GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services

Governance · Social Development · Humanitarian · Conflict

Countering violent extremism

Topic guide

March 2017

About this Topic Guide

This GSDRC Topic Guide was written by Mareike Schomerus and Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy (both of the Overseas Development Institute) with Jassi Sandhar. Its production was supported by the UK Government.

GSDRC appreciates the contributions of Shivit Bakrania, James Golshetti, Rami Khouri, Dina Mansour-Ille, Aoife McCullough, Brian Lucas, Catherine Mueller, Jamie Pett, Lisa Stampnitzky, Craig Valters and Rebecca Wolfe.

GSDRC Topic Guides aim to provide a clear, concise and objective report on findings from rigorous research on critical areas of development policy. Rather than provide policy guidance or recommendations, their purpose is to signpost policymakers and practitioners to the key debates and evidence on the topic of focus, to support informed decision-making.

About GSDRC

GSDRC is a partnership of research institutes, think-tanks and consultancy organisations with expertise in governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. We provide applied knowledge services on demand and online. Our specialist research team supports a range of international development agencies, synthesising the latest evidence and expert thinking to inform policy and practice.

GSDRC, International Development Department, College of Social Sciences
University of Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK
www.gsdrc.org

Cover: Spiral staircase at an abandoned explosives factory (Jano De Cesare)

Suggested citation:

Supported by:

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

UKaid
from the British people

Contents

Acronyms

CT	Counter-Terrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICG	International Crisis Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
POA	UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	UN Security Council
US	United States
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USIP	US Institute for Peace

Summary

Definitions and concepts

There is no consensus on what violent extremism is and how best to prevent or counter it. The term 'violent extremism' has become a catch-all for a number of phenomena, and there is considerable variation in how terminology is used. Radicalism, terrorism, and violent extremism are often used interchangeably, even though they describe different processes.

The term violent extremism conflates belief and use of force. Critics also see the use of 'extremist' as always politically motivated: it can be used to denounce those that threaten the political status quo. Its use to describe primarily Islamist groups has obscured the fact that extremist beliefs and support for violence are found across different cultures, religions, and political situations. More attention is now being paid to, for example, right-wing or left-wing violent extremism.

The breadth of definitions and debate may offer an opportunity for more creative policy and programme engagement. However, it can also encourage ad hoc policymaking.

What we know about violent extremism

Rigorous empirical research that would allow conclusive statements on violent extremism is rare, so extremist violence tends to be explained through untested theories. Political interests may also inform an explanation or definition.

Causes of violent extremism are often divided into 'push' and 'pull' factors. This overlooks links between them, however, and can lead to overgeneralisation. 'Individual' and 'community' factors are more useful categories—though still interconnected.

Factors at the individual level include:

- **Personal relationships:** These are important in spreading or reinforcing extremist ideas, and a radicalising peer group can provide a sense of belonging.

- **Beliefs, values and convictions**: Extremist beliefs can be religious, spiritual, moral, or political and tend to express the conviction that a group, a way of life, or a political system needs to be challenged or destroyed. The perception of being denied recognition at a collective and personal level is considered critical.

- **Manipulation**: Manipulation by extremist groups happens in a complex interplay of identity formation and other enabling factors. Whether there is a causal relationship between access to information (including to social media) and extremism is under-researched. This also challenges counter-approaches that use media strategies.

- **Trauma and humiliation**: How emotions of humiliation and betrayal result in the reproduction of violence is a topic in urgent need of research.

Factors at the community level include:

- **History and narratives**: Legacies of oppression, subjugation, and interference by dominant powers matter. Sharing an oppression narrative with a community can create a sense of belonging in a marginalised situation.

- **Rejection of an external system**: Externally imposed or international systems that are associated with injustice and humiliation can create resistance that can turn violent.

- **Governance**: Poor/unjust governance can promote acceptance of an extremist group. Failure of a government to deliver services may enable violent extremists to establish safe havens.

- **Business and crime**: Commercial interests can drive violent behaviour. Some extremist groups act as credit institutions where no others are available.

- **Marginalisation and lack of choices**: Violence can be seen as a way of gaining more choices, an audible political voice, or a stronger economic position.

Those who join violent extremist groups come from diverse backgrounds and arrive via different paths. Violent extremism is not the consequence of a long-term political or religious 'maturation'.

There is no straightforward link between violent extremism and religious faith or specific practices. Many of those radicalising have only a faint grasp of the holy texts of the religion they are purportedly defending. This highlights that a belief—which can be a strong driver of violence—is not to be equated with a religious faith based on the interpretation of scriptures. A large-scale public opinion survey in Pakistan found neither religious practice nor support for political Islam was related to support for violent extremist groups.

A direct link between education and specific attitudes has not been established: lack of education does not cause extremist views.

Neither radicalisation nor state collapse necessarily leads to violent extremism. Some scholars argue that in a situation of collapse it is in fact more difficult for extremist ideologies to gain traction.

Violent extremism involves local, regional and international dimensions, so strategies to tackle it are needed at different levels.

Researching and understanding violent extremism

Boundaries between research disciplines hinder our understanding of violent extremism. Sociology seeks to identify what role the socio-economic, political, and cultural context plays in changing beliefs. However, a predictable relationship between political violence, structures, or relative deprivation has not been proven— nor is it likely that social phenomena will become so accurately predictable. Recent scholarship has highlighted that addressing grievances might not be sufficient to end extremist violence if one group is still seen as benefitting more from a system than another.

Psychology has not been able to isolate psychological factors as causes of extremism, nor have broader social, behavioural, or psychological theories been empirically affirmed. Possible paths for future research include group processes.

Economic explanations for violent extremism have not yet yielded enough evidence to support the claim that poverty causes violent extremism. Some economic theories argue that extremist beliefs and violent activity are a reaction to globalized open markets.

While current approaches to understanding violent extremism are still rooted in a search for push or pull factors, behavioural science suggests that decisions are emotional and that rationalisations (or the identification of push/pull factors) are constructed after an emotional decision has been made. A priority in understanding violent extremism might be to focus on the social and emotional world of those who use violence to express their beliefs.

Tackling violent extremism

Those working to counter violent extremism argue that 'hard approaches' involving the military, intelligence and police are counterterrorism (CT) rather than CVE. 'Soft' approaches—the domain of CVE—emphasise cultural and social elements. However, the boundary between CT and CVE can become blurred. Some analysts advocate 'smart CVE' which mixes soft and hard approaches, depending on whether a social or political dimension of violent extremism is emphasised.

An important distinction is between work that directly and explicitly seeks to counter violent extremism and development programmes that address development gaps considered drivers of VE.

Indirect CVE approaches may identify and address violent extremism as:

- **a social problem**: strategies include promoting counter-narratives and fostering community resilience, for example
- **an economic threat or issue** : strategies explicitly support economic development
- **a peace-building issue**: strategies seek to promote conflict prevention, mediation, or strengthened governance and rule of law.

The gender dimensions of violent extremism remain neglected in both research and practice.

Assessing whether CVE programmes work

It is difficult to isolate how a single programme affects the many factors that may contribute to a person's involvement in violent extremism. Individual programmes can likely only be evaluated against context-specific indicators; doing so requires deep expertise. Locally-appropriate definitions of CVE are difficult to develop. Assessment is also a challenge because:

- CVE programmes seek long-term change in areas/populations that can be difficult to access.
- It can be unclear what is being measured: a change in beliefs, in behaviour, or both.
- CVE programmes are seeking also to understand the absence of violent extremism—to measure a negative.
- Independent evaluation is particularly important for CVE programmes.

Evaluation strategies need to be designed in tandem with programme strategies and allow for adjustment if the chosen approach does not work. Clear, transparent, and honest relationships are needed between research, policy and practice.

'Doing no harm' in programming

The literature suggests possible lessons for CVE:

- Programmes could be examined with a focus on how they might influence people's experience of development and shape civil society
- Stigmatisation of entire communities needs to be avoided.
- CVE programmes that inadvertently increase the alienation of targeted groups would be advised to consult the substantive research on these processes.
- If a programme is expected to be community-led, communities need to be involved in decisions on funding, identifying needs and in setting priorities.
- A perspective from peace-building highlights the need to engage with all stakeholders, including conflict actors.
- It is important to make deliberate efforts to involve both men and women.

Tensions between development and CVE programmes

CVE is often located within security agencies, and communication across security and development departments may need improvement. Further, tensions between development and CVE programmes can include the following:

- Development programmes work to longer timeframes.
- Development stresses local ownership, whereas CVE programmes are often informed by outside security interests.
- Development and security actors now often compete for development funds.
- Development actors seek connections. Security actors tend to be bunkerised.
- CVE actors might see it as necessary to work with repressive governments to maintain access for development or CVE programmes.

Evidence challenges

There are two main challenges in the pursuit of an evidence base for CVE programmes:

- Empirical evidence on what violent extremism is and how it can be countered is scarce: the evidence base is nascent at best.
- Even with increasing empirical information, the issue does not become less complex. While this makes programming difficult, it might also prevent the search for a one-size-fits-all approach.

1 Introduction: Definitions and concepts

1.1   What is violent extremism?

The term 'violent extremism' has many definitions. Those seeking to protect citizens and political systems use it to categorise crimes; others argue there is no such thing, seeing use of the expression as politically motivated. And yet the term has become ubiquitous. The Global Extremism Monitor of the Centre on Religion & Geopolitics, for example, used it in counting that, in June 2016 alone, 27 religious extremist groups were responsible for 314 violent incidents in 28 countries around the world. The five deadliest of these incidents were in Afghanistan, Yemen, Somali, Niger and Iraq, where at least 577 people were killed (Tony Blair Foundation 2016). These numbers do not make it clear exactly what the nature of the extremism was.

This example shows how easily it is for the term 'violent extremism' to become a catch-all for a number of phenomena. Its use also seems to project clarity about motivations for or root causes of a violent act. This is misleading: violent extremism as a concept is deeply contested. Understanding that there are different definitions as well as rejections of the term is a crucial starting point in this regard. Currently, there is no consensus on what violent extremism is and how best to prevent or counter it.[1] Yet the breadth of definitions and debate may offer an opportunity for more creative policy and programme engagement (ICG 2016).

1.2   Belief system or security threat?

One challenge in achieving a clear definition is that violent extremism conflates two things: belief and force. Radicalism, terrorism and violent extremism all cross paths in the literature as well as in policy and programme designs, and in a way that makes it difficult to separate one from the other. The terms 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism' in particular are often used interchangeably (Abbas 2015).[2] Yet definitions vary, and can highlight belief or violence to different degrees.

'Terrorism' is always associated with violence. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (2011) defines it as 'the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objective'. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) puts forward a similar definition (Chase 2013).

Definitions of radicalisation and extremism distinguish between violent and non-violent forms, although the division is itself disputed (Schmid 2014). Veldhuis and Staun (2009) argue radicalisation is understood as either 'violent radicalisation, with emphasis on the active pursuit or acceptance of the use of violence to attain the stated goal, or 'the active pursuit or acceptance of far reaching changes in society, which may or may not constitute a danger to democracy and may or may not involve the threat of or use of violence to attain the stated goals'. A similar distinction is made for 'extremism'.

There has been some study of radicalisation as a process that leads to violent extremism and terrorism (Baker-Beall et al. 2015). Yet is extremism dangerous only when it is violent? It is not clear when exactly radical ideologies are considered a security threat and a precursor to violent extremism (Borum 2011a: 8). And is militancy extremist or the expression of a vulnerability—or is it a political choice (Heath-Kelly et al. 2015)?

Further, is all violence equal? Gherabeyya (2016) distinguishes symbolic violence from material violence. Symbolic violence is contextual and includes cultural practices that gradually cultivate hatred and fear of the 'other', laying the foundation for material (physical) violence that is described as terrorism or violent extremism.

