has enveloped daily life within Colombian society. Moreover, just because a Peace Agreement has been signed, does not mean that society will immediately embrace “peace.” The assumption that the post-Conflict context immediately brings forth peace, prosperity and stability negates the reality that conflict, violence and poverty may become embedded in a post-conflict social fabric, requiring major structural renewal and rebuilding – both in theory and in practice (Denov & Buccitelli, 2013). The reconciliation gatherings spearheaded by Agape have shown that through a well-developed community engagement strategy, these long-standing narratives of violence, fear and hate can gradually – with time and commitment - be replaced with counter-narratives of peace, reconciliation and hope. Perhaps most importantly, it is the key players in the theatre of armed conflict – the victims, perpetrators and witnesses to the conflict themselves – who are essential to the creation and maintenance of these counter-narratives, ultimately contributing to reconciliation, community building and the prevention of radicalization and further violence.

Further studies would be necessary to confirm and/or replicate Agape’s experiences. Moreover, it would be critical to learn and understand if our processes of reconciliation can be transferred and replicated in other war-affected contexts around the globe, as well as the necessary conditions for this process of community building to be successful in different cultural and geo-political contexts. In addition, given the vital role that civil society has played throughout our community engagement strategy, research might also consider the significant role that civil society plays in peace and reconciliation processes.
civil society is often viewed as “peripheral” to the key players of conflict (perpetrators and direct victims), particularly in Colombia, further research would benefit from further exploring and understanding the valuable and powerful counter-narratives offered by civil society in the post-conflict context.

REFERENCES


SECTION 4

NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM
The main finding on this matter is that the first item on the agenda of the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters is a “worldly” subject."

- Haldun Yalcinkaya, Tansel Özyer, Bedi Çelik & Saban Kardas

**Introduction**

The terrorist organization DAESH has emerged as a global threat against international peace and security through its terrorist attacks in not only the Syrian and Iraqi territories but also in the rest of the world. Its attacks take place in three distinct geographical regions that are the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, its so-called emirates in the Middle East and North Africa, and the remaining regions in the world. It has been conducting attacks in the first two regions through its so-called military units. Its terrorist attacks in the third geographical category, i.e., the rest of the world, was carried out by its supporters, sleeper cells or returning foreign fighters. The human resources of DAESH is composed of individuals living in the so called “Islamic State” territory or people living in various other regions of the world who believe in its so called utopia.

The ideology of the DAESH depending on a militant and Salafist understanding of religion has produced a worldview that is alien to the civilized world’s states system. In this framework, the bonds of identity and citizenship of the civilized world hold no meaning for the worldview of the DAESH. Hence, one needs to emphasize that the DAESH supporters reject the values of the civilized world, while at the same time benefit from the capabilities it presents.

Thanks to the technological developments in transportation and communication in the 21st century, the new generation has achieved an unprecedentedly high level in mobility and awareness. Developments in transportation have enabled even ordinary people to travel to almost anywhere in the world with ease. New communication technologies made possible for people to follow
the developments in other continents, and, moreover, to interact with people around the world in real-time. There is no doubt that these communication and transportation capabilities are mostly used for peaceful purposes. Yet, these capabilities also present opportunities for those malicious individuals that seek to achieve their sinister purposes. Such sinister purposes range from common crimes to global terrorism. DAESH masterfully benefits from the communication and transportation systems in order to conduct global terrorism.

Utilizing the latest technological capabilities in distinct geographies with no regard for the civilized world’s values, DAESH has become a threat on a global scale, with its terror attacks that ignores national borders. Among the important tools are social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, PallTalk, KIK and Twitter, which it uses to convey its ideology and activities on the global level. Twitter is the most commonly used social media platform among the others, which is largely because messaging on Twitter is possible even when there is no 3G and Wi-Fi connection. Tech-savvy DAESH supporters make frequent use of social media platforms, for they are mostly young and pre-middle aged or Y and Z generations. Moreover, it is almost impossible for social science scholars to conduct a field research about the DAESH members and supporters who are extremely radicalized. Yet, technological developments have introduced a methodological innovation involving closer multi-disciplinary interaction of social science scholars with sub-disciplines of Computer Science. Within this context, scholars from the disciplines of International Security and Computer Engineering have come together and adopted new methodological approaches in social science in order to realize the current project.

In this context, the research question of this project involves the analysis of Turkish speaking DAESH supporters’ agenda on Twitter. Thanks to this project, it is possible to reach findings about Turkish speaking DAESH supporters’ agendas and tendencies by using reliable and plausible research methods. This research is of great importance, since it is the first scholarly research on this scale about Turkish speaking DAESH supporters. Although, there are similar research projects about English or Arabic speaking DAESH supporters, overall, it is a fairly new approach in the discipline of International Security to conduct such kind of research on this particular subject. Further research about the PKK or other terrorist groups is possible with this method, which utilizes advance network analysis techniques.

This report will first touch upon the previous research about DAESH supporters on Twitter in other languages. Then, the methodology of the research will be explained and the findings of the research will be presented.

1. Social Network Analysis about DAESH in the World

Scholarly research about DAESH is generally concentrated in the research centers in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In the U.S., the work of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a center of excellence under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security and Maryland University, and the Brookings Institution come to the forefront. In the United Kingdom, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence under the Kings College stand out. In the Netherlands, a state-sponsored think-tank based in the Hague, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), conducts research about DAESH. In addition, an Abu Dhabi based think-tank of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum, HEDAYAH, coordinates research about DAESH and radicalization.

Main topics of the research pieces about DAESH are radicalization, terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters. All this research conducted either by the aforementioned institutes or other centers aim to eventually destroy DAESH and its violence, stop its proliferation and prevent its reoccurrence. The main problem that researchers are faced with is the difficulty in reaching data about the DAESH violence. This difficulty led researchers to adopt new approaches enabled by technology, and, thus, the method of social network analysis has emerged.

There is a series of research papers that utilized social network analysis on DAESH (O’Callaghan, Prucha, Greene, Conway, Carthy & Cunningham, 2014; Klausen, 2015; Maggioni & Magri 2015; Fisher, 2015; Berger & Perez, 2016; Transfeld & Werenfels, 2016). The most remarkable of these papers is “The ISIS Twitter Census” which is conducted by J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, and published by the Brookings Institution. Berger and Jonathon determined approximately 46,000 Twitter accounts associated with DAESH in September 2014 and started following them between October 4 and November 27, 2014. They reached some findings as a result. The results suggested that most of the DAESH supporters were in the territories of Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. One-fifth of them spoke English, while the three-fourth spoke Arabic (Berger & Morgan, 2015). The mentioned report presents demographic details about the Twitter usage of DAESH and elaborates its research methods. Their methodology has become a starting point of our research and has further been developed in accordance with the needs of our project. The most important aspect of this report is that it was conducted just for the Turkish-speaking DAESH supporters and thereby enabling to determine their agendas.
2. Methodology

The research methodologies utilized by J.M. Berger et al. in their two different reports on White Supremacists and DAESH on Twitter published in March 2013 (Berger & Strathearn, 2013) and March 2015 (Berger & Morgan, 2015) are explained in a great detail. One of the most important characteristics of these reports is that they have adopted a quantitative methodology. Elaborating the methodologies of these research pieces is very crucial for both casting light on future research and for comparing the results of further research. In this context, this research of ORSAM was based on the methodologies adopted by J.M. Berger et al. At the same time, these methodologies have undergone adaptations, revisions and additions, when necessary.

Having said that, we have also limited the scope of the research subject with the DAESH supporters who speak Turkish and use Twitter platform, for reasons stated below:

1. The related literature and recent publications showed that there is no comprehensive research on the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters despite the multitude of research about DAESH supporters in other languages.

2. Considering the variety of social media platforms and their different type of contents, Twitter stands out for this research for it has a 140-character limit and its content is more suitable for quantitative analysis.

3. DAESH supporters make very effective and intense use of Twitter.

1st Stage: Identifying the seed accounts (Level 0 accounts in Figure–1) that will enable us to reach the entire Turkish speaking DAESH supporters.

2nd Stage: Identifying the accounts (Level 1 accounts in Figure–1) that the seed accounts follow.

3rd Stage: Collecting the data regarding the Level 0 and 1 accounts (the profile information and the most recent 200 tweets) (Profile information: UserID, UserName, UserScreenName, UserLocation, AccountCreatedAt TweetCount, RTcount) (Tweets: Tweet, TweetCreatedAt, TweetLocation – Latitude, TweetLocation – Longitude, TweetSource).

4th Stage: Noise reduction of the Level 1 accounts (cleaning the dataset: deleting irrelevant and spam-bot accounts, sorting out the accounts either supporter or not).

5th Stage: Extracting the statistics from the dataset, visualizing all statistics, having the relationship map and reporting all findings.

Figure 1: Supporter Account Network.

At the first stage, the seed accounts were identified (Figure–1). The seed accounts are those who are identified as definitely DAESH supporters. The process of identifying those seed accounts took a long time and was more labor-dependent. The entire research was carried out according to the timetable seen in the Figure–2. In the beginning of the research, there was no such account identified as DAESH supporter to start with. For this reason, the official documents and magazines of DAESH had been examined to come up with a list of keywords associated with its terminology. Between 15 and 16 June 2015, all profiles and tweets of the accounts who used those 52 keywords had been collected. Afterwards, a total number of 51,982 tweets had been downloaded and manually inspected one-by-one for four months.
Because manual examination would take time, before ending the inspection, to see whether the researchers were on the right direction or not, in the mid-period, data collection process had been initiated for 139 accounts that were identified until that time. At that stage, the data such as profiles, tweet-retweet counts and friends list of these accounts was downloaded from Twitter. The researchers determined that 56 of the 139 accounts were suspended, 83 accounts were still active, and these 83 accounts were linked to 40,826 friends. Each of these 83 accounts followed an average of 492 accounts. In addition, this group of 83 accounts sent 1,632 tweets and 648 retweets in 2013; 4,744 tweets and 4,205 retweets in 2014; and 85,930 tweets and 86,442 retweets in the first ten months of 2015. In 2015, September is the month in which the highest number of tweets was sent (38,616/43,521). Charts about this data are shown in the Graph 1 and 2.
At the end of four months, after the examination of 51,982 tweets, 227 Twitter accounts were identified, among whom 92 were the most likely, 88 were likely, and 41 were slightly likely DAESH supporters, while 6 of them belonged to various media outlets. The Graph 3 shows the distribution of the accounts.

Graph 3: Assessments about 227 Accounts.

While these studies continued, due to the increasing use of Twitter and other social media platforms by DAESH and other radical terror groups for propaganda and recruitment purposes, these kind of exploitations created reactions in the world leading to pressures on Twitter to suspend these accounts. Consequently, Twitter had started suspending the accounts that act in violation of the terms of use of the platform. Because of those suspension campaigns, some negative side effects emerged on the research. Because the examination process takes a certain period of time, during this time, some of the accounts identified as supporters are suspended. Therefore, after the initial review of the 227 accounts that were identified in the first months, 135 (60%) were suspended while the remaining 92 (40%) stayed active (See Graph 3).

Figure 3: Relation Map of 92/68,603 Accounts.

Afterwards, data (profiles and friends list) for the remaining 92 accounts were collected and then friends network were mapped by using ForceAtlas-2 layout in the Gephi application (see Figure 3). It was discovered that the 92 accounts followed a total of 68,603 friend accounts and on the average one of these 92 accounts was following 745 friend accounts.

The relation map analysis process showed the researchers that the dataset must be narrowed down, because dataset of 92/68,603 accounts had included a lot of useless or irrelevant (non-supporters) accounts. At this point, a final review of these 92 accounts had been initiated and it was observed that 14 more accounts were suspended. Therefore, in the last review, it was seen that of the 227 accounts, 78 (34.4%) remained active while 149 (65.6%) was suspended (Graph 3).

The remaining 78 active accounts are categorized as follows: 14 accounts (18%) are the most likely DAESH supporters, 5 accounts (6%) are private and 59 accounts (76%) are not DAESH supporters (Graph 4). As a result, the fact that 149 of the 227 accounts were suspended shows that they had supported DAESH or other radical terror groups, shared content praising terrorism and that is the reason why they had been suspended by Twitter. Therefore, of the total number of 227 accounts, 163 accounts (71.8%) of which 149 suspended and 14 active are DAESH supporters, while the remaining 64 accounts (28.2%) are not (Graph 4).
Another point that needs explanation is the reason for the inspection of the most recent two hundred tweets. The central assumption here is that the analysis is needed for the most up-to-date situation and the most recent two hundred tweets would be sufficient for that.

After these points are emphasized, we need to touch upon the sorting and cleaning process of the stage four. The first sorting in the process was done in accordance with the counts of follower and followed accounts. This way of sorting was used in the research of Berger et al., as well as in our research. According to this approach, if a DAESH supporter account has more than 50,000 followers or follows more than 1,500 accounts, it is weeded from the dataset. That is because, anecdotal observations show that these accounts with high numbers of followers or friends are the least likely to be DAESH supporters. These limits are set as 50,000/500 in the research of Berger and Morgan. In our study, the friend count was limited to 1,500, because the manual inspection showed that most of the accounts with a friend count of 1,500 are also DAESH supporters.

After the first elimination, the remaining accounts were sorted out by the criteria stated below in order to determine whether an account is a DAESH supporter or not. These criteria were also used in the research of Berger and Morgan as well.

1. **Content inspection:** The tweets sent by each account (the content of the most recent 200 tweets) were examined for the presence of any message, video or image that supports DAESH.

2. **Examination of profile information and profile image:** If the account did not fit the first criterion, its profile was examined for any DAESH supporting statements or its profile picture was examined for images such as the DAESH black flag, or etc.

3. **Followers list:** If an account did not fit the first two criteria, its followers list was examined. If there was a majority of DAESH supporters in the list, the account was deemed a DAESH supporter.

4. **List of followed accounts:** If an account did not fit the criteria above, then the followed accounts were examined. If the majority of them were DAESH supporters, then the account was deemed a DAESH supporter.

Consequently, at the first stage of the research which involved identifying seed accounts and took four months, 14 active accounts that were identified as DAESH supporters (6.1% of the total number of 227) were found out (the count then rose to 21, when 7 more accounts were added during the last review process) and the second stage began. At this stage, the friends list of the 21 accounts were collected and total dataset reached to 3,937 accounts. In the third stage of the research, the account information of all these (profiles, tweets – approximately 787,400 tweets) was collected.

The fourth stage of the research involved the cleanup, noise reduction and the sorting out of non-DAESH supporter accounts from the dataset of 3,937 accounts. This stage, the methodology to be used differs from the methodology of Berger et al. (IQI methodology). That is because, the dataset is relatively smaller; therefore, allowing manual detection and decreasing the likelihood of errors during sorting out.

A further point must be illuminated here before mentioning the sorting algorithm. That point involves the reason for the preference of the friend list (followed accounts) of the seed accounts over their followers. It is related to the widely circulated phrase in the social network analysis terminology that a “friend of my friend is also a friend.” In other words, it is much likely that a DAESH supporter follows another DAESH supporter than a DAESH supporter is followed by almost anyone. That is to say, a DAESH supporter may be followed by numerous irrelevant accounts such as intelligence agencies, researchers and observers. This may cause an unnecessary noise for the dataset. Therefore, it is assumed that working on the followed accounts rather than the followers will decrease the margin of error while sorting out the dataset.

