RESEARCHING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Considerations, Reflections, and Perspectives

Edited by

Kateira Aryaeinejad
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Emma Heywood
Jacob Udo-Udo Jacob

RESOLVE /
NETWORK

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Acknowledgments

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Foreword

Dr. Joseph Sany[1]

> " *Further efforts should be placed on conceptualizing frameworks and methods that are supportive and cognizant of the benefits of a broader inclusion of local expertise and perspective while mitigating the potential risks and biases.* "

Preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism has become a significant aspect of national security strategies worldwide. Given the complexity and the protractedness of terrorism and violent extremism, there is a growing expectation from peacebuilders and policymakers for a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena. Researchers in these fields of study feel the pressure and responsibility to facilitate the understanding and documentation of the various aspects of these phenomena as thoroughly as possible to help governments, organizations, and individuals protect themselves and society. Therefore, there is a pressing need for innovative and creative research methodologies that help us learn and acquire a deeper understanding of terrorism and violent extremism more than just prove a set of hypotheses.

The growth of research on preventing and countering violent extremism has rendered this edited volume a timely and crucial tool for institutions working on preventing and resolving violent conflicts. The volume explores innovative and practical research design, methods, and data considerations in chapters that also provide insight on engaging with diverse contexts and actors. The spectrum of research methods presented raise several themes that transcend disciplinary approaches and provide the basis for a more sophisticated, prosperous, and nuanced understanding of violent extremism and terrorism. As such, this volume is important for those wishing to engage in research on terrorism and violent extremism

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1   *Dr. Joseph Sany is the vice president of the U.S. Institute of Peace's Africa Center. Dr. Sany has been working at the forefront of peacebuilding with civil society, governments, businesses, and international organizations in Africa for over 20 years and holds a doctorate in public policy and a master's in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University.*

or to improve their understanding of how such research can contribute to efforts aimed at eroding the motivations and means of violent extremist actors.

The editors of and authors featured in this volume have gone above and beyond to ensure that this book serves as a comprehensive introduction and reference guide to the modern research methodologies used to understand and eventually inform the design and implementation of effective policies and strategies to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism. With chapters written by esteemed researchers in this field, the collection of contributions in the volume provides invaluable information through sections focused on data, various innovative and creative research methods, and research processes and relationships.

In its section on data, this volume explores how different types of information can be collected, analyzed, and ultimately leveraged to create evidence-based policies, strategies, and interventions to address violent extremism locally and globally, tailored to different pressing priorities and concerns. On methods, this volume contains insights on traditional and innovative approaches to conducing research and assessments and analyzing information derived from them to produce actionable and nuanced findings on violent extremism with consideration for the ethical factors inherent in doing so. On relationships and processes, the different chapters in the final section and throughout the volume provide a rich kaleidoscope of perspectives and serve as an accessible tool for approaching and navigating the processes; stakeholders; and, at times, competing priorities involved in understanding and researching violent extremist risk, dynamics, and impact.

What is more, drawing on reflections from studies conducted in different regions of the world and employing various research methodologies, the chapters within this volume provide reflections and considerations on engaging with both actors who have experienced violent extremism as well as understanding the worldviews and motivations behind those who have mobilized to violence. Due to the different nature of scenarios in different parts of the world, the volume explores these distinctions and, in doing so, acknowledges that there needs to be more than just a one-size-fits-all resolution to violent extremism—policies must be tailored to fit the context and local experience to responsibly prevent and counter violent extremism.

Learning from the past experiences of researchers, which this volume does, is crucial for both researchers and policymakers. This compilation of collective reflections on the authors' experiences, the challenges of data collection, choosing research and analysis methods, managing and building research relationships, and facing ethical dilemmas provides much needed insight into the decisions, caveats, processes, and relationships that ultimately shape research findings. As such, the compilation of chapters within this volume is also immensely helpful for policymakers using research to make programmatic decisions.

However, the volume is far from an exhaustive repertoire of research methodologies; instead, it also challenges the reader to be innovative and explore new questions and potential gaps in research. The notion of localization is just one of the many gaps and questions this volume, without diving deeply into, presses the reader to explore and contribute to enriching the ongoing quest to develop strategies and methodologies that facilitate a meaningful understanding of terrorism and violent extremism for effective prevention and mitigation strategies. Engaging with and incorporating local perspectives, expertise, and experiences in research processes is discussed in section three of the volume, wherein the chapters raise important questions about who is best placed to conduct such research. Local academics and researchers may have an advantage as they will likely have significant familiarity with an area, allowing them to acquire the necessary contextual legitimacy and insight.

Still, further questions remain regarding the conceptualization of localization and its relevance to research methodologies. Involving local experts and communities in the research process has been found to provide valuable insight, as those with insider knowledge can provide a more in-depth look within specific contexts and offer perspectives that outsiders may overlook. Additionally, involving local communities can help to build trust with those potentially affected by terrorism and violent extremism. Still, localization of research is not exempt from risks and dilemmas—including the potential for bias and reluctance from local experts and communities and limitations in resources and capacity. Further efforts should be placed on conceptualizing frameworks and methods that are supportive and cognizant of the benefits of a broader inclusion of local expertise and perspective while mitigating the potential risks and biases.

From my own perspective, this volume is a worthy addition to the existing literature. While it is understood that extremist movements, in most cases, are born out of conflict and instability, these groups also have been known to target vulnerable groups of people within their communities to use them to carry out their motives. Understanding that violent extremism is a significant threat to peace, institutions like my own U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) work towards preventing and countering it in partnership with different stakeholders and by seeking to understand the fundamental causes of violent conflict and through providing training and resources to policymakers and practitioners to better equip them to prevent and resolve conflict in their communities. This volume contributes to these efforts and will undoubtably contribute to those of others seeking to address the complexity of violent extremism, save the lives of those affected by it, and continue to stem its rise. Its breadth and coverage provide expansive insights and ideas for others engaged and trying to make sense of research in this space.

Contents

Introduction

Over the years, violent extremism (VE) has remained a persistent topic of focus and a pressing issue around the globe. From the rise of the so-called Islamic State; the resurgence of ideologically motivated violence; and the evolution of online and offline activities and attacks, VE continues to fuel instability and fragility with an impact on social and economic structures worldwide. While the impact of VE can vary depending on the context, actor, and method, its impact on individual lives and local and international dynamics spans far beyond individual ideologies and attacks and can vary significantly based on context.

Over the years, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have increasingly recognized the importance of employing rigorous research and the findings derived from it to improve the VE policy landscape. At the center of this is the recognition that one-size-fits-all solutions to extremist violence do not exist. Policy and practice must be tailored based on variations in context, experiences, and motivations, which necessitates hyper-contextualized data for more informed and nuanced decision-making.

For example, in the West African Sahel region, where deaths from terrorism have increased substantially over the past decade and a half,[1] the prominence of organized terrorist groups[2] and a complex interaction of social, political, and environmental factors[3] combine to create a flourishing landscape for VE and a difficult environment for countermeasures.

Yet, VE manifests differently in different contexts. In some contexts, violent extremist sentiments may be fueled by legacies of conflicts past, distinct social and environmental stressors, or issues specific to lone individuals that motivate mobilization to and support for

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1   Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, March 2022), https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf.

2   Including, for example, Al-Shabaab, Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), the self-proclaimed Islamic State, and Boko Haram.

3   To include conflict, poverty, food insecurity, youth unemployment, low literacy rates, poor governance, an expanding youth population, and weak statehood. For more on violent extremism and terrorism in Coastal West Africa, see for example: The Contagion of Violent Extremism in West African Coastal States (The NATO Strategic Direction – South Hub and The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, 2022), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42293-doc-20220927_NU_JFCNP_NSD-S_HUB_REPORT_THE_CONTAGION_OF_VIOLENT_EXTREMISM_IN_WEST_AFRICAN_COASTAL_STATES.pdf; Costal West Africa Senior Study Group, *Coastal West Africa Senior Study Group Final Report: Strategic Recommendations for Policies and Programs to Encourage Good Governance, Peace, and Stability* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2022), https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/12/coastal-west-africa-senior-study-group-final-report.

ideologically-motivated violence. Global shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, migration crises, and interstate conflict—which can exacerbate global, regional, and local tensions, impact social structures, and fuel resource insecurity—have only added to complexity surrounding local and global violent extremist trends.

As the nature of VE continues to evolve—both locally and globally—research is essential in our efforts to craft better policy and programming aimed at preventing and addressing it. Research provides information that can help answer some of our most pressing questions about the phenomenon so that we can craft informed and contextually appropriate solutions and avoid potentially negative outcomes. However, while the body of knowledge from research on VE has notably increased and expanded, there is still more to know, learn, and understand, especially given the pace at which global and local dynamics evolve.

While it is beyond the scope of this volume to provide an in-depth overview of the entirety of the body of research on VE, it is safe to say that the process of conducting such research is not without its challenges. Variation in definitions of "violent extremism" and the multidisciplinary nature of the field present opportunities for researchers to borrow from other fields and adopt more nuanced, localized definitions of their subject of study. However, this can make it difficult for researchers to pinpoint a topic of focus and understand, assess, and tease out the inherently complex phenomena. The prioritization of "violent extremism" and "terrorism" in the national security space increases the potential impact of this type of research, while also raising the stakes of and pressure associated with finding definitive answers to address emerging policy priorities. Securitization, politicization, and stigmatization associated with the terms "violent extremism" and "extremism" also increase attention to research conducted in this field and the importance of adopting an accurate, unbiased, and meticulous approach to it. Even experienced researchers can struggle to establish trust and gain access to research participants willing to discuss localized violent extremist dynamics. Just the usage of the terms "violent extremism" and "extremism" can pose specific challenges and potential harms requiring an ethical approach to using those terms to discuss, label, and identify populations, ideas, or individuals appropriately and accurately. Security and safety also pose significant issues to research on VE both online and offline, with important yet, until recently, under addressed and underappreciated implications for the mental and physical well-being of researchers and research participants.

But with challenges come opportunities for growth and improvement. Over the years, the field has most certainly faced many shortcomings, but in doing so, it has provided an opportunity for all of us to learn from them. No longer is research on VE largely focused on one group or ideology. Bit by bit, research on the topic has become more cognizant of the diversity of actors, ideas, and movements engaged in VE and more inclusive and representative of the perspectives and voices of individuals and populations affected by it. Which brings us to this edited volume. Given the challenges associated with the field, the importance of research in informing policy and programmatic decisions within it, and the importance of ethical and accurate approaches to understanding national security issues, using and understanding research on VE goes beyond just reading a research report or journal article. Instead, one must also understand the processes, data, and decisions behind the research and how they may have impacted the findings.

Why an edited volume on researching violent extremism?

In 2018, the RESOLVE Network hosted a regional research priorities working group in Dakar, Senegal. The working group convened colleagues focused on research, policy, and practice to collaboratively scope out areas where further research on VE in the North Africa Sahel, specifically, was needed. Out of that group, a key question emerged—what actually are the best practices in conducting research on violent extremism?[4]

This edited volume is borne out of a series of similar conversations and questions we have had over the years related to research on VE and the challenges inherent within it. This volume does not focus on studying research best practices—although we hope others continue to do so. Instead, we wanted to create a platform—one that existed outside of coffee break chats during research conferences, discussions within working groups or capacity building exercises, or the methodology and caveat sections of research reports—in which researchers could share their experiences, reflections, perspectives, and lingering questions related to research on violent extremism with others working in the field. Indeed, our goal was to provide a space where individuals learning about, carrying out, or using

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4   RESOLVE Network. *Charting Violent Extremism Research Priorities in North Africa and the Sahel 2018.* Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021. https://doi.org/10.37805/rp2021.1.lcb.

research on violent extremism could gain further insight and expand their own considerations based on the reflections of researchers with whom they might not otherwise have an opportunity to interact.[5]

And so, in 2019, we released a call for chapters inviting researchers and their counterparts working on VE to share their stories related to conducting research, the choices they made, and their experiences and lessons learned with others who are thinking through some of the same challenges and opportunities. Throughout the years, we reached out to, and were approached by, additional researchers interested in contributing to this volume. While we could not include every submission we received, we wholeheartedly thank all of those who contributed their insights and time, and hope to continue to work together to further knowledge in this field.

The chapters[6] compiled within this edited volume provide unique insight and honest, collective reflection on the authors' experiences with research on violent extremism, including the challenges of data collection, choosing research and analysis methods, and managing and building research relationships. These reflections are helpful for those conducting research, those using research to make policy and programmatic decisions, and those seeking to better understand research findings. The chapters not only walk readers through some of the perspectives, insights, methods, and thought processes behind research in this field, they also provide important food for thought for those seeking to undertake or improve their own research on violent extremism and for those using research findings to inform their own policy or programmatic decisions.

We wanted to allow the authors to share their own experiences and insights, and, therefore, did not place specific parameters around how each individual chapter discussed challenges or opportunities in the field. As such, the structure for this volume is not necessarily reflective of all the valuable insights inherent within each chapter. Instead, the volume is organized based on key elements of research production, analysis, and delivery to guide readers through each key topic. Still, we do encourage readers to explore each chapter in

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5   The original purpose of the edited volume was to provide an open and accessible resource for individuals participating in RESOLVE Network capacity building exercises on researching violent extremism.

6   Each chapter was also published as a standalone piece, available on the RESOLVE Network's website (www.resolvenet.org).

depth. To reiterate, this volume neither compiles nor involves rigorous study of best practices in research processes, although some chapters do discuss them. As such, it does not necessarily serve as a guide for how to conduct research in and of itself. What the volume does provide, however, is an ungated, digestible, and reflective compilation of work useful for those grappling with how to conduct and make sense of research on violent extremism and related issues.

A note on structure

The volume opens with a chapter providing an overview of the state of research on violent extremism and is structured around three important facets: understanding data, insights on methodological and analytical approaches and processes, and reflections on research processes, localization, and relationships. To improve readability and utilization of the volume, resources and guides are included throughout that distill relevant information for particular audiences regarding the content of the volume and various sections within it. A full overview of the structure is included below:

- **Guides for researchers and for non-researchers (policymakers and practitioners) reading this volume.** This edited volume includes brief guides for different reader audiences. The guides provide important insights into how the chapters included in this volume may be useful to individuals from each of these backgrounds and provide readers with important aspects to keep in mind based on their own engagement with research on violent extremism as they go through the volume.

- **Section 1:** The volume opens with a chapter providing an overview of the "state of play" in research on violent extremism, with important reflections on how the field has evolved and potential challenges within it.

