RESOLVE

Building Consensus and Setting Priorities for Research on Violent Extremism

Working Paper on Findings from Expert Consultations

RESOLVE Network | September 2016

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7

INTRODUCTION 11

METHODOLOGY 15

FINDINGS 19

CONCLUSIONS 27

ANNEX A: RESEARCH PROPOSAL ABSTRACTS 29

ANNEX B: SURVEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS 41

ABOUT RESOLVE

THE RESEARCHING SOLUTIONS TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM (RESOLVE) Network is a global consortium of researchers and research organizations whose work focuses on understanding the drivers of vulnerability and sources of resilience to violent extremism. International stakeholders established the RESOLVE Network to generate, facilitate, aggregate, and synthesize methodologically sound, locally informed research on the dynamics of violent extremism. The network promotes opportunities for impactful exchanges between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers on ways to build effective, sustainable responses to the drivers of violent extremism. USIP is a member of the RESOLVE Network Steering Committee and serves as the Secretariat for RESOLVE. Led by a team of career public policy experts, researchers, and practitioners from across the conflict security and development sphere, the RESOLVE Network Secretariat staff has worked on the front lines of armed conflict and along fault lines of violent extremism in numerous countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. To learn more about our team and the RESOLVE mission, please visit the RESOLVE Network website at www.resolvenet.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper presents the preliminary results of the RESOLVE Network Secretariat's consultations with the network's organizational partners and a diverse group of eighty prominent academics, practitioners, and policymakers, who shared their views on research priorities for the countering violent extremism (CVE) community of practice. The first in a series of working papers that take stock of existing research in the field, this report explores the major challenges associated with analyzing the drivers of violent extremism and suggests parameters for developing a consensus-based research agenda.

While controversies persist over conceptual approaches to research on violent extremism, experts consulted for this study generally agreed that understanding the local context in countries impacted by violent extremism is key to developing evidence-based, policy-relevant research. **Many, however, also cautioned that the current policymaker-driven focus on dynamic "pull" factors that attract support for extremism (such as ideological messaging and online recruitment tactics) risks obscuring the importance of locally specific structural "push" factors that foment social exclusion, harden social divisions, and allow extremist groups to gain traction.** Push factors include weak rule of law, limited economic growth and opportunity, resource scarcity, demographic divides, social inequality, and high degrees of violence and ongoing armed conflict. Locally informed mixed-method studies (i.e., studies that employ a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods) on the structural drivers of extremism are essential if we are to better understand when CVE interventions are working.

The quality of existing research on violent extremism is highly variable, and the evidence base for much of the current analysis is very thin. **Experts consulted for this study agreed that it is critical to go local and go to the source to generate a stronger evidence base.** To better understand extremist group structures, recruitment patterns, and messaging tactics, comparative studies should focus on extremist materials that are produced locally, use the local language, and target specific constituencies such as women and youth. Local media sources sympathetic to extremist views should also be analyzed. In addition to qualitative studies, quantitative studies are needed for early warning of conflict escalation and to better understand how trends and dynamics that drive violent extremism evolve over time.

In a resource-constrained environment where policymakers place a premium on actionable research results, creative solutions will be needed to produce a higher-quality evidence base. More effective CVE programming and policies will likely require greater collaboration between local researchers, policymakers, and regional and international experts. Achieving collaboration, however, may be easier said than done. **Researching violent extremism can be difficult and dangerous work. Many countries grappling with violent extremism suffer from severe research-capacity deficits, security challenges, and barriers to access to relevant research data.**

Threats to the safety and security of researchers from state and nonstate actors present significant obstacles to advancing locally informed policy-relevant analysis. State-imposed restrictions on contacts with sanctioned actors impede access to primary sources of information. Restrictive government policies on data sharing, lack of transparency, and limited capacity within many state statistical bureaus likewise hinder the development of quantitative studies. To help overcome these challenges, greater investment is needed in regional and international research exchanges, research fellowships and training opportunities, multisectoral data-sharing partnerships, and structured dialogues on shared research objectives among local governments, security actors, and research organizations.

Consultations with researchers, policymakers, and practitioners also revealed a number of critical knowledge gaps and emerging trends that are likely to shape the CVE research agenda for several years to come. The proliferation in recent years of deadly attacks by violent extremist groups in parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East is of particular concern. **RESOLVE Network partners identified Nigeria, Bangladesh, Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan as among the countries that urgently need more policy-relevant research into the dynamics behind the rise of violent social movements and extremism.** Investment in collaborative, locally led research in these countries while the current security environment remains relatively permissive could rapidly produce actionable findings. Experts consulted by the RESOLVE Network Secretariat team identified the following research priorities for these and other countries facing a high risk of destabilizing threats from violent social movements:

- **Examining religious claims around justice, security, and morality.** Research is needed on the relationship between the state, religious actors and institutions, and the public. Studies that examine state oversight of religious affairs, the role of religious actors in public service provision, and the shaping of public discourse on morality, apostasy, and citizenship could provide valuable insight into extremist mobilization strategies.

- **Enhancing analysis of the role of corruption in influencing public discourse on violent extremism.** A plethora of research exists on state instability, but few empirically based studies focus specifically on the relationship between state coordination failures during complex crises, community resilience, and responses to violent extremist groups.Understanding how, when, and under what conditions communities engage with extremist groups on social justice issues is key to advancing more effective CVE policies.

- **Improving understanding of the role of state security institutions in the emergence of violent extremism.** Existing research suggests a strong link between repressive security tactics and the rise of extremism. Comparative case studies on how security structures impact public views on extremism and qualitative studies on security institutions could yield significant improvements in policies designed to prevent and counter violent extremism.

- **Assessing corrections and prison management practices.** Locally led assessments of recidivism rates among former members of extremist groups are sorely

needed. Longitudinal analyses of state prison population management practices, prison social networks, and family support networks for former detainees could generate critical insights into recidivism dynamics, community resilience, and ways to prevent or reduce recidivism.

- **Discovering how gender divides and generational social stratification fuel violent extremism.** Social and economic mobility strategies, particularly for youth in many conflict-affected countries, are interrelated and can inform decisions to reject, passively support, or actively participate in violent social movements. Measuring changes in public views on local norms around masculinity, femininity, coming of age, marriage, inheritance, citizenship, and faith could inform alternative messaging campaigns.

- **Examining nonviolent strategies to counter violent extremism.** Few studies have examined the logic of nonviolent strategies employed by communities in response to violent extremism, even though such strategies can tell us a lot about violent extremism itself. When, why, and how different actors employ nonviolent strategies requires deeper empirical inquiry. Some extremist groups have also adopted nonviolent strategies, and these, too, should be studied so as to help illuminate the ambitions, activities, and appeal of those groups.

- **Determining the impact of migration.** Little is known about the feedback loop between political instability, migration, and extremism. Studies on the impact of population displacement and state integration practices on community resilience would help us better understand the influence of dislocation on collective perceptions of justice and security.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the world has witnessed a sharp rise in devastating attacks targeting civilians. Data on violent extremist attacks suggests that although the volume of attacks ebbs and flows from year to year, violence has been increasingly concentrated in parts of Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.[1] Few observers would contradict the assertion that groups such as Boko Haram, Da'esh,[2] and al-Qaeda pose a global threat to security and stability. And because they are a *global* threat, there is a tendency to assume that what fuels violent extremism in one part of the world also stokes the killing elsewhere. This assumption, however, is misleading. For researchers investigating the factors that drive violent extremist groups to target civilians, context—especially local context—matters greatly.

The current state of the evidence and data on violent extremism poses a number of puzzles for researchers: What motivates individuals or groups to move from using or responding positively to political rhetoric that advocates the use of violence to actually taking violent action? How is violent extremism different from other forms of political violence? When and under what conditions do communities choose to support, abstain from, or actively reject violent social movements and extremist groups?

Even the very definition of "violent extremism" provokes controversy and uncertainty rather than consensus. If we are unable to define what may be the world's most urgent security challenge, how can we support effective interventions? Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have steadily tried to overcome divisions regarding terminology and conceptual differences with respect to the CVE policy agenda, but with limited success so far. Several notable commentators have expressed skepticism that CVE interventions can succeed absent common agreement on basic definitions of the problem.[3]

Other observers have criticized inattention to what they see as major drivers of violent extremism. The UN secretary-general's 2016 "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," for example, has been chastised for its failure to directly address the link between the appeal of violent extremism and the role of external military incursions and regional rivalries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia in generating armed conflicts.[4]

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1 According to analysis of data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), the actual number of attacks recorded globally decreased by 12 percent from 2014 to 2015. But according to the GTD more than 50 percent of all attacks took place in five countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the Philippines), and 69 percent of all deaths due to terrorist attacks took place in five countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Syria, and Yemen). For more details, see http://www.start.umd.edu/news/2015-global-terrorism-database-now-available.

2 *Da'esh* is the Arabic translation of the acronym for the Islamic State in the Levant, also known as ISIL or ISIS. As a general rule, the RESOLVE Network Secretariat refers to ISIS by its original Arabic name.

3 Naz Modirzadeh, "If It's Broke, Don't Make It Worse: A Critique of the U.N. Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," *Lawfare* (blog), January 23, 2016, https://www.lawfareblog.com/if-its-broke-dont-make-it-worse-critique-un-secretary-generals-plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism

4 Richard Atwood, "The Dangers Lurking in the U.N.'s New Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism," *Great Debate* (blog), Reuters, February 8, 2016, http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2016/02/07/why-is-the-wolf-so-big-and-bad/.