Another point that needs explanation is the reason for the inspection of the most recent two hundred tweets. The central assumption here is that the analysis is needed for the most up-to-date situation and the most recent two hundred tweets would be sufficient for that.

After these points are emphasized, we need to touch upon the sorting and cleaning process of the stage four. The first sorting in the process was done in accordance with the counts of follower and followed accounts. This way of sorting was used in the research of Berger et al., as well as in our research. According to this approach, if a DAESH supporter account has more than 50,000 followers or follows more than 1,500 accounts, it is weeded from the dataset. That is because, anecdotal observations show that these accounts with high numbers of followers or friends are the least likely to be DAESH supporters. These limits are set as 50,000/500 in the research of Berger and Morgan. In our study, the friend count was limited to 1,500, because the manual inspection showed that most of the accounts with a friend count of 1,500 are also DAESH supporters.

After the first elimination, the remaining accounts were sorted out by the criteria stated below in order to determine whether an account is a DAESH supporter or not. These criteria were also used in the research of Berger and Morgan as well.

1. **Content inspection:** The tweets sent by each account (the content of the most recent 200 tweets) were examined for the presence of any message, video or image that supports DAESH.

2. **Examination of profile information and profile image:** If the account did not fit the first criterion, its profile was examined for any DAESH supporting statements or its profile picture was examined for images such as the DAESH black flag, or etc.

3. **Followers list:** If an account did not fit the first two criteria, its followers list was examined. If there was a majority of DAESH supporters in the list, the account was deemed a DAESH supporter.

4. **List of followed accounts:** If an account did not fit the criteria above, then the followed accounts were examined. If the majority of them were DAESH supporters, then the account was deemed a DAESH supporter.
After sorting the dataset of 3,937 accounts in accordance with these criteria, 2,567 accounts were identified as DAESH supporters. In other words, 21 seed accounts enabled us to reach a network of 2,567 accounts. The findings about the dataset are presented in the following chapter.

3. Findings (The Twitter Statistics of the 21/2,567 Accounts)

3.1. Friends-Followers Statistics:

The average friend and follower numbers for both this research and Berger and Morgan’s research are much higher than average Twitter users. The average number of friends for a DAESH supporter identified in this research is almost half times less than the average number of Berger and Morgan (283/418=0.67). In other words, the average friend count of an account in the study of Berger and Morgan is almost one and a half times more than the average friend count of a DAESH supporter in our research (418/213=1.47) (See Graph 5).

The average follower count of a DAESH supporter in our study is 1.7 times (1,726/1004) more than the average follower count in Berger and Morgan’s study (See Graph 5).

Besides, our study has discovered that the average follower count of a DAESH supporter is six times more (1,726/283=6.1) than the average friend count. This is also clearly seen in the proportion of followers to friends (See Graph 5).

In compliance with the study of Berger and Morgan, these figures show that DAESH supporters have a larger friend and follower network. In other words, they are more connected with the people and are influencing much bigger domains.

Graph 5: Friends-Followers Statistics.

3.2. Distribution of Friends and Followers:

The account with the average number of friends (283 friends) is at the 841th rank from above, which is at the 33% percentile. The median account (at the middle percentile, 50%) is the account with 163 friends and stands at the 1,284th rank. In the average and median account figures, the distribution deviates a little bit to the left. The first 841 accounts over the average friend count (i.e., the 33% percentile) have the 75% (544,259/727,085) of the total friend count of the total mass of 2,567 accounts (See Graph 6).

The distribution of followers is quite different. The account with the average number of followers (1,726 followers) is at the 337th rank from above, which is at the 13% percentile. The median account (at the middle percentile, 50%) is the account with 188 followers and stands at the 1,284th rank. In the average and median account figures, the distribution deviates a little bit to the left. The first 337 accounts over the average friend count (i.e., the 13% percentile) have the 75% (3,807,206/4,431,430) of the total friend count of the total mass of 2,567 accounts (See Graph 6).

The distribution of followers is quite different. The account with the average number of followers (1,726 followers) is at the 337th rank from above, which is at the 13% percentile. The median account (at the middle percentile, 50%) is the account with 188 followers and stands at the 1,284th rank. In the average and median account figures, the distribution deviates a little bit to the left. The first 337 accounts over the average friend count (i.e., the 13% percentile) have the 75% (3,807,206/4,431,430) of the total friend count of the total mass of 2,567 accounts (See Graph 6).

The distribution of followers is quite different. The account with the average number of followers (1,726 followers) is at the 337th rank from above, which is at the 13% percentile. The median account (at the middle percentile, 50%) is the account with 188 followers. This statistic shows that the graph deviates to the left (See Graph 6). The 337th account which has the average number of followers (1,726 followers) is at the 13% percentile. In other words, the first 13% percentile of the dataset has 86% of the total follower count (3,807,206/4,431,430) and the remaining 87% has only the 14% of the total follower count.

It may be concluded that these statistics are very important to draw on, while countering violent extremism. For example, the follower distribution shows that when the upper 13% percentile of the accounts is targeted, it may be said that it is possible to impact on almost all (86% of the followers) of the network’s information flow.
3.5. Distribution of Account Creation Dates:

In the distribution graph (Graph-9), it can be easily seen that creation dates are gathered around the years 2015 and 2016. This figure implies that most of the accounts are created in recent years. It would not be wrong to draw two important conclusions from this statistic. First, it is quite normal that some accounts were created after the declaration of the so-called Islamic State and Caliphate in June-July 2014. Second, some accounts are targeted by the suspension campaign of Twitter to be re-created immediately after suspension (See Graph 9).

3.3. Tweet Statistics:

When we compare our tweet statistics with that of Bergen and Morgan’s, we see how active and effective the platform is being used (See Graph–7). This finding is compatible with the propaganda strategy of DAESH. In other words, DAESH’s intensive Twitter usage is an accepted and well-known fact in the literature. Just consider that each of the 2,567 accounts tweet an average of 5 times per day. It amounts to a total of 12,835 tweets per day. Also, this is an observation depending on only Turkish-speaking supporters. If we also think of other languages, it would not be an exaggeration to state that DAESH has transformed Twitter into its propaganda machine.

3.4. Distribution of Tweets:

The picture here resembles that of the distribution of followers. The graph deviates to the left to a great extent. The account with the average tweet count (3,088 tweets) is at the 421st rank and in the 16% percentile. The median account (in the 50% percentile) is the account in the 1,284th rank with 193 tweets. It would not be wrong to state that a minority of accounts (the 16% percentile) plays a great role in message and information dissemination. In other words, the first 421 accounts had sent the 89% (7,067,487/7,925,764) of the total tweets of the dataset. With this information, it is possible to prevent almost 90% of the message flow by using the right measures to target the first 421 accounts (See Graph 8).
3.6. Tweeting Platforms:

Among the tweeting platforms, the mobile devices with the Android systems (25.89%), the IOS systems (27.32%) and the Windows Phone systems (2.98%) are used for tweeting half of the messages (56.19%). In other words, the half of the messages in the dataset is tweeted from mobile devices (See Graph 10).

Graph 9: Distribution of Account Creation Date.

Graph 10: Tweeting Platforms.

3.7. Distribution of Geographic Locations:

The geographic locations can be extracted from three different sources provided by Twitter. These are user’s location and the time zone information to be entered in the profiles while creating an account and the geographic coordinates for each tweet, if it is enabled. Among these sources, only the mobile device’s GPS position is reliable and accurate. But Daesh is also aware of that and with the fatwas in their official documents and magazines, they strictly ban the use of the mobile devices’ GPS and GPS must be turned off at all times. Even so, it is possible to observe some small amount of information, since some users don’t turn off the GPS. In the scope of this research, GPS information is not included.

The user provided information (user’s locations and time zone information in the profiles) may be deliberately false or manipulative. Therefore, one must keep in mind these caveats and be careful while evaluating user-provided information.

Graph 11: Distribution of Geographic Locations, User Provided.

Only 445 accounts (17.34%) provided location in their profiles, while 2,122 accounts (82.66%) either provided none or irrelevant information. The distribution of locations is presented in the Graph 11. 284 accounts (11%) provided Turkey as their location, while 97 accounts (3.8%) entered foreign countries and 64 accounts (2.5%) provided their location as the Islamic State, Iraq and Syria. It needs to be stressed once again that this information must be evaluated with prudence.
Graph 12: Distribution of Time Zones, User Provided.

It can be seen from Graph 12 that more account holders had provided time zone information than those who provided location information. 917 accounts (35.72% of the dataset) provided this information while 1,650 accounts (64.28%) provided none. The reason for more accounts providing time zone information might be that they think the regional location derived from the time zone will not make finding the exact location any easier. The distribution of the accounts according to their time zones is seen in the Graph 12. When the time zone information is evaluated on the map, it is seen that 315 accounts (12.3%) are in the same time zone shared by Athens, Bucharest, Kiev and Istanbul, while 351 accounts (13.7%) are in another time zone shared by Pacific and Quito. Other than these, 64 accounts (2.5%) are in the time zone of Baghdad and 22 accounts (0.86%) are in the time zone of Greenland.

3.8. Relation Map of the 21/2,567 Accounts Dataset:

The Figure 4 shows the relation map of the dataset from Gephi 0.9.1 application using the ForceAtlas-2 layout. The main clusters can be seen very clearly from the map in the Figure 4.

3.9. Degree Centrality of the 21/2,567 Accounts Dataset:

Degree centrality is a measure showing the number of links connected to that node either in or out of the node. When it is sorted from the highest to the least value, the node with the highest count is said to be the most linked node and means that this node is connected with the maximum number of the nodes. In this sense, also, the degree centrality of a node means its popularity index. Nodes with a high degree centrality play a critical role in the dissemination of information to the nodes connected. In the relation map seen in the Figure 5, the nodes that have high degree centrality are pictured larger.

At this point, we need to stress an issue related to our research. For the sake of protecting the privacy of users, no account name or ID information is provided in the Figure 4 and 5. ORSAM had undertaken this research within the framework of scientific ethical guidelines in order to acquire only statistical information.
4. The Agenda of the 21/2,567 Dataset during the Terrorist Attacks

The scope of our research makes possible not only to acquire information related to the profiles but also to extract findings from the tweet contents for different purposes. To that end, we collected the tweets sent in a week following the terrorist attacks by the terrorist organizations PKK and DAESH in Turkey. We have tried to categorize words and keywords within the tweets, in order to identify the most used keywords and to understand the agenda of the users in our dataset. The dates of the mentioned attacks (See Table-1) are 10 October 2015, 12 January 2016, 19 March 2016 for the attacks by DAESH and 17 February 2016 and 13 March 2016 for the suicide bombings by the PKK. Also, the general agenda (other than these dates and without any attack) was extracted from tweets of the dataset between 8-23 April 2016.

Table 1: Examined Terrorist Attacks by DAESH and PKK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>CASE</th>
<th>CASUALTY</th>
<th>COMMITTER</th>
<th>STATUS OF COMMITTERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 OCT 2015</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>Suicide Bombing</td>
<td>103 deaths 200+ wounded</td>
<td>Yunus Emre Alagöz</td>
<td>Foreign Terrorist Fighters (returnee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 JAN 2016</td>
<td>Sultanahmet, Istanbul</td>
<td>Suicide Bombing</td>
<td>11 deaths (including attacker) 14 wounded (11 foreigners, 3 Turkish citizen)</td>
<td>Nabil Fadli (Syrian Citizen)</td>
<td>Foreign Terrorist Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 MAR 2015</td>
<td>Taksim, Istanbul</td>
<td>Suicide Bombing</td>
<td>5 deaths, wounded</td>
<td>Mehmet Öztürk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 FEB 2016</td>
<td>Merasim Sk., Ankara</td>
<td>Bomb Car Attack</td>
<td>29 deaths 61 wounded</td>
<td>Abdulbaki Sömer</td>
<td>PKK Terrorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 MAR 2016</td>
<td>Kızılay, Ankara</td>
<td>Bomb Car Attack</td>
<td>38 deaths (including attacker) 125 wounded</td>
<td>Seher Çağla Demir</td>
<td>PKK Terrorist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1. The Suicide Bombing by DAESH on 10 October 2015:

The Figure 6 shows that, the word “bomba” (bomb) is large and at the center, while the word “PKK” follows close by. It is curious that “PKK” stands close to the center while the attack was carried out by DAESH.
4.2. The Suicide Bombing by DAESH on 12 January 2016:

After the suicide bombing on this date, the messages included mostly humanistic words, yet it should be kept in mind that the word PKK is still large enough for the eye (See Figure 7).

4.3. The Suicide Bombing by PKK on 17 February 2016:

The word “PKK” clearly stands out after the suicide attack by PKK on 17 February 2016. Since the word “YPG” stands at the center, one can assume that the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters consider the PKK and YPG as the same organization (See Figure 8).

4.4. The Suicide Bombing by PKK on 13 March 2016:

The data collected after the suicide bombing of PKK on 13 March 2016 shows a similar picture. Humanistic words stand at the center while the word “PKK” stands close by (See Figure 9).

4.5. The Suicide Bombing by DAESH on 19 March 2016:

The word “PKK” is once again close to the center in the data collected after the suicide attack by DAESH on 19 March 2016 (See Figure 10).

4.6. The Agenda of DAESH Supporters between 8 and 23 April 2016:

The word cloud acquired from the dataset between 8 and 23 April 2016 shows the general agenda of Turkish speaking DAESH supporters (Figure 11). Within that period, DAESH launched rockets from the Syrian territory to Kilis on 18 and 19 April. It is intriguing that Turkish speaking DAESH supporters on Twitter had employed a “worldly” rhetoric in their agenda rather than a “religious” one. Furthermore, the close position of the words “PKK” and “Hesap (Price)” to the center shows that the agenda of the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters are influenced by the hostility between PYD/YPG and DAESH in the Syrian territory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research by ORSAM aims to explain the social media-particularly Twitter-usage by the violent extremist organizations for sinister purposes with an interdisciplinary approach relying on concrete data that makes use of the current technology and new methodologies. The research is in its infancy and constitutes an experiment in this matter. Another purpose of the research is about paving the way for further research on this subject. Even though ours is a beginner level research, its findings promote and encourage future research.

In the initial phase of the research, our greatest difficulty was that we had no current knowledge about DAESH supporter accounts. In order to overcome this, we had to spend a great deal of time-consuming effort. In approximately
four months, thousands of tweets were examined continuously at first and then when needed, with an effort like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Another difficulty involved with the research is that the Twitter company started to suspend accounts that share terrorist content particularly from mid-2015 onwards. The campaign created such a difficulty that when the first stage of the research was completed, 149 (65.6%) of the 227 accounts were suspended. Only 14 of the remaining accounts (6.1% of the original 227) were found useful. Therefore, 65% of the hard work in the first stage had been for nothing. Of course, Twitter’s aggressive suspension campaign is not a coincidence. DAESH carried out its most bloody terrorist attacks in that period and initiated propaganda of these attacks through Twitter, drawing reactions from all over the world. Consequently, Twitter published an official announcement (Twitter Inc., 2016) declaring that 125,000 accounts from mid-2015 to February 2015, and 235,000 accounts until 18 August 2016 were suspended totaling approximately 360,000 in more than one year.