- **Section 2 (including a section overview):** Moving to data, section two includes chapters that discuss common issues associated with data on violent extremism and approaches used to account for and address them.

- **Section 3 (including a section overview):** Following discussion of data, section three includes chapters with useful insights on different methodological approaches used in research on violent extremism, including reflections on their benefits and challenges.

- **Section 4 (including a section overview):** This section brings together chapters with reflections on both research processes and relationships, focused on reflections on research and research relationships, both within communities in which research is conducted and with those funding or using research findings. Also discussed in this section is the important, yet too often overlooked, role of trauma in research on violent extremism – impacting both local communities and the researchers themselves.

- **Regional Annexes:** Lastly, the volume includes two annexes highlighting chapters within other sections that specifically focus on research on violent extremism in the Western Balkans and in Southeast Asia. These chapters provide contextual insights for researchers engaged in efforts to understand, address, and utilize research on violent extremism in those two regions and were prioritized based on RESOLVE projects in both regions.[7] While these annexes are, by design, limited, it is hoped that they will inspire others to expand upon them and build out additional regionally focused reflections on research of their own.

Caveats and areas for further consideration

This edited volume is meant to provoke a conversation, one that is not limited to any certain point in time, area of the world, or specific thematic area of focus. To be sure, the chapters in this volume were written at distinct periods of time throughout 2019-2022. While they are necessarily timebound, the insights within them contain important lessons and perspectives to this day. There is still much work to be done in teasing out best practices in research in this field. Our hope is that this edited volume will provide information and spark further questions useful to others exploring various aspects of the research process and best practices within it to improve research methods, relationships, reporting, and quality.

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7   For more on these projects, please visit www.resolvenet.org/projects

That being said, notably missing from this volume are reflections and insights from research on violent extremism on the continent of Africa and the Middle East. Greater focus could also be placed on better understanding how factors like gender affect research processes and on the various safety and security issues that may impact not only researchers, but research participants. Further focus could also be placed on examining dynamics related to a broader ideological spectrum of VE—including far-left, far-right, and anti-government motivated violent extremism—and the different implications and considerations inherent in their research. How different methods may compare or be best suited to particular research environments is an additional area where further efforts should be placed.

With a focus on learning, understanding, and sharing perspectives and experiences, we look forward to continuing collaborative efforts to improve our understanding of violent extremism and mechanisms to address it together. We encourage others to continue this work, build off this work, seek additional work in this space, and incorporate collective learning and knowledge in their ongoing efforts to improve the quality and honest conversations around research, policy, and practice aimed at better understanding and addressing violent extremism around the world.

With many thanks and much reflection, thank you for reading.

Guides for Readers.

What's in this edited volume for you?

Guides for Readers

Understanding research on violent extremism can be complex. To help navigate this volume, and the different information housed within it, this section houses guides with suggestions for researchers and for non-researchers (including policymakers and practitioners) based on their relationship to research processes, findings, and efforts to address violent extremism. These guides address the following:

- Why the information in this volume may be useful to you and others in your field of work;

- Questions to consider while reading; and

- Brief overviews of the relevance of different sections within this volume based on your relationship with research.

Guide for researchers

WHAT'S IN THIS VOLUME FOR YOU?

Researchers reading this edited volume will find a number of considerations, reflections, and questions that may inform their own approaches to research on violent extremism and provide a helpful resource in navigating some of the challenges inherent within it. Although this volume is not a guide on best practices in research, or a step-by-step guide on how to conduct research, the chapters within it provide important areas for consideration for researchers conducting this type of work, including the following:

Perspectives on the field of study and definitional ambiguity.
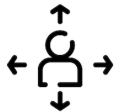
Insight on different opportunities to further use, caveat, and explore data in your research on violent extremism.

In depth descriptions of how others have used different methods to study research questions related to violent extremism and in different contexts.

Self-reflective conversations about common challenges and how others have approached them in research on violent extremism.

Considerations and reflections on working with policymakers and practitioners to improve understanding and efforts to address violent extremism.

Discussions and ideas on how researchers engage with different stakeholders in a variety of communities, including trauma-affected groups.

Important considerations around researcher identity and positionality and how they influence the research process and outcomes.

Researchers may consider keeping the following questions in mind while reading this edited volume:

- *How do I conceive of violent extremism and how does that differ from how others in this volume have approached the phenomenon?*

- *What considerations around research questions and data should I be taking into account during the research process?*

- *What type of data is best suited to my research questions?*

- *How do the data collection methods detailed in these chapters differ from or prove similar to my own?*

- *Do I face similar challenges as the authors of the chapters did? How do my means of dealing with those challenges differ from the reflections of the authors?*

- *To what extent do I consider environments, trauma, gender, and other contextual and individual factors in my research planning and processes?*

- *What impact does researcher positionality have on my work?*

- *What is my experience working with research funders? What challenges has this presented and what questions do I still have about managing researcher-funder relationships?*

- *What should I consider when writing up research findings? What caveats are important to include?*

- *How could the reflections and experiences detailed in these chapters inform my future work?*

Section 1: The state of play

Researchers of VE must understand where the field has been, where it is going, and opportunities and challenges facing research on VE when engaging in studies of the topic. This section chapter provides considerations useful in understanding the evolution of this field and opportunities for growth for researchers within it.

Section 2: Considering data

Researchers tasked with or seeking to answer specific types of research questions related to VE must understand what data is best suited to answering those specific questions. Not all data is created equal and not all data is suitable to provide insights for specific research questions. This section provides insight and reflections for researchers related to understanding the accuracy and appropriateness of data, the importance of properly and transparently reporting on research findings, the limitations of different data sources, and the considerations around ethically storing and handling sensitive data related to violent extremism.

Section 3: Perspectives on methods

Research is ultimately dictated by the methods by which data is collected and the means by which that data is analyzed. As such, beyond selecting a research question or determining which data is best suited to answer that question, researchers of violent extremism must also be well versed in the possible methods by which to obtain data and responsibly analyze it. This is particularly important for policy-focused research on VE, which entails a high degree of accuracy and potential for error. The environments in which data is collected, purpose of the research, and complexity of methods employed necessitate a high degree of awareness, contextualization, and responsibility in accounting for potential methodological and analytical biases and ensuring researcher and research participant safety and security. This section provides important reflections on understanding different methodological and analytical approaches and how they have been or might be used in the study of VE to carry out out high quality and appropriate research and analysis that adhere to ethical principles.

Section 4: Reflections on relationships and processes

Creating research is a collaborative process, involving researchers, research funders or donors, research participants, and the larger social structures and systems in which discourse and action related to VE take place. Understanding and appropriately navigating the various relationships within this ecosystem while ensuring transparency, ethics, and rigor in methods and analysis is not always an easy task. Researchers should be cognizant of the interconnected spaces in which they interact, be it with research funders, local communities, or in VE environments—both in terms of the researcher's own impact in these spaces and the impact these spaces can have on the researcher themselves. This section provides reflections on various experiences navigating these relationships before, during, and well after research on VE takes place.

Regional annexes

Context matters in research on VE. The regional annexes provided in this edited volume, while not exhaustive, highlight chapters within other sections of this volume specific to conducting VE research in Southeast Asia and the Western Balkans. Researchers interested in exploring experiences from those regions, and contextual considerations, may benefit from visiting these regional annexes.

Guide for non-researchers, policymakers, and practitioners

WHAT'S IN THIS VOLUME FOR YOU?

Those from policy or practice backgrounds reading this volume should not feel detered by the research focus. Rather, those from non-research backgrounds and those seeking to use research to inform policy and practiceon VE will find information useful in better understanding research data, methods, processes, partnerships, and their implications. Important areas for consideration for non-researchers, practitioners, and policymakers reading this edited volume include the following:

Insight on research basics, methods, processes, and decisions (and their implications) useful in better understanding research and findings
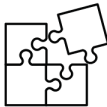
Perspectives on common research limitations and challenges and their impact on research and research findings.

Reflections on funder and researcher relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

Input on understanding data - different types, utility in answering specific questions, and limitations with implications for how we understand research findings.

Considerations based on research gaps and potential further research efforts that may inform policy and practice priorities.

Those from the policy and practice space or from outside of research may consider keeping the following questions in mind while reading this edited volume:

- *How do I currently use research in my own work?*

- *What is my relationship to the research process (consumer, funder, adjacent, etc.)?*

- *What questions about violent extremism am I looking to answer? How can the information in this guide help me better identify where and how research on violent extremism is best situated to help answer those questions?*

- *How do I currently work with researchers? How can I improve collaborative work with them?*

- *What elements should I take into consideration when commissioning research?*

- *What caveats should I keep in mind when reviewing or reading research to inform policy and practice decisions?*

- *How do research findings impact policy and program decisions and vice versa?*

- *At what stage in the policy/program lifecycle are different kinds of research most appropriate/ needed?*

- *What contextual considerations should I keep in mind when funding research? How might these impact the quality and feasibility of research processes and findings derived from them?*

Section 1: The state of play

Much like researchers, consumers of research on VE must understand where the field has been, where it is going, and opportunities and challenges facing research on VE when engaging in studies of the topic. This section chapter provides considerations useful in understanding the evolution of this field and its implications for informed and nuanced understandings for research within it and VE trends and environments.

Section 2: Considering data

Non-researchers using or consuming information from studies on VE must be able to assess the suitability of data to answering the stated research questions. Data has many limitations and caveats. In the absence of transparent and honest reporting, data can be misinterpreted, misleading, or inadvertently mischaracterized. Understanding the differences between types of data will aid in more critical and accurate reading of research findings and their implications. This section provides insight on how to understand data related to VE and its validity, what that means for understanding VE more broadly, and what data can actually tell us to inform policy and programming aimed at addressing VE.

Section 3: Perspectives on methods

Not all who utilize or consume research on VE are trained in understanding the intricacies of research methods and analytical techniques. Still, the means by which data is collected and assessed to produce research findings—particularly on sensitive and complex topics such as VE—can have implications on the accuracy, utility, and implications of research findings. In lieu of in-depth methodological and analytical training, the insights in this section provide basic and digestible information useful for those funding, using, or reading research on VE. The chapters in this section provide a starting point by which to make sense of how different methods and means of analysis work in practice and how they may impact research results for more critical and informed reading and decision making.

Section 4: Reflections on relationships and processes

Much like researchers themselves, non-researchers (including policymakers, practitioners, donors/funders, and consumers of research) can all have an impact, albeit varied, on research processes and findings. Unequal power dynamics exist in research of any sort, including in research on VE given its heightened security focus and sensitivity. Research agendas are not always driven by the researchers themselves, nor the communities most impacted by VE. This section provides reflections useful in understanding these relationships and the power dynamics within them useful in making sense of how these dynamics may shape research processes and resultant findings and identify opportunities to contribute to a more collaborative and accountable field of practice.

Regional annexes

Context matters in research on VE. The regional annexes provided in this edited volume, while not exhaustive, highlight chapters within other sections of this volume specific to conducting VE research in Southeast Asia and the Western Balkans. Non-researchers interested in exploring research experiences from those regions, and contextual considerations, may benefit from visiting these regional annexes.

Section 1.

The State of Play

Section 1 | GUIDE FOR READERS

What's in this section for you?

For researchers:

Researchers of VE must understand where the field has been, where it is going, and opportunities and challenges facing research on VE when engaging in studies of the topic. The chapter in this opening section provides researchers with considerations useful in understanding the evolution of this field and opportunities for growth within it.

For non-researchers, policymakers, & practitioners:

This opening section provides considerations useful for non-researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to better understand the evolution of research on violent extremism. The chapter in this section also provides insight on implications for deriving nuanced understandings of research to better understand VE trends and environments.

Researching Violent Extremism
The State of Play

J.M. Berger[1]

The study of violent extremism is entering a new phase, with shifts in academic focus and policy direction, as well as a host of new and continuing practical and ethical challenges. This chapter will present an overview of the challenges ahead and discuss some strategies for improving the state of research.

Introduction

The field of terrorism studies has vastly expanded over the last two decades. As an illustrative example, the term "terrorism" has been mentioned in an average of more than 60,000 Google Scholar results per year since 2010 alone, including academic publications and cited works. While Google Scholar is an admittedly imprecise tool, the index provides some insights on relative trends in research on terrorism.

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[1] *Berger is a research fellow with VOX-Pol and a PhD candidate at Swansea University's School of Law, where he studies extremist ideologies. He is the author of four books, including Extremism (2018, MIT Press).*

While almost 5,000 publications indexed on Google Scholar address, to a greater or lesser extent, the question of "root causes of terrorism, at the beginning of this marathon of output, which started soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, only a fractional number of indexed publications addressed "extremism." Given the nature of terrorist movements, however, this should be no great mystery. The root cause of terrorism is extremism.

In most real-world examples, and certainly in the most consequential cases with which the literature is concerned, terrorism is an activity carried out almost exclusively by extremists, in the service of extremist ideologies. If an extremist movement can do more than terrorism – for example, control a state's political apparatus, wage war, or commit genocide – it does so. If it cannot muster the resources or agree on a determination to carry out terrorism, it does less.