---

[1] Stakeholders include governments, non-state actors, civil society , academics, policy-makers, religious leaders and laypersons, as well as the extremists themselves.
[2] It is worth noting here how President Obama used the term 'violent extremism' instead of 'terrorism' to avoid ascribing terrorism to the Muslim minority in the US (see Beinart 2015).

1.3 Terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism: Different origins and traditions

As a term, 'violent extremism' emerged rather recently: the notion of 'radicalisation' as a precursor to violent activities gained prominence after the 9/11 attacks (Heath-Kelly et al. 2015). The term 'terrorism' is much older, having been used in the French Revolution to represent actions taken by the state to protect its authority; for French loyalists it was thus positive (Chase 2013). It was widely used after World War II to describe anti-colonial independence movements in Algeria and Palestine.

'Extremism' and 'terrorism' continue to be understood differently in Western and non-Western contexts. One reason is terminology: Arab media today more commonly use 'terrorism' (*irhab*) or 'militant terrorism' (*irhab mosalah*) rather than 'extremism' (*tataruf*), and there is no equivalent to 'violent extremism'. And notions have evolved in different ways in the political imagination. Writing for *Al Hayat* newspaper, Al Ghabra (2016) emphasises the Western roots of the concept of 'terrorism' as state-led, highlighting that the most common use today—to describe violence by non-state actors—contradicts this. He argues that a non-state actor who commits violence should not automatically be labelled an extremist or a terrorist: since both state and non-state actors can be violent, 'terrorism should be defined as deliberate violence that targets innocent civilians and their assets'.

Yet, of course, both Western and non-Western contexts are not monolithic: there is considerable variation as to how terminology is used and actors are interpreted. For example, in Lebanon, Hezbollah is a parliamentary political party that has emerged from a liberation movement. The UK, however, considers its military wing a terrorist organisation. Meanwhile, several Western countries plus two regional Arab institutions, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League, do not make a distinction between the military and the political wing and classify Hezbollah outright as a terrorist organisation.

The UK government has recognised that the term 'violent extremism' is too vague. A revision to the original Prevent Strategy moved the terminology away from this because 'the term is ambiguous and has caused some confusion in the past, most notably by giving the impression that the scope of Prevent is very wide indeed and includes a range of activity far beyond counter-terrorism…The review concludes that the main aim of Prevent must be to prevent people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' (HM Government 2011: 25).[3]

1.4 The role of politics in defining extremism

Defining 'extremism' or 'violent extremism' is not simply a linguistic exercise: it is political. The Lebanon example shows how labelling particular groups as extreme comes with political baggage: for something to be extreme, a defined vantage point is needed (Neumann 2013: 876). Critics argue that describing those who look 'extreme' from a particular perspective contributes to divisive 'othering'—a tactic those accused of extremism are also guilty of. This is where politics comes in—and especially if states are involved.

Some states have used the term 'violent extremism' to describe groups that threaten the political *status quo*. In Egypt, particularly since the 2013 military coup, the government has successfully portrayed the Muslim Brotherhood as a second Al-Qaeda, with influences on both public opinion and media coverage (Lynch 2016). The organisation has confirmed its commitment to non-violence but continues to be 'demonised' by the Egyptian government, write Awad and Hashem (2015). The Egyptian example underscores the importance of the political context. This is often neglected when the processes of radicalisation and violent extremism are discussed as the experiences of individuals.

---

[3] The UK's Prevent Strategy forms part of the counter-terrorism strategy Contest. Prevent seeks to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism (HM Government 2011: 6).

Non-state actors accused of violent extremism often reject such a label as they view their action as political expression, pursuing just ends with no alternative to violence (Chase 2013). Thus, rather than focusing on the characteristics of an individual, argues Kundnani (2015), we should examine violence as political expression through the experience of the state and government.

Further prominent criticism of the use of the term is that it is not evenly applied to all types of extremist and radical beliefs (Baker-Beall et al. 2015). In post-9/11 debates the focus was almost exclusively on Islamic perpetrators of violent acts. This implies that violent extremism is linked to religious beliefs, a suggestion that remains stubbornly prominent, despite nuanced scholarship that shows that interpretation of religious scriptures is also shaped by political context and that religion serves as a poor analytical framework. Scholars have suggested focusing instead on what values are held dear (Atran & Axelrod 2008; Francis 2015).

More recently, more attention has been given to including, for example, right- or left-wing extremism under the label. Islamist extremism, however, remains the most prominent type, as evidenced in a recent UK government strategy against extremism which states: 'The greatest

> ## Defining violent extremism
>
> The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism acknowledges there is no clear definition of 'violent extremism' but that an image of extremism has been shaped by the attacks of terrorist groups such as Islamic State, Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda.
>
> The UK government describes extremism as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs'.
>
> The US Agency for International Development (USAID) defines violent extremism as 'advocating, engaging in or preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives'.
>
> The Dutch government uses the term 'violent jihadism' interchangeably with 'violent extremism', which effectively limits the phenomenon of extremism to a particular group/religion.
>
> Appendix B presents a more detailed discussion of various definitions.

current challenge comes from the global rise of Islamist extremism, but continues 'We are clear that this strategy will tackle all forms of extremism: violent and non- violent, Islamist and neo-Nazi' (HM Government 2015b: 9-10).

This reflects learning from previous strategies to counter violent extremism, which came under scrutiny for radicalising people through further marginalisation (Thomas 2015; TES 2016a). The UK's Prevent Strategy emphasises that, while an ideology of extremism and violence is a problem, religious belief is not (HM Government 2011). The government also claims it will fight terrorism of every kind, whether based on Islamist, extreme right-wing or any other extremist ideology (HM Government 2013).

1.5   Unclear definitions, unclear policies?

The EU Council's Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism attempts to reflect a member state consensus as to what terrorism is.[4] This, however, is yet to be reflected in aligned action and policies. Even if a definition is agreed, therefore, an agreement on what actions to take does not follow automatically. Lack of clear

---

[4] This was first announced on 13 June 2002 and then in 2008. The definition put forward is that terrorism 'may seriously damage a country or an international organization where committed with the aim of: seriously intimidating a population; or unduly compelling a government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act; or seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization'. The framework decision (2002/475/JHA) and amending decision (2008/919/JHA) require EU countries to align their legislation and introduce minimum penalties regarding terrorist offences. See http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV%3Al33168

parameters as to what constitutes extremism has led to *ad hoc* and reactive policy-making and programme designs.[5]

As cross-border networks of extremism expand, international and regional actors need more coordinated strategies and information exchange. In May 2013, the UN Security Council (UNSC) issued a statement on terrorism in the Sahel that recognised that,

> Terrorism will not be defeated by military force or security forces, law enforcement measures, and intelligence operations alone' and underlined 'the need to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, including, but not limited to, strengthening efforts for the successful prevention and peaceful resolution of prolonged conflicts, and also promoting the rule of law, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, tolerance and inclusiveness.

This opened up even more widely the possibilities on how to think about, define and counter violence that is driven by beliefs.

---

[5] Jehangir Khan, Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre in the Department of Political Affairs, has described strategies following 9/11 as too narrow: 'There is a shift to a more integrated policy of preventing violent extremism, emphasis on 'preventing' (see UN, 2015b).

2 Analytical frameworks: Insights and challenges

This section introduces explanations of violent extremism put forward by different disciplines, how these approach the study of violent extremism and prominent myths and contradictions.

The different explanations can be confusing but the absence of one agreed analytical framework is not a weakness. A phenomenon as multi-faceted, amorphous and complex as violent extremism benefits from being viewed through multiple lenses and using different methods.

Yet there is little rigorous empirical work that allows for conclusive statements on violent extremism (Schuurman & Eijkman 2013); several evidence reviews conducted from different angles attest to this.[6] Currently, extremist violence tends to be explained using available, but often untested, theories. These are often based on research conducted by actors whose interests lie in countering violent extremism.

Causal factors too may be overstated for political reasons. This means unwelcome political dissent may be labelled violent extremism. This mechanism is not new: Stampnitzky (2014) argues that terrorism is a social construct that makes it possible to paint any political violence as irrational.

The dearth of empirical studies means the most prominent explanations for violent extremism are those that seem 'addressable' through existing mechanisms, including those championed by political, military and intelligence communities (Githens-Mazer & Lambert 2010). Politics, research, recommendations, security considerations and power are intricately linked in this field. It is thus crucial always to consider what political interests have informed any given explanation.

A future research agenda must—independent of political and security interests—further refine the concept of violent extremism and find ways to link contemporary social and political context, history and individual experiences more credibly to develop new theories.[7] Attention to counterfactuals is needed: little work has been done on why people do *not* radicalise (Cragin 2014).[8]

2.1 Push and pull factors: Useful categories?

The current debate within practice and scholarship is dominated by the idea that drivers of violent extremism exist and that these can be categorised into push and pull factors. This separation often fails to acknowledge complexity and inter-linkages—or even that one factor may be the flip side of another. Also, factors tend to be identified because they are familiar: in the absence of empirical and independent research, existing 'solutions'—for example education or employment opportunities—influence how push and pull factors are framed. It is thus likely that at times—often inadvertently—a so-called driver emerges from an analysis of what development gap might be filled.

Push factors are described as linked to individuals' situations, including social, political, cultural and economic influences as well as private factors. However, they do not guarantee an individual will turn extremist. Many factors seem to work in concert and in different ways for different people.

Pull factors promise that participation in a movement, organisation or activity will bring rewards (USAID 2011). This perspective assumes rewards are universal and individuals make a cost/benefit analysis of how to obtain these. More recent research has challenged these assumptions.

Studies tend to emphasise push factors but downplay pull factors (USAID 2009), particularly those that are situated within beliefs, values, morals or spiritual leadership or what Atran (2010) refers to as 'sacred values'.

---

[6] See Morris et al. (2010); Borum (2011a, 2011b); Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011); Christmann (2012); Schmid (2013); Allan et al. (2015); Pate (2015); . At times, the text relativises the certainty with which factors are identified—see, for example, Fenstermacher et al.(2011).

[7] For a comprehensive discussion on a future research agenda, see USIP (2016). See also Jackson et al. (2009).

[8] For an example, see di Stefano (2016).

This is not surprising, as programmes rarely address spirituality or deeply held beliefs: there is no ready-made solution on offer. Interventions often deal with this by working with religious leaders—however, this reduces the notion of belief to a religious interpretation.

Despite these shortcomings, a huge body of work exists that seeks to identify and then interrogate factors that aid violent extremism. Below is a non-exhaustive list of drivers and causes as identified across different research disciplines, grouped under broader categories. The extent to which these have been empirically confirmed is mixed.[9]

2.2 Individual factors

Personal relationships

Relationships have been identified as crucial in introducing people to extremist beliefs (Sageman 2004; USAID 2009; Atran 2010; Hassan 2012; Sheikh et al. 2013; Ranstorp 2016). Their importance highlights a challenging contradiction: radicalisation is seen as influenced by peer groups or the social and political environment yet it is an individual process (DFID, 2015). Generalising an individual's vulnerability and openness to extremist thought, however, runs the risk of downplaying political reasons by emphasising individual personality traits (Borum 2004; Heath-Kelly et al. 2015).

Peer respect or membership of a radicalising peer group can bring higher social status (USAID 2011; Ranstorp 2016); this can be informed by a shared identity, including a religious identity (Botha & Abdile 2014). Terrorism research highlights belonging and community as more powerful than committing violence together (Crenshaw 1998; Horgan, in Borum 2004). Individuals may fear repercussions if they do not join an extremist group (Hassan 2012). Relationships can also play a part when an individual rebels against values held by family, friends or the community (Ranstorp 2016).

Other studies argue that individual influence—in a mentor-like capacity—has been crucial in convincing people to join, for example, Boko Haram (Mercy Corps 2016). If an individual's beliefs are supported by relationships with people who share extremist beliefs, a greater sense of purpose can convince people that violence is a viable choice (Taylor & Louis 2004). Relationships also become a belief-enforcing echo chamber: in a study of the American right, Hochschild (2016) argues that 'the more that people confine themselves to likeminded company, the more extreme their views become'.