In conclusion, this study was conducted with the 21 seed accounts that were identified in the initial stage. Of course, the total number of 2,567 accounts which was reached from 21 seed accounts is not a realistic figure pertaining to the total number of Turkish speaking DAESH supporters. Researchers that conducted the study estimate a higher number. Therefore, the study needs to be replicated in a way that further improved in order to reach a more realistic figure.

As mentioned earlier in the report, this research is based on the methodology of the report by Berger and Morgan. Yet, the total number of identified accounts -2,567- did not necessitate the utilization of the entire methodology. The reason for that is the relatively small number of accounts making manual examination possible. Yet, if a big dataset is defined for future research, the methodology needs to be employed to its full extent, since automation, machine-learning and computing technologies are needed for processing big data. By this means, bigger data will be processed in a shorter time and energy conservation will be enabled.

Within that scope, this research enables an area of study on the other terrorist organizations which threaten Turkey for its geopolitically important location plagued by wars and civil conflicts. A similar study may be conducted particularly for PKK, since it has acquired support and sympathy from the international community by using social media.

To summarize the findings of the research carried out under these circumstances and in the light of above information:

- 21 seed accounts and a friend network of 2,567 users were identified pertaining to Turkish speaking DAESH supporters. The research was carried out with the content provided by these accounts.
- The average friend count of this group is 283 and the average follower count is 1,726. The follower-friend ratio is 6.1, while for a Twitter user it is 1.9. It shows us the extent of the reach by the dataset.
- Daily average tweet count for the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters is 5.3.
- The distribution of followers acquired in the research suggests that if the 13% percentile with higher followers is blocked, it is possible to block the communication of almost all the network (86% of the followers).
- The acquired findings show that a minority (the 16% percentile) within the dataset plays an important role in the dissemination of messages and information. In other words, the first 421 accounts (16% of the total) account for the 90% of the total messages. Read backwards, it means that if the 16% percentile is blocked, the communication among the group will be hindered to a great extent.
- The most important steps taken in this direction is Twitter’s suspension campaign. There are studies that show the campaigns have affected the DAESH supporters in other languages (Berger & Perez, 2016).
- 56% of the tweets are sent from mobile devices.
- Of the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters, 11% according to the profile information and 12.3% according to the time zone information are from Turkey, while the rest is from around the world.
- One of the findings of the research is about the agenda of the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters. The basic finding on this matter is that the first item of the agenda of the Turkish speaking DAESH supporters is a “worldly” subject, i.e., “PKK” and related issues. Religious issues, which form the basis of their ideology, take place in the second tier of their agenda. It is intriguing that an organization with a religious reference does not
have religion as its first agenda item. Our basic analysis about this matter is that the conflict between DAESH and PYD/YPG is the Syrian territory reverberates in the Turkish territory as DAESH-PKK confrontation. Furthermore, their hostility in Syria fuels their enmity in Turkey. Further analysis on this finding is undoubtedly possible. Even so, the implication that both groups’ terror attacks in Turkey in 2015 and 2016 stem from their mutual hostility is a remarkable observation for international peace and security.

REFERENCES


Introduction

This paper aims to identify the most common counter-narratives to violent extremism in South East Asia, including some of the cross-cutting strategies of these counter-narratives, and highlight gaps in the existing dataset of counter-narratives for the region. This paper also aims to provide recommendations to program developers and policymakers for how to better utilize existing counter-narratives in the region against violent extremism, as well as guidance for developing new ones. The countries included in the assessment for South East Asia are Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Developing South East Asia Counter-Narrative Frameworks

The contents of this essay are based on two projects conducted by Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. The first project, the development of a Compendium of good practice for counter-narratives for the South East Asia region, resulted in a practical toolkit titled *Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in South East Asia: A How-To Guide* (Zeiger, 2016). The project, supported by the Attorney-General’s Department of Australia, aimed to explain existing good practice approaches to counter-messaging, reflect diverse regional practices in South East Asia, include a number of case studies of effective counter-narrative campaigns and link to relevant online material. The How-To Guide contains an Annex of 80 examples of counter-narratives from the region and outside the region.
The second project, Hedayah’s Counter-Narrative Library (and subsequently the South East Asia Collection) is an online dataset of over 330 existing, open-source counter-narratives to include video clips, movies, books, cartoons, news articles and religious arguments that help to dismantle and undermine violent extremist narratives internationally. This research essay draws on the collective body of knowledge of these two projects, as well as discussions and interviews with key policymakers and practitioners conducted by the author.

Contextualizing Counter-Narratives in South East Asia

While a comprehensive analysis of the threats of violent extremism in South East Asia and the recruitment narratives of violent extremists in the region are outside the scope of this research paper, it is important to contextualize the content of the counter-narrative evaluation by first providing some background to violent extremism in South East Asia.

The main threats of violent extremism in South East Asia can be categorized as follows:

1. The radicalization, recruitment and travel of individuals from the region to Iraq and Syria and the potential return of those individuals to carry out attacks regionally;

2. Radicalization of individuals inspired by international conflicts and carrying out local attacks; and

3. Association of global violent extremist ideology with historical, localized and cross-regional conflicts and the re-energization of local violent extremist networks with respect to new threats (Zeiger, 2016, p. 38).

Violent extremist networks continue to target individuals for recruitment in South East Asia. For example, a May 2016 video released by ISIS features children from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines burning their passports and joining the so-called “Islamic State” (Shiloach, 2016). Moreover, the Katibah Nusantara (“Malay Archipelago Unit” or “Majmuah Al Arkhabily” in Arabic), was established in September 2014 Malaysians and Indonesians to Syria (Hasakah) since September 2014 (Arianti and Singh, 2015). In terms of the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, the Soufan Group’s December 2015 report on foreign fighters indicated that around 1150 foreign fighters have traveled from South East Asia (including Australia and New Zealand) to Iraq and Syria since the beginning of the conflict until the end of 2015 (The Soufan Group, 2015, pp. 8-9). The numbers of fighters according to official counts per country are as follows: Australia (150-250), Indonesia (700), Malaysia (100) and the Philippines (100), with a couple also from Singapore (2) and New Zealand (5-10). According to the same report by the Soufan Group, there have been returnees to Indonesia (162) and Malaysia (5+).

Individuals have also been inspired by international conflicts to carry out attacks locally in South East Asia, sometimes with little operational support from existing violent extremist networks. For example, Singapore has also been on high alert after the arrest of 6 individuals in Indonesia, inspired by and linked to ISIS members, plotting to carry out an attack on the famous Marina Bay hotel in August 2016 (Arshad, 2016). Moreover, the December 2014 attack on a chocolate store in Sydney, Australia, highlights the potential of lone-actor attackers in the region.

Finally, the merging of new global violent extremist ideology onto local threats is an urgent issue. Historically speaking, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have been the virulent actors in terms of violent extremist ideology and networks in South East Asia, the main players being Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines, Laskhar Jundullah in Indonesia, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) in Malaysia and Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) throughout all South East Asian countries. Exacerbated by a new, more violent global ideology such as ISIS, these long-standing networks pose a significant threat in terms of their knowledge of explosives and terrorism operations, financial resources, and well-established religious and ideological arguments that are persuasive in the region. For example, several previously existing violent extremist groups have been vying for power in order to establish a South East Asian wilayat under ISIS—the two key players being Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon in the Philippines and Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) leader Santoso in Indonesia. Despite Santoso having claimed land in Poso, Indonesia that could be the safe haven for a South East Asian wilayat, there has been reportedly contact between ISIS leaders in Syria and Hapilon in December 2016 with respect to establishing a wilayat in Mindanao (Fonbuena, January 2017), and that Hapilon is considering long-held Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MLLF) territory in Central Mindanao as the potential location of this wilayat. However, unconfirmed reports that Hapilon may have been killed in airstrikes on his house may shift the narrative of the South East Asia wilayat back to Indonesia (Romero, 2017).

Before delving into the dataset of counter-narratives aimed at South East Asia, it is important to also point out the main recruitment narratives of violent ex-
tremist groups in the region. The “How-To Guide” points out four key violent extremist narratives for the region, that are summarized below (Zeiger, 2016, pp. 6-10):

1. **Religious or ideological narratives.** Most recruitment narratives include an element of religious justification, or divine legitimacy, for the end goals of the organization and a call to action to violence that is morally inspired or required. The religious arguments in South East Asia mainly utilize Islam to justify the ideological and political goals. Two of the common religious narratives violent extremists use are: 1) equating the concept of jihad with necessary violence (*fard al ayn*); and 2) emphasizing the concept of *al-wala wa’al-bara* and therefore polarizing the world between the believers and the kuffar—or the “infidels” that, in the ideology of violent extremists, deserve to be killed.

2. **Political narratives.** These narratives contain elements of government change, new stat-structure or the institution of a new legal system. For South East Asia, since the most common violent extremist groups use Islam to justify their violence, the political narratives are often colored with religious undertones. For example, JI argues that their main goal is to establish a regional *Dawla Islamiyah* (an Islamic state), whereby the political system is governed by what they consider to be legitimate Islamic authority. ISIS narratives emphasize the utopian vision of the “Khilafa” being in the territory they hold in Iraq and Syria, and they feature stories demonstrating their apparent control of territory, their ability to provide access to water and electricity, their ability to provide safe and secure infrastructure and their ability to provide education for its “citizens.”

3. **Social or heroic narratives.** These types of narratives appeal to the individuals’ sense of adventure, or to the sense of duty to participate in a greater cause or for the greater good. For example, JI leaders have called for jihad for retribution against those who have caused Muslims to suffer in Bosnia, Palestine and Chechnya as motivation to join their fight. Recently, ISIS has referred to the conflict in Myanmar and the violence against Muslim Rohingya as a reason to join their ranks—which has potential recruitment power in South East Asia especially. The Malaysian government has recently raised concerns, and even made an arrest of an individual claiming to be an ISIS supporter that was planning on traveling Myanmar to carry out attacks (“Rohingya plight,” 2017).

4. **Economic narratives.** This narrative emphasizes the financial incentive of joining a terrorist organization, and in more impoverished regions, has some weight in South East Asia due to a lack of opportunities to advance in society economically. For example, in the Philippines, young ASG members were motivated to join because they were given cash and easy access to weapons. Kidnappings and the collection of ransoms, which were trademarks of the group, reinforced the idea that ASG members would not be suffering economically. Similarly, one former Indonesian ISIS member, Mazlan, described how he was lured to Syria with the promise of cash and the ability to provide for his family (“Recruit promised cash,” 2015).

Having outlined the crucial and emerging threats for the region when it comes to violent extremism, and summarizing the relevant narratives of violent extremists, it is now important to turn to the analysis of the counter-narratives pertinent to the region and the lessons that can be drawn from this analysis.

**Methodology**

The How-To Guide and South East Asia Collection available on the Counter-Narrative Library were cultivated using a mixed methodology to include: 1) performing desk research on violent extremist narratives and counter-narratives in the region; 2) convening an expert workshop in March 2016 with 20+ practitioners, government officials, civil society members, and researchers to collate and evaluate existing counter-narratives and good practice; and 3) soliciting feedback on the draft report from relevant participants from the expert workshop as well as a network of regional government officials.

During the desk research phase, a number of examples for violent extremist narratives in South East Asia were identified, taking into consideration the diversity in violent extremist groups in the region. These violent extremist narratives were classified and categorized in order to determine the most common ways in which violent extremists were recruiting and radicalizing for South East Asia. There was also a baseline assessment conducted of the violent extremist groups in the region, especially with reference to the most current threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and how ISIS is influencing existing violent extremist networks in South East Asia.

From there, Hedayah also invited the experts participating in the March 2016 workshop to submit counter-narratives from their regions and countries that they felt were most relevant in their context. The experts chosen were identi-
Counter-Narratives in South East Asia

The dataset this essay draws upon can be described in the following chart, reflecting both the counter-narratives in the collection for the How-to Guide as well as the Counter-Narrative Library database (which is an evergreen product and often updated) (See Figure 1). As evidenced by the chart, the primary counter-narratives for South East Asia region are coming from Australian and Indonesian contexts. As such, the primary languages available for the South East Asia collections are English and Bahasa Indonesian. For a more comprehensive study of the existing counter-narratives in South East Asia, there should be an increased focus on collecting and collating counter-narratives in Bahasa Malay and Tagalog. However, it should be noted that experts at the Semarang workshop pointed out that many counter-narratives in Bahasa Indonesian were also understood and utilized in Malaysia, due to the fact that despite variations in spoken dialects, the two languages are very closely related. Moreover, some of the English counter-narratives also maintain a certain resonance in the region, as English is widely spoken in all South East Asian countries.

In the practical toolkit or How-To Guide, several steps are outlined in terms of how to create a successful counter-narrative in South East Asia. The preliminary step to developing an effective counter-narrative in South East Asia is to assess the drivers of radicalization, or locally-relevant “push and pull factors” that lead to radicalization and recruitment. Push factors are the “socio-economic grievances (real or perceived) that have to do with external forces and pressures on an individual,” whereas pull factors are the “psycho-social factors that draw an individual to violent extremism” (Zeiger, 2016, p. 4). While the step-by-step instruction is outside the scope of this research paper, the analysis of local push and pull factors related to radicalization and recruitment in South East Asia is an important point of comparison necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of counter-narratives in the region. As such, a summary of the relevant push and pull factors in South East Asia are summarized in Figure 2.
Group (RRG) based in Singapore that aims to directly counter the messages of Daesh through several brochures that are available in print and online. One of the brochures, “The Fallacies of ISIS Islamic Caliphate” gives reasons why ISIS’s Caliphate is illegitimate based on Islamic scholarship, Quranic verses and prophetic tradition (Sunnah). Moreover, the brochure also gives some resources for how individuals might contribute to the crisis in Iraq and Syria, by providing links to relief efforts.

When it comes to the main messengers for the dataset available, the key messengers were predominantly community leaders, faith leaders and former violent extremists for the South East Asia region. Many faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially in Indonesia, regularly produce content that directly or indirectly counters the narratives of violent extremism in the region. There are also a number of former violent extremists, specifically those who have left Jemaah Islamiyah (as well as several Daesh defectors), who now speak out against violent extremism. Former violent extremists may be some of the more effective messengers against violent extremism, namely because their personal experience of participating in violent extremism or terrorism builds their credibility.

It was noted both at the workshop hosted in Semarang, as well as by the present author, that the counter-narratives that exist for South East Asia do not sufficiently focus on the role of families—either as key messengers or key interlocutors. With the exception of programs such as that conducted by Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SA VE) that provides knowledge and skill-building for mothers in order to reduce violent extremism in their communities, not many of the counter-narratives collected in this dataset are oriented towards families, either in terms of the content they provide, or in terms of the messenger delivering the message. However, culturally speaking, families—especially mothers—have a significant influence on their children in South East Asia. For example, an Indonesian and Malaysian proverb refers to the idea that “heaven is under the feet of the mother,” which is also rooted in hadith (Sunan An-Nasa’i 3104).