Figure 1: Google Scholar Results per Year[2]
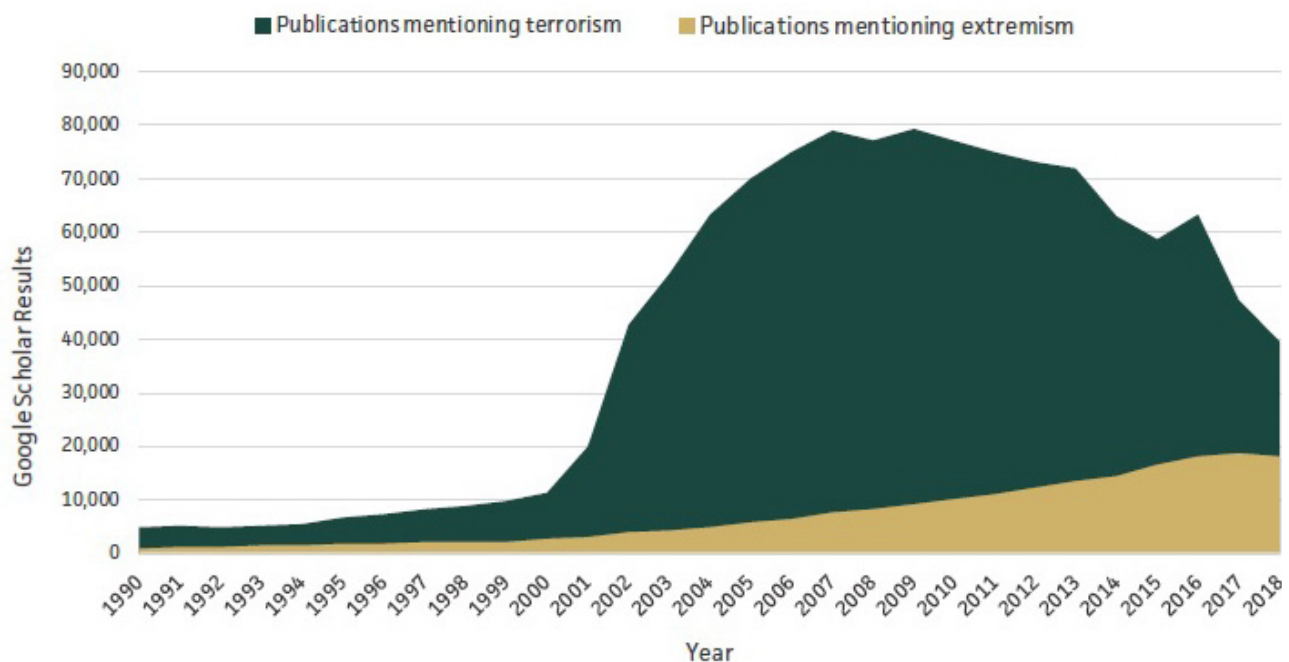
2   Google Scholar, accessed May 30, 2019.

The more pertinent question for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike, therefore, is "what causes extremism?" Some might argue this is a distinction without a difference, but terrorism and extremism are absolutely not synonymous. Terrorism is just one tactic used by extremists; neither the deadliest nor the most disruptive. Studying terrorists to understand extremism is like studying baseball to understand sports. You can develop many useful insights, but not a complete picture.

Fortunately, the field is slowly starting to shift. After peaking in 2009, the number of publications mentioning terrorism began to decline, while the number of publications mentioning extremism has slowly but steadily increased. In significant part this is attributable to a shift in public policy, from a strict counterterrorism focus to programs aiming to counter or prevent violent extremism. Real-world events also played a role—the rise of the Islamic State and a revitalized global white nationalist scene, among other things, have cast a spotlight on extremist activities other than terrorism.

Despite this progress, much work remains. As academics and policy makers, we are in the earliest days of establishing extremism as a credible, cohesive field of study. This chapter will look at the major challenges ahead and discuss some future avenues of study. The remainder of this volume will explore a number of pragmatic approaches to various important research questions in the field, with a focus on applications to countering and preventing violent extremism.

Definitional issues: Abuse and misinterpretation

The first challenge facing scholars of extremism is the issue of definitions, a challenge familiar to anyone who has worked on terrorism. Despite the prodigious output noted above, the field of terrorism studies has not reached hard consensus on a definition of terrorism, although a soft consensus has generally emerged around key issues—including the public nature of the act and the need for an expressly political or ideological motivation. This definitional issue is much deeper with regard to "extremism," where even soft consensus is elusive. Compared to "terrorist", the "extremist" label is vaguer and more politically charged, and much more subject to abuse.

Many definitions of extremism are predicated on the idea that extremists are situated on the fringes of society and enjoy little mainstream support, parameters which are ill-equipped for scenarios in which extremist movements enjoy widespread popular support or political power. This problem extends around the globe, from European countries with extremist parties seated in parliaments, to the military-led violence perpetrated against Rohingya (deemed genocide by the U.S. House of Representatives and a United Nations human rights envoy[3]) and other ethnic and religious populations in Myanmar, a rising right-wing movement in India, and the persistent presence of jihadist and extremist Islamist political movements and insurgencies in the Middle East and Africa. Extremism manifests in many different places and takes different forms depending on the capabilities of extremist actors at any given point in history. Our current definitions do not encompass the entirety of the problem. To understand extremism, scholars require an empirical category that recognizes that social movements can evolve in and out of extremism over time.[4]

Abuse of the term "extremist" by those who hold power is another (and related) consequence of the definitional failure, and one of the most important. Russian law defines extremism in part as opposition to the state, and China has used extremism as a pretext to create detention camps for Uyghur Muslims.[5] While definitional abuse may be less overtly consequential in liberal democracies, it still results in the imbalanced application of security measures and social engineering against populations based on their proximity to the reins of political power.[6] The semantic discussion is directly tied to how security policies are applied in the real world; the extremist label empowers governments to take extraordinary action against designated groups and movements. This can and does result in human rights abuses.

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3   "US House Designates Myanmar Campaign Against Rohingya Minority 'Genocide,'" *Voice of America*, December 13, 2018, https://www. voanews.com/usa/us-house-designates-myanmar-campaign-against-rohingya-minority-genocide; "Prosecute Myanmar Army Chief for Rohingya 'Genocide': UN Envoy," *Al Jazeera*, January 25, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/prosecute-myanmar-army-chief-rohingya-genocide-envoy-190125112535665.html.

4   James Griffiths, "Elections in EU and India Tilt the World's Largest Democracies Towards Populism," *CNN*, May 28, 2019, https://www. cnn.com/2019/05/27/india/european-union-india-populism-intl/index.html.

5   J. Brian Gross, "Russia's War on Political and Religious Extremism: An Appraisal of the Law On Counteracting Extremist Activity," *BYU Law Review* (2003): 717; Rob Schmitz, "Reporter's Notebook: Uighurs Held For 'Extremist Thoughts' They Didn't Know They Had," *NPR,* May 7, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/05/07/720608802/reporters-notebook-uighurs-held-for-extremist-thoughts-they-didnt-know-they-had.

6   Joe Davidson, "Domestic Terrorism Story Renews Fears Over Trump's Coddling of White Nationalists," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/05/domestic-terrorism-story-renews-fears-over-trumps-coddling-white-nationalists/?utm_term=.af2591b57411.

Another common definitional issue revolves around stipulations that extremism must include the use of violence. Certainly, violent extremism is a particularly difficult problem and worthy of dedicated study (as in this volume), and limiting policies to violent extremism is an easy way to constrain some abuses of the broader extremist label. But within the very term "violent extremism" is the implicit assumption that not all extremists are violent. Extremist social movements can oscillate between violent and non-violent phases. In order to understand extremism as a field of study, the term and its conceptualization must also be able to travel with a movement between its violent and nonviolent phases, while seeking to minimize the prospect of abuse by those who hold power.

While other issues may arise in the pursuit of academic and empirical rigor on the topic, the susceptibility of the term to political abuse and the risk of category errors[7] in academic study are the most important. These issues are more profound than the definitional ambiguity around terrorism, because the range of potential errors and misapplications is much wider. The author has addressed himself to the definition problem at some length and will continue to do so,[8] but solving the categorical challenge will require a much broader discussion and movement toward an eventual consensus among scholars in the field.

This is not a secondary issue, an ivory-tower indulgence, or a technicality. It is a critical problem with potentially disastrous real-world consequences. If you are skeptical about that assertion, ask the Uyghurs or the Rohingya what they think. They are suffering the direct and brutal consequences of our failure to clearly delineate an objective category.

Multidisciplinary issues: Silos and balkanization

Much like the field of terrorism studies and the search for "root causes," the study of extremism is multidisciplinary, which has resulted in some degree of Balkanization in research. Extremism can be approached from a number of perspectives, including political science, sociology, individual psychology, and social psychology—interrelated disciplines to be certain, but with distinct methodologies and bodies of literature. One challenge in studying

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7   Category errors are the conflation of unlike things into a single category, for instance studying fruit to draw conclusions about carrots.

8   J.M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

extremism is the reconciliation of individual and social dynamics—why groups radicalize versus why people radicalize, and how the group dynamics reflect and shape individual psychology.

In addition to these basic questions and the disciplines with which they are associated, a variety of other fields come into play when evaluating extremist activity, such as the study of war and conflict, the study of propaganda and persuasion, and social media research and analysis. The last category has received a significant amount of attention due to the large-scale and consequential adoption of social media by various extremist movements and social groupings, such as IS and the alt-right, and the relative ease of creating and quantifying social media datasets compared to other forms of field work. Because this sub-field is relatively young, the interdisciplinary nature of the work is especially challenging, with contributions to the literature sometimes coming from people with backgrounds in hard sciences (such as computer scientists, data scientists and even physicists) rather than the social sciences.[9]

Some of this material would clearly benefit from a more holistic approach and subject-matter expertise on the specific movements being studied. Likewise, some research by social scientists and terrorism experts would also benefit from a better understanding of online dynamics and social network analysis. Overall, interdisciplinary collaboration is an important route to obtaining better and more rigorous outcomes. Researchers should consider seeking input from experts in specialties different from their own, especially social media researchers who specialize in metrics and network analysis but may lack substantial subject-matter expertise on the movement being examined.

Ethical challenges: Designations, biases, and disclosures

Complicated ethical issues swirl around the question of how and whether to label a movement or individual as extremist.

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9   For example: Neil F. Johnson, et al., "New Online Ecology of Adversarial Aggregates: ISIS and Beyond," *Science* 352, no. 6292 (2016): 1459-63.

With respect to movements, the definitional issues discussed in the preceding section are responsible for most of these complications. For example, when extremism is associated with unpopularity or lack of political power, dominant sociopolitical actors can use the label to stifle or even prosecute dissent. These issues are not likely to be resolved until a consensus on definition is reached, and of course, an academic consensus will not entirely prevent political actors from abusing the term.

A related but distinct issue pertains to the identification of individuals as extremists, or as being popular or influential among extremists. This problem is significant in social media research, although it is not confined to that realm. Online, the identification of individuals associated with extremist movements has obvious value for replication of social media studies and more broadly for a public understanding of the drivers of extremism—the individuals who are influential or popular within an extremist network shed light on many aspects of a movement, including its key issues and important leaders. Offline, such judgments may be considered very subjective, despite the best efforts of researchers to establish clear evidence and criteria (and not all experts and researchers put forth their best efforts). To cite just one example, consider the controversy over the Southern Poverty Law Center's identification of Maajid Nawaz, the founding chairman of Quilliam, as an anti-Muslim extremist.[10]

Yet even social media analytical approaches are almost always inferential to a greater or lesser degree, sifting large datasets to identify important users based on a **probability** of extremist involvement rather than a **certainty**. As such, most useful analytical approaches will inevitably identify some accounts that may be significant but are not indisputably extremist in nature, and some that are simply noise. For a simple example, a list of users following IS propaganda accounts online is certain to identify academic and private researchers. Most amelioratory approaches will only reduce the presence of such users; virtually no approach can fully eliminate them.

To take a more significant problem, the analysis of a white nationalist network might identify accounts associated with certain news outlets as "influential" regardless of whether they openly endorse extremism. This may include people who carefully parse their language

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10   Richard Cohen, "SPLC Statement Regarding Maajid Nawaz and the Quilliam Foundation," Southern Poverty Law Center, June 18, 2018, https://www.splcenter.org/news/2018/06/18/splc-statement-regarding-maajid-nawaz-and-quilliam-foundation.

and publicly expressed views and who may object, plausibly or not,[11] to being identified as influential among extremists of a certain type. Finally, social media network analysis may identify accounts based on engagement with a user who has been targeted for harassment, rather than partaking of extremist or extremist-adjacent views.

While many academics can be trusted to navigate and understand such nuances, there are more substantial obstacles in how such research translates into popular media, news reports and opinion articles, particularly with respect to individuals who are popular among extremists but who eschew an explicit association.

For instance, scholars and researchers (including this author of this chapter) might encounter obstacles when attempting to review published research pertaining to how some U.S. and international extremists have explicitly supported U.S. President Donald Trump.[12] While this phenomenon is well-known to subject-matter experts studying white nationalism, it may be difficult for researchers to discuss their findings objectively without being accused of a partisan motivation. News coverage of such research may be sensationalized or politicized, omitting nuance or misrepresenting facts. This problem is greatly exacerbated when analysis identifies figures who are less well-known to the public and may face more serious negative consequences (such as loss of employment or social media platform) if they are associated with extremism by researchers.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to these issues, especially given that legal guidelines surrounding libel and slander may vary widely from one jurisdiction to the next, depending on the location of both the researchers and the named individuals. The consequences of identifying private individuals with extremist movements, especially when they have not explicitly adopted an extremist viewpoint, can be significant, whether that association is derived from social media or other sources. The field would benefit from a much more

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11   Ari Feldman, "Ben Shapiro Helped Radicalize A Nazi Sympathizer Who Defaced Synagogue, The Man's Lawyer Says," *The Forward*, May 28, 2019, https://forward.com/fast-forward/425012/ben-shapiro-nazi-sympathizer-synagogue-swastika/.

12   Glenn Kessler, "Fact Checker: Donald Trump and David Duke: For the Record," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2016; Nick Robins-Early, "How Far-Right Extremists Abroad Have Adopted Trump's Symbols As Their Own," *Huffington Post*, April 6, 2019; J. M. Berger, "The Alt-Right Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Audience for Alt-Right Content on Twitter," *VOX-Pol*, October 15, 2018, https://www.voxpol.eu/new-research-report-the-alt-right-twitter-census-by-j-m-berger/.

extensive, focused discussion of these issues and clear consensus-driven guidelines about to how to handle such situations going forward.

Finally, the study of extremism contains some inherent conflicts with respect to the political and religious orientations of researchers and the societies they inhabit, which are little discussed in the field. In order to study extremism at all, researchers and scholars must first identify movements and individuals as extremist or not. As alluded to previously, this can have many consequences for those so labelled, and a failure to properly identify a movement that is extremist in nature can give license to those who are exempted. Researchers are largely responsible for policing their own potential biases with respect to these questions.

The consequences of a formal or informal extremist designation range from small scales (stigma within certain social circles) to large (law enforcement scrutiny and even arrest). One place where this challenge is particularly visible is on social media, where a verdict of extremism can lead to deplatforming and other material consequences. Social media companies are currently struggling to establish baseline guidance for when to remove or limit the reach of users believed to be associated with extremism. These decisions are often headline-driven, and studies that produce significant mass media coverage almost certainly sway the process, which can be problematic if academic nuances are lost in the transition to front pages.

This leads to another widespread ethical challenge: sorting out the influence of funding sources on research priorities. This problem is both individual and institutional. On the individual level, many researchers (including myself) work closely with social media companies on a paid or unpaid basis to research issues related to content moderation. In addition to such consulting work, many studies of extremist activity online are funded by social media companies directly or through intermediaries. Social media companies may also choose to provide selected researchers with data that is not available to the general public, another form of influence on research topics.