The UN action plan does, however, reflect what seems to be an emerging consensus around the need for more context-specific and locally driven analysis of violent conflict. The "Plan of Action" calls for states to develop their own national strategies for countering and preventing violent extremism, placing a premium on locally based solutions.[5] This fact alone signals a major paradigm shift within the international community away from the totalizing, externally driven imperatives of a highly militarized global war on terror. The relatively new emphasis on grassroots community empowerment and locally driven solutions in response to violent extremism is encouraging. But with the jury still out on which interventions are most effective in reducing the influence of extremist groups, the question facing researchers, practitioners, and policymakers now is how to develop a research agenda that leverages locally informed data and generates actionable recommendations.

International stakeholders established the Researching Solutions to Violent Extremism (RESOLVE) Network to answer that very question. Since early 2015, policymakers and practitioners have convened dozens of international, regional, and local summits on approaches to countering violent extremism. A major finding of the February 2015 White House CVE Summit was that more locally informed, context-specific research is needed on the drivers of violent extremism to identify more effective policy responses. Subsequently, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) organized a number of major conferences in an effort to expand and share knowledge about research in the CVE field and to support the establishment of the RESOLVE Network. Officially launched on the sidelines of the meeting of the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the network represents a global consortium of research organizations, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers committed to leveraging locally informed research to identify effective responses to violent extremism.

Since its founding, the RESOLVE Network has consulted stakeholders around the world on how to drive forward with a policy-relevant research agenda that will lead to actionable recommendations for addressing the impact of violent social movements and extremist groups. As of this writing (September 2016), six months after the network's Steering Committee officially adopted terms of reference in Geneva, the RESOLVE Network is supported by sixteen partner organizations. With the Secretariat currently housed at USIP, network partners operate across six priority regions, including the Balkans and Caucasus, the Levant and Greater Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, South Asia and Central Asia, and Southeast Asia.

This working paper is the result of the RESOLVE Network Secretariat team's consultations with network partners and a diverse group of eighty prominent academics, practitioners, and policymakers, who shared their views on research priorities for the CVE community of practice. The paper describes where there appears to be consensus on research priorities; identifies which research questions may elicit the most fruitful responses; and suggests geographic areas that may need greater investment in research. It also spells out some of the challenges associated with this sensitive area of research and suggests possible solutions. Our consultations began in late May 2016, when USIP in its capacity as the Secretariat for the RESOLVE Network, set out to identify research priorities for the network and

5 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General," A/70/674, December 24, 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.

pathways for supporting locally driven cross-disciplinary studies on the drivers of violent extremism. In support of this effort, the Secretariat team has undertaken three streams of analysis: the expert consultations described in this paper, case study literature reviews, and the text-mining analysis of a large corpus of peer-reviewed literature. Findings from each effort will be published as part of a series of working papers over the next several months.

This working paper is only a preliminary mapping exercise and in no way represents a comprehensive assessment of, or the final word on the network's research agenda. This paper is part of the RESOLVE Secretariat team's efforts to kick-start discussions between network partners, members, and supporters in the wider community of practice. The RESOLVE Network Secretariat team is proud to be part of the collective global effort to develop thought leadership on this critical issue; we welcome feedback on this paper and look forward to continuing and expanding the conversation on the best way forward.

METHODOLOGY

The RESOLVE Network Secretariat team launched a multipart study in the summer of 2016, with the aim of taking stock of what we know and what we don't know about the state of the research and evidence on violent extremism. Considerable ambivalence exists across the CVE community of practice about conceptual frameworks that appear to borrow heavily from counterterrorism policy and practices. But do CVE experts have less ambivalence about other frameworks? To find out, we conducted expert consultations that required participants to make tough choices about how to resolve differences over definitions and terms. The Secretariat team took a hard look at those underlying tensions to see whether they might overlap with more well-established analytical frameworks. We also sought to identify where cross-cutting themes, such as gender, social stratification, population displacement, social identity, and social networks, intersect and to highlight fresh approaches to establishing a research agenda.

For the purposes of this study, we defined "violent extremist groups" as social groups that are inspired to use violence through intergroup conflict that is rooted in political, religious, or identity-based moral discourses. Drawing from a diverse range of sources[6] on political violence and mass mobilization, we further defined violent social movements as "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations, engaged in violent political or cultural conflict, on the basis of shared collective identity."[7] The terms "violent social movements" and "violent extremist groups" are used interchangeably throughout this paper. In both instances, identity—perceived and real—serves as the linchpin of collective action, providing the basis for in-group communal violence against a range of targets that are viewed as part of an out-group.[8]

Societal and institutional responses to violent extremist groups are equally relevant to policy discussions on measures meant to blunt or counter the impact of such groups or to prevent them from gaining traction. State-based responses to violent social movements and the impact of state responses on communities and their resilience in the face of violence are therefore central concerns. Moreover, if community resilience sits at the center of CVE or PVE (preventing violent extremism) efforts, then nonviolent action is one in a range of strategic responses worthy of consideration.[9] Our analytical inquiry centers, therefore, on institutions, social groups, and networks as the key units of analysis, the behaviors and actions they undertake to advance their aims, and the normative constructs such groups and networks employ to support claims of political legitimacy.

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6 Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015); Charles Tilly, "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?" *Comparative Politics* 5, no. 3, Special Issue on Revolution and Social Change (April 1973): 425–447; Charles Tilly, "Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 1, Theories of Terrorism: A Symposium (March 2004): 5–13; Colin J. Beck, "The Contribution of Social Movement Theory to Understanding Terrorism," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008).

7 Mario Diani, "The Concept of Social Movement," *Sociological Review* 40 (1992): 13.

8 Jeff Goodwin, "A Theory of Categorical Terrorism," *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (June 2006): 2027–2046.

9 Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Action," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 7–44.

Consultations with more than eighty experts conducted through a combination of surveys and focus group workshops formed the cornerstone of our research. The team deployed two surveys online, using Kobo Toolbox. The first survey ("Survey 1") was open for six weeks in June and July and was sent to 469 individuals from multiple sectors and disciplines, including anthropology, criminology, economics, human geography, international security and conflict studies, public health, religious studies, sociology, and social psychology. These individuals were identified as subject matter experts either by the Network Secretariat team or by other survey respondents. Demographic details of Survey 1 respondents are presented in figures 1–3.

The second survey ("Survey 2") solicited input from RESOLVE Network partners on prioritizing research questions collected in the first survey and developed during two focus group workshops. Survey 2, which was open August 8–26, consolidated questions from Survey 1 and questions that emerged during focus group discussions and during a preliminary review of the literature on the intersection between governance gaps and the emergence and expansion of violent social movements.[10] Survey 2 sought to identify ten priority research questions from a set of roughly sixty questions, and to identify five priority countries where research is most urgently needed. After eliminating redundant questions from the larger list, we consolidated a total of twenty-one questions into a single list subdivided by categories and asked respondents to rate the questions in terms of their importance, answerability, and operational and ethical feasibility. We also asked respondents to rank up to ten questions in order of priority importance.

The two focus group workshops brought together select groups of subject matter experts with a wealth of research expertise and practical experience in the field. Twenty individuals participated in the first workshop, which was held at USIP in Washington, DC, on June 29; sixteen experts took part in the second workshop, which was held July 27–28 at the Center for Peacekeeping Operations (ZIF) in Berlin. The experts came from the United Nations, think tanks, universities, nongovernmental organizations, and government agencies in North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Washington workshop was facilitated by USIP staff; in Berlin, USIP staff had support from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), and ZIF. Both workshops were held under the Chatham House Rule, which allows participants to use information received during a workshop but which requires that the identity of all participants be kept confidential. Rapporteurs took exhaustive notes, which were later sorted, coded, and analyzed.

We asked participants to work together in small groups during multiple rounds of discussions to develop shared definitions and conceptual frameworks, and to draft research proposal abstracts on a given theme. We also asked participants to identify barriers inherent to researching violent social movements and extremist groups and solutions to research challenges. In each round of discussions, the groups included some individuals who had expertise in the study topic and some who did not, thus encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration. This combination was meant to generate proposals that were both realistic and fresh in their approach. Facilitators guided each group through the pro-

10 As part of its multipart analysis of the state of the evidence and data on violent extremism, the RESOLVE Network Secretariat undertook a focused examination of scholarly analysis on interrelationships between the governments of Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh and select organizations affiliated with violent social movements; a separate working paper on findings from that study will be published later in 2016.

cess, which included developing four sections: research question and hypotheses; methods and data; challenges; and solutions. Participants in Focus Group 1 explored ways to develop research on governance, religion and religious identity, family and social networks, state security, and violent extremist organizations' structure and networks. Focus Group 2 covered prisons, gender, reintegration and reconciliation, and migration and displacement. Extensive notes from both focus groups form the basis for the study proposal abstracts presented in annex A.