Relationships can have positive effects too, of course (Williams et al. 2015). Botha and Abdile (2014) find, for example, that members of families or groups that discuss politics are more likely to see the value of participating and less likely to withdraw or choose violence to protest a political system.

Beliefs, values and convictions

Psychology in particular has been attempting to understand the links between violence and beliefs, ideology, politics, identity and relationships (Martens 2004; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2008b). Extremist beliefs can be religious, spiritual, moral or political and tend to express the conviction that a group, way of life or political system needs to be challenged or destroyed (Atran & Axelrod 2008; USAID 2009).[10] Identity is often constructed from such beliefs, which are linked to dignity, recognition and respect (for oneself but also for one's community and culture) (Botha & Abdile 2014).

The perception of being denied recognition at a collective and personal level can narrow beliefs towards more extreme viewpoints. It can be as broad as a fear of domination by an order that seeks to establish different norms—be these more liberal or more conservative. Attempts to change customs and values may also be experienced as a threat to culture. These could include, for example, shifting gender roles or moves towards more inclusive or different education (USAID 2011).

---

[9] For an evidence review on some of these drivers, see Allan et al. (2015).

[10] See also Hochschild (2016) for a discussion on the experience of impoverished rural US.

How concepts that form the basis of a belief are understood plays a part in whether or not an individual supports violence. A large-scale study found, for example, that Pakistanis who defined *jihad* as an external militarised struggle rather than an internal struggle for righteousness were more supportive of violent groups (Fair et al. 2012: 689).

There is tentative work that shows that extremism often follows a conversion from an opposite set of values—for example from petty criminality to devout faith (Ranstorp 2016). However, so far there has been no work that categorically shows that violent extremists share similar psychiatric or psychological characteristics (ibid.).

Manipulation

Often, those categorised as violent extremists are depicted as having been manipulated in their beliefs, identity, interpretations of history or choice of violent ways to make their voices heard (Hassan 2012), including through 'radicalisers' or 'groomers' (Hassan 2012; Ranstorp 2016). Manipulation by extremist groups happens in a complex interplay of identity formation and other enabling factors such as those highlighted in this text (Allan et al. 2015: 4). One example is Al-Shabaab's approach to bolstering individuals in a group while asking them to recruit their friends or presenting extremism as a religious duty (Hassan 2012).

Although social media is often depicted as having manipulative power, there is a lack of research on whether there is a causal relationship between access to information (or lack thereof) and radicalisation (Ranstorp 2016). The power of social media in the other direction—to promote counter-narratives—is equally unproven (Ferguson 2016a). Research is stronger on the use of social media once people have joined violent groups (Klausen 2015).

Using manipulation as an explanation for extremist beliefs presents a challenge. It suggests that those who radicalise are malleable or immature. The image of the teenager rebelling against authorities is regularly conjured up—helped by the fact that those who commit violence tend to be young. This perspective implies individuals will outgrow their beliefs—which could contribute to strengthening them.

Trauma and humiliation

Trauma and humiliation are rarely mentioned as a separate influential factor (Ranstorp 2016) but there is increasing acknowledgement that we need to better understand how such emotions result in the reproduction of violence (Fattah & Fierke 2009). Experiences of violence or war have for some influenced pathways to extremist beliefs and the use of violence to achieve these. However, the evidence is mixed on the direct relationship between experiences of violence—for example the rape of women—and future violent choices (Carter 2013: 3). A number of scholars have also highlighted the discourse of humiliation and shame, as experienced for example in the Middle East context, and its relationship to terrorism and violent extremism (Fattah & Fierke 2009). Al-Qaeda, for instance, has been described as having hijacked such emotions to justify acts of violence against the West.

Demography

There is no clear demographic profile of violent extremists. This is obvious: it is not easy to seek unifying demographic factors between people spread out across the world who could be, for example, white fascists, members of a militant left-wing group or practising different interpretations of Christianity, Islam or Judaism while supporting violence to reject a secular state.

A few demographic factors stand out but are also rather vague. The vast majority of those considered violent extremists in the Muslim world are male—but research on why this is the case is still in its infancy (Allan et al. 2015: 2). Explanations that use masculinity as a deciding factor are speculative. It could be that men experience more or different peer pressure or that cultural expectations play a part. Women may have less access to peer groups than men.

Further research is needed on the role of women in extremist movements as well as how extremism has deepened stereotypes (Carter 2013: 5). Assumptions that women are better situated to mitigate violent

extremism, for example, may downplay their role as political actors, and do not acknowledge the active role they have played in other armed movements (Bloom et al. 2012). Nor do they grapple sufficiently with the phenomenon of women who leave their homes and countries to 'serve' Islamic State fighters—the so-called *jihad el nikah* or sexual jihad.

Violent extremism is also primarily a phenomenon of youth—often of youth who have a history of petty delinquency and drug dealing (Ranstorp 2016). Among violent extremists, those experiencing marginalisation in urban settings are often first or second generation rural-to-urban migrants who struggle to settle in the new environment—economically and socially (USAID 2011). This does not mean urban migration itself is the cause of radicalisation (Allan et al. 2015: 8); rather, successful integration lessens the likelihood of radicalisation.

2.3 Community factors

History and narratives

Historical legacies of oppression, subjugation and interference by dominant powers can push people towards extremist beliefs. One study argues that foreign authority or influence has had a profoundly debilitating impact not only on the politics and economies of many countries but, equally important, also on collective self-confidence and self-respect (USAID 2009). Again in Egypt, in its early days, the Muslim Brotherhood's stated goals and motivation focused on resisting British colonialism and preserving Egyptian values, religion and culture (Farmer 2007). Sharing an oppression narrative with a community can create a sense of belonging in a marginalised situation. To promote or use violence in such a situation can suggest violent acts are history in the making (USAID 2011).

Influential history does not have to lie in the distant past. More recent events can quickly take on historical significance in the sense that they shape the events that occur immediately after. The bombing of Somali towns by the mostly Ugandan and Burundian African Union Mission in Somalia is seen as a factor that strengthened support for Al-Shabaab, which opposed the mission (Hassan 2012).

A more depoliticised argument to support the importance of historical legacies is that they make it easier for 'victimisation narratives' to take hold.

Rejection of an international or external system

Externally imposed systems that are associated with injustice and humiliation can create resistance that can turn violent (Horgan, in Borum 2004b). Research within economics has linked resistance to political or ideological concepts—such as empires, colonialism or globalisation (meaning a free market system)—to increased terrorist activity (Kurth Cronin 2003). In this understanding, an imposed system oppresses those it dominates and devalues their culture (USAID 2009). Such interpretations of injustice are often cited as the motivation for Western youth to join Islamic State (Hénin 2015). Recent trends of rising nationalism across Europe and the US suggest rejection of the globalised system by voters and underscore the conflicting experience of living under a perceived international system.

This point links closely to the experience of governance.

Governance

Governance can act as an enabling factor in several ways. Frustration with existing governments often serves as a stepping-stone towards broad community support or at least acceptance of an extremist group promising an alternative and possibly even a change in government on the national level (Mercy Corps 2016). Unmet socioeconomic needs may be significant not because of actual material deprivation but because marginalised populations feel state and society have abandoned them and left a governance gap (USAID 2011).

Failure to deliver services—coupled with lack of trust in government—can open up pathways for other methods (Botha & Abdile 2014; Allan et al. 2015: 6). Violent extremists may be able to establish safe havens in poorly governed areas, at times supported by communities who feel neglected by their government and

who turn to extremist groups for services (Allan et al. 2015: 4). A striking finding is that absence of stability—another development promise—acts as a strong factor in growing support for those who will provide stability, even if it is not the government (Allan et al. 2015: 7).

Traditional terrorism research identifies retaliation against perceived injustice as a primary motivation (Hacker & Hacker 1976). This may include using violence to turn against a government that represses its citizens through cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment by police or security forces (Botha & Abdile 2014). The harsher the repression (especially if concentrated in common locales such as prisons), the greater the push to use violence (White 1989; USAID 2011). This is particularly the case when such repression is pursued with impunity or through corruption, allowing extremist groups or radical politicians to portray themselves as an alternative to immoral ruling elites (USAID 2011; DFID 2015; Rehmann 2016). In a study on Al-Shabaab, for example, participants mentioned their desire to take revenge against Somalia's Transitional Federal Government because of its humiliating harassment at checkpoints, particularly of women (Hassan 2012; DFID 2015).

Disappointment with democratic and liberal processes can encourage people to support other types of governance processes, in both the developing and the developed world (Allin 2016; Ranstorp 2016). The most visible growth in terms of sympathisers of polarised politics—as measured through growth in Twitter following—is currently among white nationalists in developed countries who express discontent with a governing elite (Garcia 2016). The US Agency for International Development (2011) found that, in developing democracies, extremist beliefs formed when new elites had their expectations of economic improvement and social mobility disappointed. This disappointment motivated more extreme views than poverty did. This may have significance for both developed contexts also: it is necessary to open up the debate to include extremist movements in all contexts .

Business and crime

Some case studies find commercial interests drive violent behaviour, as violence can be offered as a protection mechanism or is sometimes paid for directly (Hassan 2012). Corrupt systems of governance can also be enabling environments as they allow extremist groups to link to organised crime (USAID 2011). At times, membership or support of extremist groups is the best way to access resources (ibid.). In the case of Boko Haram, for example, individuals receive direct support from the organisation through loans for their small business ventures (Mercy Corps 2016). Where formal credit institutions are not accessible to most, this provides a convincing incentive.

Marginalisation and lack of choices

Perceptions or experience of marginalisation and neglect are regularly cited as a driver of violent extremism (Hassan 2012), although one comprehensive literature review finds the evidence supporting this clear causality is mixed (Allan et al. 2015: 4). Violent actions can be seen as a way to achieve a status that is associated with more choices or a stronger economic position (USAID 2011). Lack of professional opportunities falls under this category; some studies find unemployment and limited livelihood options drive extremism (Botha & Abdile 2014), though others contest such a clear economic link (Allan et al. 2015). Extremist groups that offer a social circle and some livelihood protection are seen as an alternative (USAID 2011; Botha & Abdile 2014), particularly as some extremist groups pay salaries (Hassan 2012; Botha & Abdile 2014).

However, several factors need to come together for social and economic marginalisation to be a clearly identifiable factor in radicalisation. One crucial element is that marginalisation and group identities must overlap: only if there is a peer group that shares the same experience of marginalisation does it become a powerful factor (Allan et al. 2015: 8). In a different perspective, polarised politics are seen as an enabling factor for extremist choices (Ranstorp 2016). Polarisation along political or other identities can strengthen the perceived benefit of being a member of a group as it distances itself from 'the others' (Botha & Abdile 2014).

2.4 Myths and challenges

Because it is not easy to describe the phenomenon of violent extremism, a number of myths have emerged. First, a number of influential factors have been discounted, even though they continue to be used as explanations for violent extremism.

Discounted factors

- **Demography:** Identifying at-risk groups based solely on demographic factors is not possible, as the diverse backgrounds, experiences and choices of, for example, Boko Haram members have shown (Mercy Corps 2016).

- **Income:** There are no broadly identifiable patterns in the socioeconomic backgrounds of those who commit extremist violence (Ranstorp 2016). Poverty is not a clear cause, particularly of the kind of extremism that rejects Western ideologies (Fair et al., 2012, 2014; Allan et al. 2015: 7).

- **Violent extremism as maturation:** The path towards violence does not follow obvious trajectories. Violent extremism is not the consequence of a long-term 'maturation' either in a political movement or in a religious environment (Ranstorp 2016).