This problem is not new, although its locus has shifted. Since September 11, governments have frequently funded terrorism studies. These are typically disclosed, but they neverthe-

less shape research agendas. Governments also hire individuals (including myself) as trainers, speakers, researchers, and consultants on terrorism and extremism, relationships that are not always disclosable.

Some effort should be made within the academy to examine how these funding streams allow funders to set the agenda with respect to both the type and the volume of research conducted, the potential effect on research outcomes, and institutional decision-making processes with respect to how research is funded. Social media companies and government agencies should also modify their use of non-disclosure agreements whenever possible in order to allow consultants to more fully disclose potential conflicts of interest. A substantial amount of work across the entirety of the field will be required to properly assess these issues. In the meantime, researchers should attempt to build more transparent funding portfolios for themselves, when practical, and consciously interrogate themselves about how their output is shaped by funding sources. This includes questioning whether potentially important or fruitful areas of research are being neglected due to a lack of funding opportunities—which in some cases may be caused by funders' desire to avoid certain topics.

Practical challenges: Safety and access

In addition to the practical issues discussed in the preceding sections, a number of additional challenges can be seen on the horizon.

Some of these, such as safety issues during field research, are not entirely new but may be intensified by evolving tactics and political situations. These include the increasing adoption of extremist practices such as execution of hostages and territorial control, as well as a continued hostile worldwide attitude toward journalists, media workers, and other people who publish facts—emanating not just from extremist movements themselves, but sometimes from governments in areas where extremist movements operate.[13]

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13 "Database of Journalists Killed," Committee to Protect Journalists, accessed June 2, 2019, https://cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&sourceOfFire%5B%5D=Government%20Officials&-sourceOfFire%5B%5D=Military%20Officials&sourceOfFire%5B%5D=Paramilitary%20Group&sourceOfFire%5B%5D=Political%20Group&start_year=1992&end_year=2019&group_by=year

To date, jihadist extremists have not systematically targeted researchers for potential violence outside of conflict zones. Indeed, groups such as al Qaeda have often sought to benefit from adversary research.[14] However, such dynamics could easily change, particularly with the rise of groups such as IS, whose targeting practices are more indiscriminate. As research increases on right-wing movements with a larger and more diffuse presence, researchers may need to be more conscious of potential threats closer to home. The exposure of private information online is tactic that is likely to increase from all hostile actors. Additional safety resources and training are needed for those operating in this space.

Virtual environments also present challenges, particularly in relation to online research in the era of deplatforming—the removal of extremist content and users from the most important social media outlets. As social media companies crack down on extremist content, some valuable resources become more difficult to obtain. This important problem and related issues are discussed throughout this volume. For purposes of this chapter, a short overview is sufficient.

To state the obvious, if researchers can't obtain data, they can't analyze it. Social media platforms have varying rules and guidelines with respect to material that has been removed, based in part on their user agreements and terms of service. In some cases, material that is removed on the grounds of extremism is not retained by the platform in any capacity, rendering it truly ephemeral. Even when the content is retained by a platform, there are no clear guidelines for how researchers may access it.

This can present problems in assessing current and historical movements, as a wealth of archival material can be found all over the Internet, especially on social and streaming platforms. To pick just one example, the historically notable lectures of the late Christian Identity ideologue Wesley Swift (1913-1970) are widely available on major platforms. This material is important to researchers, but also to extremists; most of this material is posted online by Christian Identity adherents. Should this material be aggressively deplatformed, there are limited opportunities to discover it elsewhere.

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14   "Bin Laden's Bookshelf," U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/features/bin-laden-s-bookshelf?start=5.

While this obstacle can be overcome by committed researchers with deep knowledge of lower-visibility extremist platforms that have different incentives regarding the removal of content, it creates a gatekeeping effect for those who are newer to the field (discussed at more length by Charlie Winter).[15] The archiving of deplatformed material for use by qualified researchers would help mitigate this issue, as would specialized training and resources for new researchers on how to safely and ethically access lower-visibility platforms. Practical approaches to solving this problem can be made available through private-public partnerships.

Another practical challenge in deplatforming relates to the intersection of extremism and the boundaries of free speech. To date, the failure to define extremism and, to some extent, terrorism has resulted in a series of ad hoc decisions about which users are extremists and what content is allowed on social media, decisions which are then retroactively forged into policy positions. Slow progress is being made toward developing policies more soundly based on scholarship, but popular condemnation is still a major driver of deplatforming.

Another important area that companies are currently exploring is whether most or all extremist-associated content should be removed, or only the most problematic, aggressive, or violent examples.

The unfettered use of any given technological platform is not identical to the principle of free speech in democracies, which is more concerned with preventing government action against individuals based solely on their free expression of ideas. Social media platforms, however, are globally ubiquitous and free to the public and they have become essential for many people. Some users and activists may not distinguish between speech on social media and free speech broadly construed.

The hybrid nature of social media complicates these calculations. Virtually no one would argue for deplatforming email users based on content. In the minds of some users, social media is similarly situated, somewhere between a user's dining room table and the town square, spaces where free speech is protected. But even in the town square, harassment

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15 Charlie Winter, "Researching Jihadist Propaganda: Access, Interpretation, and Trauma," *RESOLVE Network* (May 2019) https://www.resolvenet.org/research/researching-jihadist-propaganda-access-interpretation-and-trauma.

and threats of violence are generally not allowed. And social media's broadcasting element—the ability to reach massive worldwide audiences—makes it functionally similar to radio and television, spaces where speech is almost always regulated to some extent.

Social media companies also bear some degree of direct responsibility for the abuse of their platforms by extremists and other bad actors, especially when their business incentives and technical decisions directly empower and amplify that abuse.

These issues will continue to present significant challenges to both the private and public sectors, as companies and governments grapple with emerging challenges and debate whether and how to regulate such hybrid platforms. The problem will likely never be fully resolved, due to shifting social mores and adaptive extremist tactics, but may be mitigated as new social media outlets emerge, especially if newcomers to the field reduce the centrality of viral content to business models and focus on building platforms based on realistic expectations about abuse by bad actors.

P/CVE issues: Policy priorities and measures of success

The increase in extremism research over the last 10 years was spurred in part by a shift in government policies from counterterrorism to preventing/countering violent extremism, with the latter intended to address extremism broadly as a social phenomenon and to reduce the impact of terrorism by reducing the number of people willing to employ it.[16] In many ways, this was a positive development, although the field has developed in fits and starts, with implementations of supposed remedies to extremism considerably preceding research on what remedies might be effective.

P/CVE initiatives were generously funded from about 2010 to 2016, but many programs boasted metrics for success (such as social media impressions and engagements) that did not directly pertain to whether they meaningfully prevented or countered extremism. The

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16   Gary LaFree and Joshua D. Freilich, "Government Policies for Counteracting Violent Extremism," *Annual Review of Criminology* 2 (2019): 383-404.

question is inherently difficult to answer, due to its counterfactual nature: It is not possible to fully know how many people did **not** radicalize due to a particular program's influence.

At this point, the evaluation problem is widely recognized in the field, and important preliminary research has been carried out to remediate the problem.[17] Williams, Horgan, and Evans (2016) have proposed a 12-point set of measurements addressing a number of issues clearly relevant to extremism.[18] Other schema address issues that are much less demonstrably relevant, such as "resilience" and "community engagement."[19] Several evaluations of specific programs and approaches have been conducted recently, including but not limited to Schuurman and Bakker (2016),[20] Bastug and Evlek (2016),[21] and Ferguson (2016).[22] Additional efforts are currently underway, and many organizations are now working to include robust and relevant evaluation in the design of P/CVE programs from the outset.[23]

While the methodology of P/CVE is slowly improving, the political climate surrounding it has deteriorated. The most significant problem is the overabundance of programs and research targeting Muslim extremists relative to every other class, and the predication of many P/CVE programs on questionable or clearly wrong presumptions regarding the religious roots of extremism.[24] Extremism can be religious, racial, or nationalistic, among other possibilities, and there are clear similarities among these different types. The global extremist environment is extraordinarily diverse, from the resurgence of white nationalism in the West[25]

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17   Amy-Jane Gielen, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances, and How?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2017): 1-19.

18   Michael J. Williams, John G. Horgan, and William P. Evans, "Evaluation of a Multi-faceted, US Community-based, Muslim-led CVE Program," *National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice* (2016).

19   Gielen, "Countering Violent Extremism," 1-19.

20   Bart Schuurman and Edwin Bakker, "Reintegrating Jihadist Extremists: Evaluating a Dutch Initiative, 2013–2014," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 8, no. 1 (2016): 66-85.

21   Mehmet F. Bastug and Ugur K. Evlek, "Individual Disengagement and Deradicalization Pilot Program in Turkey: Methods and Outcomes," *Journal for Deradicalization* 8 (2016): 25-45.

22   Kate Ferguson, "Countering Violent Extremism through Media and Communication Strategies," *Reflections* 27 (2016): 28.

23   Todd C. Helmus, et al., "RAND Program Evaluation Toolkit for Countering Violent Extremism," *RAND Corporation* (2017); Joanna Hofman, et al., "Evaluating Interventions that Prevent or Counter Violent Extremism" *RAND Corporation* (2018); "Developing a Toolkit for Monitoring, Measurement and Evaluation for P/CVE," *Hedayah Center*, http://www.hedayahcenter.org/activities/758/2017/771/developing-a-toolkit-for-monitoring-measurement-and-evaluation-for-p-cve; "A New Tool Addresses the Challenge of Measuring CVE Impact," Hedayah Center, August 16, 2018, http://www.hedayahcenter.org/media-details/49/news/51/latest-news/916/a-new-tool-addresses-the-challenge-of-measuring-cve-impact.

24   Eric Rosand, "In Strategies to Counter Violent Extremism, Politics often Trump Evidence," Brookings Institution, May 6, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/05/06/in-strategies-to-counter-violent-extremism-politics-often-trumps-evidence/.

25   Sara Ganim, Chris Welch, and Nathaniel Meyersohn, "A Resurgence of White Nationalism': Hate Groups Spiked in 2016," *CNN Politics,* February 15, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/02/15/politics/hate-groups-spiked-in-2016/index.html.

to a state-led campaign of genocide in Myanmar[26] and beyond. Muslim extremists are not necessarily the most numerous or most destructive extremists at work in the world today, but they are certainly the most discussed and prioritized in policy and research circles.

The rise of right-wing political movements in the United States and Europe has additionally complicated the P/CVE environment, both in terms of reduced funding for credible efforts and limiting programs' focus on racist and nationalist extremism.[27] In addition, the prevailing political environment has empowered movements and individuals who are distinctly anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant, increasing the baseline skepticism of target audiences and diminishing community buy-in, problems that plagued P/CVE programs even under less problematic leadership.[28]

Some have argued that the best response to these developments is a return to terrorism prevention rather than focusing on P/CVE, and this argument has some obvious merits from the limited perspective of government policy.[29] There are many good reasons for healthy skepticism about the government's role in policies and programs that amount to social engineering, especially when policymakers turn a blind eye to extremists among their political supporters and fellow travelers or may themselves traffic in the tropes of extremism.

Yet a return to tactical priorities over the broader social problem hardly seems suited to our times. Whether or not government is the proper lodestar for P/CVE priorities, programs and funding, the study and countering of extremism is necessary and important work.

We must acknowledge that the recent focus on extremism in the academy and among community organizations has been empowered and at times directly subsidized by government spending and stated policy priorities. While technology companies have taken up some of

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26   Chris Beyrer and Adeeba Kamarulzaman, "Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar: The Rohingya Crisis and Human Rights," *The Lancet* 390, no. 10102 (2017): 1570-73.

27   Peter Beinart, "Trump Shut Programs to Counter Violent Extremism," *The Atlantic*, October 29, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/trump-shut-countering-violent-extremism-program/574237/.

28   Faiza Patel, Andrew Lindsay, and Sophia Den Uyl, "Countering Violent Extremism in the Trump Era," *Brennan Center for Justice*, June 15, 2018, https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/countering-violent-extremism-trump-era.

29   Haroro J. Ingram, "Terrorism Prevention in the United States," *George Washington University* (November 2018), https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Terrorism%20Prevention%20Policy%20Paper.pdf.

the funding slack, they bring their own biases, and changes in the nature of government support for P/CVE has the potential to seriously diminish the size of the academic field.

However one assesses the exact role of government support in shaping terrorism and extremism studies, it is undeniable that scholars seeking to work on these issues have enjoyed a surplus of funding and attention for a decade or more. This has created incentives that not only fuel growth in the field but shape its focus—by funding and incentivizing programs and research that address jihadism at a higher rate than those that address white nationalism, for instance (although this is starting to change).

For all of these reasons, it is important that the field develop diverse and relatively independent funding streams. Changes to the government funding landscape will not result in an end to study, by any means, but it will make such study more difficult and create barriers to entry for younger researchers, who may lack the institutional clout to get ambitious projects approved in the absence of a surplus funding environment.

While there is no question that the field would benefit from turning a much more critical eye toward both programs and research,[30] we should be careful not to discourage unconventional approaches to an area of study that has suffered from an excess of conventionality.

On the other hand, P/CVE programs and research are likely to face increased pressure to produce concrete and quantifiable results, and this is not a bad thing. Most close observers of the scene would readily acknowledge that the surplus scenario has resulted in the funding of many weak programs that did not produce demonstrably useful (or even measurable) results. Countless blue-skies programs have been funded in order to satisfy the political imperative to do something, anything, about the perceived crisis, and many will not be missed.

Here, again, the continued lack of consensus on the definition and causes of extremism complicates prospects for the future. Unfortunately, programs will likely be selected for elim-

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30   Ben Emmerson, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Framework Principles for Securing the Accountability of Public Officials for Gross or Systematic Human Rights Violations Committed in the Context of State Counter-terrorism Initiatives." *Human Rights Council* (2013).

ination in the same way they were first funded—based on political expediency, optimistic promises, and unproven or disproven assumptions, rather than on their rigor and objective merits. Researchers across the board should advocate for projects that are grounded and that produce concrete results. When undertaking more experimental projects, researchers should ground and contextualize expectations, rather than overselling untested strategies for reducing extremism.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the current state of research on extremism and violent extremism and looked at factors that will shape the field in the years to come.