Figure 1. Respondents by Sector and Discipline

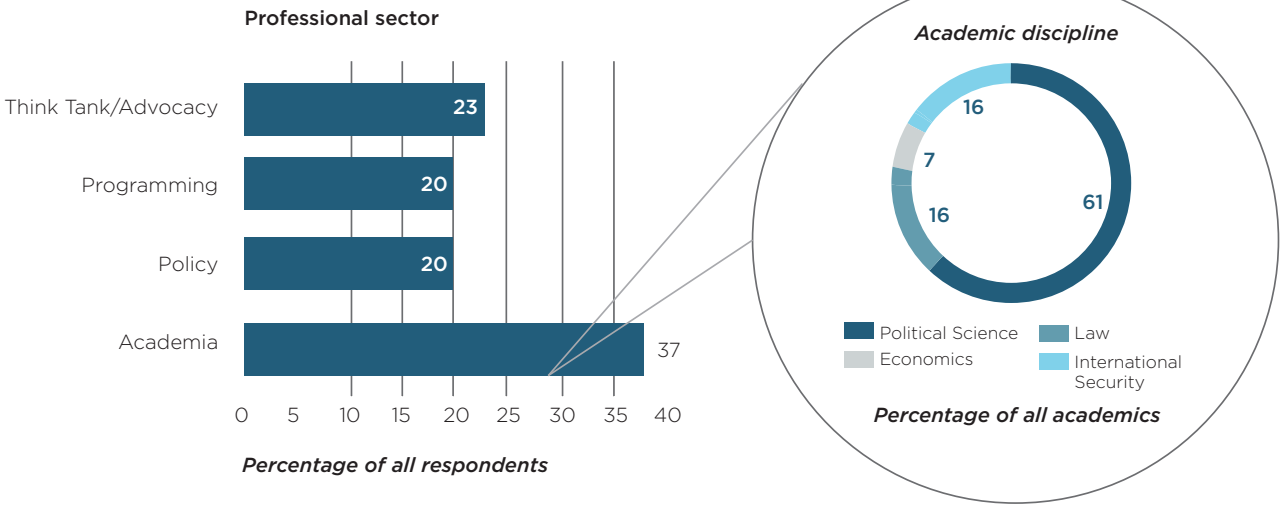
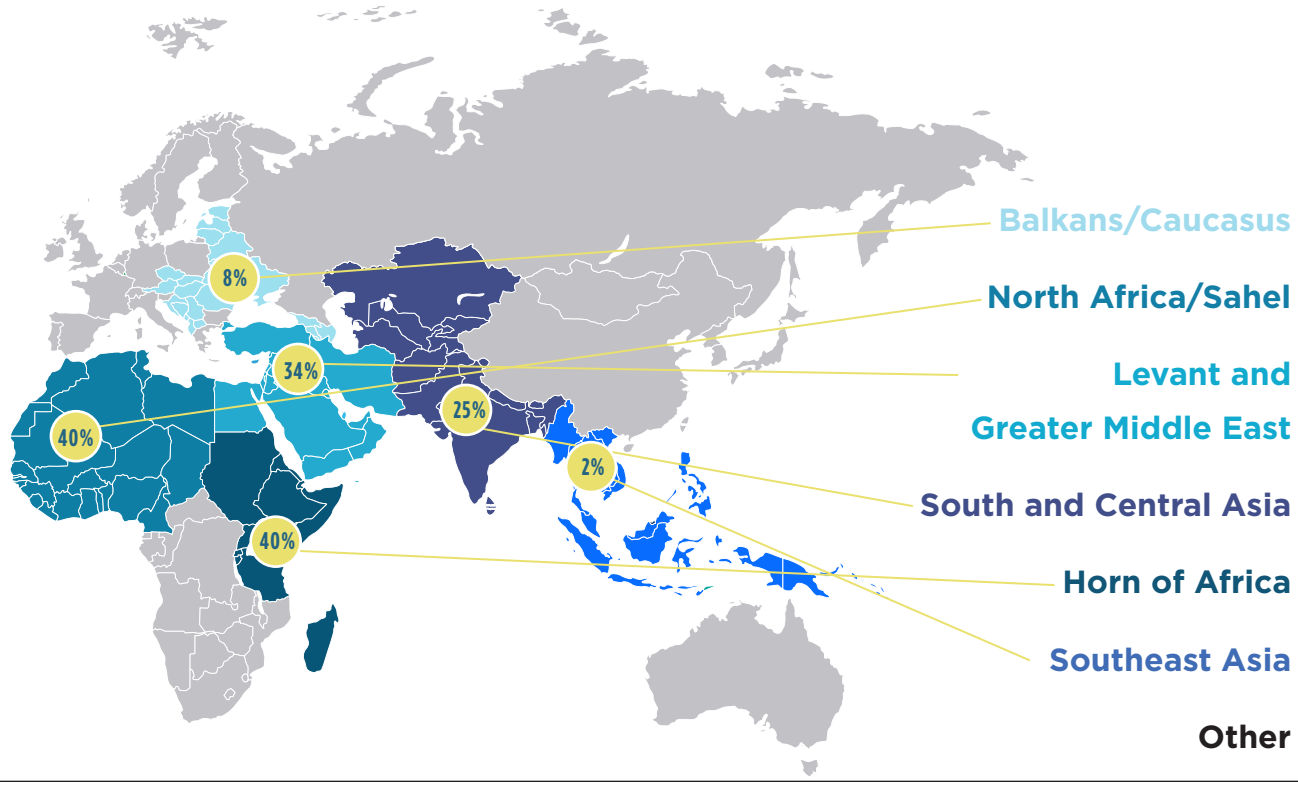


Figure 2. Respondents by Region of Expertise



FINDINGS

CONFRONTING DIVERGENT DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

Just as "terrorism" is a contested concept,[11] so, too, according to our consultations with experts, is "violent extremism." No internationally accepted legal definitions of "terrorism" and "violent extremism" exist, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. The UN secretary-general's 2016 "Plan of Action" suggests that states should define "violent extremism" as they see fit, while cautioning against an overly broad application of the term, which might result in abuses.[12] This recommendation is understandable, given the well-known discrepancies between legal definitions of terrorism employed by various UN member-states and the highly subjective nature of definitions of "extremism" in the context of conflicts in which nonstate actors play a prominent role.[13] But although the secretary-general's recommendation is understandable, it is not particularly helpful. Vaguely defined analytical terms often result in equally vague policy prescriptions. As the UN special rapporteur on counterterrorism has pointed out, some states have misused poorly defined concepts outlined in the plan of action "to suppress political opposition or ideological dissent from mainstream values."[14] Although the UN plan offers a politically expedient way out of the contentious politics around human rights and counterterrorism policies for states seeking to develop strategic responses to violent extremist groups, it poses serious challenges for researchers seeking to conduct empirical analysis on the subject and to identify effective responses. Absent a set of shared definitions, typologies, and analytical frameworks that sets parameters around a common unit of analysis, identifying effective responses to a problem is extremely difficult.

Theories abound across the disciplines as to what drives extremist groups and violent social movements. Over the past three decades, scholars have deployed a wide array of theories to try to pinpoint the key drivers. Deprivation theory, grievance theory, and repression theory are just three of the many theoretical frameworks on offer.[15] The rise of al-Qaeda and, subsequently, of Da'esh, however, appears to have convinced many researchers that this new kind of borderless, leaderless violence demands a new theory and specialized study. This may or may not be the case. It is a clear there is a divide within the academic community over the interrelated roles of identity and ideology in encouraging violence and defining group strategies around deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians

11 Alex Schmid, "The Revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 2 (2012).

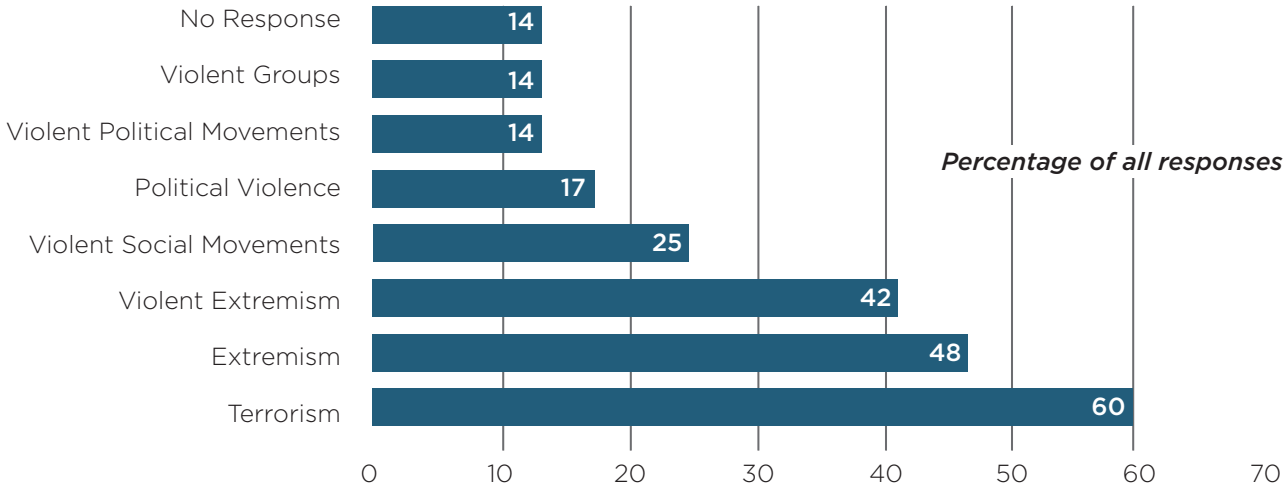
12 UNGA, "Plan of Action," 2.

13 Kristina Thorne, "'Terrorist' Lists: A Brief Overview of Lists and Their Sanctions in the US, UN, and Europe," HD Working Paper (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, June 2006).

14 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Do Not Criminalize Extreme Views—UN Special Rapporteur on Counterterrorism," statement issued March, 15, 2016, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17229#sthash.j0lDD44h.dpuf.

15 Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 405–420.

Figure 3. Problematic Words or Phrases Related to Violent Extremism Selected by Respondents



Respondents were able to select multiple words or phrases.

and civilian institutions.[16] A primary goal of our expert consultations, therefore, was to understand where and why divergences exist among experts over definitions and conceptual approaches to research on this particular type of violence.