For the dataset in Hedayah’s online Counter-Narrative Library, the types of messages* are categorized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUSH FACTORS</th>
<th>PULL FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Islamophobia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hate speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of democratization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of education and critical thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ethnic and religious marginalization and intolerance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Military operations by Western governments in Afghanistan and Iraq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feelings of victimhood and secondary trauma related to suffering of Muslims outside the region (Palestinians, refugees from Syria)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor justice system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violence in the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural and religious identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence of media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feelings of victimhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Monetary incentives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Idealization of former fighters from Afghanistan and other conflicts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Idea of achieving a &quot;pure Islam&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of adventure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feelings of power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunity of transformation and change for their communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These push and pull factors were identified by the participants at the Semarang workshop in March 2016.

**Preliminary Results**

Based on the collation of these counter-narratives contained in the South East Asia collection, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, when it comes to the target audience, a large number of the counter-narratives seem to be aimed at what were categorized as “general audiences” and “key influencers.” This means the predominant narratives are not directly aimed at sympathizers, justifiers and direct perpetrators, nor were the specific messages. For example, the Somali Podcast initiative based out of Australia targets a general audience by seeking to promote messages of social cohesion, and provide examples of active and positive role-models in the Somali-Australian community (Somali Podcast, n.d.). A Bahasa Indonesian film clip titled “Panduan Mengelola Informasi” targets “key influencers” by warning youth of the dangers of misinformation that may be available online, and includes scriptures from the Qur’an that encourage Muslims to be careful in processing information (Jalan Damai, 2015). However, there are not any specific details or arguments against violent extremists directly in this video. On the other hand, one notable exception, is a set of brochures developed by the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) based in Singapore that aims to directly counter the messages of Daesh through several brochures that are available in print and online. One of the brochures, “The Fallacies of ISIS Islamic Caliphate” gives reasons why ISIS’s Caliphate is illegitimate based on Islamic scholarship, Quranic verses and prophetic tradition (Sunnah). Moreover, the brochure also gives some resources for how individuals might contribute to the crisis in Iraq and Syria, by providing links to relief efforts.
For the dataset available, the content of the messages against violent extremism in South East Asia consisted of a large number of “positive” or “peace” messages, as well as a large number of theological counter-narratives directly refuting violent extremist arguments through religious ideology. While these messages are important, when cross-referenced with the push and pull factors listed earlier in this essay, as well as the types of violent extremist narratives prevalent in the region, the existing counter-narratives seem to lack an appropriate response to political arguments.

Finally, for the items contained in the Counter-Narrative Library, there were a variety of mediums that were examined in the South East Asia collection. The mediums used were primarily websites or web blogs (21) and video content shared on social media such as YouTube (18). There were some examples of news articles and interviews with religious figures, expert commentators and former violent extremists or defectors. However, there were very few examples coming from traditional media platforms such as radio, newspaper, TV or films. It should be noted, however, that in the collection process, the counter-narratives identified through desk research were primarily through online sources, and the participants at the Semarang workshop providing the counter-narrative examples were also asked to provide links or copies of the content, if possible. This may have limited the ability to collate non-Internet based sources found more in traditional media.

**Recommendations for CVE Programs, Policy and Practice**

Taking into consideration the above analysis with regards to the counter-narratives existing in South East Asia, there are a number of recommendations this report makes with regards to future counter-narrative development. These recommendations are not comprehensive, but the critical recommendations for CVE policy and practice are outlined below:

1. **Promote and expand the existing set of counter-narratives beyond religious and ideological counter-narratives.** In particular, counter-narratives in South East Asia should focus also on some of the non-religious or non-ideological push and pull factors, such as marginalization of minority ethnic and religious groups, lack of employment or access to economic opportunities, persistence of other types of violence glorified in communities, and the idealization or sense of heroism/adventure evoked from current and former fighters in foreign conflicts. Counter-narratives emphasizing the weakness of violent extremist groups, or their lack of ability to provide for their group members, could be especially persuasive when it comes to the political narratives put forth by violent extremist organizations in South East Asia.

2. **Develop and tailor counter-narratives towards whole families.** As was previously mentioned, the family unit, especially the mother figure, is significant culturally in South East Asia. New counter-narratives should explore ways in which: a) the family can be a recipient of appropriate information through counter-narratives that could enhance their ability to build resilience and protective factors through other family members; and b) family figures, such as mothers, can be utilized as key messengers in counter-narrative design and development.

3. **Harness power of regional diversity and create opportunities for cross-ethnic and cross-religious cooperation.** The South East Asia region is diverse in terms of ethnicity, religious groups, cultures and languages. While these differences can be exploited by violent extremist groups and used to justify their cause, cross-ethnic and cross-religious cooperation can be powerful in terms of refuting the dividing nature of violent extremist groups. For example, “A Common Word” is an open letter by Muslim leaders to Christians, emphasizing God’s commandments to all Abrahamic faiths to love Him and to love their neighbors. While being initiated in Jordan, the movement has gained some traction within Indonesia and the Philippines.
4. Incorporate lessons learned on counter-narrative work into rehabilitation and reintegration programs. With a significant number of incarcerated violent extremists in South East Asia, especially in Indonesia and the Philippines, there is a strong need to develop better strategies for rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders. In this regard, it is important to apply some of the lessons learned from counter-narrative work to the setting of these programs geared towards incarcerated individuals. For example, instead of focusing on the religious ideology and justifications for violence, Indonesian programs may want to utilize other counter-narrative frameworks that address push and pull factors not related to religious ideology. Moreover, the religious counter-narratives may not be effective—for some JI prisoners, religious counter-messaging has actually been counterproductive, and their religious ideals have been strengthened during the process of rehabilitation programs.

5. Identify, collate and assess the impact of counter-narratives in the offline space for South East Asia. Partially due to the methods of collection regarding the counter-narratives included in the dataset for the How-To Guide, there is a disproportionate amount of counter-narratives that are available online as compared to strictly “offline.” While South East Asia has a significant online presence, and social media platforms are growing, there are still significant portions of the populations that have limited access to internet. In this regard, it is important to also develop counter-narratives that utilize traditional mediums such as billboards, pamphlets, public service announcements, radio, television and newspapers. Moreover, it is even more important to ensure that the mediums used in counter-narratives are those that the most “at-risk” or “vulnerable” populations are exposed to in their everyday lives.

REFERENCES


SECTION 5

METHODS FOR P/CVE AND MONITORING, MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION METHODS
The Generation Global programme (hereinafter Gen G) of the Tony Blair Institute has been operating for more than seven years in more than 20 countries. During that time, it has reached over 245,000 students aged 12 to 17, working with over 2,500 schools, training nearly 9000 teachers, and facilitating over 2500 videoconference dialogues.

The goal of the programme is to build a generation of young people at ease with those of different religions, beliefs and cultural backgrounds. Such young people will have cultivated a personal resilience to extremist thinking, and will be less prone to radicalization. As explored more fully below, we believe that particular habits of mind contribute to creating a mindset that is more vulnerable to radicalization; the experiences of participation in Gen G challenge the cultivation of this habitus. Gen G seeks to open students’ minds to cultural and religious diversity, thus reducing the opportunities for misconceptions and stereotypes. The programme gives them a range of important global competencies, including dialogue, critical thinking and religious literacy, as well as the opportunity to practice those skills with their global peers through direct exposure to others of different cultures and beliefs. Students are equipped to make the most of the opportunities for authentic engagement with challenging questions of identity and culture, both in their encounters with their global peers, and in their own classrooms.

The programme provides a range of flexible classroom resources that enable teachers to cultivate this range of critical 21st century skills in their students. Many schools do not take their participation any further, recognising the impact of these classroom sessions in cultivating a space for the exploration of di-

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF A GLOBAL DIALOGUE PROGRAMME

Matthew Lawrence and Dr. Ian Jamison

The ability to interact confidently with people from other cultures or different points of view without becoming defensive or angry is a critical skill in this respect.”

- Matthew Lawrence & Dr. Ian Jamison
versity within their own schools and communities. Most participating schools, however, go on to practice these skills with their global peers through the programme’s dialogue opportunities; either through our own online student community, or through facilitated video conference dialogue. The programme’s offer is unique in that it offers a combination of classroom materials to develop skills, and the direct moderated encounter with the other to practice those skills.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change underlying this approach as an educational intervention to prevent violent extremism is complex and multi-layered. Education is a space that is increasingly recognised as pivotal in building resilience against destructive ideologies and extremist narratives. Gen G is not a Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programme per se: this education work is not designed to de-radicalize those who are already engaged in extremist activities, but it is situated “upstream,” and thus aimed at a general educational audience, intending to build young people’s resilience to recruitment into extremism that can lead to violence.

There is a strong consensus that a particular kind of education is necessary in order to help young people resist extremist narratives, by cultivating the skills and experiences that contribute to a resilient and positive mindset. In a literature review of the field, Ratna Ghosh and her colleagues at McGill University (2015) concluded that “…education must instil critical thinking, respect for diversity, and values for citizenship if it is to successfully prevent extremism,” and went further in suggesting that “Open and critical pedagogy is paramount. Learning must be student-centred and should encourage identity development and foster critical thinking and appraisal.” This emphasis upon a critical pedagogy that builds the skills and confidence that enable young people to critique even powerful narratives presented by their society is also underpinned by Davies’ work where she sets this critical approach as the direct response to “extremism… founded on the notion that there is one right answer,” and thus aimed at a general educational audience, intending to build young people’s resilience to recruitment into extremism that can lead to violence.

Existing literature suggests that a number of educational factors exist that can contribute to vulnerability to radicalization. The following paragraphs outline these, in each case the aspects of the Gen G program that address those concerns are discussed.

1. Acceptance that there is only one correct way of viewing the world (and that education largely consists of being told what that is). Many education systems, whether consciously or unconsciously, promote a monochrome view of the world; where one particular narrative is privileged, and all others are rejected. In some cases this can directly support extremist narratives, but in all cases, this privileging of one viewpoint over others, and teaching students that there is always “a correct answer — that cannot be questioned” is in itself supportive of a mindset that is open to radicalization. Rose (2015) suggests that this may be true of particular ways of teaching, such as in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. Many extremist ideologues are very well educated, but have been educated in such a way that they understand that there is always one “right” answer.

   - Safe encounter with a range of other perspectives through dialogue. Young people taking part in Gen G are able to have safe encounters with a range of other perspectives through their participation in dialogue. This may be with other perspectives through the global dialogue opportunities offered by the programme through video conferences or team blogging, or through the practice of dialogue within their own classrooms.

2. Lack of confidence in discussing one’s own ideas, and in challenging others. Many young people participate in education systems that require them to be passive and uncritical consumers of ideas. A research snapshot of global education undertaken by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation suggested that rote learning (whether from books, or blackboard) was common (indeed often the most common) teaching approach. They thus lack confi-
dence when talking about their own ideas and perspectives, and frequently rely upon ideas that they have heard elsewhere. At the same time they are unwilling to critique or challenge ideas that they believe firmly to be wrong. Young people educated in this way are consistently told that their own perspectives are of no value — and that acceptance of the expert's narrative is the only positive way to progress.

- Opportunities for students to share their own perspectives in a supportive environment – and to challenge and explore difference safely. Through the lesson activities and the dialogue opportunities of the Gen G programme, young people are given the opportunity to explore their own perspectives in a supportive environment, and at the same time are empowered to challenge ideas that they find difficult.

- Experience of having one’s own values and attitudes heard and valued. For many students this kind of educational experience is the first time that someone in a school context will ask them what they think — and that experience of having one’s views listened to respectfully may be uniquely empowering.

3. “Othering” of those that are different, unknown or minorities. This may happen in a number of ways in education systems. Some education systems still support prejudicial attitudes, using official textbooks that may denigrate or misrepresent minorities or those who are different. Even where this does not appear in official texts, such attitudes can be passed on or reinforced by teachers’ approaches (either by directly supporting such perspectives, or by refusing to challenge them when they occur). In terms of student-to-student relationships, “othering” of those who are different is a common feature of bullying in schools.

- Direct engagement with the Other – both globally (through dialogue opportunities) and locally (through classroom activities). Gen G enables young people to directly encounter those “Others” about which they may hold prejudiced or misrepresentative views. This may happen through the dialogue opportunities – most memorably for many young people through the videoconferences – but also through the online space, and within their own classrooms. Many young people who study together at school never have the opportunity to share their personal perspectives, and many teachers report that the classroom activities give the opportunity for students to safely learn to navigate differences in their own communities.

Gen G is designed to challenge these factors that might contribute to vulnerability to radicalization. The lesson activities use child-centered, active pedagogies that provide an experiential approach to the acquisition of skills. Teachers are given practical tools that enable them to create safe spaces (which we understand as a respectful atmosphere that allows students to share their ideas, that encourages open-mindedness, and equips students with the appropriate critical skills) for dialogue in their classrooms, and in this environment students explore issues of identity, values, faith and beliefs. These preparatory experiences support students, not only in recognising through experience the complexity of identity, but also the inherent diversity of their own classroom. Through experience, students learn to embrace rather than fear difference, and are empowered to engage in dialogue around the most challenging issues. The global engagement then enables students to explore a nuanced and diverse range of responses to questions of identity and meaning, and through direct encounter with the Other, to overcome and discard prejudices.

**Evaluation Overview**

During the period September 2015 to May 2016, an evaluation of Gen G was carried out by a team from Exeter University led by Professor Rupert Wegerif. This evaluation sought to measure the impact of the Gen G programme on the participating students. While a great deal of anecdotal feedback suggesting that students were positively impacted had been collected by the programme team, a rigorous survey combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches was needed to provide more robust evidence of impact.

Measurement of the effectiveness of this programme was particularly challenging as it sought to evaluate attitudinal change amongst a substantial cohort of young people across a very wide geographical range. To date, little, if any, detailed research has been done examining the potential impact of educational interventions designed to build resilience against violent extremism. Where such work has been undertaken, it has been small-scale and qualitative, concentrated upon small and/or local cohorts of participants over relatively short periods of time, or has focussed upon getting a snapshot of attitudes, rather than attempting to measure attitudinal change.

Rather than using pre and post intervention measures, a semi-longitudinal research tool gathered baseline data from participating students and a control group in each school, as well as their teachers, at the start of their Gen G experience, and after each subsequent dialogue experience (whether videoconferencing or online blogging). This data was collected using a complicated series
of inter-related questionnaires, each available in four languages, including a series of vignettes (imagined scenarios where students were asked to consider how they would respond). In total, 5,157 individuals responded, resulting in 7,411 responses post-validation for analysis. A core group of 1,259 responses were identified to enable accurate comparison between the initial baseline and any subsequent change (427 from the control group and 832 from the programme group) from 89 schools across 15 countries. The data was subjected to a whole cohort analysis, and enhanced by a series of multi-level analyses (innovative in educational research), corpus linguistic analysis of 1,140 students’ written pre- and post-dialogue reflections, observation of video conference recordings, and in-depth case studies that included semi-structured interviews with identified students and teachers.

A range of innovative approaches were used, including the development of a new tool, the “Measure of Dialogical Open Mindedness” (MDOM). This is an original instrument developed for the evaluation of the Gen G programme, focussing upon measuring five key areas that combine to give an insight into participants’ approach to the Other. A separate measure of the “Knowledge and Experience of Difference” (KED) was also used to contextualise students’ responses.