While the field has clearly advanced in its approach to extremism and violent extremism contra terrorism, much work remains, including answering very basic questions about how to define and set boundaries around extremism as an academic area of study. The failure of definition has myriad practical consequences, including distortions to our basic under-standing of the problem. The study of extremism is troubled by political pressures and biases, some overt and others implicit, which may emerge among researchers, institutions, and funding sources. The establishment of a rigorous and objective definition of the phe-nomenon and the field would help ameliorate this problem and several other derivative issues.

Despite these challenges, the study of extremism has attracted many brilliant minds over the years, both before and after September 11. Important, landmark work has been done on the topic, even in the absence of a clear "extremism studies" discipline. But the failure of definition has contributed to an environment that favors research on jihadism over all other ideologies. This narrow understanding of extremism impedes progress on life-and-death situations currently unfolding around the globe, where non-jihadists are engaged in ethnic cleansing, genocide, and mass incarceration based on ethnic and religious identities. Examples include the widely reported detention and "re-education" of Uyghur Muslims in

China[31] and what the U.N. has deemed a "policy of apartheid" by Myanmar toward the Rohingya and other ethnic groups.[32] Unknown thousands have died, and millions more have been denied basic liberties. These cases are clear examples of the need to move past a terrorism-studies paradigm and to address extremism as rigorously and objectively as possible.

To be sure, the nature of academia means that we will never see an absolutely firm consensus. Realistically, the process will be similar to the iterative definition of terrorism that has emerged since September 11. While an absolute consensus still eludes, there is a general consensus (within academia at least) that provides a relatively stable category for the study of terrorism as ideologically motivated public violence by nonstate actors, with some continued debate around the margins.

While some opening volleys have been fired with respect to starting this iterative process for the definition of extremism,[33] these efforts must be significantly expanded. This is neither an academic, nor an "academic" distinction. Real people are impacted every day by the failure to rigorously define extremism.

Concurrent with and complementary to these efforts, research into extremism and violent extremism will have to adapt to a changing political and funding environment. While this will present challenges, there is much to be gained by establishing a well-defined field with greater independence and more academic rigor. The potential shrinkage of the post-9/11 surplus-funding environment may lead to more diverse, independent and transparent funding streams with different incentive structures. Scholars may feel more inclined and more empowered to focus attention where they think it belongs, rather than tailoring their research to avail themselves of large pots of available funding.

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31 Chris Buckley, Paul Mozur, and Austin Ramzy, "How China Turned a City Into a Prison: A Surveillance State Reaches New Heights," *New York Times*, April 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/04/world/asia/xinjiang-china-surveillance-prison.html.

32 Emanuel Stoakes and Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Myanmar: UN threatens to withdraw aid over 'policy of apartheid' against Rohingya," *The Guardian*, June 17, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/17/myanmar-un-threatens-to-withdraw-aid-over-policy-of-apartheid-against-rohingya.

33 Astrid Bötticher, "Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 4 (2017); Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-radicalisation, Counter-radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICCT-The Hague* 97, no. 1 (2013): 22; Sam Jackson, "Non-normative Political Extremism: Reclaiming a Concept's Analytical Utility," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 2 (2019): 244-259; Berger, *Extremism* (2018).

However, the evolving funding environment may also reduce overall output, discourage innovation and create barriers to entry for young scholars. Here, again, an improved definition and the formalization of an extremism studies discipline is needed to help mitigate problems by regularizing the academic environment, prioritizing sound research over the headline-of-the-day, and making the field less sensitive to the prevailing political winds. Researchers should confront these issues directly, pushing back on institutional obstacles to craft, present, and defend definitions of extremism that are clearly delineated and as objective as possible. This is necessary in order to resolve the academic deficiencies that arise from the use of unarticulated or overly relative definitions, as well as to force consideration of current, pressing, and deadly extremist violence in contexts that may not currently benefit from the full force of scholarly study due to political pressures or category instability. This is crucial both for academic integrity and for the advancement of fair and just policies.

Fortunately, some strides have been made recently in the comparative and longitudinal study of extremist violence and narratives, primarily examining jihadist versus right-wing movements. These efforts should be expanded to include a wider variety of content. By promoting this change in the field, we can advance the study of all forms of extremism, including in already established areas such as jihadism, because comparative study will inevitably produce important insights that are not available from the study of single movements.

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Section 2.

Considering Data

Section 2 | GUIDE FOR READERS

What's in this section for you?

For researchers:

This section will help you understand how to identify, collate, and safeguard data suited to answer different types of research questions on violent extremism. The section also provides important information about reporting on data responsibly and ethically.

For non-researchers, policymakers, & practitioners:

This section will help you understand the limitations to and suitability of data within research projects, helpful in understanding how research findings and the data used to develop them can be used and generalized in specific contexts. The section also provides important information for those reading research on violent extremism to avoid and identify areas where data may be misinterpreted, misleading, or inadvertently mischaracterized.

Section 2 Overview
CONSIDERING DATA

The chapters in this section address a key number of issues, such as:

- *the differences between types of data to assess their utility in addressing certain violent extremism research questions, including those related to violent extremist worldviews and behaviors.*

- *the limits and opportunities that data on violent extremism presents to better report on and assess research findings and caveats.*

- *specific issues affecting data quality, selection, and interpretation to better inform research processes and analysis of findings.*

- *the importance of transparency and responsibility in collecting and reporting on data to better ensure ethical handling and do no harm approaches in research processes.*

- *specific considerations around both primary and secondary data, including considerations related to building and using databases to better interpret and collate information, as well as to reconcile potentially conflicting findings.*

Introduction

Identifying, collecting, and understanding data for research on violent extremism can be a challenging endeavor. While data collection challenges are not unique to the field, the securitized nature of the terms "violent extremism" and "terrorism" add an additional layer of complexity. What is "violent extremism" and how do we define it vis-à-vis other types of violence? How do we ethically and accurately apply "violent extremist" as a label to describe actors, activities, and content under study? Where do we look for violent extremism and terrorism--what samples do we use, what inclusion and exclusion criteria do we employ? Central to all these questions is how specifics around and limitations inherent within the data we collect and the data we use shape both what we understand the threat from violent extremism and terrorism to be and our responses to it. Understanding the limits and opportunities associated with data, therefore, is a crucial first step in identifying what we do and do not know in this field.

This section provides considerations, reflections, and information on data quality, caveats, and selection, as well as the implications of each in shaping what we understand to be the drivers, characteristics, and threats posed by violent extremism. Chapters within this section highlight for readers the importance of understanding that not all data are equal, nor do all data necessarily tell the same story. Collectively and individually, the authors' reflections and recommendations underscore the importance of understanding how data on violent extremism differs and the challenges in appropriately identifying, collecting, and interpreting it.

Woven through these chapters is a call for caution in interpreting data as the ultimate truth. Data, after all, is not free from bias. Research consumers and researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in all disciplines should take care when approaching and interpreting data. A greater effort to understand from whence and when data was derived, who collected the data, how it was collected, and how that data was interpreted is needed by the community of practice and research audiences overall. As many of the authors in this section note, accurately and transparently reporting on caveats is essential to understanding what data on violent extremism can tell us and, importantly, what it cannot.

This section is particularly important for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike, given the importance of understanding data for each of these stakeholders, both in work on violent extremism and more broadly. Researchers will find important information regarding considerations for selecting data based on their research questions and common data collection difficulties. Practitioners will find beneficial a more in-depth understanding of what type of data might be more relevant in light of monitoring and evaluation considerations and program development processes. Finally, policymakers will find particularly useful specific caveats to keep in mind when assessing data for policy-relevance and for informing efforts to understand, prevent, and address violent extremism on a strategic level.

Section overview

This section includes a compilation of chapters that provide greater clarity on interpreting data on violent extremism and its impact on findings. It is important to note that the chapters in this section are not only focused on data alone. However, readers will benefit from the insights related to the issue of data in terrorism and violent extremism studies in addition to the non-data-specific reflections each chapter holds. Figure 1 provides a visual guide for understanding the connectivity of the chapters within this section.

Figure 1: Section 2 Chapter Flow and Connectivity
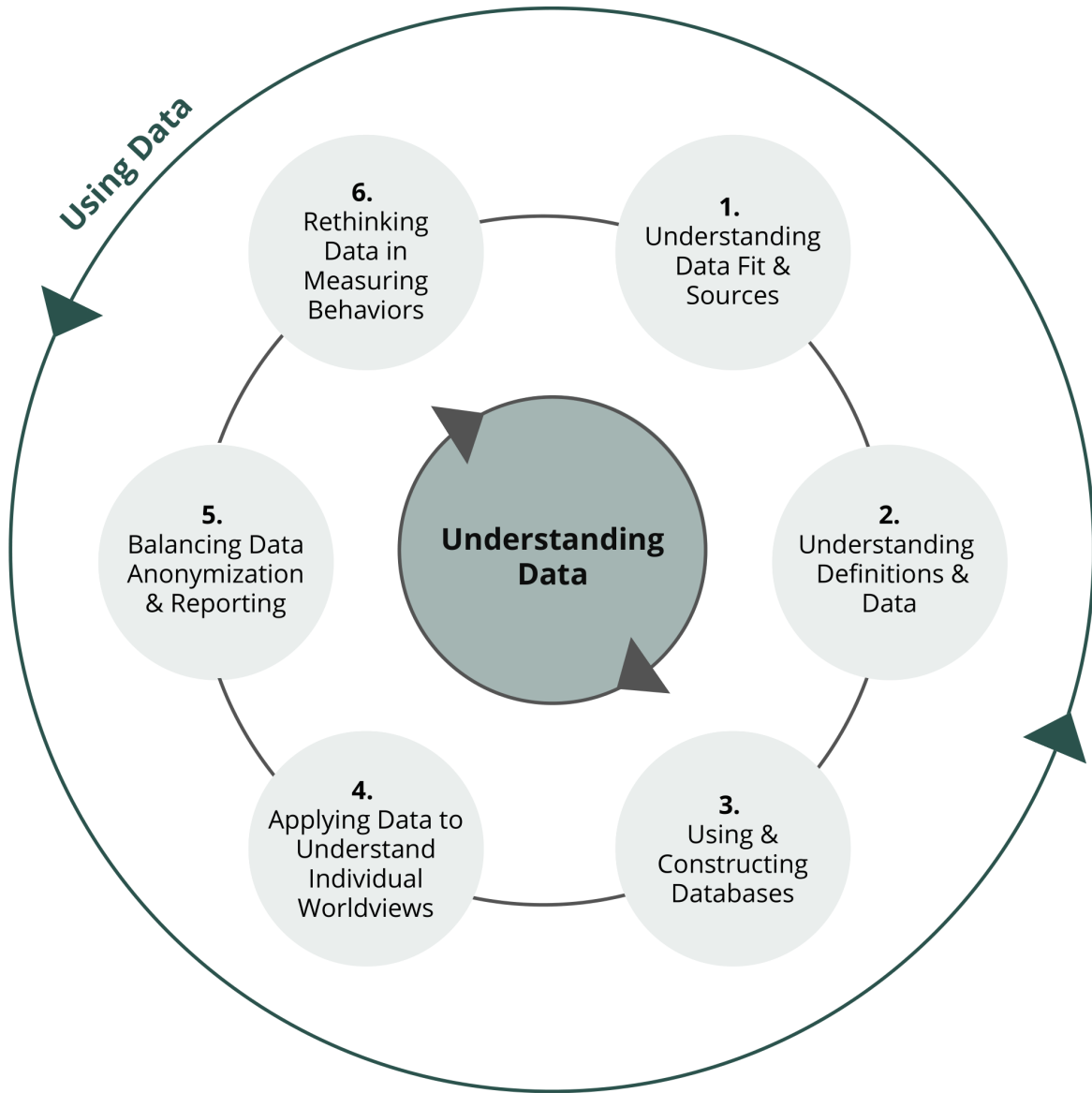
Understanding data: Sources, fit, and specificity

When dealing with data, it is imperative that, first and foremost, one understands the different sources from which data comes and the appropriateness of that data for the research question at hand. But how do we determine what data we need to answer different research

questions related to violent extremism, especially given the sensitive and securitized nature of the topic? What are the limitations of different types of data in answering specific types of research questions? How do we deal with limited data and assess its quality?

The first chapter in this section, by Omi Hodwitz, discusses common sources of data, determining data fit, and means by which to assess the appropriateness of different data sources for research needs and according to specific research questions. She details important considerations around using and properly understanding different data sources, including self-reported data—wherein researchers gather data through first-hand accounts, surveys, and interviews; official data—or data reported by government entities; "victimization data"—involving data gathered from victims of terrorism or violent extremism; and data derived from media reports or pre-existing databases.

Hodwitz's overview of the promises and limitations within each data source serves as a point of caution for potential users. Using any type of data, as Hodwitz suggests, places responsibility on the data aggregator and data user to properly understand issues that may impact their findings and interpretation of results, including coverage and missing data, issues influencing accuracy and quality, and concerns related to potential conflicts of interest. Ultimately, as Hodwitz concludes, it is of utmost importance that users of data understand the data they are using, its utility in informing their question of focus and method of analysis, and how to exercise transparency in their decision-making processes and reporting of results. Detailing considerations and caveats related to each type of data, Hodwitz recognizes the difficulties inherent in the field, and champions awareness, transparency, and analytical honesty as a means by which to address them.

Those interested in better understanding which types of data are best suited to answering different types of research questions and how to handle issues associated with using data in quantitative analysis, specifically, will benefit from the clear guidance this chapter provides.

Challenges with data: Availability, collection criteria, and reliability

The second chapter of this section moves beyond understanding data basics and appropriate means of analysis towards detailing challenges encountered in collecting data for a specific project. In his chapter, Paul Gill reflects on issues associated with data availability, research feasibility, definitional choices, data coding and quality assurance, and strengths and weaknesses associated with collecting open-source data in studying lone-actor terrorism specifically. As Gill details, a main challenge in determining the data to be collected, and thus interpreting findings from it, lies in defining the parameters around the topic of study. In the case of lone-actor studies, Gill explains, even studies on the same topic utilize different definitions, with implication for data and research comparability. Careful selection and consideration of definitions, therefore, is a crucial part of understanding the topic of focus and data collected and analyzed. Gill cautions that it is more than plausible that definitional choices can and will lead to divergent findings on the same topic of study based on the researcher's decisions to include, or not to include, specific elements within their definitions of choice. Ultimately, as Gill notes, "researchers and research consumers should pay close attention to how the availability of data may limit the research query and, therefore, research findings."[1]

In addition to focusing on data feasibility, availability, and coding, Gill discusses the importance of determining the reliability of any data collected and used in research studies. As underscored by Hodwitz, different data sources have different potential biases. While these biases may not always be evident, nor surmountable when dealing with either open or closed source data, care should be taken to research and understand potential biases, incompleteness, or inaccuracies that may impact the reliability of data from different open sources. Gill also presents and explains a reliability continuum created for the study discussed in his chapter, in which non-tabloid newspapers, court and legal documents, and local news reporting were deemed more reliable in terms of the data they provide than sources such as opinion blogs, verbal or written statements by accused terrorist offenders or affiliated groups, warrants, and expert witness reports.