In Survey 1, respondents were given a list of terms or phrases and invited to select those that they found to be problematic (see figure 4). Respondents were then asked to explain why they made those selections. Respondents found "terrorism" (selected by 60 percent of survey participants), "extremism" (48 percent), and "violent extremism" (42 percent) the most problematic. Although the pool of respondents to Survey 1 was limited, it is interesting that many respondents indicated "violent social movements," as among the least problematic terms to define. In open-ended responses, several respondents elaborated on this point, suggesting that social movement theory, social change theory, and social network analysis might provide a way forward in the development of interdisciplinary studies on "violent extremism". The terms "violent political movements" and "violent groups" were the least problematic. "Violent extremism overemphasizes the role of ideology in explaining violence, to the detriment of political and historical context," one survey respondent noted, and then explained: "'Terrorism' is problematic because it includes a value judgment—'terrorists are evil, their actions are inherently unjustified.' Many of the same tactics employed by terrorists were used by groups in the first half of the twenty-first century who were referred to as freedom fighters or [described in] other less value-laden terms."

Controversies over definitions and terms similarly bedeviled the focus group process throughout, highlighting the difficulties researchers face when trying to conduct empirical analysis on themes that

16 Jonathan Leader Maynard, "Identity and Ideology in Political Violence and Conflict," *St. Anthony's International Review* 10, no. 2 (2015): 18–52.

are the subject of heated political and cultural contestation. During both focus groups, participants were asked to work together to identify potential research questions, methodological approaches, and data that would support studies on violent extremism. Although participants quickly came to agreement on the definition of some terms, the meaning and use of many other terms remained contentious. In many cases, in order to move forward with proposal development, participants identified variables without clearly defining them in order to satisfy—or at least not offend—the different perspectives at the table.

Despite pronounced differences over definitions of terms, there was a strong convergence of views on what distinguishes extremist violence from other types of violence. Participants frequently cited targeted violence against civilians and civilian institutions, the embrace of ideological norms and moral discourses that include expansive definitions of combatants, and spectacular modes of attack against ideologically determined "out-groups" as part of the repertoire of violence employed by extremist groups.

This suggests a conceptual overlap with existing research on genocide and atrocity prevention, hinting at one potential path forward for developing a shared analytical framework. Indicators of the potential for state-led mass killings overlap with, or are even the same as, indicators of the potential emergence of violent social movements and extremist groups.[17] Thus, early warning assessments of the potential for state-led mass violence—even though some of these assessment methods are still in their infancy—may be useful for formulating indicators specific to the emergence of violent social movements and violent extremism.

IDENTIFYING RESEARCH PRIORITIES, RISKS, AND CHALLENGES

A key goal of our consultations was to identify priority research questions and needs. In the follow-up second survey sent to RESOLVE Network partners, respondents for organizations operating across the network's six priority regions identified geographical areas in need of further research and priority research questions. Respondents put Nigeria, Bangladesh, Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan at the very top of the list of countries where more research on violent extremism is urgently needed (see the text box on page 22). The growing reach of groups such as Boko Haram, Da'esh, al-Qaeda, and al-Shabaab in these countries is evident from both news reports and event-based data sets. Four of the countries—Nigeria, Bangladesh, Libya, and Somalia—are among the twenty-five countries listed in 2015 by the Early Warning Project as having the highest risk for mass killings.[18] According to the Global Terrorism Database, these countries have seen a sharp rise in the number of attacks by violent extremist groups since 2010.[19]

17 Lawrence Woocher, "Developing a Strategy, Methods and Tools for Genocide Early Warning," report prepared for the Office of the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Center for International Conflict Resolution, Columbia University, September 26, 2006.

18 The Early Warning Project is a joint initiative of the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College. The project's website is at http://www.earlywarningproject.com/.

19 The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is an open-source database including information on terrorist events around the world from 1970 through 2015 (with additional annual updates planned for the future). Unlike many other event databases, the

Top 10 Countries in Need of Further Research on Violent Extremism

1. Nigeria	6. Kenya
2. Bangladesh	7. Tunisia
3. Somalia	8. Algeria
4. Libya	9. Mali
5. Afghanistan	10. Kosovo

In addition to determining geographical priorities, we sought in our consultations to identify research questions that network partners feel are in urgent need of investigation. Our objective in doing so was to develop a preliminary roadmap that would identify where our partners agreed on critical gaps in research and to support research project designs that incorporated empirical methods. We sorted roughly sixty questions identified in Survey 1 into four broad categories, eliminating duplicates and questions that seemed redundant. The first category of questions pertained to political, economic, and other structural-level variables, or "push factors." The second category encompassed questions about "pull factors", such as the role of social identity, social stratification, social networks, and social discourses in driving violent extremism. The third category centered on questions pertaining to the structures or roles of specific groups or actors in conflict settings. The final and fourth category included a short list of questions about lessons learned from past CVE/PVE programs or other policy approaches to mitigating violent conflict.

We then distilled the list of questions down to twenty-one questions (a list of these questions is in annex B) and sent them to the RESOLVE Network's partners and asked them to rank the questions in order of priority. Their responses emphasized the need to focus more heavily on local structural drivers of violent extremism, such as locally based formal and informal institutions and practices that contribute to social exclusion. This suggests that more national and subnational data, collected on an annual basis, is required to understand the ways in which states and communities respond to violent social movements and extremist groups. Respondents evinced less interest in questions relating to pull factors that lead individuals to be attracted to extremist rhetoric and action. Questions that probe what lessons might be learned from evaluations of current CVE programs and other types of violence mitigation measures were also less interesting to most respondents.

The text box that follows lists the ten questions that RESOLVE Network partners thought should be prioritized in new research. The questions are in descending order of priority, as determined by an analysis of responses from eleven out of sixteen partner organizations in the RESOLVE Network. These and other questions identified by experts consulted during focus group workshops might form the starting basis for a shared research agenda.

GTD includes systematic data on US as well as transnational and international terrorist incidents that have occurred during this period; it now includes more than 150,000 cases. See http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/.

Top Ten Research Questions, In Descending Order of Priority

1. What conditions, factors, or qualities enable communities to resist and/or the influence of violent extremist organizations?
2. How do the provision of essential public services and perceptions of government legitimacy inform support for or rejection of violent extremism?
3. How does the level of social, cultural, and religious integration within a community inform the community's support for or rejection of violent extremism?
4. How does the state security structure and practice impact community support for, direct participation in or defection from extremist violence against civilians and civilian institutions?
5. What avenues of engagement and communication exist between communities, violent extremist groups, and the state? If any, how do those channels of engagement impact communities' ability to negotiate with the state or the group for access to public services?
6. Why do some successfully recruited individuals become violent and others do not? What does non-violent support of violent extremism by recruited individuals look like?
7. What social conditions, factors, or qualities enable women to resist and/or counter violent extremist organizations' influence and/or actions within their families and communities?
8. What lessons can be learned from past successful reintegration efforts of individuals formerly associated with violent groups or organizations? And in other cases, what has gone wrong?
9. What conditions within host countries or communities influence—either positively or negatively—the susceptibility of migrants and refugees to recruitment efforts by violent extremist organizations?
10. How do intergenerational narratives of geopolitical injustice (such as state occupation, invasion, war, and atrocities) inform an individual's support of, participation in, defection from, or rejection of violent extremist organizations?

Prioritizing questions is one challenge; designing studies and collecting salient data is entirely another. The interplay between the role of the state in providing public services and goods, such as security, justice, public health, and education, was central to our discussions across the board. The role of corruption in influencing public responses to violent extremism, in particular, was a theme that was repeatedly touched on in both the focus groups. There is a plethora of research on state fragility, but few empirically based studies focus specifically on the relationship between state coordination failures during complex crises, community resilience, and responses to violent extremist groups.

During both focus group workshops, many participants noted significant data gaps as they sought to craft research proposal abstracts on topics ranging from governance to state security, families and social networks, religion and religious identity, violent extremist group organizational structures,

gender, migration, and corrections and prison management. Disaggregated data on specific identity-based groups are often in short supply in many countries affected by conflict. Critical demographic and baseline statistical information about communities at the subnational level is frequently unavailable in many countries. Fragile states often lack the capacity to regularly collect census data and information about government provision of basic public services.

Lack of information about state justice and security institutions and practices is particularly glaring. Little locally generated data on security institutions is publicly available, and many states resist scrutiny of local security practices. Given that existing research suggests a correlation between repressive security tactics and the rise of extremism, it was not surprising that the role of the state, and security institutions in particular, figured prominently in focus group discussions. Participants observed that comparative case studies on how security structures affect public views on extremism and qualitative studies on security institutions could yield significant policy improvements.

Participants also noted the need for data on the demographics of state-sponsored security actors, the demographics of prison populations, detention practices, and violent crime rates in communities at risk for a proliferation of identity-based revenge attacks. Data on state prosecutions of individuals affiliated with extremist groups, conviction rates for offenders, and information about court sentencing practices would also enhance the CVE knowledge base. Locally led assessments of recidivism rates among former members of extremist groups could generate valuable insights into how communities cope with reintegration.

In small-group discussions, participants noted that in many countries where violent extremist groups have begun to gain traction, governments actively monitor and oversee religious institutions. Laws governing apostasy and setting prohibitions on religious pluralism form the backbone of some state governing structures. Tracing the political evolution of blasphemy laws and data on prosecutions for violations of such laws would provide invaluable insight into the impact of enforcement patterns on select communities. In some countries, state laws call for close oversight of the role of religious actors in shaping public discourse. Yet, as focus group participants noted, there are few studies that focus on the ways in which states wield institutional levers to influence public discourse on religious identity. Regular collection of local data on state subsidies for or sanctions against religious actors could illuminate important trends.