- **Extremism as a religious issue:** The link between violent extremism and religious beliefs is not straightforward. It has often been stated that many of those radicalising have only a faint grasp of the holy texts of the religion they are purportedly defending. This highlights that a belief—which can be a strong driver of violence—is not to be equated with a religious faith based on the interpretation of scriptures. Other types of values are more important. This could include that people hold a certain image of a religion, rather than having detailed knowledge (Fair et al. 2012).

- **Extremism as arising from specific religious practice:** It is wrong to assume that, for example, those who are very active in their religious groups are more likely to become violent extremists. On the contrary: a large-scale public opinion survey in Pakistan found neither religious practice nor support for political Islam was related to support for violent extremist militant groups (Fair et al. 2012: 689).

- **Radicalisation as an education issue:** A direct link between education and specific attitudes has not been established; as such, lack of education does not cause extremist views (Allan et al. 2015: 5). While Al-Shabaab members, for example, can have limited exposure to education, the conclusions drawn from this are suggestive rather than conclusive (Botha & Abdile 2014). In one study on Al-Shabaab, very few participants said their lack of education had pushed them towards joining the group (Hassan 2012).

Causality and sequencing in radicalisation and extremism

It is often assumed there is an observable trajectory that starts with ideology and moves through to extremist ideology (the process of radicalisation) and then on to violence. Yet studies on violent extremism show that people who hold radical political or moral ideas do not necessarily engage in violence, and 'many terrorists – even those who lay claim to a cause – are not deeply ideological and may not radicalise in any traditional sense'. Instead, 'different pathways and mechanisms operate in different ways for different people at different points in time and perhaps in different contexts' (Borum 2011a: 8). A study in a number of European countries on 'home-grown' terrorism found those holding radical political beliefs were not necessarily using violence: radicals were more likely to 'have been involved in political protest, to have studied at university (and studied humanities or arts subjects) and to have been employed' than those committing violence (Bartlett et al. 2010).

State collapse is also often called a cause of violent extremism. George W. Bush's administration's National Strategy for Combating Terrorism posited that 'in ailing states or states emerging from conflict…spoilers can take advantage of instability to create conditions terrorists can exploit' (The White House 2003). Yet this widely accepted assumption lacks empirical support. Most conflict theories emphasise that, on the sub-state

level, individual or community interests are likely to drive violence. In fact, Devlin-Foltz and Ozkececi-Tanner (2010) argue that, in a situation of daily violence and a collapsed state, 'ideologues' with longer-term visions (for example of a different social order) struggle to have much impact. It seems that, when a state collapses, ideology does not gain much traction. This leaves the question of how state collapse affects radical groups unanswered.

Local and global: Where should violent extremism be countered?

The global, regional and local dimensions of violent extremism are confusing—yet understanding the space in which extremism happens is of increasing interest to scholars.

Local dimensions are the most obvious, and studies highlight the need to engage at the community level. One analyst describes the task of community engagement as having to understand how people 'come to think what they think, and ultimately, how they progress – or not – from thinking into action. It is not a task for a single theory or discipline. Any useful framework must be able to integrate mechanisms at micro (individual) and macro (societal/cultural) levels' (Borum 2011a).

Individuals considering violence often locate themselves on the periphery of communities and societies. Yet Bartlett et al. (2010) emphasise that communities have a role to play and need to discuss violence. How communities understand why violence occurs and what community actions can enable or abet violent extremism becomes central to how violent extremism is understood more broadly.

On the regional level, Social Network Analysis shows that violent events cluster. One such cluster includes Nigeria, northern Algeria and the Gulf of Guinea (Walther & Leuprecht, 2015). Thus, spatial patterns suggest deterrence and containment strategies need to be devised at regional and transnational levels (ibid.).

Carley (2003) argues there is a need to look beyond the social networks of extremists and pay more attention to violent events and where they happen if strategic planning tools are to be used. The EU's Counter-Terrorism Strategy, while focused on Europe, acknowledges cross-border networks (EU Council 2005) but a transnational force to counter violent extremism has yet to be developed.

Disciplinary boundaries

Boundaries between research disciplines are a major hindrance to efforts to gain a better understanding of violent extremism. Other areas of research or theories may provide useful insights: Edwards (2015) suggests drawing on scholarship on gang membership to understand the processes behind people joining and leaving violent extremist groups. Borum (2011a) emphasises the need to delve into social movement theory, social psychology or conversion theory. Jackson (2016) points out that criminologists use research methods that are worth exploring, such as using large datasets to seek correlates. Behavioural research has barely been applied in conflict settings.

2.5 Perspectives from sociology

Sociology offers a number of angles to use in framing an understanding of extremist violence. These highlight that the socioeconomic, political and cultural context is important. Belief systems of interest include those that draw on morality, polarised views of politics and political actors or the pursuit of utopian ideals (Martin 2014). However, scholarship on political violence (and by extension violent extremism) continues to be contested. Theories are continuously rejected or refined.

Structural theory has been used to explain violent resistance as taking advantage of structural weaknesses in the state in relation to access to services, equal and freedom. Relative deprivation theory—another prominent older theory—emphasises that, if individuals feel deprived of economic, social or cultural benefits that others have, this can lead to collective action (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2008a).

Goodwin (2006) criticises these established ideas, instead offering the concept of 'categorical terrorism': 'the strategic use of violence and threats of violence by oppositional political groups against other groups that are seen as benefitting from the existing system that those using violence reject' (p.2038). This theory highlights

that extremist violence does not automatically end if a specific grievance is tackled, if certain groups are still seen to be benefiting from the broader system.

However, there is no empirical evidence to prove a predictable relationship between political violence, structures or relative deprivation—nor is it likely that social phenomena will ever be so accurately predictable. Theories may explain why some individuals become terrorists but, since only a fraction of the individuals exposed to the same factors turn to violence, they do not explain why others exposed to the same conditions do not. One attempt to account for this is to focus instead on individual-level theories, as is most commonly the case in psychology.

2.6 Psychological frameworks

Psychologists are interested in understanding an individual's motives and psychological and mental state to explain why he or she engages in certain activities. In the early days of modern terrorism—after the 'terrorist' concept was established for political reasons, as Stampnitzky (2014) argues—research in psychology worked with psychopathological theories positing that terrorism required insanity or mental instability (Victoroff 2005). The belief that only the clinically insane participate in violent activities has now been dismissed (Crenshaw 1992; Horgan 2008), along with attempts to link terrorist activities to specific mental illnesses, such as bipolarity or schizophrenia (Victoroff 2005). In fact, empirical work has found that, among imprisoned terrorists, prevalence of mental illness is as low as or lower than in the general population (Ruby 2002).

Psychology has not been able to isolate psychological factors as root causes for extremism, nor have broader social, behavioural or psychological theories been convincingly and empirically affirmed. That people learn violence from their peer groups (social learning theory) and that frustration causes violence (the frustration/aggression hypothesis) have both been dismissed as sufficiently establishing causality (Victoroff 2005). The reasons for individual behaviour are currently presented as a wide range of possibilities, each of which is established and measured through a different method.

Nonetheless, a large number of theories exist. One attempt to capture psychological insights for counterstrategies has been terrorist profiling, which looks at individual mental and personality traits to ascertain influences and linkages (Schmid & Jongman 1988). Researchers have suggested violent extremists could share traits with those displaying other extreme behaviour, such as self-harming (Kruglanski et al. 2014). The need for cognitive closure (ibid.) or the trait of dependency (Merari 2010) could contribute to the tendency to go along with the group consensus. Rejection sensitivity (Downey et al. 2004) could contribute to the tendency to be offended and hence experience significance loss, as could a culture that places high value on 'honour' (Cohen et al. 1996; Gelfand et al. 2011).

More recent psychological work has taken a slightly different angle, examining what specific cognitive patterns contribute to processes of identity formation that can lead to extremist views for some (Allan et al. 2015: 2). A number of possible paths for future research have been identified, such as the study of group processes (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2008b).

2.7 Extremism from an economic perspective

A negative economic climate can lead to frustration and people can find economic security through extremist groups. But there is not enough evidence to support the broad-based causal claim that poverty is an enabling factor for extremism. Though some extremist groups offer improved livelihoods on an individual level, some of those joining extremist groups belong to the upper middle classes or even come from wealthy families.

As we have seen, some economic theories argue extremist beliefs and violence are a reaction to globalised open markets: the global influence and power of the Western world make it a target (Kurth Cronin 2003). Within Western countries, extremist political beliefs echo anti-globalisation sentiments—which underlines that it is not simply a case of the wealthier country being targeted from poorer counties. Economists are, however, divided on whether the economy or economic status of a country has an impact on terrorism, in

terms of producing terrorists. Some economists have reported a statistically significant negative correlation between economic performance and violence (Blomberg et al. 2004; Drakos & Gofas 2006).

Krueger and Laitin (2007) find wealthy countries are more likely to be the recipients of terrorist attacks but the economic status of the country from where terrorists emerge is not a significant indicator. Li and Schuab (2004) find no direct link between terrorism and foreign direct investment or gross domestic product, but conclude that countries with more economic development produce fewer extremists or terrorists willing to commit violence.

2.8 Combining psychology and economics: Behavioural sciences

A promising field of research—albeit an extremely challenging one—is emerging in the behavioural sciences. Behavioural science seeks to identify patterns of behaviour that deviate systematically from rational choice models (Victoroff 2005). Rational choice theory is gradually losing importance in explaining extremist violence because it fails to account for, for example, the fact that thousands of people do not engage in violent extremist activities, even when they live in a situation where joining an extremist group could be beneficial. Behavioural economics posits that contextual and behavioural factors are more important than rational choice. Gradually, research is seeking to identify such factors and biases, but work on what factors push people towards certain political decisions remains in its infancy (Schomerus & Rigterink 2016).

There is increasing interest in using behavioural insights in the international development sphere (World Bank 2015), including on how beliefs and ideology guide individual behaviour and influence how groups behave and societies change (Homer-Dixon et al. 2013: 343). Again, this research is in its early stages, particularly pertaining to violent behaviour and the beliefs that underpin it (Ille & Mansour-Ille 2015).

While the behavioural approach to understanding extremist violence may be promising, current insights are derived mainly from the use of behavioural approaches in other areas—for example in public health initiatives that seek to encourage behavioural change (Weine et al. 2016). Some insights are being used to establish whether there are new ways of profiling extremists (Zekulin & Anderson 2016). This is a nascent area; profiling has in the past not been an effective prevention strategy.

Other research links insights into possible drivers of violent extremism—such as the importance of personal relationships—to examine the extent to which other behavioural work on peer groups, for example the bystander intervention model—could inform what people witnessing radicalisation processes might do (Williams et al. 2016).

However, the biggest potential contribution of behavioural economics to the study of violent extremism at the moment may lie in its entirely different analytical framework. While current approaches to understanding violent extremism are still rooted in a search for push or pull factors, behavioural economics posits that decisions are emotional and that rationalisations (or what we might call the identification of push/pull factors) are constructed after an emotional decision has been made (March 1978; Kahneman 2003). If this were the case, a priority in understanding violent extremism would be to focus on the social and emotional world of those who use violence to express their beliefs.

3 Approaches and tools against violent extremism

How to counter or prevent violent extremism (CVE/ PVE) is an area of much debate and practical developments. In the 2011 review of the UK's Prevent Strategy, Lord Carlile argued that CVE programs are not exact: 'It is not science' (Carlile 2011: 3). While CVE practitioners clearly separate their work from counterterrorism (CT), CVE and CT are interconnected in the literature on CVE interventions and engagement by governments and civil society organisations.[11] While some CVE practitioners argue that hard approaches—which emphasise the role of the military, intelligence and police to contain and disrupt terrorism and violent extremism (Byman 2006; International Peace Institute 2010; Byman 2006)—are what defines CT and what CVE never uses, the line remains blurred.