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1   Paul Gill, *The Data Collection Challenge: Experiences Studying Lone-actor Terrorism* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2020), https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-02/RSVE_RVESeries_Gill_February2020.pdf, 8.

Gill concludes with additional considerations when dealing with open and closed sources of data in terrorism studies, including the importance of comparing open and closed source studies on the same phenomenon to verify and test results from each. Additionally, researchers should consider how the topic of study—in his case, lone actor terrorism—may influence data availability or limitations. Finally, Gill provides an important takeaway for readers in policy and practice, and for researchers working for policy and practice outcomes. Research does not occur in a bubble, and researchers, policymakers, and practitioners must be aware that while research can and will influence policy outcomes, ensuring it does so responsibly is of the utmost importance.

Secondary data sources: Understanding, creating, and using secondary source databases

What is in a database and how do we create and understand the information housed within it for research, policy, and practice needs? There is no shortage of databases focusing on terrorism and violent extremism. Open-access and closed databases are increasingly used in assessing violent extremist phenomena and individual violent extremist characteristics. This, to be sure, is a good thing, alleviating the burden on individual researchers seeking to derive data for their research needs. Using a database, however, requires careful research and consideration. Not all databases are created equal nor is the data housed within them necessarily the most suitable for all research questions related to terrorism and violent extremism. Understanding this and understanding how to better interpret and use the information provided within databases is paramount to responsibly conducting database-reliant research on violent extremism and accurately reporting results and inferences derived from it.

Drawing from his doctoral research experience, Joe Whittaker's chapter builds on information presented in its companion chapters through discussing considerations around using and constructing secondary source (data derived from others) databases on terrorism. Whittaker details important lessons from his own experience in constructing a database using secondary sources, including considerations around definitions, the construction and use of codebooks, analyzing the data housed within them, and ethical and anonymiza-

tion safeguards. The chapter addresses issues such as identifying appropriate sources for data collection; determining and understanding parameters around the data collected in terms of definitional and inclusion/exclusion criteria; creating and understanding code-books; choosing appropriate analytical methods; implementing appropriate ethical proto-cols around data collection, storage, and reporting; and, importantly, researcher self-care when interacting with data on violent extremism that can be sensitive and psychologically traumatizing. In doing so, Whittaker not only underscores the continued importance of collecting and collating secondary source data but also in appropriately safeguarding indi-vidual identities when dealing with personally identifiable information related to suspected "violent extremism" and "terrorism."

Research funders and readers interested in better understanding how to effectively utilize secondary source databases for research, policy, and practice will benefit from the thor-ough, yet accessible information provided in this chapter.

Primary data and individual worldviews: Walking through research on terrorist media choices

Given the rise of social media and online technologies, a prominent question in P/CVE has been how media consumption and interaction may influence radicalization trajectories. But what data do we need to determine that impact? In his chapter, Donald Holbrook discusses his approach to determining how we can measure and understand the worldviews of indi-vidual terrorists based on the media they chose to consume. Guiding the reader through a series of decisions and considerations involved in his own research process, Holbrook also underlines the importance of recognizing that the type of data we use and how we analyze it has implications for the information we can derive from it.

Studies of violent extremist materials online and individual interviews with extremists may elicit important data. However, when seeking to assess how individuals who seek to carry out acts of terrorism actually consume those materials and what that tells us about their worldviews, different data sources may be required. Based on his own research, Holbrook's chapter walks readers through how he categorized and analyzed digital and physical media

found during investigations of individuals found guilty of planning or carrying out acts of terrorism to determine what that consumption may reveal about those individuals' worldviews. The chapter walks readers through specific inclusion and exclusion criteria and considerations important in appropriately framing research inquiries and deriving data that can be used to explore questions related to media consumption and terrorist mindsets. The chapter is useful for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike interested in further exploring the impact and appeal of media and online content on individual radicalization processes and mindsets. Additionally, the chapter provides a ready-to-use framework useful in interpreting whether media content can be deemed violent extremist or simply extreme (or fringe). After all, data alone is just that, data. Interpreting data and developing tools by which to categorize and clearly define it (especially when applying terms such as "violent extremist") are essential in communicating its relevance to policy and practice.

Research on Islamist extremism in the Swiss context: Assessing and analyzing a sensitive phenomenon

Beyond detailing important considerations around methodological and ethical challenges when conducting research on violent extremism, Miryam Eser Davolio's chapter provides important insight into another common challenge associated with data in studies of VE: ensuring anonymity. Detailing challenges and reflections based on research conducted on Islamist extremism in Switzerland during a time of heightened focus on the issue, Davolio expands on not only important research process considerations, but also on the challenges of presenting high profile research with a small sample of individuals from a relatively small community. Specifically, Davolio discusses the intricacies associated with safeguarding and ensuring the anonymization of data on individuals in environments in which they may be easily identified and public demand for information is high.

Reporting on data is just as important as collecting the data itself. Transparency is of course prioritized to appropriately detail caveats and ensure fidelity of data used in research on violent extremism. However, in some cases, given the heightened interest in violent extremism, complete transparency may produce adverse impacts for research participants and communities of focus. Davolio reflects on managing this dilemma, balancing the need to

include information vital in appropriately contextualizing radicalization processes with the need to safeguard local communities in which it occurred. Importantly, as Davolio notes, researchers must take great care to ensure that not only are they accurately reporting on sensitive data related to violent extremism, but that they are also careful in how they present information derived from that data. This is important given the relative ease by which data and findings derived from it can—whether intentionally or not—be mishandled, misinterpreted, and used to produce ill-advised outcomes or further stigmatization and harm.

Readers should not only take note of the important reflections on researcher responsibility in studying violent extremism, but also the importance of implementing appropriate researcher, practitioner, and policymaker safeguards to ensure that sensitive data on violent extremism is neither abused nor used inappropriately in making programmatic and policy decisions.

Lab-in-field experiments for the reintegration of violent extremists: The promise of prosocial evaluation

Evaluating policy and practice aimed at addressing violent extremism is essential in uncovering benefits, drawbacks, and areas by which to improve P/CVE initiatives, but how do we determine what type of data we need to properly evaluate programmatic and policy impact? Again, not all data are created equal in measuring how P/CVE policy and programs have changed violent extremist dynamics, behaviors, and attitudes. Indeed, examining each of these dynamics can require vastly different data to accurately measure change. Data on behaviors related to violent extremism, in particular, have been notoriously difficult to collect and analyze. While many evaluations may use perception surveys to determine the impact of a program on violent extremism, those perception surveys are not necessarily suited to addressing questions related to behavioral change. Perception surveys may provide useful, if not potentially biased, information on attitudinal change, but how that attitudinal change translates into changes in behaviors and activities remains elusive.

In his chapter, Cameron Sumpter presents an important consideration when identifying and gathering data that can be used to more closely understand behavioral changes result-

ing from P/CVE programs and policies based on fieldwork conducted with recently released convicted terrorists in Indonesia. Sumpter details the potential that so-called "lab-in-field" experiments may have in eliciting data useful in determining violent extremist reintegration through a focus on behavioral and prosocial change. As Sumpter notes, it can be difficult to discern whether data gathered from individual interviews is accurate, as it is hard to determine whether the interviewee is telling the truth, especially when answering questions related to violent extremism. Lab-in-field experiments, as Sumpter argues, offer an opportunity to apply social "games" to elicit data on individual behaviors beyond information supplied in an interview. These types of experiments are not without their challenges, however. Readers of this chapter should consider how alternative means and methods might be used to gather data suitable in determining behavioral and attitudinal change. The considerations within this chapter are particularly useful for policymakers and practitioners charged with implementing evaluations and the researchers charged with conducting them.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the type, the quality, and the relevance of data on violent extremism and terrorism determines the conclusions we draw from it and how we use those conclusions to inform prevention and countering activities. Understanding data, and caveats associated with it, therefore, is instrumental in understanding the overall threat landscape and, importantly, distinguishing what we should and can do to address it.

While reading this section, individuals should consider how data interacts with their own work on violent extremism. Are you a producer of data, a consumer of data, or a funder of efforts to collect and analyze data on violent extremism? What questions related to violent extremism are you trying to answer and what do the considerations provided in this section suggest about how you might better or more accurately identify the data needed to address them? Finally, how can you better ensure transparency and fidelity in your own collection, analysis, reporting, or utilization of data for P/CVE efforts? Ultimately, it is not just the data we use, but how we use it that will impact collaborative efforts to address violent extremist dynamics around the world.

Recognizing & Resolving Issues in Terrorism Research, Data Collection, & Analysis

Omi Hodwitz[1]

In the years following 9/11, countries around the world sought to implement evidence-based counterterrorism policy and practices. Political narratives suggest these measures have been effective in stemming the tide of extremist violence, often in the absence of empirical results supporting this claim. This chapter focuses on the need for appropriate and well-informed quantitative methods of assessment and analysis. The chapter begins with an introductory discussion about the collection of quantitative data; readers are introduced to data collection techniques and effective methods of quality control. The focus then expands to include appropriate quantitative techniques for addressing specific research questions, including the impact of policy, of diverse practices, as well as isolating the effects of political, economic, and social factors on extremist behavior. The chapter concludes with a series of cautionary tales

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1   *Dr. Omi Hodwitz is a criminologist and Associate Professor at the University of Idaho. She specializes in data collection and analysis, counterterrorism practices and policies, and deradicalization and reoffending.*

regarding drawing conclusions from statistical results, lessons learned from the analytical field, and best practices moving forward.

Introduction

Many individuals view quantitative research, particularly data collection and analysis, as a daunting and anxiety-producing exercise best left to others. Although some frame their analytical allegiances positing qualitative against quantitative methods, many are simply uncomfortable with quantitative processes.[2] Is this aversion warranted? In this author's opinion, yes and no. On the one hand, there are a number of difficulties and pitfalls that the unseasoned researcher may encounter. On the other hand, with proper warning and instruction, researchers can minimize or avoid these problems altogether. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is twofold; first, to introduce the curious scholar to issues surrounding quantitative data collection and analysis in terrorism studies and second, through that introduction, to quell reservations about the inaccessibility of these practices. The purpose is not to create research experts (it would be impossible to accomplish that feat in a single chapter) but to equip readers with enough information to pause, reflect on the methods and strategies available, and seek out more information.

The first half of the chapter provides an overview of data collection considerations. Readers are introduced to a number of data sources and issues that influence which of those sources are best suited to answer the research question at hand, and factors that impact the quality of data. The goal of this discussion is to give new researchers the tools necessary to critically assess available data options. The second half of the chapter is devoted to analytical considerations. Readers are introduced to a number of broad questions that guide terrorism research and the quantitative methods traditionally used to address these questions. The goal of this section is to familiarize researchers with the options available to them so that they may seek out additional information as warranted. The chapter ends with a short narrative illustrating best practices and principles in terrorism research.

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2   There is an ongoing debate within the research community regarding the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research; this often results in the statement that one approach is superior to the other. Fortunately, 21st century researchers are moving away from this historical divide, recognizing that one approach compliments the other.

Data collection

What data resources are available to researchers? How does a researcher select a data source? How do we determine the quality of data? This section seeks to address these and other similar questions about data collection and availability, while also identifying some of the considerations and concerns of which potential users of data should be aware. The section begins by looking at traditional data sources, then shifts to factors influencing data selection, and ends with data quality assessment.

Data sources

Researchers examining individual and group-level violent crime traditionally use three primary sources of data: self-report data, official data, and victimization data. Although these are common sources for the examination of apolitical criminal offending, they may be less than ideal when examining terrorism.[3] As detailed below, these sources of data are difficult to collect, subject to censorship, or simply may not exist.

Self-report data involves collecting data through a survey or interview process; members of the population of interest report their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relation to a phenomenon of interest. In order to collect self-report data on terrorism, the researcher is most often required to solicit the participation of active or former extremists. As the reader can likely imagine, this is no small feat. Extremists are difficult to access, and identifying willing participants is a logistically and legally demanding task. Even if the researcher is able to identify and access extremists, they may be unwilling to participate in an interview process. In cases where they are amenable, generalizability remains a concern—how well do the select few that are willing to be interviewed represent all of those unwilling to cooperate? As such, it is difficult (and questionable) to draw inferences from self-report interviews and apply those inferences to a larger population.[4] In addition, the interview process may influence participant responses, introducing potential error. Social desirability bias and respondent bias is a concern in self-report data—the interviewee may want to

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3   Gary LaFree and Laura Dugan, "How Does Studying Terrorism Compare to Studying Crime?," in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism, ed. Mathieu Deflem (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2004), 61-63.

4   Joshua D. Freilich and Gary LaFree, "Measurement Issues in the Study of Terrorism: Introducing the Special Issue," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, nos. 7-8 (2016): 570.

present themselves in a positive way, disguise some of their activities, or protect members of their community through the omission of details, all leading to inaccuracies in responses. Therefore, although self-report data may be a potentially rich source of information, it is often difficult to collect and is subject to error. That is not to say that this approach is completely absent from or a futile endeavor in terrorism research. A number of researchers have been successful in soliciting the participation of current and former extremists, resulting in valuable insights on a variety of factors, including radicalization, disengagement, and group membership.[5] Still, the successful collection of terrorism-related self-report data is the exception, not the norm.