Religion often lies at the heart of questions about justice, security, and the legitimate use of force, a central ideological concern of many extremist groups and violent social movements. If we can better understand the relationship between the state, religious actors and institutions, and the public, we will better understand violent extremism. Studies that examine state oversight of religious affairs, the role of religious actors in public service provision, and the shaping of public discourse on morality, apostasy, and citizenship could provide valuable insight into extremist mobilization strategies.

Likewise, research on how social networks influence community decisions to employ violent or nonviolent action to resolve localized conflict is scarce. Some participants noted that few studies have examined the logic of nonviolent strategies employed by different stakeholders in communities affected by

violent extremism. Much of the research to date on violent social movements focuses on outcomes of violent action rather than on the subtle interplay between community decisions to abstain from, actively resist, or support violent social movements. Little is known about when and why some extremist groups employ nonviolent strategies to achieve their aims. Both observations suggest possible avenues for researchers to take in exploring the logic of nonviolent strategies in conflict-affected communities.

Participants noted that the rising number of communities displaced by armed conflict in locations where extremist groups are not only active but also prominent suggests a need for more studies of migrant, refugee, and displaced populations. This need is particularly pronounced in countries with large numbers of displaced youth. Social and economic mobility strategies, particularly for young men and women in many conflict-affected countries, are interrelated and can inform decisions to passively support or actively participate in violent social movements. Measuring changes in public views on local norms around masculinity, femininity, sexuality, marriage, inheritance, morality, and citizenship could inform alternative messaging campaigns.

Several study proposals were put aside when focus group participants realized that the data required to answer the accompanying research question were either inaccessible or nonexistent. Many participants agreed that more large-scale statistically based studies and longitudinal studies were needed to better understand the evolving decisions of individuals, communities, and groups in adopting violent or nonviolent behaviors over time and the contexts in which those decisions were made. Additionally, subnational and cross-case comparisons could be useful in controlling for the potential effects of context and other variables in a given location.

Focus group participants factored these gaps and challenges into their research proposal abstracts. Those abstracts (reproduced in annex A) identify a range of unanswered questions and outline topic areas that are highly policy relevant. The methods described in the abstract take bold approaches to overcoming the problem of limited availability of data and constraints on access to existing data. In addition to providing a roadmap for locally driven, locally informed research, the abstracts collectively point the way toward a research agenda that moves policy and practice from assessment to action.

CONCLUSIONS

The United Nations' call for member-states to develop national-level CVE strategies is a wake-up call not only for policymakers but also for researchers. Data-driven, evidence-based studies on the drivers of violent extremism are few and far between. The majority of existing research relies heavily on anecdotal evidence derived primarily from qualitative studies or quantitative studies which often draw conclusions from limited data. If, as the UN "Plan of Action" suggests, more analysis is needed on the drivers of violent extremism in order to improve the effectiveness of interventions and CVE strategies, stakeholders will need to increase investment in research that resonates with local realities. Our consultations with experts suggest that although the universe of existing CVE-related studies is rich with conjecture, it is poor in locally led, locally informed analysis from the field. The emerging policy-led emphasis on risk assessments and early warning analysis is a promising sign of the growing appetite for evidence-based policy and practice in this complex field.

As participants noted, however, the urgent need to respond to the challenges posed by violent extremism appears to have made stakeholders hungry for quick results; they are less ready than before to invest in studies that take more than a few months to conduct. And such studies demand the kind of substantial material and financial investment that is beyond the reach of most researchers. Even in instances where funding can be found to support data collection of the scope and breadth demanded to plug current gaps, security threats pose a serious risk, particularly for local researchers.

Barriers are yet higher for locally based researchers in conflict-affected countries, who are often the best positioned to make an impact on CVE policy and practice. Locally based researchers and organizations should be taking the lead in setting research agendas that link directly to community concerns about violent extremism as well as national-level CVE strategies. Yet many researchers and local organizations lack the financial or material support needed to advance their research skills, build capacity, and implement projects.

They also frequently face resistance from local government institutions that are averse to scrutiny of the state's role in influencing community responses to extremism, and suspicious of researchers' motives. Some participants noted, for example, that state-imposed restrictions on contacts with sanctioned members of extremist groups create serious barriers to developing studies that are based on primary source information. Prohibitions on the provision of material support to sanctioned extremist groups are understandable and in many cases may be necessary, but those prohibitions can make it difficult to generate policy-relevant data. Some of these barriers can be overcome through stronger partnerships with government agencies that already collect relevant information. Participants suggested, nonetheless, that international stakeholders and local governments should revisit and refine best practices and consider developing standards for providing access to certain sources of information that might be considered sensitive, such as current and former detainees. International stakeholders, local governments, and research organizations should also explore new ways of supporting structured

dialogues between local government institutions and researchers to promote the identification of shared research objectives and encourage information sharing.

It is an encouraging sign that the research community has begun to pursue questions that inform our collective understanding of the drivers and impacts of violent extremism. But low levels of investment in large-scale studies, problems in gaining access to data, and limited expertise in the use of such tools in many countries present high barriers to results-oriented research that leads to effective interventions. Collaboration between international and national researchers on projects that integrate large-N statistical studies and longitudinal studies is urgently needed. Advances in computational analysis could be especially useful in this regard and hold tremendous promise for the future of research on violent extremism. The use of specialized data-analysis tools to trace sentiment, ideas, and concepts across a large corpus of written materials can, for example, illuminate knowledge gaps and provide avenues for analyzing social media and other relevant online outputs. As noted earlier, large-scale collection of event-based data can support early warning modeling methods. The accuracy of such models would be vastly improved by the input of local, subnational-level data, which would require greater cross-country, regional, and in some cases international research collaboration.

The complicated, context-specific, and hyperlocal nature of violent extremism demands other approaches, too. The role of history in shaping social, political, and economic structures is not inconsequential. Many countries grappling with extremist violence trace the roots of discord to interstate competition during the colonial and post-colonial eras. To increase the applicability of research, policymakers should encourage the inclusion of local research partners in research projects on violent extremism by making local participation a stated requirement in requests for research proposals. Requests for proposals should also encourage interdisciplinary, mixed-method longitudinal studies with a medium- to long-term time frame.

Countering violent extremism requires developing and acting on a research agenda that reflects local realities. Policymakers, as well as researchers, may have to rethink their approaches to identifying solutions to violent extremism. But such steps have to be taken if policy interventions are to proceed on the basis of adequate evidence and accurate data.

Locally led, locally informed research is likely to include—rather than ignore—historical perspectives that resonate with contemporary realities, thereby bolstering the credibility of findings with local stakeholders. By bringing more diverse voices and perspectives into the research discussion at the local level, new questions will be asked and the overall knowledge base will be greatly expanded. Our collective challenge is to ensure that global inquiry into the drivers of extremism and the factors that contribute to community resilience reflects the diversity of local interests, perspectives, and experiences.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A: RESEARCH PROPOSAL ABSTRACTS

The following abstracts of research proposals were drafted at the two focus group workshops. One aim of the focus groups was to identify areas of study that aligned with the emerging prioritization of national- and subnational-level assessments of structural drivers of violent extremism. We sought to specifically address the overemphasis in many assessment approaches on the risk of community "radicalization," a term widely contested in much of the literature on the subject. Our goal was to examine knowledge gaps regarding the role of the state in shaping the environment and reciprocal relationships between the structure of extremist groups and material and sociocultural sources of community resistance and resilience in the face of mass violence.

Drawing on discussions with a wide array of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers over the past year, the RESOLVE Network selected a variety of themes for discussion: governance; state security; families and social networks; religion and religious identity; violent extremist group organizational structures; gender; migration; and corrections and prison management. We asked focus group participants to work together in small groups during multiple rounds of discussions to draft research proposal abstracts on one of these themes. In each round of proposal development, the groups included some individuals who had expertise in the study topic and some who did not, thus encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration. This combination was designed to encourage the development of proposals that were both realistic and fresh in their approach. Facilitators guided each group through the process, which included developing four sections: research question and hypotheses; methods and data; challenges; and solutions.

The drafts were subsequently edited by the RESOLVE Secretariat team to give them a consistent format.

GOVERNANCE

Background

Research indicates a link between state fragility, authoritarian governance, and support for violent extremist groups.[20] This research project study will look specifically at the dynamics between the state and religious organizations with regard to control, power, and suppression, and how that relationship influences violent extremism..

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20 Amos Sawyer, "Violent Conflicts and Governance Challenges in West Africa: The Case of the Mano River Basin Area," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42 (2004): 437–463; Ulrich Schneckener, "Fragile Statehood, Armed Non-State Actors and Security Governance," in *Private Actors and Security Governance*, ed. Alan Bryden and Marina Caparini (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2006), 23–40; Blake Edward Barkley, "The Last Vestiges of Statehood: Failed States and the Groups That Work Within Them," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 16 (2015); Max Abrahms and Philip B. K. Potter, "Explaining Terrorism: Leadership Deficits and Militant Group Tactics," *International Organization* 69 (2015): 311–342; K. Proctor and B. Tesfaye, "How Good Governance Can Diminish Support for Violent Extremism" (Portland, OR: Mercy Corps, 2015), https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/investing-iraqs-peace-how-good-governance-can-diminish-support-violent-extremism; and Harriet Allan et al., "Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review" (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2015), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0899d40f0b64974000192/Drivers_of_Radicalisation_Literature_Review.pdf.