**MDOM Scale**

For this scale, questions were created to access the core concept of dialogic open-mindedness; these were augmented with questions adapted from existing instruments; although this is an original instrument developed for the evaluation of the Gen G programme, we drew upon other measures for some of the questions which relate to various relevant traditions of research in psychology, including: Tolerance of Ambiguity, Self-Confidence in the Face of Difference, Knowledge and Experience of Difference – Approach and Avoidance, and Just World and Learning Environment.

Tolerance of ambiguity. These questions seek information about whether those answering the question are comfortable with accepting that there is not always a correct answer to every question. This builds upon the work reviewed by Kruglanski (2013) and Sanchez, Shih and Garcia (2009), and relates to work on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) highlighted in Ghosh et al (2015). Davies (2008) suggests that tolerance of, and openness to, ambiguity is critical for equipping young people to resist extremist positions. By expressing a tolerance of ambiguity at some level, students are already expressing a state of mind that is different from extremist positions that present a single viewpoint as the only acceptable one.

Examples of the statements requiring a response based on the Likert scale, to ascertain the degree to which respondents agree or disagree, include:

- I feel uncomfortable when I don’t know what the truth is.
- I think it is essential that we have a strong government which makes definite laws.

Self-confidence in the presence of diversity of views or people. These questions seek responses from participants relating to their own confidence in interacting with other people who may be from different cultures. Again, this relates significantly to PVE; the ability to interact confidently with people from other cultures or different points of view without becoming defensive or angry is a critical skill in this respect. This contrasts with extremist positions, where those who are different are actively “Othered”, and frequently marked out as legitimate targets for violence. Brown and Gaertner (2001) suggest that this is done through social categorisation in which out-group members, including civilians (so that they can be legitimately targeted), are seen as enemies, and psychological distancing by exaggerating the difference between in-group and out-group members. Here, participants are asked to respond to a series of statements about their own experiences, including, for example:

- When I see people being mocked for being different I get angry and I tell those who are mocking to stop.
- I am confident about speaking out in class.

Knowledge and experience of diversity of views or people – approach/avoidance. These questions used the approach/avoidance motivation distinction as highlighted by, for example, Elliot and Covington (2001). The scale explores attitudes towards difference to quantify the extent to which students approach difference positively, or attempt to avoid engagement. Similarly to other factors explored above, this is a critical component of education to prevent violent extremism. Ghosh et al (2015) surveyed a range of literature on this area, and demonstrate that many extremist narratives seek to go beyond simple ignorance of the Other (which is tolerated in many educational contexts), to actively cultivate inaccurate understandings of the Other that are used to misinform students, and build negative attitudes. Ghosh refers to studies undertaken on school texts in both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as examples of this misleading approach being institutionalised within education systems. The extremist nar-
rative is one that lies at one end of the approach/avoidance distinction, and the Gen G experience of direct and open dialogue at the other. Examples of statements participants were asked to respond to include:

- I am confident in talking to someone from another country
- I want to understand the different branches within religious and non-religious traditions

**Just World Hypothesis.** Investigation into the steps leading to the formation of violent extremists has suggested a connection with belief in the “Just World Hypothesis” (Borum, 2003). This widely researched phenomenon can be described as a condition in which “individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1030). This belief is correlated with irrationally blaming victims for their misfortunes. The Just World Hypothesis is particularly associated with religiosity (Kaplan, 2012). If people feel that they themselves are the victims of injustice, then it can follow from the Just World Hypothesis that there must be someone or somebody to blame for this injustice that is external to God's will and the enemy of God's will. A sense of injustice and need to blame others is a key component of most models of the formation of violent extremism (Moghaddam, 2005). After discussion with Professor Brahm Norwich of Exeter (an informal advisor to the project) we decided to include some questions from measures of the Just World Hypothesis as an indirect way to approach potential vulnerability to radicalization. These questions seek information from respondents about the extent to which they believe in the Just World Hypothesis in line with Lerner’s formulation (1980) and more recent iterations for example Dalbert (2009). Examples of the statements include:

- If I suffer a misfortune I have usually brought it on myself in some way
- When I get “lucky breaks” it is usually because I have earned them

**Learning environment.** Lastly, there is a line of questioning that seeks information about the learning environment that has been created by teachers as part of Gen G, which look to the experiences that the participants have had as part of the programme. Here, the objective was to assess the extent to which classrooms are becoming places that genuinely encourage open-mindedness, and equip students with the appropriate critical skills to develop resilience against extremist narratives. A number of authors, Davies (2014), Gereluk (2012) and Ghosh et al (2015) foreground the importance of the development of critical thinking, and the importance of such skills in “developing resilient citizens” (Ghosh et al, p. 49). The importance of this kind of approach is flagged up by Salna (2011): “…the main problem in Indonesia is critical thinking for students. The reason why some of the young get involved in political violence or extremism [is] because they do not ask questions to the recruiter” Examples of these statements include:

- I know that whatever I say, my teacher will make sure that I am treated with respect.
- In my class, disagreements are resolved so that we can get along well after the disagreement.

**Measuring Knowledge and Experience of Difference**

Alongside the MDOM scale, a scale to measure Knowledge and Experience of Difference (KED) was devised. This scale sought contextual information from the respondents about their experiences and knowledge of diversity. The scale was augmented with questions that more specifically relate to the stated aims and desired outcomes of the Gen G evaluation.

Examples include:

- In the area where I live, everyone is from one culture, worldview or background
- Everyone who belongs to a particular worldview, belief or culture will all believe the same thing

**Vignettes**

In addition to this quantitative data, two “vignette” questions were included. These asked students to describe how they would respond in a given situation (How did you feel? What did you think? What did you do?). They were then asked to imagine a response if the situation has not been experienced. The technique is based on a method described by Barter and Renold (2000). In brief, “Vignettes are short scenarios or stories in written or pictorial form which participants can comment upon.” (Renold, 2002, pp. 3-5).

Example vignette scenarios are:

- Think about a time when you read something in a newspaper or online which was unpleasant about a religious minority in your community – you have friends in this group.
• Please tell us about a time when you met someone from a religion that you didn’t know about, or a culture different to your own.

Key Findings

Overall, the analysis shows that being part of the Gen G programme has a modest but statistically significant, positive impact on students’ Measure of Dialogical Open Mindedness (MDOM) and Knowledge and Experience of Difference (KED), e.g. their attitudes towards others who are different.

The two graphs above outline the comparative change between the control and programme groups on both the measures of MDOM (fig 1) and KED (fig 2). This positive result varied by school. Some showed a marked impact, and others little or no impact. Schools within countries are generally dissimilar in terms of variation in MDOM and KED scores. This suggests that the pattern of variation is not simply a geographical issue, but is rooted in differences within individual schools.

Analysis of the control groups, i.e. students that did not participate in the programme, demonstrated a clear decline in dialogic open-mindedness. During the period of the study, a wide range of news stories were suggested by our country coordinators as potentially having an impact upon students’ attitudes. Some of these were global stories that contributed to local impacts in a range of countries. Others were more local, but equally powerful in their impact. Some examples of issues being presented as a cause for concern in e.g. Europe, the US, Jordan, and Egypt include the continuing war in Syria, and the associated increasing movement of refugee populations. The continuing challenges of the Israel / Palestine situation were highlighted across the Middle East, as well as rising nationalism and the Kashmir situation in India. Further, the discourse and rhetoric around such global events as the UK referendum on exiting the European Union and the US presidential election may have increased perceptions of Othering giving licence for increasingly confrontational attitudes to be used in the public square.

Conventional wisdom expects young people to espouse liberal and open ideas, or to be more likely to do so than their adult peers. However, the publication of the Yuva Nagrik Meter (YNM), a national benchmark study of Children’s Movement for Civic Awareness (CMCA) in 2015, which assessed attitudes of over 10000 young people across 11 state capitals in India, demonstrated popular support for regressive and conservative ideas. It found that a majority of college students favour military rule and disapprove of boys and girls from different religions meeting in public, and agree that women’s dress and behaviour might provoke rape. Substantial minorities believe that women should accept a certain amount of violence, that domestic workers do not deserve a minimum wage, and that (the illegal) practice of dowry is acceptable.

Given that the schools involved in the programme are self-selecting implies that these schools are already orientated to some degree towards open-mindedness, thus suggesting that the decrease in the control group scores is unlikely to be simply a school level factor (such as school ethos). Accepting that the wider societal influences on students in many of the countries involved is away from the development of open-mindedness, the effect of the programme has perhaps a greater potency than the statistical outputs alone can suggest.

The evaluation’s corpus linguistics analysis uncovered clear evidence of a shift in the direction of increased dialogic open-mindedness and awareness of complexity. This included a shift from using language indicative of simple “us and them” attitude towards a greater use of “we”, accompanied by awareness that this inclusive “we” included a great deal of individual variation, demonstrating increased awareness of both the diversity of their own community and the diversity of the others. Analysis of a much higher frequency of the word “sad” in the post-videoconference vignette responses also implies a greater sense of empathy with the victim of discrimination; and analysis of the unexpectedly high frequency of the word “happy” in the post-videoconference vignette responses reflects an increased number of students writing about how happy they are to know someone from a different culture. Existing research (Savage & Liht, 2013) suggests that increased awareness of complexity and tolerance is a good way to prevent future radicalization.

The case studies suggest that the programme has substantial potential to exert transformative effects on teachers, students and whole classes. They also point to reasons why some schools achieve significant positive change in their students, and others do not. Schools in Italy and India that demonstrated increases in MDOM and KED scores had particularly passionate teachers who expressed concern not only with better teaching, but with changing the world, which they seemingly have communicated to their students. These teachers were able to point to specific examples of how the programme had transferred...
out of the classroom into social action (e.g. helping Syrian refugees newly arrived in their town).

Research and Policy Considerations

The outcome of the research flagged up a number of critical questions for further research; notably the need for a longitudinal survey to establish the extent to which any attitudinal changes might influence the longer term attitudes and behaviours of participants. At the same time, specific case studies of specific areas of the research would be useful to establish both the drivers of attitudinal change (and the relationship between attitudinal and behavioural change), as well as clarifying the causal processes between the intervention activities and attitudinal change. A more detailed understanding of the comparative impacts of different ways of practicing dialogue should also be explored.

There are some clear policy recommendations that arise from this research. In the global education space, while there is growing recognition of the importance of Global Competencies (which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) plan to include in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment), the need for adequate teacher training to support the development of these skill sets is not yet widely acknowledged. Policy makers should prioritise the inclusion of these approaches in initial teacher training. Given that many countries see teachers leaving the profession within the first five years, this is the best opportunity to ensure that the significance and impact of dialogical approaches to education are most firmly embedded within the fundamental skill set of all classroom practitioners. It should also be included within plans for regular continuing professional development (CPD), where possible, and actively supported by those policy gatekeepers that are able to shape the CPD that teachers are offered.

The OECD’s emphasis upon the kinds of educational reform that can have the most profound impact in the classroom calls attention to both education for enhanced skills, and education for positive attitudes. Policy makers should use these reports as drivers for educational reform that allow them to implement and embed proven approaches, such as those demonstrated by Generation Global.

Further, even where teachers do wish to advance these skill sets in the classroom it is often difficult, as curriculum pressures frequently force them to concentrate on teaching to prescribed testing requirements. This is frequently, and correctly, presented as a challenge for holistic education that develops the whole person, but the skills acquired through this kind of approach mean that this should be understood in a more urgent way. While the skills acquired by students are important preparation for the 21st century world, and keys to the modern workplace, there is beyond this a broader set of questions about the kinds of safe and stable societies that we seek to create for the future. If governments want to prepare their young people for the globalised world, and to give them the skill sets that they need to build resilience to extreme narratives and radicalization, then appropriate professional development needs to be provided to teachers and sufficient space allocated within curricula.

1. Promote and expand the existing set of counter-narratives beyond religious and ideological counter-narratives. In particular, counter-narratives in South East Asia should focus also on some of the non-religious or non-ideological push and pull factors, such as marginalization of minority ethnic and religious groups, lack of employment or access to economic opportunities, persistence of other types of violence glorified in communities, and the idealization or sense of heroism/adventure evoked from current and former fighters in foreign conflicts. Counter-narratives emphasizing the weakness of violent extremist groups, or their lack of ability to provide for their group members, could be especially persuasive when it comes to the political narratives put forth by violent extremist organizations in South East Asia.

2. Develop and tailor counter-narratives towards whole families. As was previously mentioned, the family unit, especially the mother figure, is significant culturally in South East Asia. New counter-narratives should explore ways in which: a) the family can be a recipient of appropriate information through counter-narratives that could enhance their ability to build resilience and protective factors through other family members; and b) family figures, such as mothers, can be utilized as key messengers in counter-narrative design and development.

3. Harness power of regional diversity and create opportunities for cross-ethnic and cross-religious cooperation. The South East Asia region is diverse in terms of ethnicity, religious groups, cultures and languages. While these differences can be exploited by violent extremist groups and used to justify their cause, cross-ethnic and cross-religious cooperation can be powerful in terms of refuting the dividing nature of violent extremist groups. For example, “A Common Word” is an open letter by Muslim leaders to Christians, emphasizing God’s commandments to all Abrahamic faiths to
love Him and to love their neighbors. While being initiated in Jordan, the movement has gained some traction within Indonesia and the Philippines.

4. Incorporate lessons learned on counter-narrative work into rehabilitation and reintegration programs. With a significant number of incarcerated violent extremists in South East Asia, especially in Indonesia and the Philippines, there is a strong need to develop better strategies for rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders. In this regard, it is important to apply some of the lessons learned from counter-narrative work to the setting of these programs geared towards incarcerated individuals. For example, instead of focusing on the religious ideology and justifications for violence, Indonesian programs may want to utilize other counter-narrative frameworks that address push and pull factors not related to religious ideology. Moreover, the religious counter-narratives may not be effective—for some JI prisoners, religious counter-messaging has actually been counterproductive, and their religious ideals have been strengthened during the process of rehabilitation programs.

5. Identify, collate and assess the impact of counter-narratives in the offline space for South East Asia. Partially due to the methods of collection regarding the counter-narratives included in the dataset for the How-To Guide, there is a disproportionate amount of counter-narratives that are available online as compared to strictly “offline.” While South East Asia has a significant online presence, and social media platforms are growing, there are still significant portions of the populations that have limited access to internet. In this regard, it is important to also develop counter-narratives that utilize traditional mediums such as billboards, pamphlets, public service announcements, radio, television and newspapers. Moreover, it is even more important to ensure that the mediums used in counter-narratives are those that the most “at-risk” or “vulnerable” populations are exposed to in their everyday lives.

REFERENCES


Introduction

There are two central and recurring challenges facing the community of CVE practitioners and researchers:

1. Defining and delineating the concepts of extremism, violent extremism (VE) and CVE, in order to develop a consensus, or multiple contextual but functional definitions.
2. Identifying the causal factors that lead individuals and groups to either sympathize with, join or reject VE groups and their associated violent ideologies.