Official data, similar to self-report data, come with a host of cautionary considerations, although these caveats differ considerably from the concerns levied at self-report sources.[6] Official data refer to data sources built and distributed by government entities. Unfortunately, the first hurdle a researcher may face when relying on official data is that it simply may not exist. Many countries, for a variety of reasons, do not collect terrorism data. The United States government, for example, does not keep an official terrorism database for research purposes; nor do other countries, such as China, Canada, and Nigeria, to name an eclectic few. In addition, some nations may not be willing to share information on terrorism with the research community, limiting the ability to examine extremist violence in those areas.[7] Even if they do collect data and make it available for public use, governments are often swayed in the data collection process by a host of considerations that influence the accuracy of the data. For example, perhaps it is politically strategic at certain points in time or under specific administrations to underreport or overreport terrorist events, to inflate or deflate casualties and damages, or to acknowledge or mask the identity of perpetrators.[8] If so, official data cannot be used with any degree of confidence. In addition, some countries (such as the United States) do not always convict extremists of terrorism-specific offenses but, instead, will process political offenders under more traditional criminal statutes. These

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5 See, for example, John G. Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

6 LaFree and Dugan, 62.

7 Freilich and LaFree, 571.

8 Gary Ackerman and Lauren E. Pinson, "Speaking Truth to Sources: Introducing a Method for the Quantitative Evaluation of Open Sources in Event Data," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39, no. 7-8 (2016): 618.

factors suggest that researchers should use official data cautiously, if it is available at all, or, if alternative data sources are available, pass over official sources entirely.

The last source of traditional data, **victimization data**, is very rare in terrorism research. Victimization data refer to information gathered directly from the victims of crime, usually through survey or interview techniques. Victims of terrorism are, however, unique when compared to victims of apolitical crimes. Unfortunately, the most obvious characteristic (and hinderance) is that terrorism victims are often killed in attacks, eliminating them as a potential source of information.[9] In addition, since terrorism is usually focused on sending a message to an audience that extends beyond the immediate victims, attackers often choose victims at random or as a matter of convenience rather than intentionally or based on prior personal interactions. This limits the amount of valuable information victims can provide given their peripheral relationship to the perpetrator of extremist violence. Lastly, victims who are strategically targeted by perpetrators and actually survive the attack are so rare that collecting a large enough sample to warrant quantitative analysis is nearly impossible.

Given the difficulties in collecting self-report, official, or victimization data, researchers have turned to other sources of data, including media reports, arrest and conviction data, journals, and books. With enough time, perseverance, and diligence, these early collections have become established databases that are now key sources of terrorism data[10]. Although these databases do not necessarily suffer from the same issues noted above, they come with their own host of considerations and caveats, as described below.

User's choice

Databases are collections of topic-specific data organized to facilitate ease of access and management. The information stored in a database is usually organized in a vertical and horizontal fashion with rows denoting the unit of analysis or metric of observation and columns denoting variables. For example, if the database is an event database that reports terrorist attacks, each row would represent an attack (the unit of analysis) and each column would record details of that attack (variables). Databases allow researchers to easily

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9   LaFree and Dugan, 62-63.

10   Joe Whittaker, "Building Secondary Source Databases on Violent Extremism: Reflections and Suggestions," *RESOLVE,* July 9, 2019. https://resolvenet.org/research/building-secondary-source-databases-violent-extremism-reflections-and-suggestions

access and analyze records on aggregations of the unit of analysis. A popular event-based terrorism database, for example, is the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) collected and distributed by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). The GTD reports all terrorist attacks committed between 1970 and present day and contains, at the time of writing this chapter, nearly 200,000 incidents. As the reader can well imagine, researchers would be hard pressed to effectively answer a number of meta-questions about terrorism without access to a database of this kind with such a volume of information. Of course, as discussed below, while databases are not an infallible resource, they are a necessary tool for the quantitative examination of political violence in the absence of surveys and other means of gathering quantitative data.

A database ideally contains valid and reliable content. There are a number of factors that influence the quality of data outlined in the next section. Before discussing quality, however, there are a handful of considerations for which the database user (rather than that database developer) bears responsibility. A conscientious user should be aware that databases differ considerably in a number of ways, which introduces inconsistencies across datasets. The researcher should be informed about the sources of these potential inconsistencies and their relevance to her/his research so that, when she/he selects a database, the selected database is appropriate for the research question. Inconsistencies can arise due to multiple factors, including diversity in operational definitions, units of analysis, and coding strategies.

There is no universal definition of terrorism, and different states and research projects will vary in how they conceptualize the phenomenon[11]. Schmid and Jongman noted that definitions may vary on 22 unique elements, resulting in more than a hundred variations.[12] Terrorism databases are no exception to this finding. Database developers use different definitions and thus different exclusion and inclusion rules resulting in diversity across databases. Studies have shown that databases appearing similar in nature often report dramatically different rates and types of attacks, likely due at least in part to definitional cri-

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11   J.M. Berger, "Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play," *RESOLVE,* June 23, 2019. https://resolvenet.org/research/researching-violent-extremism-state-play

12   Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, & Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

teria.[13] For example, the GTD excludes state-sponsored attacks while early versions of the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (WTI) includes attacks perpetrated by the state. Other sources of definitional variation may arise in regard to, among other factors, the inclusion or exclusion of insurgencies, intergroup violence, and purely criminal activities carried out by extremist groups.

A second source of inconsistency lies with the unit of analysis or the entity of interest. Databases may vary considerably in this regard; some focus on individual perpetrators, while others focus on groups or attacks. The Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database, for example, reports on individual extremists in the United States, while the Big Allied and Dangerous (BAAD) dataset captures information on terrorist organizations.[14] Although there may be some overlap between the two databases, their units of analysis ensure they are measuring different entities.

A third consideration includes case creation and coding strategies; databases employ unique strategies that affect the number and type of observations included. For example, one database may code a coordinated attack as a single event, while another may code it as multiple separate events. Comparing the International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE) database with the WTI provides a ready example of this issue. Jenkins and Johnson, upon examining these databases, discovered that ITERATE had created forty separate incidents for a coordinated bombing while the WTI coded it as a single event.[15] This is not an error on the part of either database per se but simply reflects different strategies in action.

These points of inconsistency may not appear particularly problematic at first glance, but the caution presented here is threefold. First, database users should review definitional criteria to ensure that the database is compatible with the researcher's interests. Is the user interested in including or excluding particular events or observations, such as state-sponsored terrorism or insurgent attacks? Second, users should attend to the unit of analysis and ensure that they select a dataset that best matches the research question at hand. If,

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13   See, for example, Ivan Sascha Sheehan, "Assessing and Comparing Data Sources for Terrorism Research" in *Evidence-Based Counterterrorism Policy*, eds. Cynthia Lum and Leslie W. Kennedy. (New York: Springer, 2012).

14   The BAAD database name reflects a tongue-in-cheek recognition that terrorist organizations are undesirable and unwelcome entities.

15   Brian Michael Jenkins and J. J. Johnson, *International Terrorism: A Chronology, 1968-1974* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1975).

for example, the researcher is interested in exploring factors that facilitate individual-level radicalization, the PIRUS database will likely be a more appropriate choice than the BAAD dataset. Third, researchers should be mindful of their choices and how it can affect their results. In the case of coordinated attacks, for example, selecting one database over another will influence reported rates of terrorism, particularly in areas where coordinated attacks are commonplace. Therefore, it falls on the user to carefully consider characteristics unique to the data and, in light of these factors, to determine if the data are appropriate to address the research question at hand.

Caveat emptor: Quality considerations

When reviewing data options, users need to ensure a good fit to their research question, while also critically assessing the quality of the data. There are many factors that influence quality, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to create an exhaustive list (if such a task were even possible); however, there are a number of areas of concern to which researchers typically attend, including the characteristics of the original source material, the potential for coding errors, and possible conflicts of interest.

Most terrorism databases rely on open source material, particularly media reports.[16] Although open sources are an inexpensive and accessible way to gather data, they can also be problematic. One issue that causes data producers concern is **coverage**; in many cases, data are either missing or incomplete. In the case of terrorist attacks, media often under-report foiled or failed attacks, limiting the presence of these types of incidents in event databases. In addition, in certain areas of the world political violence is prevalent, such as remote areas in Nigeria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, but media representation is limited or non-existent due to accessibility issues, which results in underreporting in these regions.

The attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine headquarters in Paris in January of 2015 provides an example of this concern. On January 7th, 2015, assailants opened fire in the satirical magazine headquarters, resulting in a two-day chase and 17 victim fatalities. The event dominated headlines for weeks afterwards and even now, several years later, a media search

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16   Neil G. Bowie, "Terrorism Events Data: An Inventory of Databases and Data Sets, 1968-2017," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 4 (2017): 50.

of "Charlie Hebdo attack" results in nearly 100,000 individual hits.[17] Three days before the Paris attacks, Boko Haram raided Baga city in Nigeria, killing upwards of 2000 people over four days. In contrast to the Paris attacks, Western media failed to report on the Baga events until a week after the spree had ended and these reports were, for the most part, limited to a simple paragraph due to lack of information. BBC news, for example, first reported the attack on January 15th, stating that it was "faced with the challenge of trying to piece together the details so...[it]... can provide the most accurate picture of what really happened."[18] A media search of "Baga 2015 attack" produces less than 5,000 individual hits, even though the fatalities eclipsed Paris by more than 1,000 percent.[19] Quite simply, accurate and complete information on the Baga attack is not available.   The stark contrast between Paris and Baga illustrates an important point: while there is little a researcher can do about the ability of the media to capture and accurately report terrorist activities around the globe, it would behoove the user to familiarize her/himself with the data producer's approach to potentially inaccurate and incomplete sources, as would be found in some remote areas. Does the data producer acknowledge issues related to coverage? Does it take measures to overcome these issues whenever possible? In a similar vein, even if events are reported, databases often rely heavily on English-speaking sources, leading to an underrepresentation of information about foreign nations that have limited language sources. This results in an overrepresentation of information on terrorist events in Western nations or targeting Anglo-Western victims and an underrepresentation of data in non-Western and non-English settings. Is the data collection agency or institution capable of multilingual data collection? Does it report the use of non-English sources and/or does it have collection capacities in non-Western nations?

In addition to coverage, sources also influence **data accuracy**. Data accuracy may refer to missing values, factual errors, and inherent uncertainty. Do databases use valid sources? Do they triangulate their information using multiple sources? And do they use current and updated sources? Validity is a difficult metric to assess but some databases provide a source validity rating.[20] If they do not, the astute user will likely have informed opinions that

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17   The search was conducted by the author of this chapter while composing the first draft in the summer of 2019.

18   BBC, "Nigeria Boko Haram: What Really Happened in the Baga Attack," 2015.

19   The search was conducted by the author of this chapter while composing the first draft in the summer of 2019.

20   A source validity rating refers to an explicit scoring system that ranks sources from low to high credibility. Each observation in the database, for example, will be informed by one or more external sources. When a source validity rating is included, the database will report

can guide her/his assessment of potential source bias. Centrist media sources are ideal in comparison to left- or right-leaning sources but, when the latter are used, are they used together to present a balanced summary of each data point? Even if there is no discernible bias, databases should, whenever possible, employ multiple sources for each observation to ensure complete and accurate information about an event, person, or group. They should also prioritize current sources. It may take some time for complete and updated information to become available to the public, and if database producers rely on early media releases, they will likely report, among other factors, inaccuracies or uncertainties in casualties and perpetrator information.

In light of concerns about data accuracy, researchers should look for source information in potential datasets. Is the database transparent about the sources used? Does it provide a validity scoring metric and if so, is the researcher in agreement with that metric? Is triangulation required and is a premium placed on current sources? These are all source-related factors that can and should guide the assessment of data quality.

In addition to source characteristics, coding practices also impact data quality. Human coders are not infallible; they are subject to error and bias. Although this cannot be entirely eliminated, it can be minimized through a variety of ways. First, careful training is key; database producers are responsible for ensuring that coders take part in rigorous instruction and practice periods before coding real data. In addition, datasets should be assessed for interrater reliability or the degree of agreement or similarity between coders. This may involve having more than one trained person code the same dataset and then assessing the results using Krippendorff's alpha procedure or a similar statistical test.[21] Data users should, whenever possible, inquire about coder training processes and interrater reliability metrics.

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the external sources and inform the user of the level of confidence the data collectors have in those sources.

21   Freilich and LaFree, 574. Krippendorf's Alpha is a statistical test that determines interrater reliability. It compares variable values across multiple coding sets and determines whether there is a significant difference in those values. If the differences across sets are minimal, interrater reliability is high and the coding strategy is considered reliable.

Some researchers advocate the use of computer algorithms and data crawlers to overcome human error.[22] Unfortunately, automated data collection methods also introduce error and are not a particularly sound option. In a study that compared automated, human, and hybrid data collection of suicide attacks, researchers found that automated processes exaggerated the number of attacks by creating duplicate and false events and reported inaccurate event characteristics.[23] Using five separate databases as a reference, the research team identified 136 unique suicide attacks that occurred globally over a two-month period in 2015. They then compared the number and characteristics of suicide attacks that each collection and coding process produced. Automated processes resulted in the erroneous identification of more than 5000 suicide attacks over the two-month period, including the successful assassination of the United States President Obama several times over, while human and hybrid processes were much more conservative, reporting between ten and 443 incidents, depending on the database. As for coding details, the automated process often led to inaccurate location information, erroneous attack resolution and outcomes, and the lack of topic segmentation. In other words, automated processes are not a panacea solution and may introduce a degree of error that exceeds human or hybrid processes.

Regardless of the method, researchers should carefully assess the data and look for potential inconsistencies (such as the successful assassination of President Obama). If there are inconsistencies, are they explained by coding strategies? In order to address this question, the data user will likely need to familiarize her/himself with the codebook and coding practices used by data developers.[24] Does the codebook describe how coders address ambiguities, a key source of coding inconsistency? Does it summarize the coder training process? Lastly, it is never a bad idea to discuss potential databases with other researchers. What impressions do others have of the data and do they have any cautionary tales to share?

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22 See, for example, Idean Salehyan, "Best Practices in the Collection of Conflict Data," *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 1 (2015). Also see Philip A. Schrodt, "Automated Production of High-Volume, Near-Real-Time Political Event Data," in *APSA 2010 Annual Meeting Paper,* 2010.

23 Brian Wingenroth, Erin Miller, Michael Jensen, Omi Hodwitz, and Kieran Quinlan, "Event Data and the Construction of Reality," in International Conference on Social Computing, Behavioral-Cultural Modeling, & Prediction and Behavior Representations in Modeling and Simulation (SBP-BRiMS), 2016.

24 Quality public access databases will provide a codebook with the data that describes each variable, coding strategies, and database history and sponsorship. If a database does not provide a codebook...*caveat emptor* (buyer beware).

The last area of concern relates to potential conflicts of interests.[25] Data users should consider the identity of the agency that produced the data and the characteristics unique to that agency. Is the agency independent or is it influenced by other groups or actors? Does it report its funding sources? Lastly, are there incentives to report the data in a particular way? For example, as described previously, a state-coordinated database may have reason to omit or edit events and details. However, state-generated data are not the only sources subject to reliability issues. Independent institutions may be funded by state or corporate interests, suggesting the potential for a conflict of interest. In simple terms, consider the credibility of the data producer before relying on the data.