Research Question and Hypotheses

What is the relationship between violent extremism and the degree and effectiveness of control by the state over religious, educational, charitable, cultural, and civil society organizations?

The following hypotheses will be tested:

- Less control by the state over these religious institutions will lead to less violent extremism.
- Less control by the state over these religious institutions will lead to more violent extremism.
- More control by the state over these religious institutions will lead to less violent extremism.
- More control by the state over these religious institutions will lead to more violent extremism.
- There is no relationship between the level of state control of religious institutions and the level of violent extremism.

Data and Methods

Control, the key independent variable, needs to be clearly defined, as there are a variety of means by which the state can control religious institutions. State control can be measured in various ways:

- Determine what, if any, state subsidies exist for religious institutions.
- Determine what, if any, state oversight mechanisms are in place to monitor religious organizations and their financial dealings.
- Determine the amount of media licensing and time afforded to religious leaders and organizations.
- Identify legal frameworks for civil society.
- Examine religious directives issued in support of state positions.
- Examine religious institutions with constitutional status.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews to identify how the state facilitates or obstructs public discourse on religion.

In addition to examining both the ways in which and the extent to which the state controls religious organizations' activities, the study will use corruption indicators and public perception surveys to assess state legitimacy. Violent extremism, the dependent variable of interest, will be measured based in part on the number of incidents of violence and the number of foreign fighters involved. Comparative case studies, macro-level analyses, and regression models will be used to test the hypotheses.

Challenges and Solutions

The study will require the collection of new and existing data to build a complete control data-set. Certain states may be unwilling to allow the collection of new data, particularly through interviews with representatives from affected religious organizations. Gaining access to financial records for these organizations is also likely to be difficult.

Publicly available media reports, however, could elucidate the level of state oversight of religious organizations. A review of official state registries of religious organizations and charities, as well as related reports, could further illuminate the level of state control. Although it may be difficult to identify proxy indicators of state legitimacy, a more nuanced understanding of how the public views the role of the state in providing public goods can be obtained by looking at perception surveys, corruption indices, customs receipts for specific high-value commodities, such as weapons and natural resources, and the market valuation of certain local staple commodities.

STATE SECURITY SECTOR

Background

Although the state security apparatus should protect and support civilians, numerous accounts from around the world show that this does not always happen.[21] Abuse of civilians by state security actors or their failure to provide security can influence support for violent extremism.[22] This research project will study the relationship between the state security apparatuses and the communities they serve and explore how that relationship links to violent extremism.

Research Question and Hypotheses

How do the state's security structure and its practices affect community support for, participation in, and defection from extremist violence against civilians and civilian institutions?

Hypotheses to be tested include, but are not limited to, include the following:

- State security actors operate differently in and interact differently with communities when stationed in a province or district adjacent to another country than when stationed in a province or region that does not share a border.
- The more homogenous the demographics of the state security actors and the community are, the less support the community gives to extremist violence against civilians and civilian institutions.
- The stronger that civilian oversight of state security actors is, the more robust are the accountability mechanisms made available to communities, and the lower is the support given by the community to extremist violence against civilians and civilian institutions.

Data and Methods

This study will generate subnational case studies to determine the impact of state security actors at the local level. This unit of analysis is important for developing ways to identify early warning signs. The case studies will allow for comparisons within specific countries, with a particular focus on comparing the impact of state security actors on provinces and districts that border another country with those that do not.

Within each province or district of study, analysis will be conducted along three lines:

- A qualitative assessment will map security sector structures (e.g., jurisdiction, mandate, civilian oversight), practice (e.g., training, policy tactics, communications), and accountability mechanisms.

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21 Human Rights Watch, "Pakistan: Extrajudicial Executions by Army in Swat" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010), https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/07/16/pakistan-extrajudicial-executions-army-swat; Human Rights Watch, "Criminal Reprisals: Kenyan Police and Military Abuses against Ethnic Somalis," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2012), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/kenya0512webwcover.pdf; Alex Ortiz, "Leaked Official Report Accuses Egypt's Military of Human Rights Abuses," *CBS News*, April 21, 2013, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/leaked-official-report-accuses-egypts-military-of-human-rights-abuses/; Tim Hume, "Report Alleges 'Systematic' Torture of Civilians in Kachin Areas of Myanmar," *CNN*, June 10, 2014, accessed August 19, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/10/world/asia/myanmar-kachin-torture-report/; and Hanna Hindstrom, "Burma's Transition to Civilian Rule Hasn't Stopped the Abuses of Its Ethnic Wars," *Time,* April 1, 2016, http://time.com/4277328/burma-myanmar-suu-kyi-ethnic-wars/.

22 Allan et al., "Drivers of Violent Extremism."

- A census and ethnographic mapping will document the demographics of both the security forces and the communities of concern. Variables of interest include ethnicity, gender balance, sectarian orientation, socioeconomic political affiliations, and origin stories tracing the evolution of security actors' careers.
- An assessment of resource-based conflict in the geographic areas of interest will document the physical landscape, available natural resources, and border and trade dispute issues.

Challenges and Solutions

It may be challenging to directly observe the actions of state security forces and establish relevant performance indicators. But these challenges could be overcome, in part, by utilizing new types of data-collection technology, such as satellite imagery and geographic information systems. Facilitating information sharing and creating opportunities to bring together diverse sets of stakeholders—such as human rights organizations and defense lawyers—could offer additional ways of obtaining fresh data.

Because of the sensitive nature of collecting information on state security forces, security—within the areas of study and when conducting the work in general—will be of great concern for both the study team and the study participants. These challenges could be overcome by collaboration between international, regional, and national-level research organizations in approaching state sources for information. Nonetheless, it will be difficult to identify relevant and accurate indicators to assess the impact of state security actors and actions on a community's level of support for, participation in, or defection from extremist violence against civilians and civilian institutions. There is also a need to control for "noise" (i.e., those factors that suggest a causal relationship where one does not exist); this might be achieved through community-level surveys or focus groups.

CORRECTIONS AND PRISON MANAGEMENT

Background

Corrections and prison management have been shown in some cases to be influential in shaping the trajectory of violent extremist groups,[23] but significant questions remain unanswered concerning the ways in which detention practices contribute to recidivism among violent extremists.[24] There also appears to be little publicly available research that assesses the link between recidivism rates and community responses to former detainees.

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23 Greg Hannah, Lindsay Clutterbuck, and Jennifer Rubin, "Radicalization or Rehabilitation: Understanding the Challenge of Extremist and Radicalized Prisoners" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR571.html; Fiona Mangan and Erica Gaston, *Prisons in Yemen*, Peaceworks, no. 106 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, March 2015), http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/03/03/prisons-in-yemen; Noor Huda Ismail and Susan Sim, "From Prison to Carnage in Jakarta: A Tale of Two Terrorist Convicts, Their Mentor behind Bars, and the Fighter with ISIS," *Brookings*, January 22, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/from-prison-to-carnage-in-jakarta-a-tale-of-two-terrorist-convicts-their-mentor-behind-bars-and-the-fighter-with-isis-part-1/; and Jess McHugh, "Islamic Radicalization In French Prisons: Can Isolation Program Prevent Charlie Hebdo-Style Terror Attacks?," *International Business Times*, January 6, 2016, http://www.ibtimes.com/islamic-radicalization-french-prisons-can-isolation-program-prevent-charlie-hebdo-2249922.

24 Susan Sim and Noor Huda Ismail, "Predicting Terrorist Recidivism in Indonesia's Prisons," *Brookings*, January 28, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/predicting-terrorist-recidivism-in-indonesias-prisons/; Tinka M. Veldhuis, "Reintegrating Violent Extremist Offenders: Policy Questions and Lessons Learned" (Washington, DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2015), https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/VeldhuisPaper-Final%20(2).pdf; Daan Weggemans and Beatrice de Graaf, "Daan Weggemans on Recidivism and Reintegration of Jihadist Former Detainees," Leiden University, Governance and Global Affairs, May 22, 2015, http://campusdenhaag.leiden.edu/events/upon-release.html.

This research project will look at how prison management practices and social and family dynamics within communities with significant numbers of detainees collectively inform recidivism rates. Countries to consider for this comparative study include Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Kenya, and Libya.

Research Question and Hypotheses

How do population management and segregation inside prisons and factors within communities to which former prisoners return affect recidivism rates of violent extremists in conflict-affected countries?

Hypotheses to be tested include, but are not limited to, include the following:

- Harsh population management practices, the use of isolation techniques, and segregation of special categories of prisoners increase the likelihood of recidivism.
- More liberal population management practices, integrated prison population management, and limited or no use of isolation techniques decrease the likelihood of recidivism.
- Family dynamics and levels of social exclusion within communities of returning former detainees affect recidivism rates.
- Family dynamics and levels of social exclusion within communities of returning former detainees have little or no effect on recidivism rates.

Data and Methods

This study will develop case studies in multiple countries for comparison. Each case study will include a systematic assessment of prison practices in each country, qualitative stakeholder interviews, ethnographies of detainees, case record reviews, and social media analyses of online materials referencing current and former detainees. To guarantee accuracy of the data, the study will have to be longitudinal (running for three to five years) and closely follow specific sets of detainees after their exit from prison. The key outcome is recidivism. Because this is a dichotomous variable, logistic regressions to help ascertain the causal factors linked with recidivism can be run. A key point of interest is understanding the decision-making process of those who do *not* return to violent extremist organizations after leaving prison.