The challenge in defining and delineating the concepts outlined above presents several complications. Beyond the international community’s inability to agree on definitions for “radicalization” “extremism” or “violent extremism,” the set of practices that can be considered “CVE” can overlap with traditional spheres of development, human rights, governance, counter terrorism, and peacebuilding. Having only emerged in the last decade, the nascent field has proliferated among practitioners and policymakers in response to a shift in the global threat posed by armed non-state actors. Evolving from traditional counter terrorism (CT), CVE has increasingly placed CT efforts within a “soft power” framework, focusing on understanding the factors that motivate the individual and complex process of radicalization through to recruitment by violent extremist groups. Paradoxically, while the word “counter” is operative,
everal CVE programs and strategies are focused on prevention and deradicalization initiatives, much more than the term “countering” would suggest.

Apart from terminological complexity, identifying the causal factors that lead individuals and groups to sympathize with or join VE groups presents an even greater challenge. Since its emergence as a concept, peacebuilders and development professionals have both embraced CVE as an important new framework for addressing terrorism, and decried the term for its oversimplification of a complex issue and potential to do harm. In an attempt to justify CVE spending, social scientists and development workers have endeavored to delineate a coherent pathology for VE (Appleby, 2012; Iannaccone, 2006; Pressman & Flockton, 2012). Studies have sought to develop frameworks that identify causes, either necessary or sufficient, that drive the complex process of radicalization (Borum, 2011; Kruglanski et al, 2014). Similarly, much thought and resources have been dedicated to the empirical assessment of potential correlations between programmatic interventions and a reduction in VE activities (Christmann, 2012; Heydemann, 2014).

Very little empirical evidence supports the notion of a predictable path to radicalization to VE. There is also a lack of evidence illustrating strong relationships between CVE programmatic interventions and general success in achieving their intended impact. This lack of empirically established success is often attributed to the overall dearth of empirical research, including a lack of randomized control trials to rigorously assess the impacts of CVE interventions. Research is also hampered by the complicated task of attributing causality when the desired outcome is a non-event, which is the case with preventive CVE efforts. This problem is often seen in the research tools used to gauge levels of sympathy or allegiance to VE groups, and to measure shift in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors over time. Developing reliable and measurable indicators or benchmarks for success is complicated by each of these challenges.

**CVE in Afghanistan**

This section will elaborate on the two challenges of terminology and causality when applied to the context of CVE research and programming in Afghanistan. Beyond terminological ambiguity, the issue of definitions in Afghanistan is further hindered by inadequate linguistic, social and cultural translation. In both Pashtu and Dari, the two national languages of Afghanistan, wording that differentiates violence from violent extremism produces an awkward translation that does not communicate the intended connotations of the latter. Without a proper distinction between the two, the design of CVE programming will struggle to fit local context. This contextualization is one of the few areas of consensus around designing successful CVE interventions.²

CVE emerged in part from the post-9/11 realization that an exclusively kinetic approach to CT was unable to either address the underlying causes of terrorism, or to sway public opinion away from VE groups, toward legally sanctioned forms of political participation (Frazer & Nünlist, 2015). Nowhere has this realization been more visible than in Afghanistan, where policy shifted from a primary focus on military missions to eradicate perceived havens of terrorism towards a strategy seeking to have the military engage directly in reconstruction, thereby winning over hearts and minds (Coburn, 2016). The reconstruction effort slowly shifted in the late 00s to a counterinsurgency (COIN) effort, which centered on combined civilian and military efforts simultaneously taken to defeat the insurgency and eliminate its root causes. COIN doctrine was central to a substantial troop surge that took place in 2009, leading to a twinning of civilian efforts and military operations to delegitimize and destroy the insurgency. This led to a conflation between the military and civilian spheres for local populations, and a confusing hybrid CT space for practitioners (Schirch & Cortright, 2014).

Post-2012, CVE became a more prominent framework for addressing the persistence of VE in Afghanistan, with both the US and UK governments funding initiatives as broad as media messaging, interfaith dialogues and the development of an Afghan CVE strategy falling under their purview. Given the complex repercussions of overlapping military and development initiatives in Afghanistan – as well as recent memories of night raids and drone campaigns among many civilians - it is no surprise that any term emanating from the West meant to describe a CT initiative - even rebranded under CVE – might be met by Afghans with suspicion.

CVE is also confronted by the challenge of debating the issue of VE without alienating specific cultural or religious populations. Conversations and policy surrounding VE are predominantly targeting violent Islamic extremism, notably groups like Daesh/ISIS, the Taliban and Boko Haram. In Afghanistan, the dominant narrative espoused by VE groups is that they are the bulwark against Western influence, and any effort to undermine these groups is inherently anti-Islamic. This poses an additional complication to defining the term in Afghanistan: how to translate the definitions and key terminology in

a coherent and usable manner, while not evoking anti-American sentiment. This challenge may be accentuated by a political push to rebrand CVE as “Countering Islamic Extremism” under the Trump administration (Ainsley, Volz & Cooke, 2017).

The challenge of the lack of empirical evidence is as relevant in Afghanistan as it is elsewhere, despite 15 years’ worth of research (Beath, Christia & Enikolopov, 2013; Chou, 2012; Long & Callen, 2014; Mikulaschek & Shapiro, 2016; Lyall, Blair & Imai, 2013). Much of the CVE research and programming in Afghanistan has been conducted in a ‘siloed’ fashion, with donors independently funding initiatives without a coherent approach. What research does exist is often the proprietary information of either NATO or embassies, and is not shared, perhaps ironically, for security purposes.

Combining these challenges, we emerge with several central questions that must be addressed in order to ensure that CVE programming is drawing on established lessons and good practices. Most CVE programs begin by asking the following questions: How does radicalization/recruitment occur? At what stage in these processes is an intervention likely to elicit the desired result? What type of intervention is best suited to the situation? And how can its impact be measured?

Beginning with these questions, researchers frequently design instruments that seek to assess popular support for radical groups, establish the scope and parameters of a CVE intervention, and develop indicators against which results can be measured. These tools are frequently designed by Western academics and practitioners emerging from a wide variety of professional and academic backgrounds.

In Afghanistan, many of the communities that are currently under insurgent control, or which are considered the most vulnerable to the threat of violent extremism, are in rural areas with exceptionally low literacy rates (CPCA, 2014). Additionally, most of these communities have experienced multiple overlapping forms of violence, including, but not limited to, domestic violence, gender based violence, criminal violence, insurgent violence, foreign intervention, and other forms of inter/intra communal violence. In this context, it seems critical now to design research that seeks to establish indicators that reflect how local populations perceive violent extremism. We need to understand how they measure key concepts related to peace, violence and extremism for themselves, rather than imposing external experts’ perceptions of violence and its rhetoric.

The Everyday Peace Indicators Project

Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty (2014a, 2016b) have developed an approach that identifies community-sourced indicators of change. The Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) project, currently piloted in five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South America, uses these community generated indicators to measure peacefulness based upon each community’s own standards of peace. The EPI Project was inspired by projects from the ecological sciences that were concerned with the exclusions commonly found in top-down research. The project seeks to construct community-level indicators of peace and change through the community sourcing of indicators. Rather than using pre-existing datasets or indicators as a starting point, the EPI project began by asking people to reflect on the conditions of peace in their own communities and to identify indicators that would help them track changes in their everyday lives.

The everyday indicators provide rich empirical data about what people use in their daily lives to measure their own peace and safety. Thus, in the EPI pilot, research subjects cited seemingly anecdotal indicators that came from their everyday experiences: the ability to walk safely from a bus stop; the ability to sleep at home without fear of rebel attack; or the ability to access specific public services.

Many orthodox indicators of peace and peacebuilding may be “precisely wrong” in that they are technically correct, but report a very misleading picture. This observation can apply to measures of peacebuilding, the observance of peace accords, state-building and transitions from authoritarianism, as well as countering violent extremism. There is an increasing recognition of the limitations of approaches to measuring peace, and of the limitations in evaluation practices. Many in the Non-governmental Organizational (NGOs) world, as well as certain intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and bilateral donor governments, have begun to examine ways to make indicators more responsive. However, this desire for change is frequently stymied by bureaucratic inertia and the tendency toward more traditional statistical methods.

The Everyday Peace Indicators addresses this gap in expectations and experiences between formal peacebuilding and state-building programs (often top-down) and on-the-ground traditions of dispute resolution and legitimacy.
cifically, they aim to harness local knowledge of peace and integrate it formally with ongoing international, bilateral and NGO efforts to safeguard transitions towards peace and democracy.  

EPI for CVE

The EPI approach is compelling as a CVE methodology for three reasons. First, as described above, CVE is a disputed concept, as are VE and the concept of extremism itself. Given this, it seems fitting that rather than having someone external to a conflict design assessments for it, the research community should also investigate how results differ when local communities are permitted to define the issues and indicators themselves. Second, this framework would then also permit the impact of CVE programming to be measured against organic and community-led indicators. Ostensibly, this is how the community would be evaluating the programs themselves. Finally, this approach allows us to better understand how communities themselves identify violent extremism, helping practitioners to design more effective interventions.

This research is grounded in the belief that evaluations and research will benefit from the same decentralization that has been applied to understanding drivers of VE and designing interventions, as they are intrinsically connected. Rather than exogenously imposing proxy indicators, this research sets out to understand what measures local communities use to discuss extremism, violent extremism, radicalization, and efforts to prevent or counter them. It seeks to elicit how communities themselves would measure an increase or decrease in the above phenomena, and in doing so, tests if local indicators allow us to more effectively measure the impact of interventions.

Methodology

This methodology is based on Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Guinty’s “Everyday Peace Indicators” project, contextualized to develop indicators for CVE in the context of the Afghan provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar.

Instrument Design

Among the challenges of this research is the paradoxical need to design an instrument of inquiry, when the basis of the methodology is that the instrument should be defined by the community. In other words, we seek to design a frame-  

work for questions that will allow for the emergence of organic indicators, without imposing external assumptions.

Two instruments are designed in the implementation of this research. The primary instrument is a participatory focus group guideline, which seeks to induce community members to identify common concerns and indicators through discussion. The overarching questions we are looking to better understand are:

1. Broadly, how do communities define peace and violent extremism?
2. What indicators do these communities rely upon in their everyday lives to measure increases/decreases in peace, in VE recruitment and mobilization?

Focus groups discussions (FGD) take place at the village level, with up to several dozen indicators elicited from each village. Following the initial FGD, verification focus groups take place in the same locality, whereby a joint community indicator list is decided, and the indicators are diminished to a list of between 20 and 25 per village. The final list of indicators is coded into categories and analyzed, and from these final indicators, a general population survey will be designed. This survey will base its questions on gauging the locally-relevant indicators culled from the FGDs. The survey will be designed to be carried out longitudinally in order to assess any shifts in the indicators over time.

The indicators will serve as a guide to understanding local perceptions. Critically, it will also serve as a guide to the development of CVE programs in the target communities. Based on the FGD responses, USIP and local partners will develop programs to respond to the communities’ self-identified needs. Not only will the survey measure shifting perceptions over time, but it will also allow for the longitudinal assessment of CVE programmatic interventions.

Data Collection

Our local field partner began by conducting focus group discussions in the 18 villages identified. For each village, four FGDs were carried out, one with adult men (defined as over 25) and one with adult women (defined as over 25), one with male youth (defined as 12-25) and one with female youth (defined as 12-25).

The goal was to generate the indicators used by ordinary citizens, therefore we sought to identify a variety of actors relevant to the issue under study. This included schoolteachers, madrassa teachers, and politically active students,  

3 Excerpts adapted from publications by Firchow and Mac Ginty and the website: everydaypeaceindicators.org.

4 Given the security situation in the areas where this work is being carried out, we are omitting the name of the field partner and the names of the villages for their protection.
mothers/sisters of combatants and members of political groups such as Hizb Islami. These relevant individuals were balanced by average citizens such as farmers, drivers, and businessmen, the unemployed, and so on.

The first step was to test the FGD guide in the field to assess whether it elicited the types of information/indicators we were seeking, and to ensure there were no unforeseen problems (e.g. mistranslation and length) with the tool. Once the tool itself was honed, the local partner spent four months carrying out FGDs and verification focus groups with all four demographic groups (men, women, boys and girls) in each of the 18 districts covered in this research.

Analysis

Analysis was carried out jointly between USIP and the local partner. The local partner has an in-depth knowledge of violent extremism and CVE programming, but more importantly they bring a profound understanding of the local context and culture that was vital to effective analysis. Members of both USIP’s global CVE Working Group as well as its Afghanistan team were also consulted in the analysis, as were USIP’s data analysts. Finally, Pamina Firchow, who pioneered this concept in the EPI project, was consulted with regards to both design and analysis.

In the first stage of analysis, the indicators were compiled and cleaned. The cleaning process entailed confirming that there were no repeat indicators, and that translation was verified to ensure that there were no incorrect interpretations of the indicators’ meaning. The cleaning process permitted the researchers to identify broad categories into which the indicators could be classified. These categories then permitted an analysis of frequencies and correlations, to better understand the themes most prevalent in the community-driven indicators.

Findings and Program Interventions

The fieldwork portion of the research, specifically the initial FGDs and secondary verification rounds has been finalized, as well as the coding and analysis of the data. At this stage, both the surveys and the programmatic interventions are being designed. Several of the districts will be randomly assigned as control districts, where no interventions will take place. On the other hand, in the treatment districts, programmatic interventions will be designed based on feedback elicited from the communities during the focus groups. The surveys designed from the indicator lists will then be used to evaluate the success of the CVE programming, against the indicators defined by the community, and across the treatment and control groups. A final evaluation of this methodology, including the lists of indicators and final surveys will be published upon completion. Below are a few examples of indicators that have been collected:

Examples of indicators of diminishing violent extremism:

1. When we see antennas on the roofs of people’s houses (context added by author: the Taliban continues to prohibit television, antennas or satellites on roofs are an open sign that the area is not controlled by the Taliban)

2. When we see farmers loading vegetable trucks at night (context added by author: vegetables are grown in this district and supplied to the city in the early morning, however farmers will not load their trucks at night if the area is threatened by armed groups)

3. When we see local religious leaders openly attend the funerals of fallen Afghan National Army soldiers (context added by author: in other districts the Taliban have killed Ulema who attended ANA funerals)

Examples of indicators of increasing violent extremism:

1. When we see the men keeping/growing out their beards (context added by author: both the Taliban and other VE groups operating in the districts will interpret specific hairstyles or a lack of facial hair as a sign that someone is working for the government or international community, and therefore is a target)

2. We hear people labelling others (context added by author: this is a reference to takfiris and describes the increasing trend of competing VEOs in Nangarhar denouncing others as illegitimate, and infidel)

Examples of indicators of increasing peace:

1. Seeing girls going to school (Note: this was the most common peace indicator across nearly all of the districts surveyed, which is notable given gender norms in Afghanistan)

2. Vaccination campaigns are permitted in our village (context added by author: many VE groups and notably the Taliban have banned vaccination campaigns and tell local residents that vaccinations are an attempt to indoctrinate Afghans)
The indicators were evaluated in several ways. First, looking at the number of votes that each indicator received helped to clarify how the communities prioritized each, highlighting trends across top-ranking indicators. Analysis of these demonstrated interesting trends in local perceptions of security. For example, despite the fact that in Afghanistan women’s presence or participation in public space can be controversial, a recurring top indicator for peace across districts was the visibility of women and girls. Specifically, seeing women going to school, traveling to the market and other metrics related to mobility.