In East Africa, for example, governments have used countering terrorism and violent extremism as a pretext to crack down on opposition and silence human rights activists, clearly blurring the two areas for operational purposes (Open Society Foundations 2013). Another example of the grey area between the two is the 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (van Ginkel 2012), which addresses contextual as well as structural aspects of terrorism.[12]

So-called 'soft' approaches—the domain of CVE—emphasise cultural and social elements[13] or de-radicalisation of those who have not yet been involved in violent extremism (Clutterbuck 2015). Yet more reactive approaches to CVE involve the disengagement and demobilisation of violent extremists. This gravitates towards structural aspects, such as addressing the proliferation of cross-border networks of extremist groups, incarceration and reintegrating fighters into the mainstream population, since communities do not always accept them back (Zeiger & Aly 2015).

So, while CVE emphasises soft approaches, a number of counter-insurgency strategists and analysts advocate a mix of both (Burke 2004). 'Smart CVE' entails this mixing of soft and hard approaches, depending on whether a social or political dimension of violent extremism is emphasised. Current approaches nevertheless continue to have blind spots: they are particularly weak in understanding the role of gender and women (Center for Human Rights and Global Justice 2012; USIP 2015: 9-10).

> A Bangladeshi de-radicalisation programme is one example of a mixed CVE approach. Launched in 2005, it targeted those involved with Harajat-ul-jihad-al-Islami and Jama'atul Mujahideen of Bangladesh. Its strategy involved incarceration, intelligence, and intellectual intervention to present an Islamic counter-discourse.
>
> *Source: IPI (2010: 5)*

An important distinction in programming is between work that directly and explicitly seeks to counter violent extremism and development programmes that seek to fill some of the development gaps that are considered drivers of violent extremism, thus implicitly addressing it. Conflict resolution efforts may fall into this category, too. Below are examples of programme approaches that entail indirect CVE.

---

[11] See, for example, HM Government (2011) and Carlile (2011). See also HM Government (2015): 'Over the next five years our priorities will be to: Tackle terrorism head-on at home and abroad in a tough and comprehensive way, counter extremism and challenge the poisonous ideologies that feed it.'

[12] Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Indonesia have developed de-radicalisation programmes, which take into account the 'philosophies, rationales and approaches' of a Muslim environment, which may not be fit for a non-Muslim one. Morocco has put together a comprehensive approach 'from actively reinforcing and promoting its own traditional Maliki form of Islamic law to producing a government-approved curriculum for imams to use. It also takes active measures to promote Moroccan values in Moroccan communities living abroad' (Clutterbuck 2015).

[13] A more radical policy suggestion to counter marginalisation is to lend support to non-violent Islamist activism, signalling that the political position is taken seriously but violence is never acceptable (Edwards 2015).

3.1 Development approach 1: Violent extremism as a social problem

This approach underscores community and societal engagement. Kruglanski and Fishman (2009) describe the need to create incentives for de-radicalisation through vocational training and family assistance while presenting counter-arguments to dislodge the foundations of an extremist ideology. Qamar-ul Huda suggests empowering selected citizens who can employ strategies to delegitimise extremist groups and foster community resilience to radicalisation (Huda 2011).

There are numerous examples of such approaches. The UK's Value Complexity Prevention Method sought to increase resilience among young British Muslims by increasing understanding of how different people hold different values, in the belief that radicalisers exploit simplified 'othering' (Liht & Savage 2013: 44). In Indonesia, faith-based organisations in collaboration with human rights and civil society groups have contributed to the strengthening of counter-narratives on the premises of Islam. The Uganda Somalis Community emerged as a response to discrimination against Somali communities and has been important in preventing potential radicalisation in Uganda because of societal discrimination and exclusion (van Ginkel 2012).

However, it is as yet unproven that counter-narratives work—primarily because they often do not seek to address the factor that made the extremist narrative attractive (Ferguson 2016b). Also, not all civic and community engagement is without challenges. In Pakistan, donor money has supported CVE projects that are not informed by a contextual understanding of violent extremism.

3.2 Development approach 2: Violent extremism as an economic issue

While there is no evidence of a direct link between poverty and violent extremism, terrorism has affected poor countries the most (Bergin & Hately 2015). Violent extremism and terrorism also have an adverse effect on national economies. It is estimated that Boko Haram in Nigeria is responsible for a reduction in foreign direct investment of US$6.1 billion in 2010 (ibid.: 6).

Another approach to violent extremism can thus use the lens of addressing poverty and supporting broader development in underdeveloped contexts. Australia has already taken steps to integrate CVE measures into its aid programme, using development assistance to improve education in Islamic schools in the southern Philippines and counter-radicalisation programmes in Indonesia (Bergin & Hately 2015: 3-4). USAID followed a similar paradigm in 2011, integrating CVE into development policies and programmes that support economic development (USAID 2011).

3.3 Development approach 3: Violent extremism and peace-building

Conflict prevention, mediation, strengthening the rule of law, good governance and resilience approaches may take on and be used with a CVE/PVE aim (Holmer 2013). Yet these approaches are not easily transferable, the peace-building community may be reluctant to support CVE interpretations of their work and a CVE focus may significantly shift the role of actors with whom peace-building normally engages.

Women's contributions to mediation and peace-building as a CVE strategy have resulted in calls for a more gender-aware approach. CT experts, mostly male, have been largely oblivious to the gender-specific dimensions of violent extremism. Some women have been active contributors to the expansion of violent extremism. Meanwhile, while it is assumed women can play a role in crafting counter-narratives in their family and community, this requires further investigation (USIP 2015: 9-10; Strasser 2016). There is also a large body of scholarship that contests whether gender empowerment programmes alone are enough to shift balances of power and to encourage a different way of working (Seckinelgin & Klot 2014).

4 Assessing whether CVE programmes work

Universal indicators to measure progress on CVE require agreement on definitions and causes—in short, a universal theory of violent extremism. Yet it may be necessary to abandon the search for a globally applicable CVE framework and for measurement that homogenises the very diversity that might need highlighting. The idea that one unifying theory can provide all answers remains seductive—as has been the case in conflict research (Schomerus 2016). However, unified theories are bound to lead to programmatic templates. Emerging best practice is shaped not by a rejection of the amorphous and unclear nature of violent extremism but by making space for multiple, even contradictory, ideas.

CVE programmes have measurement challenges in common with other development or conflict resolution programmes: it is difficult to identify all factors that contribute to a change in a situation. Even if an area experiences violent conflict despite a peace-building programme, this does not necessarily prove the programme failed—maybe the situation could have been a lot worse (Keen 2010). A number of reasons contribute to the measurement challenge:

- A person likely has many reasons to develop extremist beliefs and to turn towards violence; it is difficult to isolate exactly how a single programme has an impact on these many reasons.

- CVE programmes are designed to bring about long-term change—or even prevent a change from happening (Horgan & Braddock 2010). This is challenging to track.

- An outcome could be the result of another programme or better intelligence (Dawson et al. 2014).

- The length of time needed for outcomes to emerge usually extends far beyond the evaluation period (Mastroe 2016).

- Violent extremism often occurs in areas where access to information is very poor, and evaluations at best work with a very limited amount of data (Mastroe 2016).

- Beneficiaries and participants may be difficult to access or engage.

- It is often impossible to adjust strategies to improve a programme within a cycle. Monitoring and evaluation is designed to address issues but in reality flexibility is difficult even in less complicated development programmes (Valters et al. 2016).

- Recent scholarship stresses the need to understand the difference between de-radicalisation (ideological change) and simple disengagement (refraining from radical activities) (Lindekilde 2016). Yet how can a change in ideology be measured? Can a change in the number of times someone has participated in violence indicate whether their beliefs have changed too?

A number of recent publications grapple in detail with this methodological challenge,[14] including a UK government review of domestic Prevent programming.[15]

CVE programmes are often not ordinary development programmes. Research is in many cases driven by intelligence or military interests, and programmes are often designed using such lenses. It is thus not surprising that the notion of counter-radicalisation is heavily contested. Just two prominent criticisms are that counter-radicalisation strategies alienate whole groups and thus contribute to social disharmony and that they frame political choices as immature or vulnerable (Baker-Beall et al. 2015).

---

[14] See Horgan and Braddock (2010); Chowdhury Fink et al. (2013); Dawson et al. (2014); van Hemert et al. (2014); Brett et al. (2015); Khalil and Zeuthen (2016); Mastroe (2016), Mastroe and Szmania (2016).
[15] On the poor history of evaluation of Prevent-associated projects and the methodological challenge of measuring outcomes, see Carlile (2011: 6-7).

4.1 Indicators

It is challenging to identify suitable and honest indicators to measure CVE programmes (Romaniuk 2015: 35). Indicators developed by programmes that seek to de-radicalise have been dismissed as not credible (Horgan & Braddock 2010). There are a number of reasons for this:

- There are no standard or universal validated measures to report on violent extremism. This means the scale on which to measure a change in these processes is not obvious.

- Individual programmes can likely only be evaluated against context-specific indicators; doing so requires deep expertise (Dawson et al. 2014).

- It continues to be a challenge to develop locally appropriate definitions of CVE (Khalil & Zeuthen 2014).

- CVE programmes seek also to understand the absence of violent extremism, thus in effect aim to measure a negative (Holmer 2013). This is a recognised problem in impact measurement.

- Baselines are missing—yet what would a baseline to measure violent extremism look like? An obvious answer is to count the number of violent events in any one period (Frey & Luechinger 2003). Yet simple counting bunches together events that might have different causes or that were carried out by different people.

These factors create a problem for measurement. How would a programme first be able to address the nature of personal relationships and then measure the extent to which it had been able to influence these? What type of programme could address narratives about history, governance and the desire for revenge for humiliation? What would be the intended effect of a programme that does this and how would it be captured in a measured effect? What would a key performance indicator be that can track personal relationships? Is it a CVE success if political discontent is not expressed? The line between being successful against the visible manifestations of extremism and possibly fuelling the conditions that created it—including political oppression—is thin.

4.2 Emerging best practice

Thoughtful measurement can help highlight that there are no simple approaches, programmes and explanations when it comes to violent extremism. Some elements of best practice in measuring CVE are emerging; these are informed by best practice in other areas.

- Since peace-building and conflict prevention face similar challenges (Aggestam 2003), it is worth looking at evolving best practice here. One way is to develop processes to track the overall conflict dynamics (Keen 2010).

- Most programmes are better served by independent evaluation; this is particularly so for politically sensitive and often ideologically informed programming such as CVE (Chowdhury Fink et al. 2013).

- It is crucial to design evaluation strategies in tandem with programme strategies and allow for adjustment if the chosen approach does not work.

- Contextual measurement that does more than tracking narrow indicators of programme implementation may allow for better understanding. In Kenya, a government programme (Strengthening Community Resilience against Extremism) is linked to a 'community tension monitoring' mechanism (Luengo-Cabrera & Pauwels 2016).

- Horgan and Braddock (2010) suggest multi-attribute evaluation—modelled on Multiattribute Utility Technology as developed by Edwards and Newman (1982)—as the most promising way forward. This approach emphasises comparisons between programmes, consideration of multiple interests that translate into multiple objectives and the need to make judgements when evaluating a programme and to seek research evidence to justify those judgments. Horgan and Braddock also stress the importance of making evaluations relevant to policy decisions.

A crucial element of best practice is that, for any programmatic approach to work, there is a need for clear, transparent and honest relationships between research, policy and practice.

4.3 Theories of Change

The Theory of Change of a CVE programme may clearly identify a desired impact. Yet even relatively straightforward development programmes can struggle with attributing change to their programme activities. With CVE, the added challenge is that causes are not exactly clear.

Tools to counter these challenges of attribution have been developed. One method is to design programmes with a focus on its possible contribution, rather than on directly attributable change. This, however, requires a much wider Theory of Change that includes a detailed consideration of the context in which a programme is implemented (Stein & Valters 2012; Valters 2015).