Challenges and Solutions

Gaining access to prisoners and prison-related policies will be challenging. All studies in this issue area should look at factors related to the prisons in which the detainees were confined and the communities to which they return. Cooperation with governments could facilitate access to detainees, their families, and case records. Security will also likely be a concern; researchers may encounter threats and reprisals. One way to deal with potential security threats might be to recruit regionally based researchers from areas outside of the countries of interest under a research-exchange program. Short-term research exchanges of this sort could further reduce security threats. Researchers would be best served by seeking appropriate authorizations; working within the rules and regulations enhances researcher safety. Even under the best of conditions, however, isolating the factors that lead to recidivism will remain a challenge; as a consequence, identifying a true causal relationship rather than a correlated one will be difficult.

VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND NETWORKS

Background

Although the actions of violent extremist organizations often dominate the front pages of newspapers around the world, less information is available on the internal structures and systems of these groups, because data collection can be challenging.[25] In many cases, details of the inner workings of groups are uncovered only when individuals defect or are captured and share information.[26] This research project will examine the relationship between an organization's structure and policies and the success of its recruitment efforts. Countries that could be candidates for examination in this study include Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Mali, Egypt, and Libya.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Is there a relationship between the organizational structure of violent extremist groups and an organizational commitment to violence on recruitment?

The following hypotheses will be tested:

- There is a relationship between organizational structure of a group and recruitment.
- There is a relationship between organizational commitment to violence and recruitment.
- There is a relationship between both the organizational structure of a group and commitment to violence and recruitment.

Data and Methods

Recruitment is the dependent variable and must be structured in a way that allows for a spectrum of actions, from passive to active, to be represented. The following data can be used to assess the success of a violent extremist organization's recruitment efforts: the number of foreign fighters involved; the number of members in the organization; the duration of individual engagement with a group; and the duration and life cycles of internal cadres, committees, and subgroups within an organization. Qualitative interviews with individuals who were recruited by organizations might be one of the best routes to surfacing this type of data. Organizational structure is an independent variable that reflects both the leadership structure and types of roles within the organization. Given the loosely structured nature of most violent extremist organizations, this variable requires a typology that reflects the variety that exists within and among these groups.

Commitment to violence is another independent variable. The following data can be used to assess an organization's commitment to violence: the number and types of incidentsperpetrated or claimed to be perpetrated by the organization; the amount of social media and other propaganda regarding the use of violence or support for

25 Fulan Nasrullah, "How Boko Haram Keeps Its Secrets Secret," *African Arguments*, September 18, 2015, http://africanarguments.org/2015/09/18/how-boko-haram-keeps-its-secrets-secret/.

26 Jocelyn Kelly, "Indoctrinate the Heart to Impunity: Rituals, Culture and Control within the Lord's Resistance Army" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2015), http://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/indoctrinate-heart-impunity; and Thomas Joscelyn and David Daoud, "Al Qaeda Defector Discusses Group's Secrets in Islamic State Magazine," *Long War Journal*, May 3, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/05/al-qaeda-defector-discusses-groups-secrets-in-islamic-state-magazine.php.

violence; the full repertoire of activities employed by an organization to achieve its goals; and the prominence of violence within that repertoire. Large-N studies of event-based data, comparative case study analysis, and regression analysis are the primary methods for assessing the key variables.

Challenges and Solutions

Documenting the leadership structure of a violent extremist organization is challenging because of the clandestine nature of the groups and inaccessibility of reliable data. The elasticity of group structures also makes it difficult to measure change. Variations in organizational structures can exist between locations and leaders.

Assessments of publicly available records—such as organizational publications, social media and online communications, sanctions-monitoring reports, governmental assessments, and other official sources—could provide reliable information. Older data might be accessible for historical analysis. Crowdsourcing could be used to identify a group's structure and leadership, though challenges exist with validating data. A temporal analysis of leadership changes and recruitment patterns, along with a detailed typology of group structures, could reveal important nuances. It is important to note, however, that an endogenous relationship exists between the three key variables, which makes it difficult to parse out which variables are affecting the others. Nuanced statistical analyses are critical to separate the variables in order to identify what relationships exist between them.

Interviews with individuals recruited by violent extremist organizations could be valuable sources of data on recruitment tactics, group demographics, and motivations. It is difficult, however, to validate these individuals' claims. Individuals who support a violent extremist organization, particularly those who have actively participated in the perpetration of violence, might offer a more socially acceptable answer in explaining their motivations for participation to please the interviewer. Triangulating information through publicly available sources and other stakeholder interviews could increase the accuracy of findings. Conducting a pilot study using the preceding methods in a data-rich location, preferably at a subnational level, as proof of concept, and then scaling up, could produce a highly impactful set of country studies.

REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION

Background

The return of former violent extremists to their communities of origin presents new challenges for reintegration and reconciliation efforts conducted amid ongoing conflict.[27] Research suggests that the most successful demobilization efforts have usually occurred at the end of a clearly defined conflict. Today, as former fighters return home while violence in places such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan continues, some analysts and practitioners question the appropriateness of reintegration practices.[28] This research project will look at past reintegration and reconciliation efforts to identify key programming components necessary for successful reintegration of this new wave of former fighters. What lessons can be learned from past successful reintegration efforts (i.e., efforts that led to little or no recidivism) to address the current needs of former fighters returning to society?

27 Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions-Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Section, "DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective" (New York: United Nations, 2010), http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/DDR_retrospective.pdf.

28 James Cockayne and Siobhan O'Neil, "UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?" (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2015), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5532/UNDDR.pdf.

And what kinds of things went wrong in the past? A frequently proposed intervention for mitigating violent extremism is the reintegration of former fighters into communities and normal civilian life.

Research Question and Hypotheses

What social, economic, and political prerequisites at a community level facilitate the successful reintegration of former fighters?

The following hypotheses will be tested:

- Ongoing conflict negatively affects the success of reintegration efforts.
- Ongoing conflict has no effect or a positive effect on the success of reintegration efforts.
- Social, political, or economic exclusion of certain communities affects the successful reintegration of former fighters.
- Social, political, or economic exclusion of certain communities has little to no demonstrable impact on the successful reintegration of former fighters.

Data and Methods

This study will examine and compare three successful and three failed UN-sponsored reintegration programs. Each of the programs will be at least ten years old, to allow for the passage of enough time for implementation to take place and potential failure to become apparent. This study will not evaluate the reintegration programming itself, but rather the environment in which the programs were implemented. Factors that should be considered for each program include the relative population size of the host community; the financial and material resources of the overall program; the resources provided to the individuals being reintegrated; and community members' reception of individuals returning home. To assess these factors, the study will draw on the following resources:

- Government documents, to assess the economic conditions of the communities to which former fighters are returning.
- Press coverage, to learn about the political system and greater context.
- Interviews with community members and returnees, to understand social perceptions and conditions within the community.

Challenges and Solutions

Gaining access to returned extremist foreign fighters presents a unique challenge. Looking at multiple reintegration efforts in various contexts will allow for better assessment of the necessary structural factors for successful reintegration programming. Because of a lack of existing data and challenges associated with collecting new data, this study should focus primarily on internationally developed and implemented reintegration programming and ignore indigenous reintegration and reconciliation efforts.

RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Background

To grow their support base and recruit new members, some violent extremist organizations successfully exploit religion and religious identity in contexts in which there are normative constraints around religious pluralism.

Discourses around blasphemy, apostasy, religious pluralism, retributive justice, and violence found in extremist communications often dovetail with wider public dialogues on these topics. This research project will conduct comparative country case studies to identify the intersection between state responses to violent extremism and religious discourse on violence.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

How do religious actors frame narratives for or against violence? What factors enable religious actors to present and promote those narratives? This is a descriptive study, and thus no hypotheses have been identified.

Data and Methods

Comparative historical case studies will be used to create a broader understanding of the diversity of religious extremism across a variety of contexts. These case studies will explore the political, social, and economic contexts that determine whether religious actors have the narrative power to promote or counter extremism. Constitutional frameworks, legislative data, and official government statements will be particularly rich sources of data for analysis.

Challenges and Solutions

Security challenges and cultural sensitivities may constrain access to data. Local researchers will be critical to understanding the more granular issues of the role of religion in shaping public discourse on extremism. Large-N surveys and longitudinal studies will be useful tools with which to trace the influence of religious narratives on public discourses on violence and legitimate uses of force.

FAMILY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Background

Although much research has focused on why and when individuals or groups choose to participate in violent social movements, relatively little attention has been paid to decisions to resist or repel violent social movements.[29] Several studies have relatedly tried to elucidate community mechanisms' resilience,[30] but much more research is needed on families, women, and social networks. This research project will look at the positive influence that collective nonviolent action can have on community resilience and, more specifically, on women's participation in nonviolent collective actions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Primary question: How and under what conditions does nonviolent collective action address social injustices and create space for alternatives to violent extremism? Secondary question: How do families play a role in shaping responses to extremism?

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29 Stevan Weine et al., "Building Community Resilience to Counter Violent Extremism," *Democracy and Security* 9 (2103): 327–333; Global Center on Cooperative Security, "Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Resilience in the Greater Horn of Africa: An Action Plan," (Goshen, IN: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2015), http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/HOA_CVE_Action_Agenda_lo.pdf.

30 Ami Carpenter, "Havens in a Firestorm: Perspectives from Baghdad on Resilience to Sectarian Violence," *Civil Wars* 14 (2012): 182–204.

Overall, this study seeks to understand the role of gender-based structural violence in driving violent extremism, and the impact of gender-based structural violence on women's actions or participation in violent or nonviolent social movements.