Rising unemployment emerged repeatedly as an indicator of violent extremism, contrary to the dominant narrative in CVE research which contests a relationship between economic indicators and VE. There are a number of ways in which this finding may be interpreted. Rising violence in an area may lead local businesses to shut down, and those with the means to migrate might do so, causing an increase in unemployment. The direction of the correlation may be reversed, implying that youth are incentivized to join armed groups based on financial incentives, implying that they are recruited or ‘hired’ more often than ‘radicalized’. However this is interpreted, it certainly calls into question the prevailing assumption that there is no relationship. Further study on the relationship between income, unemployment and violent extremism is important, separating unemployment and income as independent variables. Both Pashtu and Dari have specific language that differentiates the words ‘employment’ and ‘meaningful employment’, potentially helping the analysis to understand how this distinction is used in relation to its perceived relationship to VE. We need to better understand the psychological effect of unemployment which isn’t directly correlated to something like household income, and the impact of these variables on vulnerability to recruitment and radicalization.

Throughout the basic analysis of indicators, a set of categories emerged, and each indicator was coded into twenty-two categories. The frequency of indicators within each category, observed across each village, permitted the identification of certain trends, as in the following:

Figure 1: The red bar on the left represents the number of indicators for peace while the blue bar on the right represents number of indicators of violent extremism. The length of the bar denotes how many (between 1 and 60) indicators were coded into the category on the left hand side. These are the first 3 villages listed in order by their name in alphabetical order, which has been removed for the security of the local research team.

An overview of the first three villages’ indicators broken down by category demonstrates that indicators for non-state armed forces were the most prevalent for violent extremism, whereas the majority of peace indicators related to daily security and gender roles.

Certain categories were further sub-categorized to provide more granular detail, notably within the categories of non-state armed forces, which identified whether the indicators was related to the Taliban, ISIS, or an ‘other’ group, and whether it referred to the group’s political control, visibility or propaganda. This more granular analysis allowed us to understand which groups were present, and how. The visual below presents the same three villages as above in the same order. Where the bar is red, the presence or even political control of these armed groups was associated with an indicator of peace.
Figure 2: The red bar on the left represents the number of indicators for peace while the blue bar on the right represents number of indicators of violent extremism. The length of the bar denotes how many (between 1 and 50) indicators were coded into the category on the left hand side. These are the same 3 villages as above. T was the code for Taliban, broken down into whether the indicator was in reference to the group’s propaganda, political control or visibility. The coding is the same for ISIS and ‘other’ used when the group was unnamed.

As USIP designs CVE programming, the dynamics uncovered through analysis will feed into program design. The indicators themselves will be turned into surveys which will be administered every six months in both treatment and control districts, to assess whether the metrics themselves provide a more accurate measure of peace and VE dynamics. Several traditional proxy indicators and measures of kinetic activity in these villages will be used to compare against the everyday indicators.

Conclusion

This research is significant for several reasons. This will be the first application of community-sourced indicators, helping CVE researchers and practitioners understand how interventions differ when local communities are permitted to define the issues and indicators themselves. Additionally applying randomized controls trials (RCTs) may help better understand whether programmatic interventions achieve their intended objectives.

As outlined above, there is a shortage of RCTs in both CVE research and program evaluation. RCTs have their drawbacks, including the difficulty of uniform application, the risk of external factors affecting results, and the ethical implications of assigning control districts (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016). Despite these challenges, RCTs offer an approach where some level of correlation between intervention and outcome may be demonstrated. Assigning treatment and control districts may allow us to better understand the effectiveness of CVE programming.

Finally, the community-sourced metrics used to design and evaluate this intervention are less vulnerable to the external biases that traditionally affect CVE. CVE programming is often discredited due to the difficulty in identifying indicators that prove a program’s success. Indicators are often reflective of the academic or professional background of those carrying out the programs – a social scientist might measure social cohesion while a media organization may measure rhetoric – and while these may be relevant indicators, they do not necessarily reflect the underlying issues in that community as much as the biases of those carrying out the interventions. Community sourced indicators provide a new set of potentially powerful metrics that could more closely reflect the underlying challenges facing a community, thereby providing an accurate gauge to demonstrate the success or failure of future CVE programming.
REFERENCES


Heydemann, S., & President, V. (2014) ‘Countering violent extremism as a field of practice,’ *United States Institute of Peace Insights*, 1


CONCLUSION

This edited volume provides a well-integrated collection of papers that focus on and represent evidence-based research that challenges the existing common ground of the preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) field. The contributing authors’ diverse perspectives, guided by their respective areas of expertise, creates a synergy that stimulates the thinking of an entire field, prompting many to think in new ways about their research and how it can be translated into action to better enhance and integrate such efforts into existing P/CVE strategies.

This edited volume includes two annexes based on the recommendations and discussions provided by the researchers and speakers for the Annual CVE Research Conference 2016. First, “A Research Agenda for 2017-2018” – Annex I, to identify areas that are in need of further research and bridge existing knowledge and research gaps to include methodological issues and potential specific research projects. Secondly, “A Policy and Programming Brief” – Annex II, that addresses the continued challenges of implementing P/CVE programs and to help advise on and shape more integrated and effective P/CVE strategies that draw on the broad range of recommendations shared by the researchers at the Conference. Building on Hedayah’s previous two volumes from the 2014 International Countering Violent Extremism Conference (Zeiger & Aly, 2015; Zeiger, 2016), this volume advances a new and important area of research and aims to inform P/CVE policy around the world.

This conclusion chapter provides a summary of key findings highlighted from the papers of this edited volume as follows:

CONTEMPORARY P/CVE RESEARCH & PRACTICE

Lilah Elsayed
Section 1: Innovative Research and New Dynamics in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

In *Towards a Meaningful Integration of Brain Science Research in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) Programming*, Niconchuk demonstrated the importance of integrating research and expertise from behavioral and neuroscience into P/CVE research and programming. The author concluded in his paper that this integration works best by designing research programs that contribute to a better understanding of how violent extremist groups work socially, cognitively, and biologically to, in turn, better design counter-radicalization programs. Niconchuk also underlined the need to design specific research initiatives that focus on psychological issues related to violent extremism including victimhood, social exclusion, identity fusion, perceived deprivation, trauma and stress, particularly for vulnerable young people at high-risk.

Following on from Niconchuk’s paper is *The Role of Volunteerism in Preventing Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia: A discussion paper for the United Nations Volunteers Programme*, written by Robert Templer and edited by Jane E. Lawson. In sum, the paper placed great importance on including volunteerism in P/CVE efforts, particularly in the multi-cultural and religious context of Southeast Asian societies. The paper highlighted many of the benefits of volunteerism, both at the individual and community levels, for enhancing social cohesion, social networks, trust, outreach and participation and to further develop the notion of social capital. The author emphasized that volunteerism may have the greatest impact on mitigating the risks posed by radicalization and violent extremism by creating more-resilient people and communities. The author placed a greater emphasis on including volunteering programs, not only within broader conflict resolution and peacebuilding programs, but also within reintegration programs, while giving special attention to the role of women and youth.

Section 2: Exploring Distinct Challenges in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

This section includes four papers that focus on local drivers of radicalization and/or push/pull factors that lead to radicalization and violent extremism. Comerford’s paper, *New Dynamics of Extremism in South Asia: Case Studies from Kashmir, Bangladesh and Afghanistan* examined challenges related to extremism in the South Asian context. The author stressed the importance of understanding “local factors” when developing effective P/CVE and resilience building interventions at the local, national and regional levels. Developing counter-narratives at these different levels provides a better understanding of the domestic and international drivers of extremism, which include factors related to extremist networks, funding streams, and the transfer of ideologies. Comerford also placed a great emphasis on the effective role of educational institutions in building critical thinking skills and resilience among students, enabling them to challenge extremist ideas.

In *A Geographical and Temporal Overview of Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia*, Finley and Templer examine violent extremism in five Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. Finley and Templer concluded that countries can significantly reduce the risks of radicalization and violence when civil conflicts, exclusion of minorities and human rights violations are addressed by governments. The authors also emphasized the need for more research and P/CVE interventions that focus on the gender aspects of countering violent extremism across the region as well as provide greater attention to women and families of returnees from conflict zones.

In the paper, *Critical Issues in Preventing Violent Extremism in South Asia*, Ben Schonveld examined the main drivers of violent extremism in South Asian countries. Schonveld concluded with some key recommendations for supporting P/CVE efforts and particularly the UNDP’s programs across the region. These recommendations include: “the essentiality of maintaining local political ownership”; “developing a local lexicon for local contexts that takes into consideration sensitivity of local contexts”; “investing more resources in political capacity”; “prioritizing human rights and the civil society sector for P/CVE programming”; and “promoting the role of gender in P/CVE research and programming.”

In *Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in North Africa: ‘Grassroots’ Insights from the 2015 Afrobarometer Survey*, Lekalake analysed the results of an Afrobarometer survey conducted from 2014/2015 on ‘grassroots’ perceptions and evaluation of P/CVE, violent extremism and violence. The survey focused on five North African countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Sudan. The results highlighted the importance of future investment into security infrastructure in the region, particularly in Tunisia. In addition, the results on citizen preferences for government priorities e.g. peace and security vs. democracy and human rights have important implications for P/CVE policy and programming. For example, Lekalake demonstrated how a majority of citizens in Egypt and Morocco prioritized security and CVE efforts even if they come at the expense of these rights. The findings of the survey also featured some discrepancies between public perception and “objective/expert” analysis of the threat of violent extremism, indicating the need for further qualitative research at the...
community level to explain such differences and the role of media reporting and government messaging in forming these opinions. Further research could also include differences in the public’s understanding of recruitment motivations, for example, through interviewing fighters and members of their communities of origin to draw an explicit link between the two groups.

Section 3: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Programming by Case Studies

This section includes three papers that shed light on P/CVE programming from Somalia, Serbia and Colombia. Tesfaye’s paper, *Critical Choices: Assessing the Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youths’ Propensity towards Violence*, evaluates the USAID-funded programme, ‘Somali Youth Leaders Initiative’ (SYLI), which aims at reducing Somali youth support and participation in violence. Mercy corps carried out a “rigorous mixed-methods impact evaluation” of SYLI and among the key findings presented were the following: youth who were in secondary school through SYLI were less likely to be satisfied with the government’s provision of education, less likely to feel optimistic about future employment prospects and less likely to feel isolated and excluded in his/her community. The authors highlighted the need for designing and implementing youth programs that address both the lack of skills and lack of opportunities that hinder youth, in order to reduce violent extremism. The authors also recommended donors to invest more in P/CVE interventions that can change attitudes and behaviors. The authors concluded that research to test and evaluate other types of development programs that reduce violence outcomes should continue.

Although Tesfaye’s paper examined the role of combining formal education with civic engagement in community projects to reduce violent extremism, the overriding purpose of Jovana Saračević’s paper was to determine the relative importance of non-formal educational outreachs in P/CVE policies. Focusing on the “workshops, seminars, lectures, open talks, focus groups and youth-led activities” conducted by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia since 2013, Saračević shows how these non-formal education platforms, designed to fit the local context, helped in developing the critical thinking skills of Sandzak youth. Saračević recommends collaboration between the formal and non-formal education system by incorporating non-formal P/CVE education into formal educational institutions. The author also recommended designing and implementing systematic home-bound and “family-oriented” activities, encouraging youth activism, restoring and building trust in institutions, such as police agencies, and providing more inclusive policies that integrate the “Bosniak community” into Serbia’s political, economic and cultural life to help counter violent extremism.

Following 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia, Marchland, Denov and Serna discussed the important role of civil society in P/CVE research in *Walking the Collective Path to Peace: A Community Engagement Strategy to Reconciliation in the Context of Armed Conflict in Colombia*. In this paper, after examining the work of Agape for Colombia, a volunteer organization that uses community-engagement to build credible counter-narratives and hold reconciliation gatherings in Colombia, the authors presented some key findings on “community building” and the significant role “civil society” played in peace and reconciliation processes. The authors also recommended examining the role that reconciliation processes and strategies can play in the development of counter-narratives to help reduce radicalization and violent extremism that have been produced from war.

Section 4: Narratives and Counter-Narratives to Violent Extremism

This section comprises of two papers that highlight P/CVE research conducted not only to understand the potency of violent extremist narratives propagated for varying audiences with completely different histories and backgrounds but also the practical methods used in developing alternative counter-narratives to undermine terrorist and violent extremist speech.

Aiming to explain the crucial role of social media—particularly Twitter—usage by violent extremist organizations for terrorist and extremist ideological messaging and recruitment purposes, Yağıcıkaya, Özyer, Çelik and Kardas in *Twitter Social Network Analysis on Turkish Speaking Daesh Supporters*, examined the use of Turkish speaking Daesh supporters on the social media platform, Twitter. This research, conducted by the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, analyzed tweets from “21 seed accounts and a friend network of 2,567 users” to identify keywords within the tweets that allowed a better understanding of the agenda of Daesh supporters. The research was conducted to cover the period of 8-23 April 2016 and following the attacks committed on 10 October 2015, 12 January 2016, 19 March 2016, 17 February 2016 and 13 March 2016, and showed a focus on the PKK and religious issues dominated Turkish speaking Daesh supporters.

Drawing upon a good practice guide for counter-narratives entitled *Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in South East Asia: A How-To Guide*, Zeiger’s paper, *Counter-Narratives to Violent Extremism in South East Asia: A Preliminary Assessment,*
examined counter-narratives in the South East Asian region and identified key research gaps in counter messaging both online and offline. The paper reflected diverse regional practices in South East Asia while focusing on several countries including “Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.” The first project identifies best practice in the counter-narrative space, while the second project seeks to undermine extremist narratives. The author proposes a number of recommendations for future development of counter-narratives within the South East Asian context to include the development of counter-narratives that focus on insights addressing “non-religious and non-ideological push and pull factors” as well as promoting alternative messaging that is using influential family figures, such as “mothers”, as messengers in counter-messaging. The paper also provided key recommendations that highlight the importance of utilizing the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of South East Asian societies in promoting more diverse “cross-ethnic and cross-religious” initiatives for counter-messaging. In addition, better integration of counter-messaging efforts could be a key element in designing and implementing broader re-integration and rehabilitation programs for Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, particularly in countries such as Indonesia and Philippines.