5 'Doing no harm' in programming

CVE programmes need to ascertain first and foremost that their programmes do no harm (Bergin & Hately 2015). And yet even less contentious development programmes can struggle to apply this principle. Both development and CVE programmes seek to induce complex change. It lies in the nature of change that one can never be certain that all aspects of any change will be positive.

The do no harm principle posits that, during programme design and planning, all possible effects of a programme—long, short, mid-term; intended, unintended; positive, negative—are considered. A pure interpretation of the concept would mean a programme that might have negative consequences would not be implemented, even if other considerations outweigh the negatives.

'Do no harm' seems an obvious principle to uphold and yet it is difficult to implement. Several factors play into this:

- Pursuing change is an unpredictable endeavour.
- It is impossible to foresee long-term consequences.
- The effects of a programme may not fall neatly into positive/negative categories.
- The process of considering all possible consequences is costly and may hinder an agency's implementation plan, which has drawbacks for funding and success.
- Conflict interventions, particularly those driven by security or violent extremism concerns, are often born from emergency thinking.

5.1 Linking development and CVE programmes: Opportunities and tensions

One suggestion to ensure no harm is done is to explicitly link development goals—relating to poverty reduction, governance and human security—with CVE goals. For example, strengthening community structures may serve both objectives (Briscoe & van Ginkel 2013).

What sounds like a sensible approach—essentially integrating development, humanitarian aid and CVE goals—entails blurring the lines between goals and actors. There are a thus a number of tensions between the approaches development programmes use and the interests that underpin CVE.

- **Unclear mandates and interests:** Humanitarian workers have to engage with armed groups; if they are too closely linked to CVE programmes their work may become impossible. Development practice has always been challenging when the suspicion is too strong that there is a political agenda attached.
- **Timeframe:** Development programmes look at long-term changes in communities using a broad programmatic agenda but in reality they are tied to three- to five-year cycles. CVE is seeking short-term successes against extremist groups (Bergin & Hately 2015). Since the two types of programme work on different timelines it is challenging to identify priorities and ensure they do not conflict with each other within one community.
- **Interest:** Development programming works on the principle of local ownership. Not all development agencies aim to be impartial—yet many do. Security as an objective is never impartial, so combining the two creates tension (Briscoe & van Ginkel 2013).
- **Resources:** With an increasing push towards securitisation of aid, development and security actors can now be in competition for development funds (Briscoe & van Ginkel 2013).
- **Ways of working:** Security actors operate very differently to development agencies (Holmer 2013). While the latter seek connections, the former tend to be bunkerised and to rely on local communities for intelligence, which in itself can create problems around impartiality.

- **Acceptable means to an end:** Stabilisation is a process that has great potential to be harmful (Wilton Park 2014). Thus, its actors weigh up what are acceptable levels of harm for what kind of outcome in different ways than development and peace actors do. In some cases, security actors have acted in contradiction to the principles of governance, rule of law and do no harm that development actors seek to establish, undermining the development effort (Briscoe & van Ginkel 2013).
- **Choice of partners:** CVE actors may see it as necessary to work with a repressive government to maintain access for development or CVE programmes. In the long run, this may prove counterproductive in preventing extremism or supporting development (Hénin 2015).
- **Language:** Development, peace, humanitarian and CVE actors use language in different ways, even if the terminology overlaps.

5.2 CVE, development and peace-building

Peace-building practitioners argue CVE can learn crucial lessons from peace-building. The field emphasises a local lens and the experience of conflict as a starting place for looking for ways to mitigate it. For CVE, which is increasingly perceived through international connections and economic systems, this can be helpful.

- The peace-building perspective highlights the need to engage all stakeholders, including parts of civil society that might be seen as conflict actors (Holmer 2013).
- Peace-building emphasises local ownership and the need to learn specific skills to prevent or mitigate conflict. In CVE, this would mean a significant shift in thinking: a focus not on groups but on improving processes will inevitably contextualise activities (Holmer 2013).
- Gender inclusion is important to peace-building but CVE programmes have so far largely overlooked gender dynamics. There need to be distinct attempts to involve both men and women, with a particular emphasis on women's roles in social relationships. In this way, gender roles can also become part of an analytical lens that may allow for a better understanding of violent extremism (Holmer 2013).

However, CVE programmes are often located within security agencies, as we have seen, and conversations across security and development departments are famously challenging (Bergin & Hately 2015; Kessels & Nemr 2016). Countries have addressed this in different ways. Australia, for example, has abolished its development department altogether, calling for a direct linking of aid to national security interests (Bergin & Hately 2015). There is a danger that such a focus will work towards short-termism in programmes and interventions (ibid.). The UK aid strategy posits that development resources will also be used 'to tackle the drivers of violent conflict which threaten stability and development such as extremism, illegal migration and serious and organised crime'. It also draws a link between aid and CVE/PVE in its emphasis on supporting economic growth 'to help reduce poverty, and also to address the root causes of migration and violent extremism' (HM Treasury & DFID, 2015).

The UK has created a pooled funding mechanism for the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office, DFID and wider parts of government. This is with the aim of providing,

> …a greater link between strategic decision-making and action on the ground, and in directing cross-government departmental effort in fragile states…This will increase our capacity to prevent threats and build stability, as well as respond to crises more quickly and effectively...to address the drivers of transnational threats to stability such as extremism (HM Government 2015: 64).

Whether pooled funding will automatically create a better conversation across departments—which would also require standardising definitions of processes such as radicalisation or violent extremism—is not yet clear.

5.3 Unintended consequences of CVE programmes

CVE programmes can have unintended consequences that contribute directly to conflict dynamics. In particular, CVE strategies aimed at communities broadly identified as being at risk of radicalisation can make groups of people feel stigmatised. Programmes aimed at Muslim communities—particularly programmes with roots in CT—have made entire communities feel viewed by the state as potential terrorists because of the actions of a minority (Clutterbuck 2015; see also Awan 2012; Thomas 2015) or have increased prejudice against these communities. Examples relate to aspects of the UK's Prevent Strategy (Kundani 2009; Carlile 2011; Lakhani 2011) and CVE programmes in Kenya aimed at countering the Somali Al-Shabaab group (Luengo-Cabrera & Pauwels 2016).

While such consequences may be unintended they are not impossible to foresee. Increased alienation of targeted groups is a well-researched phenomenon. 'Othering' through identifying groups that in turn increases group membership has long been identified as a conflict driver (Tajfel 1970; Schomerus 2016), especially if the identity of the group is under threat in the process (Christ et al. 2014).

While many lessons have been learnt and CVE programmes continue to be refined, it remains rare to use research insights for programme planning to genuinely seek to avoid harm. A holistic process of 'doing no harm' requires close engagement with context and with research evidence from a range of disciplines, and a continuous conversation about the interplay between different factors.

5.4 An evidence base as a continuous process

The notion of 'do no harm' is meaningful only if 'harm' can be identified. The challenges of agreeing on definitions and causes of violent extremism, the broad range of CVE approaches and the difficulties in identifying success and failure through measurement have highlighted two points:

- The knowledge gap on what violent extremism is and how it can be countered is enormous. Empirical evidence is so scarce that it is fair to say that the evidence base is nascent at best.
- Even with increasing empirical information the issue does not become less complex. Whether a programme is harmful or not cannot be conclusively answered, as increasing knowledge also increases complexity. This is arguably a useful realisation, as it may prevent the search for a one-size-fits-all approach.

This means that those seeking to understand violent extremism will need the flexibility and willingness to ask new research questions and to develop new research methods—and to dismiss those that are not working well. Those who seek to counter violent extremism will need the ability and will to change opinions and direction and to continuously examine emerging findings from research and evaluations to learn more about what changes occur and what harm might be done.

References

Abbas, F. (2015). 'Is it called "terrorism" or "violent extremism"?' *The Huffington Post*.

Aggestam, K. (2003). 'Conflict prevention: Old wine in new bottles?' *International Peacekeeping, 10*, 12-23.

Al Ghabra, S.N. (2016). 'The contradictions of the war on terror', *Al Hayat*.

Allan, H., Glazzard, A., Jesperson, S., Reddy-Tumu, S., & Winterbotham, E. (2015). *Drivers of violent extremism: Hypotheses and literature review.* London: Royal United Services Institute.

Allin, D.H. (2016). 'President Trump', *Survival, 58*, 237-248.

Atran, S. (2010). *Talking to the enemy: Violent extremism, sacred values, and what it means to be human.* London: Penguin.

Atran, S., & Axelrod, R. (2008). 'Reframing sacred values' , *Negotiation Journal, 24*, 221-246.

Awan, I. (2012). '"I am a Muslim not an extremist": How the Prevent Strategy has constructed a "suspect" community', *Politics & Policy*, 40, 6, 1747-1346.

Awad, M., & Hashem, M. (2015) *Egypt's escalating Islamist insurgency*. New York: Carnegie Middle East Center.

Baker-Beall, C., Heath-Kelly, C., & Jarvis, L. (eds). (2015). *Counter-radicalisation: Critical perspectives.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Bartlett, J., Bridwell, J., & King, M. (2010). *The edge of violence: A radical approach to extremism.* London: Demos.

Beinart, P. (2015). 'What does Obama really mean by "violent extremism"?' *The Atlantic*, 20 February

Bergin, A., & Hately, S. (2015). 'Security through aid: Countering violent extremism and terrorism with Australia's aid program'. (Strategic Insight). Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Blomberg, S., Hess, G., & Weerapana, A. (2004). 'Economic conditions and terrorism' , *European Journal of Political Economy, 20*, 463-478.

Bloom, M., Gill, P., & Horgan, J. (2012) 'Tiocfaidh ár Mná: Women in the Provisional Irish Republican Army', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 4*, 60-76.

Borum, R. (2004). *Psychology of terrorism.* Tampa: University of South Florida.

Borum, R. (2011a). 'Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories', *Journal of Strategic Security, 4*, 4, 7-36.

Borum, R. (2011b). ' Radicalization into violent extremism II: A review of conceptual models and empirical research', *Journal of Strategic Security*, 37-62.

Botha, A., & Abdile, M. (2014). *Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia*. Paris: Institute for Security Studies.

Brett, J., Bro Eriksen, K., Ronn Sorensen, A., & Tana Copenhagen Aps. (2015). 'Lessons learned from Danish and other international efforts on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in development contexts'. (Evaluation Study). Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark/Danida.

Briscoe, I., & van Ginkel, B. (2013). *The nexus between development and security: Searching for common ground in countering terrorism.* The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Buhari, M. (2015). 'Statement '. World Leaders Summit on ISIL and Violent Extremism.

Burke, J. (2004). 'Al Qaeda', in *Foreign Policy*, 1-7.

Byman, D. (2006). 'Fighting the war on terrorism: A better approach', in S. Evera (ed.). *How to make America safe: New policies for national security.* Cambridge, MA: Tobin Project.

Carley, K.M. (2003). *Dynamic network analysis for counter-terrorism.* (Working Paper).

Carlile, A. (2011). 'Report to the Home Secretary of Independent Oversight of Prevent Review and Strategy'. London: HM Government.

Carter, B. (2013). *Women and violent extremism*. Birmingham: GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services.

Center for Human Rights and Global Justice. (2012). *Women and preventing violent extremism: The U.S. and U.K. experience.* New York: NYU School of Law.

Chase, E. (2013). 'Defining terrorism: A strategic imperative', *Small Wars Journal*, 24 January.

Chowdhury Fink, N., Romaniuk, P., & Barakat, R. (2013). *Evaluating countering violent extremism: programming practice and progress.* Goshen, IN: Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation.

Christ, O., Schmid, K., Lolliot, S., Swart, H., Stolle, D., Tausch, N., Al Ramiah, A., Wagner, U., Vertovec, S., & Hewstone, M. (2014). 'Contextual effect of positive intergroup contact on outgroup prejudice', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 11, 3996-4000.

Christmann, K. (2012). *Preventing religious radicalisation and violent extremism: A systematic review of the research evidence.* London: Youth Justice Board.