Although specific hypotheses have not been identified, the assumption underlying this proposed study is that structural violence that targets women may correlate with the emergence or expansion of support for violent extremism.

Data and Methods

This will be a longitudinal, mixed-methods study that follows members of several specific nonviolent groups. The study will draw heavily on anthropology and sociology to allow for the inclusion of a gendered aspect of analysis. Each group will be evaluated separately as a case study, which will allow for comparisons to be drawn between cases. This study will pursue the following three lines of analysis: shifts in members' actions and conflict intensity over time; the impact of collective action on the positioning—violent versus nonviolent—of certain actors; and a typology of collective action movements.

Suggested data for collection include conflict-related, event-tracking data, which will be used to assess conflict intensity; news and social media tracking data, which will be used to define and verify the actions of collectives but no collective actors; and interviews with collective members, which will help to ascertain the actions of the individuals, the actions of the collective, the structure of the collective, the collective's decision-making process, and the individual's motivations for joining the collective.

Challenges and Solutions

Gaining entry into closely guarded private family spaces and community groups can be exceptionally sensitive and difficult. These factors make this study risky both for groups to participate in and for researchers to conduct. One way to meet these challenges is to ensure that local researchers or researchers within the diaspora lead the study. These researchers' contextual expertise will enable better access to study participants and a more nuanced analysis of the data obtained. Researchers who have not only ties within the countries or communities of interest but also ties elsewhere will be best qualified to balance local connections with research inquiry in this area.

GENDER

Background

There is increasing interest in understanding why women choose to join violent extremist groups and the roles they play within these groups,[31] but little concrete data is available. This research project will address this knowledge gap by examining gender-specific narratives and messaging strategies of well-known extremist groups, such as Da'esh.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To what extent does Da'esh employ gender-specific narratives to recruit women from outside Syria and Iraq?

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31 Aryn Baker, "How ISIS Is Recruiting Women from around the World," *Time,* September 6, 2014, http://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/; and Katherine Brown, "Analysis: Why Are Western Women Joining Islamic State?," *BBC News*, October 6, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29507410;

And which narratives lead to successful recruitment? This study will confirm or refute the assumption embedded in these questions—namely, that certain narratives are more impactful with certain types of women (defined by age, class, education, and so on), making them more vulnerable to recruitment efforts.

Data and Methods

This study will define "successful recruitment" as any woman who takes steps to leave her home and travel to territory where Da'esh exercises control. The study will focus solely on women who live outside Da'esh-held territory, because they are more likely to have chosen to join Da'esh rather than to have become affiliated with it for other reasons, such as proximity. Researchers will review original-language recruitment materials to identify narratives that specifically target women. Researchers will thus look at Da'esh Twitter and Facebook accounts and at *Dabiq*, which now has a section targeted for women, and other Da'esh periodicals. Interviews will be conducted with women who were successfully recruited—both those who joined and then defected from Da'esh and those who attempted to travel to Da'esh-held territory but were intercepted en route—and women from the recruited individuals' families and peer groups. A longitudinal study over several years is likely to be the most fruitful.

Challenges and Solutions

It may be difficult to gain access to women who have either defected from Da'esh or were intercepted en route to join it, because they may well be of great interest to national governments. Securing state support for the study, especially financial support, would give government agencies an incentive to work with the research team and to grant access to potential study participants. Even so, it may be difficult to verify interviewees' accounts. A longitudinal study would allow for multiple interviews with the same subjects, heightening the truthfulness of information. Local researchers would be best positioned to conduct this type of study, but security risks for both investigators and subjects suggest a need to conduct interviews confidentially, outside of recruits' communities of origin.

MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

Background

Popular narratives about the relationship between migration and violent extremism focus on how displaced populations either hide violent extremists or are hotbeds of radicalization.[32] What is less discussed and researched is how intergenerational migration patterns and immigration policies of receiving countries influence group or individual decisions to participate in violent social movements.[33] This research project will look at how state policies on the integration of immigrant communities inform the adoption or rejection of violent extremism.[34]

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32 Khalid Koser, "IDPs, Refugees, and Violent Extremism: From Victims to Vectors of Change," *Brookings*, February 20, 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/02/20/idps-refugees-and-violent-extremism-from-victims-to-vectors-of-change/; and Khalid Koser and Amy Cunningham, "Migration and Violent Extremism in Contemporary Europe," *People Move* (blog) (World Bank, Washington, DC), March 16, 2016, http://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/migration-and-violent-extremism-contemporary-europe.

33 Afua Hirsch, "The Root Cause of Extremism among British Muslims Is Alienation," *Guardian*, September 19, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/19/british-muslims-driven-to-extremism-alienated-at-home; and S. Lyons-Padilla et al., "Belonging Nowhere: Marginalization and Radicalization Risk among Muslim Immigrants," *Behavioral Science and Policy* 1 (2015): 1–12, http://gelfand.umd.edu/papers/BSP_2_Lyons_2p%20(002).pdf.

34 Although participants specifically identified Moroccan immigrants in Belgium and the Netherlands as a target population for study, the same approach could be used with other migrant communities elsewhere.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Are there substantive differences in recruitment rates between first- and second-generation migrants? In cases where it can be demonstrated that there are higher rates of successful recruitment into violent extremist groups among specific generations of migrant populations, what, if any, factors attributable to state practice contribute to perceived or lived experiences of social exclusion?

Data and Methods

This study will incorporate both desk research and comparative case studies. A major assumption is that social marginalization is a contributing factor to participation in violent extremist organizations and violent social movements. The desk research will focus on the history and immigration policies of at least two host countries and on the political and economic developments in the country of origin of a single migrant group and demographics of the migrant communities within each host country (e.g., age, age structure, gender, property ownership, levels of education, income, religion, ethnicity). This desk research will explore both government data and media reports. Through interviews, researchers will collect detailed life histories of individuals successfully recruited into extremist groups. Specific points of interest include demographics of the first wave of migrants to the host country; historical events that triggered migration waves; and events that shaped host country responses to migrants.

Challenges and Solutions

Given the research project's tight focus on the target subjects and country cases, its results may not be generalizable, and the project should be pursued initially as a pilot study, to test its feasibility and efficacy. Language barriers and sensitivities around the immigration status of potential subjects could pose problems. Trust could be built more easily by using local researchers familiar with the migrant group's language and customs. To avoid placing participants at risk for disclosing sensitive information, survey instruments should be developed to include proxy questions, which could allow researchers to collect relevant information without putting participants at risk.

ANNEX B: PRIORITY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Survey 2 included the following research questions for consideration. These questions were collated from Survey 1 responses and developed during both focus group workshops.

STRUCTURAL-LEVEL DRIVERS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: PUSH FACTORS

1. How do the provision of essential services and perceptions of government legitimacy collectively inform support for or rejection of violent extremism?

2. How does the level of social/cultural/religious/etc. integration within a community inform the community's support for or rejection of violent extremism? How do we understand and measure cultural/social/religious/etc. integration?

3. How do the state security structure and its practices impact community support for, participation in, and defection from extremist violence against civilians and civilian institutions?

4. Is there a relationship between violent extremism and the degree and effectiveness of control by the state over religious educational, charitable, cultural, and civil society organizations?

5. How do policies within prisons—for example, population management and segregation—and factors within communities to which former inmates return impact recidivism rates of violent extremists?

6. How do violent political groups shape the moral and political discourse around governance, security, justice, and legitimacy at the national and subnational levels?

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL DRIVERS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: PULL FACTORS

7. Why do some successfully recruited individuals become violent and others do not? What does nonviolent support of violent extremism by recruited individuals look like?

8. Why do women join violent extremist organizations, and what roles do women play in those organizations?

9. To what extent do violent extremist organizations employ gender-specific narratives to recruit women and men, and which of those narratives have the greatest effect on successful recruitment for each gender?

10. How do intergenerational narratives of geopolitical injustice (such as state occupation, invasion, war, and atrocities) inform an individual's support of, participation in, defection from, or rejection of violent extremist organizations?

11. Are there joint effects between a violent extremist organization's structure and commitment to violence on recruitment?

12. What conditions within host countries or communities influence—either positively or negatively—the susceptibility of migrant, refugee, and displaced populations to recruitment efforts by violent extremist organizations?

FACILITATORS OF RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

13. How and under what conditions does nonviolent collective action address social injustices and structural violence, which can lead to violent extremism, and create space for alternatives to violent extremism?

14. What conditions, factors, or qualities enable communities to resist and/or counter violent extremist organizations' influence and/or actions?

15. What conditions, factors, or qualities enable women to resist and/or counter violent extremist organizations' influence and/or actions within their families and communities?

16. What role does the law play in addressing political violence and violent extremism?

17. What avenues of engagement, communication, and/or negotiation exist between communities affected by violent extremism and violent extremist organizations or the state? If any, how do those channels of engagement impact communities' ability to negotiate with the state or the group for things such as access to public goods and services, security, and mobility?

INTERVENTIONS AND EVALUATION

18. What lessons can be learned from social marketing campaigns utilized by health agencies to produce meaningful behavior change interventions for those who support violent extremist organizations?

19. What lessons can be learned from past successful reintegration efforts of individuals formerly associated with violent groups or organizations? And in other cases, what has gone wrong in the past?

20. How can external entities support community-driven efforts to resist and counter violent extremist organizations' recruitment efforts? What are the potential dangers associated with outside support for grassroots programming?

21. What dependent variable(s) should be used to assess the success of countering violent extremism efforts, and what indicators accurately capture and define the dependent variable(s)?

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