Section 5: Methods for P/CVE and Monitoring, Measurement and Evaluation Methods

The final section of this volume concerns how P/CVE research is measured and evaluated, and the challenges that exist in doing so. Lawrence and Jamison’s essay, Measuring the Impact of a Global Dialogue Programme, provided an approach for measurement and evaluation used to assess the impact of the Global Dialogue Program (Gen G). This program was conducted by the Tony Blair Institute over the past seven years, the GEN G program aims to provide students between ages of 12-17 years old with the critical thinking skills and experience needed for them to “flourish in an interconnected and complex world.” The overall analysis found a statistically significant and positive impact on the attitudes of students that participated in the program, including a change in “Measure of Dialogic Open Mindedness (MDOM)” and “Knowledge and Experience of Difference (KED).” In addition, the linguistic analysis of student reflections from the online dialogue showed a very clear shift in the direction of greater MDOM and awareness of complexity. The paper also found that the personal engagement appeared to have a greater impact compared to topic-based discussions. The authors recommended further research to be conducted to focus on the relationship between MDOM and student behavior, reasons why results of participants and non-participants varied, and ways to develop a long-term longitudinal measure.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from Urwin’s paper Everyday CVE Indicators: A Case Study from Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country that is significantly contextualized not only from province to province or region to region but also village to village. The paper highlights the importance of studying P/CVE at a local level by allowing local communities to take part in identifying their own needs and indicators, such as defining concepts such as “peace”, “violence”, “extremism”, “violent extremism” and “radicalization.” Also crucial is the importance of involving them in measuring impact and finding local solutions. Findings of this research were utilized to serve as a framework to design a toolkit, surveys and evaluations for future P/CVE research in Afghanistan.
REFERENCES


At the International Countering Violent Extremism Research Conference 2016, Hedayah and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) convened over 250 researchers, experts, practitioners, and policymakers to identify and discuss the latest, cutting-edge research on preventing and countering violent extremism in order to develop a better evidence-base for existing policy and practice. The Governments of Australia, Spain and Norway, Coventry University, Edith Cowan University (ECU), Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Swansea University, UN Women, and Wahid Foundation were among the organizers and sponsors of the Conference. One of the objectives of the Conference was to develop and share P/CVE research agenda for 2017-2018 to identify the next steps in research for the P/CVE community. The main research recommendations from the Conference can be categorized in terms of 1) general suggestions regarding future research efforts for CVE, and 2) specific topics on which to conduct further research. The main recommendations for these categories are outlined below.

General Suggestions for Future CVE Research Efforts

- **Conduct more in-depth studies that do not focus only on push/pull factors leading to VE but also on the role of families, education, employment and good governance in P/CVE.**

  As a general point, it was agreed that there needs to be more in-depth research specifically on countering violent extremism—what works and what does not work in terms of prevention—as opposed to research on violent extremism or reasons why people join violent extremist groups.
This may include research on the role of families in P/CVE, or the role of education, employment and/or good governance. It was also recommended that more experimental research is conducted, including Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), on what types of interventions can reduce violent extremism.

- **Develop a database of citizen attitudes towards violent extremism and their evaluation of P/CVE initiatives.**
  As a start, it was recommended to create baseline surveys of the perceived threat of violent extremism in order to establish a starting point for comparison. Additionally, attitude surveys could include local, sub-national and national-level data in order to compare the datasets across contexts. Sample sizes should be sufficient to also compare across ethnic groups, urban vs. rural, age, gender etc. In particular, the attitudes surveys should focus on the relationship between perceptions of key issues related to violent extremism and measures of the relative threat posed by violent extremism in their community. For example, what is the role of media in that particular community, and how is that related to the perceived threat of violent extremism?

- **Work with psychologists, neuro-scientists, sociologists and other practitioners to integrate their respective fields into P/CVE research paradigms.**
  This includes ensuring that relevant clinical and neurological insights are taken into account when developing individual intervention programs at the design, implementation and evaluation phases. This is especially relevant for insights related to in-group bonding, antisocial behavior, victimhood, social exclusion, identity fusion, perceived deprivation, and trauma and stress.

- **Test existing metrics for measuring and evaluating countering violent extremism programs and counter-narratives.**
  While still in its beginning stages, there is an emerging body of literature that supports a number of metrics for measuring CVE programs and projects, as well as measuring the success of counter-narratives for CVE. It is important, therefore, that these metrics are tested across multiple contexts to validate and improve the existing frameworks. This includes metrics for reductions in support for violent extremism ideology, metrics for actual perpetration of terrorist actions, levels of security/safety and community resilience. Metrics and indicators ideally should use multiple data collection methods, including self-reported surveys, measures of attitude and behavioral changes in community actors, as well as statistics on community violence.

### Specific Topics for Further CVE Research

- **Conduct further research on the relationship between detention (in prisons), rehabilitation, radicalization, and the community.** This research was particularly relevant for the contexts of South East Asia and North Africa, where prisons have been sources of radicalization and recruitment. As violent extremist offenders are nearing the end of their terms, it is especially important to look at good practices for after-care and reintegration to help reduce recidivism.

- **Conduct further research on the relationship between criminality and violent extremism.** This may include linking efforts with ongoing research into hate crimes and gang violence across geographies. This also includes links between broader criminal networks such as drug trafficking or human trafficking and/or sexual-based violence.

- **Conduct further research on media and messaging to better understand violent extremist narratives and effective counter-narratives.** This should be done in a number of ways: First, further research is needed to show how terrorist narratives are used to recruit individuals in the online and offline space, in particular the tactics used to target individuals. Second, there is a need for further research on how online media influences behavior of individuals (in different regions and localities) with respect to inspiring and directing violent extremist activity. Third, there is a need to further research how offline media influences behavior of individuals (in different regions and localities) with respect to violent extremist activities.

- **Conduct research on the effectiveness of religious counter-narratives adapted to local cultural contexts on several target audiences: 1) general public, 2) sympathizers, 3) radicalized individuals.** There is a general underlying assumption that religious counter-narratives are the most effective protective factor against violent extremism, but there is not sufficient evidence to support their effectiveness. While doing so, there is also a need to work more closely with religious leaders and scholars to co-design research into the benefits of religious practice as coping and resilience mechanisms, including counter-narratives.

- **Conduct further research on the relationship between international, national and local drivers of radicalization.** This includes the relationship between human rights delivery, justice and security sector reform, education and employment at a national and local level, and how these factors relate to international politics, narratives, and relations between countries.
The purpose of this Policy and Programming Brief is to highlight five strategies discussed in details below. These strategies can feed into translating evidence-based research in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) to action to better enhance and integrate such efforts in existing counter-terrorism strategies with a joint learning approach from demarcated by theme and/or region recommendations came out from the Annual International CVE Research Conference 2016, hosted by Hedayah and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Jakarta from 6-8 December.

1. **Addressing a Need.**

Undoubtedly, there is an urgent need for an enhanced global commitment towards joining efforts to create a strong front against all forms and manifestations of violent extremism. For evidence-based P/CVE-related research to be useful, it needs to focus on challenges policymakers and practitioners face on a regular-basis to help guide their efforts and decisions. The research needs to build on the 2015 United Nations Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and 2016 UN-Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism – The Way Forward that have identified six priority areas for action including: (1) Strengthening Good Governance, Human Rights and the Rule of Law; (2) Engaging Communities; (3) Empowering Youth; (4) Gender Equality and Empowering Women; (5) Education, Skill Development and Employment Facilitation; and (6) Strategic Communications, the Internet and Social Media.
2. Share Experience and Lessons Learned from Different Countries.
For evidence to be translated into action, it needs to be relevant to the specific context it will be used in. The Annual Research Conference provides the platform for international P/CVE innovative academics, researchers and practitioners to review and document their experiences in a structured way and draw lessons that may be applicable to many countries, and eventually help to develop both country specific and global solutions.

3. Provide Local Drivers and P/CVE Solutions to Policymakers and Practitioners.
The aim of the annual Conference is to foster an environment where policymakers and practitioners take stock of the available research and evidence the knowledge gaps for the common challenge they are trying to solve. Then eventually share their own knowledge with one another and co-create regional and global practical solutions.

4. Translate Research and Evidence into Practical Tools.
Evidence-based research can inform what to do to get a desired result, but figuring out how to get that result is often the more challenging. That is why the thematic, regional and breakout sessions at the Conference have focused on (a) how can we ensure research findings feed into P/CVE policy and programming?; (b) how can we ensure these findings reach a broader audience? and; (c) how can we ensure research is responsive to the ground needs and developments? Allowing practitioners and policymakers to rapidly assess whether their current approaches are aligned with their primary objectives, while identifying key areas for improvement and potential intervention and learn from other experiences grappling with similar challenges.

5. Stay Connected.
Translating evidence into action is rarely a one-and-done proposition. It requires feedback loops and continued engagement and support as new and unexpected challenges arise. In fact, the Annual Research Conference Network cite the continuous ability to tap into the expertise of colleagues facing similar challenges around the world as the network’s top benefit.

Recommendations for P/CVE Programs/Practitioners

Drivers of Radicalization
Tailor CVE interventions to fit the most relevant push and pull factors leading to violence in a local context as understanding better the drivers and barriers to radicalization can help design such interventions so that they contribute to overall PVE objectives; Integrate research and expertise from the neuroscience and behavior into P/CVE research and programming.

Engaging Communities
Place Volunteerism within broader conflict resolution and peacebuilding programming. Volunteering may have the greatest impact on extremism when it is contributing to the reduction of risks in conflict or post-conflict situations; Design programs that promote civic engagement while supporting and facilitating participatory, community-level volunteer processes; Build on the lessons learned from development community to find out what works and what does not work in P/CVE; Ensure that local civil society actors have a leading role in investigating drivers and push/pull factors in the local community context; Design and implement systematic “family-oriented” activities contributing to P/CVE.

Alternative and Counter-Narratives, the Internet and Social Media
Develop alternative and counter-narratives that is able to address grievances in a constructive and non-violent way and provide peaceful alternatives; The need for messaging to be “authentic” means that it will almost always fail if driven by outsiders; Develop and tailor counter-narratives towards whole families (including women and children) particularly for the South East Asia region; Develop and focus counter-narratives in the offline space in addition to online; Identify emerging markets and methods of communication, and ensure a presence on those platforms; Harness the power of regional diversity in terms of religion & ethnicity, and create opportunities for cross-ethnic and cross-religious dialogues.
and interactions; Develop further research projects to identify the extent to which online isolation of violent political groups further radicalizes group members; Develop P/CVE initiatives that address radicalization in both the online and offline space.

Preparing the Community for Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Develop and integrate volunteering programs within reintegration programming to ensure that families who may have member(s) who have returned from fighting abroad are not further isolated but brought back into communities. Radicalization often follows family links and has emerged as a family activity. It may be just as vital to pull families away from other radicals and back to normal lives as it is to provide a route out for fighters; Build on past examples of reconciliation processes (e.g. Colombia and Northern Ireland) to develop mechanisms for returning foreign terrorist fighters (RFTFs); Conduct research to help better understand attitudes of communities with regards to rehabilitation and reintegration of former violent extremists.

Education and Skill Development

Develop pilot programs to test mechanisms to develop critical thinking skills to build resilience to violent extremism, particularly in contexts where education is often criticized as a driver of VE; Continue development of curricula that improve critical thinking skills amongst youth; Provide safe channels for reporting on radicalization amongst teachers, religious leaders etc.; Provide greater support to initiatives to improve the quality of education.

Measurement, Monitoring and Evaluation and P/CVE Indicators

Conduct cross-institutional collaboration to develop meaningful prevention indicators that can be collected and examined globally (sector-level indicators); Include base indicators on how the community perceives threats, security and safety when measuring the success of programs; Stop using the excuse that “it is difficult to measure CVE,” to avoid rigorous evaluations; Use not only existing tools for measurement and evaluation, but also adapt those tools by using innovative frameworks and methods; Share good practices and data around existing program evaluations on P/CVE; Target programs towards rural communities proved to be more vulnerable to VE as per key demographic variables as they may not always be the recipient of P/CVE initiatives; Consider unintended consequences of CVE interventions, and apply the “do no harm” principle.

Youth and P/CVE

Design programs that promote healthy bonding and attachments for vulnerable youth in high-risk communities and ensure those working with identified youth are trained to an appropriate standard in basic principles of social work and counselling; Encourage youth activism, awareness raising campaigns, etc., to better amplify credible voices against violent extremism.

Gender and P/CVE

Integrate mainstream P/CVE into other community-level programming that has been done with gender equity and child protection, to de-stigmatize “extremism”-related programming and to focus on extremism as one risk among many anti-social risks for youth in disenfranchised communities.

Strengthening Good Governance, Human Rights and Rule of Law

Give P/CVE programs greater focus to improve levels of trust between vulnerable communities and the state; Traditional leaders, who enjoy comparatively higher levels of trust than government, should be used as intermediaries; Conduct programs focusing on good governance and job creation, particularly among the youth, in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region because unemployment rates are very high in the region; Develop campaigns to encourage the confidence between law enforcement agencies and civil society.
Recommendations for P/CVE Policy

Engaging Communities

Develop strong partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) to better assess the threat of violent extremism as well as implement programs in the CVE “space.”; Empower CSOs and benefit from them. Enable environment for positive volunteerism; Restoring trust in institutions, wherever that trust has been diminished, is also essential. It is a long-lasting process requiring efforts from all the stakeholders – the government, civil society, educational institutions, the police, etc. Engaging these actors in joint P/CVE activities could produce long-term effects. In this respect, it is important to advocate for inclusive policies, contributing to further integration, particularly in the case of the Bosniak community in a wider political, economic and cultural community of Serbia.

Strategic Communications, The Internet and Social Media

Work to enhance strong narratives of government (e.g. tolerance and inclusiveness) to tackle some of the key grievances.

Preparing the Community for Rehabilitations and Reintegration

Develop counter-narratives based on rehabilitation and reintegration programs rehabilitation and reintegration programs (e.g. in prisons); Increase collaboration among CVE actors to include those working with right-wing extremism and de-radicalization as well as those working with gang violence prevention and reintegration of former gang members.

Youth, Gender and P/CVE

Work to ensure that “warning signs” or “symptoms” that community members are asked to report to authorities are not proxy signs for signalling out youth with mental or emotional difficulties or broken family backgrounds; Develop initiatives that build trust between institutions (such as governments, police) and youth; Build partnerships and increase collaboration between youth and government and women and government at all decision-making levels and across sectors; Empowering women and youth by opening spaces for formal and informal
volunteering spaces which creates the ecosystem for the “whole of society” to participate and engage with their communities. In the battle against extremism and radicalization, it is necessary to work with these critical stakeholders on policy and programs related to; education, social cohesion, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners of violent extremists, countering extremist messaging, entrepreneurship and job creation and implementation of national laws against terrorism.

**Education and Skill Development**

Put political will and investment into the youth education and civic engagement pillars of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism; Ensure that youth education programs with violence reduction goals work to simultaneously improve access to school, enhance the quality of education, and increase access to community; Increase government investment, engagement, and visibility in educational development projects; Build on lessons learned from implementing existing national P/CVE Strategies through educating teachers, lecturers, etc., to be able to recognize early forms of radicalization.
This edited volume contains a selection of essays and contributions written by different authors and derived from the presentations made at the International Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Research Conference 2016, which was held in Jakarta, Indonesia from 6-8 December 2016. The Conference was co-hosted by Hedayah and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Other sponsors and organizers included the Governments of Australia, Spain and Norway, Coventry University, Edith Cowan University (ECU), Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Swansea University, UN Women, and Wahid Foundation.

The purpose of this edited volume is to further enhance the field of P/CVE research through a series of short research papers. The volume covers research on five topics: 1) innovative research and new dynamics in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE); 2) exploring distinct challenges in P/CVE; 3) preventing and countering violent extremism programming by case studies; 4) narratives and counter-narratives to violent extremism; and 5) methods for P/CVE and monitoring, measurement and evaluation methods. The edited volume also includes two annexes: “A Research Agenda for 2017-2018” and “A Policy and Programming Brief”.

hedayahcenter.org | ecu.edu.au