Clutterbuck, L. (2015). *Deradicalization programs and counterterrorism.* Washington, DC: Middle East Institute.

Cohen, D., Nisbett, R., Bowdle, B., & Schwarz, N. (1996). 'Insult, aggression, and the southern culture of honor: An experimental ethnography', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 945-960.

Cragin, R.K. (2014). 'Resisting violent extremism: A conceptual model for non-radicalization', *Terrorism and Political Violence, 26*, 337-353.

Crenshaw, M. (1992) 'How terrorists think: What psychology can contribute to understanding terrorism', in L. Howard (ed.). *Terrorism: Roots, impact, responses.* London: Praeger.

Crenshaw, M. (1998). 'The logic of terrorism: Terrorist behavior as a product of choice', *Terrorism and Counter Terrorism*, 2, 54-64.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2008a). 'Studying violent radicalisation in Europe II', in The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches. Copenhagen: DIIS.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2008b). 'Studying violent radicalisation in Europe II', in The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches. Copenhagen: DIIS.

Dawson, L., Edwards, C., & Jeffray, C. (2014). *Learning and adapting: The use of monitoring and evaluation in countering violent extremism – a handbook for practitioners.* London: Royal United Services Institute.

Devlin-Foltz, Z., & Ozkececi-Tanner, B. (2010). 'State collapse and Islamist extremism: Re-evaluating the link', *Contemporary Security Policy*, *31*, 88-113.

DFID (Department for International Development). (2015). 'SEED II: Exploring the agricultural initiative's influence on stability in Somalia'. (Final Report). London: DFID.

Di Stefano, P. (2016). 'Understanding rescuing during the Rwandan genocide', *Peace Review, 28*, 195-202.

Downey, G., Mougios, V., Ayduk, O., London, B., & Shoda, Y. (2004). 'Rejection sensitivity and the defensive motivational system: Insights from the startle response to rejection cues', *Psychol Sci*, *15*, 668-673.

Drakos, K., & Gofas, A. (2006). 'In search of the average transnational terrorist attack venue', *Defence and Peace Economics*, 73-93.

Edwards, P. (2015). 'How (not) to create ex-terrorists: Prevent as ideological warfare', in C. Baker-Beall, C. Heath-Kelly, & L. Jarvis. (eds). *Counter-radicalisation: Critical Perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Edwards, W., & Newman, J. (1982). *Multiattribute Evaluation.* London: Sage.

EU Council. (2005). 'Counter-terrorism strategy'. Brussels: EU.

EU Council. (2014). 'Revised EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment'. Brussels: EU.

Fair, C.C., Malhotra, N., & Shapiro, J.N. (2012). 'Faith or doctrine? Religion and support for political violence in Pakistan', *Public Opinion Quarterly, 76*, 688-720.

Fair, C.C., Malhotra, N., & Shapiro, J.N. (2013). 'Democratic values and support for militant politics: Evidence from a national survey of Pakistan', *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 58*, 743-770.

Farmer, B.R. (2007). *Understanding radical Islam: Medieval ideology in the twenty-first century.* Bern: Peter Lang.

Fattah, K., & Fierke, K.M. (2009). 'A clash of emotions: The politics of humiliation and political violence in the Middle East', *European Journal of International Relations, 15*, 67-93.

Fenstermacher, L, & Leventhal, T (eds.). (2011). Countering violent extremism: Scientific methods and strategies. Washington, DC: Air Force Research Laboratory.

Ferguson, K. (2016a). *Countering violent extremism through media and communication strategies* (Crime and Security Research). Bath: Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research.

Ferguson, K. (2016b). 'Countering violent extremism through media and communication strategies'. (A Review of the Evidence). Bath: Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research.

Francis, M.D.M. (2015). 'Why the "sacred" is a better resource than "religion" for understanding terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence, 28*, 912-927.

Frey, B.S., & Luechinger, S. (2003). 'Measuring terrorism'. Zurich: Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, University of Zurich.

Garcia, F. (2016). 'White nationalist movement growing much faster than Isis on Twitter, study finds', *The Independent*, 3 September.

Gelfand, M.J. et al. (2011). 'Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study', *Science*, 332.

Gherabeyya, I. (2016). 'When physical violence is structured by symbolic violence', *Al Hayat*.

Githens-Mazer, J., & Lambert, R. (2010). 'Why conventional wisdom on radicalization fails', *International Affairs*, *86*, 889-901.

Goodwin, J. (2006). 'What do we really know about (suicide) terrorism?', *Sociological Forum, 21*, 315-330.

Government of The Netherlands (2014). 'The Netherlands comprehensive action programme to combat jihadism: Overview of measures and actions'. The Hague: Ministry of Security and Justice, National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism and Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Hacker, F.J., & Hacker, F. (1976). *Crusaders, criminals, crazies: Terror and terrorism in our time.* New York: Norton.

Hassan, M. (2012).' Understanding drivers of violent extremism: The case of Al-Shabab and Somali Youth', *Combating Terrorism Center West Point CTC Sentinel*, 5.

Heath-Kelly, C., Baker-Beall, C., & Jarvis, L. (2015). 'Introduction', in C. Baker-Beall, C. Heath-Kelly, & L. Jarvis. (eds). *Counter-radicalisation: Critical Perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hénin, N. (2015). *Jihad academy: The rise of Islamic State.* London: Bloomsbury.

HM Government. (2011). 'Prevent strategy'. London: HM Government.

HM Government. (2013) 'Tackling extremism in the UK'. Report from the Prime Ministers Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism. London: HM Government.

HM Government. (2015a). 'National security strategy and strategic defence and security review 2015: A secure and prosperous United Kingdom'. London: HM Government.

HM Government. (2015b). 'Counter-extremism strategy'. London: HM Government.

HM Treasury, & DFID (Department for International Development). (2015). *UK aid: Tackling global challenges in the national interest.* London: HM Treasury and DFID.

Hochschild, A.R. (2016). *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right.* New Press: New York.

Holmer, G. (2013). *Countering violent extremism*. Washington, DC: USIP.

Homer-Dixon, T., Leader Maynard, J., Mildenberger, M., Milkoreit, M., Mock, S., Quilley, S., Schröder, T., & Thagard, P. (2013). 'A complex systems approach to the study of ideology: Cognitive-affective structures and the dynamics of belief systems', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 1*, 337-363.

Horgan, J. (2008) 'From profiles to pathways and roots to routes: Perspectives from psychology on radicalization into terrorism', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 618*, 80-94.

Horgan, J., & Braddock, K. (2010). 'Rehabilitating the terrorists? Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 267-291.

Huda, Q. (2011). 'Using citizen messengers to counteract radicalism'. In: Fenstermacher, L, & Leventhal, T (eds.). (2011). *Countering violent extremism: Scientific methods and strategies*. Washington, DC: Air Force Research Laboratory.

ICG (International Crisis Group). (2016). *Exploiting disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.* (Crisis Group Special Report). Brussels: ICG.

Ille, S., & Mansour-Ille, D. (2015). 'Rational atrocities and state formation: A game theoretic approach to the case of ISIS', *The Economics of Peace and Security*, 10.

IPI (International Peace Institute). (2010). *A new approach? Deradicalization programs and counterterrorism.* New York: International Peace Institute.

Jackson, R. (ed.) (2016). *Routledge handbook of critical terrorism studies.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Jackson, R., Smyth Breen, M., & Gunning, J. (eds) (2009). *Critical terrorism studies: A new research agenda.* London: Routledge.

Kahneman, D. (2003). 'Maps of bounded rationality: Psychology for behavioral economics', *American Economic Review, 93*, 1449-1475.

Keen, D. (2010). *Mission impossible? Assessing conflict prevention*. (What Price Peace? Working Paper 3). London: SOAS.

Kessels, E., & Nemr, C. (2016). *Countering violent extremism and development assistance: Identifying synergies, obstacles and opportunities.* London: Global Center on Cooperative Security.

Khalil, J., & Zeuthen, M. (2014). 'A case study of counter violent extremism (CVE) programming: Lessons from OTI's Kenya Transition Initiative', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 3*, 18-22.

Khalil, J., & Zeuthen, M. (2016). 'Countering violent extremism and risk reduction: A guide to programme design and evaluation'. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies.

Klausen, J. (2015). 'Tweeting the Jihad: Social media networks of western foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 38*, 1-22.

Krueger, A.B., & Laitin, D.D. (2007). *Kto kogo?: A cross-country study of the origins and targets of terrorism.* (Working Paper).

Kruglanski, A.W., & Fishman, S. (2009). *'Psychological factors in terrorism and counterterrorism: Individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis',* Social Issues and Policy Review, 3*, 1-44.

Kruglanski, A.W, Gelfand, M.J., Bélanger, J.J., Sheveland, A., Hetiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2014). *'The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization'*, *Advances in Political Psychology*, 69-93.

Kundani, A. (2009). *Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism*. London: Institute of Race Relations.

Kundnani, A. (2015). *A decade lost: Rethinking radicalisation and extremism.* London: Claystone.

Kurth Cronin, A. (2003). 'Behind the curve: Globalization and international terrorism', *International Security*, 30-58.

Lakhani, S. (2011). 'Preventing violent extremism: Perceptions of policy from grassroots and communities', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 51*, 190-206.

Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. (2015). 'Al Azhar stands against fundamentalist Islam: The renewal is approved by Islam'.

Li, Q., & Schaub, D. (2004). 'Economic globalization and transnational terrorism: A pooled time-series analysis', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 48*, 230-258.

Liht, J., & Savage, S. (2013). 'Preventing violent extremism through value complexity: Being Muslim being British', *Journal of Strategic Security, 4*, 44.

Lindekilde, L. (2016). 'Radicalization, de-radicalization, and counter-radicalization', in R. Jackson (ed.). *Routledge handbook of critical terrorism studies.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Luengo-Cabrera, J., & Pauwels, A. (2016). *Countering violent extremism: The Horn of Africa.* Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies.

Lynch, M. (2016). 'Is the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization or a firewall against violent extremism?' *The Washington Post*, 7 March.

March, J.G. (1978). 'Bounded rationality, ambiguity, and the engineering of choice', *The Bell Journal of Economics, 9*, 587-608.

Martens, W.H. (2004). 'The terrorist with antisocial personality disorder', *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, 4, 45-56.

Martin, G. (2014). *Understanding terrorism: Challenges, perspectives, and issues.* London/ New York: Sage.

Mastroe, C. (2016). 'Evaluating CVE: Understanding the recent changes to the United Kingdom's implementation of prevent', *Perspectives on Terrorism, 10*, 50-60.

Mastroe, C, & Szmania, S. (2016). 'Surveying CVE metrics in prevention, disengagement and deradicalization programs'. Report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, US Department of Homeland Security.

Merari, A. (2010). *Driven to death: Psychological and social aspects of suicide terrorism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mercy Corps. (2016). *Motivations and empty promises: Voices of former Boko Haram combatants and Nigerian youth.* London: Mercy Corps.

Morris, M., Eberhard, F., Rivera, J., & Watsula, M. (2010). *Deradicalization: A review of the literature with comparison to findings in the literatures on deganging and deprogramming.* Durham, NC: Institute for Homeland Security Solutions, Duke University.

Nasser-Eddine, M., Garnham, B., Agostino, K., & Caluya, G. (2011). *Countering violent extremism literature review.* Canberra: Department of Defence.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). (2003). *'NATO's military concept for defence against terrorism'*.

NATO. (2011). *'NATO's military concept for defence against terrorism'*.

Neumann, P.R. (2013). 'The trouble with radicalization', *International Affairs, 89*, 873-93.

Open Society Foundations. (2013). *Counterterrorism and human rights: Abuses in Kenya and Uganda, the World Cup bombing and beyond.* New York: Open Society Foundations.

Pate, A. (2015). 'Surveying the literature on counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, and countering violent extremism: A summary report with a focus on Africa'. (Report to the Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office, Department of Defense, and the Office of University Programs, Department of Homeland Security). College Park, MD: START.

Ranstorp, M. (2016). 'The root causes of violent extremism'. (Issue Paper). Brussels: Radicalisation Awareness Network.

Rehmann, J. (2016). 'Bernie Sanders and the hegemonic crisis of neoliberal capitalism: What next?' *Socialism and Democracy, 30*, 1-11.

Rigterink, A.S., & M. Schomerus. (2016). 'Probing for proof, plausibility, principle and possibility: What systematic evidence reviews taught us about framing evidence for policy-making', *Development Policy Review, 34*, 5-27.

Romaniuk, P. (2015). *Does CVE work? Lessons learned from the global effort to counter violent extremism.* Goshen, IN: Global Center on Cooperative Security.

Ruby, C.L. (2002). 'Are terrorists mentally deranged?' *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 2*, 15-26.

Sageman, M. (2004). *Understanding terror networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Schmid, A.P. (2013). *Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review.* The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Schmid, A.P. (2014). *Violent and non-violent extremism: Two sides of the same coin?* The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Schmid, A.P., & Jongman, A.I. (1988). *Political terrorism. A research guide to concepts, theories, databases and literature.* Amsterdam/New Brunswick: Transaction.

Schomerus, M. (2016). *Seeking answers in times of crisis: Navigating current pitfalls of conflict research and practice.* London: ODI.

Schomerus, M., & Rigterink, A.S. (2016). 'The fear factor is a main thing: How radio influences anxiety and political attitudes', *Journal of Development Studies*.

Schuurman, B., & Eijkman, Q. (2013). 'Moving terrorism research forward', in *The crucial role of primary sources*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Seckinelgin, H, & Klot, J.F. (2014). 'From global policy to local knowledge: What is the link between women's formal political participation and gender equality in conflict-affected contexts?' *Global Policy, 5*, 36-46.

Sheikh, H., Ginges, J., & Atran, S. (2013). 'Sacred values in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Resistance to social influence, temporal discounting, and exit strategies', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1299*, 11-24.

Stampnitzky, L. (2014). *Disciplining terror: How experts invented 'terrorism'.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stein, D., & Valters, C. (2012). *Understanding theory of change in international development*. (Justice and Security Research Programme Paper). London: LSE.

Strasser, F. (2016). *Women and peace: A special role in violent conflict. Colombia talks to end war highlight women's contributions to peace*. Washington, DC: USIP.

Tajfel, H. (1970). 'Experiments in intergroup discrimination', *Scientific American, 223*, 96-102.

Taylor, D.M., & Louis ,W. (2004). 'Terrorism and the quest for identity', in F.M. Moghaddam and A.J. Marsella (eds). *Understanding terrorism: Psychosocial roots, consequences and interventions*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

TES. (2016a). 'Prevent: A web of support or of suspicion? Special Report, 4 November.

TES. (2016b). 'Teaching under the Prevent duty'.

The Holy See. (2015). 'Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of the diplomatic corps'.

The White House. (2003). 'National strategy for combating terrorism'. Washington, DC: The White House.

Thomas, P. (2015). 'Prevent and community cohesion in Britain: The worst of all possible worlds?', in C. Baker-Beall, C. Heath-Kelly, & L. Jarvis. (eds). *Counter-radicalisation: Critical perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Tony Blair Faith Foundation. (2016). 'What we know about global extremism in 2016'. 6 May.

UN. (2014). 'Resolution 2178'. New York: UN.

UN. (2015a). 'United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism'. New York: UN.

UN. (2015b). *Uprooting terrorism: Countering violent extremism through prevention*. New York: UN.

UNSC (UN Security Council). (2013). 'Statement by the president of the Security Council'. Security Council Report S/PRST/2013/5. New York: UNSC.

USIP (US Institute of Peace). (2015). *Charting a new course: Thought for action kit: Women preventing violent extremism.* Washington, DC: USIP.

USIP. (2016). 'Violent extremism: Setting priorities for research'. (Live Stream, 29 September).

USAID (US Agency for International Development). (2009). *Guide to the drivers of violent extremism*. Washington, DC: USAID.

USAID. (2011). 'The development response to violent extremism and insurgency policy', in *Putting principles into practice*. Washington, DC: USAID.

Valters, C. (2015). *Theories of Change: Time for a radical approach to learning in development.* London: ODI.

Valters, C., Cummings, C., & Nixon, H. (2016). *Putting learning at the centre: Adaptive development programming in practice.* London: ODI.

Van Ginkel, B. (2012). 'Engaging civil society in countering violent extremism', in *Experiences with the UN global counterterrorism strategy*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Van Hemert, D., van den Berg, H., van Vliet, T., Roelofs, M., Huis in tVeld, M., Marret, J., Gallucci, M., & Feddes, A. (2014) 'Innovative method and procedure to assess counter-violent-radicalisation techniques in Europe: Synthesis report on the state-of-the-art in evaluating the effectiveness of counter-violent extremism interventions'. Brussels: IMPACT Europe.

Veldhuis, T., & Staun, J. (2009). *Islamist radicalisation: A root cause model.* The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

Victoroff, J. (2005). 'The mind of the terrorist', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 3-42.

Walther, O.J., & Leuprecht, C. (2015). *Mapping and deterring violent extremist networks in north-west Africa*. (Working Paper). Copenhagen: Department of Border Region Studies.

Weine, S., Eisenman, D., Kinsler, J., Glik, D., & Polutnik, C. (2016). 'Addressing violent extremism as public health policy and practice', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1-14.

White, R.W. (1989). 'From peaceful protest to guerrilla war: Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army', *American Journal of Sociology*, 94.

Williams, M.J, Horgan, J.G., & Evans, W.P. (2015). 'The critical role of friends in networks for countering violent extremism', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1-21.

Williams, M.J., Horgan, J.G., & Evans, W.P. (2016). 'The critical role of friends in networks for countering violent extremism: Toward a theory of vicarious help-seeking', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 8*, 45-65.

Wilton Park. (2014). *Stabilisation after 2014: Lessons from contemporary operations.* (Conference Report WP1337). Steyning: Wilton Park.

World Bank. (2015). *World development report 2015: Mind, society, and behavior*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Zeiger, S., & Aly, A. (2015). *Countering violent extremism: Developing an evidence-base for policy and practice.* Perth: Hedayah and Curtin University.

Zekulin, M., & Anderson, T. (2016). 'Contemporary terrorism and the true believer', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 8*, 177-196.

Appendix A: Methods

This Topic Guide draws on a review of academic and grey literature as well as government documents and media statements. The documents reviewed were in two languages: English and Arabic. The aim was to explore conceptual and practical approaches to violent extremism in both Western and non-Western contexts. Documents were obtained through a search of academic databases, Google Scholar, websites of research institutes or organisations working on relevant topics. This was augmented by a search of OECD, UN, multilateral and bilateral documents and evaluations of programmes that seek to address violent extremism. From these documents we also used snowballing, particularly when sources were referenced for their empirical information.

The following key words were used for the search: 'extremism' coupled with 'violent' or 'prevention, 'countering', 'radicalisation', 'terrorism', 'resilience' and 'do no harm' and 'recruitment'.

Appendix B: How different actors define violent extremism

Defining extremism or violent extremism is not simply a linguistic exercise. Interests and agendas shape definitions; in turn, they also influence actions taken because of a definition. A look at how different types of organisations use different definitions highlights that naming a phenomenon is a political decision.

Multilateral organisations

Multilateral organisations generally use the term 'extremism' by referring to its observable consequences without offering a concrete definition; generally speaking, 'extremism' is often linked to or equated with radicalism and terrorism. While multilaterals may offer recommendations, they call on states to develop their own national strategies to address root causes.

The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (POA),[16] presented in December 2015, acknowledges that there is no clear definition for violent extremism but that an image of extremism has been shaped by the attacks of terrorist groups such as Islamic State, Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda. POA underscores the need to transition from a reactive to a preventive mode, meaning that the root causes of extremism are addressed, and calls on member states to develop their own national strategies.

UN Resolution 2178 (2014) sees violent extremism and terrorism as a continuum. It describes violent extremism as 'conducive to terrorism' and countering violent extremism includes 'preventing radicalisation, recruitment, and mobilization of individuals into terrorist groups and becoming foreign terrorist fighters' (UN 2014).

The EU, like the UN, does not provide a clear definition of extremism. Its Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment (EU Council 2014) puts forward joint standards for EU states to stem terrorist radicalisation and recruitment. These include: i) disrupting networks that draw people into terrorism; ii) ensuring that voices of mainstream opinion prevail over those of extremism; and iii) promoting security, justice, democracy and opportunities for all more vigorously. There are, however, definitions of terrorism such as the one provided by the NATO.[17]

---

[16] POA incorporates more than 70 recommendations to member states (to be implemented and owned at the national level) and calls for a comprehensive approach that combines security-based counter-terrorism measures with systematic preventative steps to address the underlying drivers of radicalism and extremism (UN 2015a).
[17] The NATO defines terrorism as, 'The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property in an

Governments

Governments are more proactive in defining extremism, emphasising ideologies as constituent elements of extremism and as antithetical and extraneous to national values. The British government 'defines extremism as vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (HM Government 2015: 37). Pinning down 'values', however, remains ambiguous, and this has sparked a debate over national exceptionalism, particularly as it pertains to Western societies.

The US government places emphasis on structures and ideologies. USAID, for example, defines violent extremism as 'advocating, engaging in or preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives' (USAID 2011). The Dutch government uses the term 'violent jihadism' interchangeably with 'violent extremism', which effectively limits the phenomenon of extremism to a particular group/religion. While violent jihadism is violent extremism, using these terms interchangeably is problematic because it results in the singling out of Muslims and branding them as extremists when, in fact, evidence points out that violent extremism and terrorism is practised by a variety of political and religious groups. Extremism is defined as 'the designation of the phenomenon that involves people or groups breaking the law and executing (violent) illegal actions to influence political decision-making'(Government of The Netherlands 2014).

In countries where extremism is a problem, the social and economic dimensions of extremism are placed at the centre. President Buhari of Nigeria, for example, asserts that 'violent extremists do not exist in a vacuum. They are often part of communities and families and are lured into the fold of barbaric and nihilistic organizations, somehow, through a misguided appeal to their worst fears, expectations and apparent frustrations' (Buhari 2015).

Religious institutions

Religious institutions have interpreted violent extremism from the angle of religious 'fundamentalism', which is associated with 'strict adherence' to a literal interpretation of scripture.[18] Al Azhar in Egypt has condemned acts of terrorism (Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem 2015). So has Pope Francis, who has said that religious fundamentalism,

> even before it eliminates human beings by perpetrating horrendous killings, eliminates God himself, turning him into a mere ideological pretext. In the face of such unjust aggression, which also strikes Christians and other ethnic and religious groups in the region – the Yazidis for example – a unanimous response is needed, one which, within the framework of international law, can end the spread of acts of violence, restore harmony and heal the deep wounds which the ongoing conflicts have caused (The Holy See 2015).

Religious leaders have also played a key role in defining violent extremism to their constituency and dissociating it from religion. In Nigeria, for example, the Sultan of Sokoto, the Islamic spiritual leader for Nigerians, has condemned Boko Haram and is leading efforts to prevent radicalisation of youth. According to the United States Institute of Peace, religious leaders are essential to countering violent extremism strategies because 'of their unique positions of authority, credibility, institutional resources and ties with communities. Not all violent extremism is encased in religious terms, and not all extremism is violent. But the rhetoric and media discussion of violent extremism often masks the positive role that religious actors can and do play' (USIP 2014).

---

attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objective (AAP-6)' (NATO 2003).

[18] Oxford Dictionaries defines 'fundamentalism' as, 'A form of a religion, especially Islam or Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture.' Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/fundamentalism (accessed 21 June 2016).