Navigating analysis

After selecting a quality data source, the researcher can begin analyzing the data and testing relationships. At this point it might be wise to reiterate the caveat expressed in the chapter introduction: the goal of this section is not to produce quantitative experts but, instead, to offer some analytical options that the reader should explore further once she/he formalizes her/his research question and selects her/his data. Therefore, for the ease of instruction, this section will first identify broad research questions that often inform terrorism inquiries and suggest quantitative methods appropriate for addressing these questions. Before doing so, it is helpful to deal with a small amount of quantitative housekeeping, specifically differentiating between descriptive and inferential statistics and providing a brief introduction to control variables.

As the name suggests, **descriptive or summary statistics** describe a phenomenon of interest. For instance, what is the typical age, gender, and socioeconomic background of convicted extremists? How long, on average, do terrorist organizations last before they disband? Descriptive statistics involve the simple calculation of a number of metrics, including (but not limited to) the average (the mean), the most common occurring value (the mode), and the middle value in a ranked set of values (the median). Often, the research question can be addressed through the use of descriptive statistics alone, although using descriptive statistics is becoming increasingly more common in step with inferential statistics.

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25   Yoshiko Herrera and Devesh Kapur, "Improving Data Quality: Actors, Incentives, and Capabilities," *Political Analysis* 15, no. 4 (2007): 372-82.

Inferential statistics go beyond simple description. Researchers take samples from larger populations of interest and make inferences or generalizations about the larger population based on the sample. Inferences may involve deriving estimates or assessing relationships between variables and outcomes. Many terrorism-related research questions rely on inferential statistics. For example, if a researcher is interested in assessing the relationship between aviation security measures and political violence, they may craft a research questions such as: do aviation security measures influence terrorist attacks on airports? In order to address this question, the researcher may select a sample of aviation security measures and (mindfully) select a database that reports terrorist attacks on airports. Using inferential statistics, the researcher can then examine whether terrorist attacks on airports increase or decrease following the implementation of these security measures. If results suggest a relationship, the researcher can then (cautiously) infer that aviation security measures influence terrorism.

Inferences can only be drawn when alternative explanations have been ruled out. Continuing with the example from the previous paragraph, it may be that political violence shifts due to other events that coincide with the implementation of aviation security measures but are not part of those measures, such as the introduction of cost-effective alternative means of travel or an outbreak of disease in the area of study that dissuades tourist travel. Results may show a relationship between security measures and political violence directed towards airports, but the relationship is actually due to another factor: a reduction in air travelers, thus decreasing the appeal of airports as a potential target for extremists. Researchers are required to consider alternative explanations or factors that may influence the outcome of interest and control for those influences.

Controlling for other factors means including a variable for each factor in the analysis. Control variables are kept constant (unchanging) so that they do not unduly influence the outcome of interest, allowing researchers to conclude that any observed variation or change in the dependent variable (the outcome variable) is due to the influence of the independent variable (the main explanatory variable). For the airport example, this would require including variables that recorded variations in alternative means of travel and outbreaks of disease or other health-related issues in the area of interest. If terrorist attacks on airports (the outcome or dependent variable) decrease following the implementation of security mea-

sures (the explanatory or independent variable), while holding stable any influence from alternative travel means and health-related issues (the control variables), the researcher can infer a relationship. The lesson here is to carefully consider other important influences and control for them; a failure to do so may produce results that do not accurately portray the relationship of interest.

With those clarifications in mind, the remainder of this section will focus on broad research questions and analytical strategies that can be used to address these questions. One cautionary note is necessary: analytical models or methods are not sentient entities, they will unquestioningly process data and produce statistics regardless of the fit between the data and the model. In other words, the analytical model or statistical test does not know when it is an inappropriate match for the research question or the data—only the researcher knows this. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the analytical method is suitable for the question and data. Unfortunately, providing a detailed and exhaustive list of analytical models and their suitability for particular research questions and data is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, recommendations for additional readings are included when appropriate and the reader is encouraged to consult these resources.

RESEARCH QUESTION: HOW DOES ONE VARIABLE INFLUENCE ANOTHER VARIABLE?

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: REGRESSION ANALYSIS.

One of the more traditional questions asked of researchers is how one factor influences another or, in more concrete terms, how social, political, psychological, and economic variables impact terrorist-related events and developments. Does the accessibility of certain weapons influence incidents of political violence? Are national metrics of press freedom related to terrorist activity? Does terrorism affect tourism? These are all questions that can be answered using various methods of regression analysis.

Regression techniques examine the effects that one or more independent (explanatory) variables have on the dependent (outcome) variable, holding all else constant (controlling for alternative explanations). More specifically, regression techniques explore how variations in the value of the independent variable influence values on the dependent variable.

A helpful way to understand regression is to refer to crosstabulation (crosstabs) as a point of comparison. A crosstab is a descriptive tool that displays the relationship between two variables in a table.

For example, assume a researcher is interested in studying the influence of unemployment on terrorism and hypothesizes that an increase in unemployment results in an increase in terrorism. The researcher will gather unemployment rates (independent variable) from a number of countries and compare those to terrorism rates (dependent variable) in those same countries. A crosstab function would create a table that summarizes every possible combination between those two variables and how many countries fall within each of those categories. For the unemployment example, the first cell of the crosstab may denote low unemployment and low terrorism. The value in the cell will report the number of countries that fit that criteria. The next cell may record low unemployment and medium terrorism, with a third reporting low unemployment and high terrorism, and so on until all possible combinations are reported. If the relationship is supported, the researcher would expect to see more countries in the low unemployment/low terrorism and high unemployment/high terrorism categories than in the remaining cells.

Although this is useful when seeking an overview of a potential relationship, it does not tell us if that relationship is noteworthy or significant. In other words, how much do values between cells need to differ in order to conclude that there is a relationship? Regression analysis is designed to answer this specific question. It assesses whether increases or decreases in unemployment are significantly related to increases or decreases in terrorism. If changes in the former influence changes in the latter in a consistent manner (in the same direction with some degree of frequency), the model will determine there is a relationship that can be inferred from the results. If a relationship can be inferred, then we can form expectations based on that inference, allowing researchers to predict the circumstances under which they would expect to see changes in the dependent variable.

In addition, unlike crosstabs, regression allows researchers to include and control for the influence of additional variables. Unemployment may show a consistent relationship to terrorism rates but a number other forces could be at play (e.g. health metrics, participation in national and international conflicts, political cycles). Controlling for those factors increases

confidence in resulting predictions. In other words, regression analysis does the work for the researcher; it tells the researcher whether, across countries, the values tell similar stories and if they do, what predictions can be made about countries not included in the sample, while also controlling for other factors.

There are different regression techniques, and researchers should be careful to select the appropriate option. Selections are based on the features of the dependent variable and the relationship assumed between the independent and dependent variables. Regarding the features of the dependent variable, this is determined by how the variables are measured. They may be nominal (they are dichotomous and only have a value of yes/no or 0/1), ordinal (the values can be rank-ordered, but that ordering does not have quantitative significance, such as small/medium/large), or interval/ratio (the values are continuous or have no upper limit, such as the annual income).

For example, binary logistical regression is ideal for a dichotomous or nominal dependent variable, one that assumes only two discrete outcomes. This statistical strategy would be suitable for studying factors that influence successful assassinations, hostage-takings, or other forms of political violence (these events did or did not occur resulting in a yes/no or 0/1 coding strategy). In contrast, ordinal logistical regression is appropriate for ordinal dependent variables only. A researcher interested in examining the relationship between democratic characteristics and citizen dissatisfaction with the government, for example, may hypothesize that more democratic countries will experience less citizen dissatisfaction. Although quantitative values can be assigned to the dependent variable (citizen dissatisfaction), it may be more accurate and/or efficient to rank satisfaction on a non-quantitative scale, such as low/medium/high.

Lastly, when addressing an interval/ratio or continuous variable, the researcher may opt for standard linear regression. This would be an ideal model if a researcher is exploring the influence of terrorism on, for example, tourism, as measured by tourist spending. In this example, terrorism is the independent variable and tourism spending is the dependent variable. Financial transactions of this sort have quantitative significance (the value between one dollar and two dollars is quantitatively informative) and no upper limit or cap and, therefore, is potentially a good fit for linear regression.

Linear regression, although often used in terrorism research, may not be appropriate for all studies involving continuous variables. This is due to the fact that, in addition to the features of the dependent variable, researchers can also often make an educated guess about the expected shape of the relationship and should select a statistical model that is appropriate for that shape. Linear regression assumes a linear relationship between variables (as the independent variable increases, the dependent variable is expected to increase or decrease in relative lockstep) and requires a continuous dependent variable (it has an infinite number of possible values). If a researcher is interested in examining the relationship between state oppression and citizen dissatisfaction with the government, the researcher will likely assume a linear relationship (as a metric of oppression increases, so too does citizen dissatisfaction). However, not all relationships are linear in nature. Polynomial regression, for example, allows for a curvilinear (bending) relationship between variables. An example of a potential curvilinear relationship might be found between state oppression and political violence. As state oppression increases, we would expect to see an increase in political violence; however, at a certain point, political violence may begin to decrease as the threat of incarceration, torture, or death at the hands of the state serves to deter further political protest.

This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of regression decisions, but it does illustrate the number of options available to researchers and that the selection of the appropriate model is informed by the characteristics of the dependent variable and the assumed relationship between variables. Regression models are some of the more popular analytical tools available to quantitative researchers and there are numerous texts that provide detailed summaries of these models. Some suggested sources for further reading include Richard Berk's book titled *Regression Analysis: A Constructive Critique* and Joshua Angrist and Jorn-Steffen Pischke's book *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion.*

RESEARCH QUESTION: HOW DO TRENDS OR PATTERNS CHANGE OVER TIME? HOW DO SELECT FACTORS INFLUENCE TRENDS OR PATTERNS?

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: TIME-SERIES ANALYSIS.

Time-series refers to a group of regression methods that can be used to identify and describe events across time and to predict or forecast future values of the phenomenon of interest.

Time series models assume that the data will consist of: a) a pattern, and b) random noise, also known as unexplained variation in the sample data (in simple terms, there a great deal of change in the variables that could be due to random irregularities). This analytical strategy involves diminishing or muting the random noise in order to detect an underlying pattern. For example, when examining terrorist attacks, researchers have discovered that separating incidents involving casualties from those that do not involve casualties increases the predictability of incidents involving casualties, given that non-casualty events are largely random, consisting of irregular noise.[26]

If the goal of a particular study is to describe events across time, the pattern may be reflected by a trend (a linear or nonlinear change that does not systematically repeat itself, such as an observed decrease in voter turnout situated within a larger trend of increased voter turnout) or by seasonality (systematic repetition or cyclical change, such as violence consistently increasing in the hot summer months). Research has indicated that terrorism experiences cyclical patterns or seasonality that has little do with the research question at hand and, because of this, scholars tend to focus more on trends.[27] For example, how does terrorism change over time on a global scale? How does it change in individual countries?

In addition to describing changes over time, the researcher may also be interested in assessing factors that facilitate these changes. Time-series methods are popular for assessing the impact of policy on subsequent events or behavior. For example, how does the implementation of counterterrorism policy influence rates of terrorism? Do specific security measures decrease attacks? Does group decapitation influence political violence? Time series allows for the examination of the variable of interest (e.g. policy or leadership decapitation) on the lagged (temporally delayed) value of the phenomenon of interest (terrorism).

In order to use time series models, the researcher must have data reported in temporal intervals or in an equally spaced order. In other words, the data are observed at consistent successive points in time, such as daily, monthly, or annually. A database that reports monthly terrorism rates would be appropriate for time series analysis since it gives consis-

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26   Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "Is Transnational Terrorism Becoming More Threatening? A Time-Series Investigation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 3 (2000): 307-32.

27   Enders and Sandler, 307-32.

tent temporally-anchored metrics. A database that reported single terrorist events would not be suitable since it reports observations that are not rooted in temporal intervals. However, the latter could be recoded from single events to rates in order to address pattern-related questions using time series analysis. For example, researchers often convert single event data from the GTD into aggregate attack numbers simply by calculating the number of events listed within the temporal unit of interest (e.g. month) and recording that information in a new dataset. In addition to the number of attacks, the users may also calculate additional variables, such as the number of casualties or the frequency of attack and weapon types found within each temporal unit, increasing the scope of analysis that can be conducted with the aggregated temporal set.

In addition to ensuring that the researcher has temporally-defined data, she/he will need to consider whether the dependent variable is a rare event. It is difficult to conclusively detect patterns in rare events given that, by definition, they do not occur frequently enough for a consistent pattern to emerge. For example, if a country only experiences two terrorist attacks in one year but one of them occurs during a change of administration, can we confidently conclude that a change in leadership influences terrorism? Fortunately, there are analytical approaches designed to assess and predict rare events, such as a Poisson model. When assessing rare events over time, the researcher should explore rare event time series models as the appropriate choice.

To learn more about these considerations and the factors that influence model selection, readers are encouraged to review the following sources: Chatfield's *The Analysis of Time Series: An Introduction* and Brockwell, Davis, and Fienberg's *Time Series: Theory and Methods.*

RESEARCH QUESTION: HOW DO PATTERNS SHIFT ACROSS SPACE?

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: GEOSPATIAL ANALYSIS.

Oftentimes, a researcher is interested in exploring spatial patterns of terrorism locally and around the world. While point maps (imagine sticking pins into a map) can help illustrate obvious clusters of terrorism, assessing whether these clusters are random and/or how they evolve over time entails a more sophisticated approach. Spatial data analysis techniques

and programs can assist in evaluating spatial nuances. Geographic information systems (GIS) technology, a popular method of assessing geospatial data, maps longitude and latitude events, creating a final map that can be analyzed using tools that distinguish between random and non-random patterns. For example, researchers may choose to engage in geospatial analysis to determine if there is a pattern to terrorist violence in a select region or country. This can be used to identify hot spots of activity to which counterterrorism resources can be directed.

While many of the geospatial methods are cross-sectional (no temporal component), there are some analytical alternatives that allow for the assessment of spatial patterns over time, creating the opportunity to examine the evolution of patterns.[28] This kind of analysis offers researchers the chance to examine a number of fascinating questions. What is the spatial distribution of terrorism, for example, in multiple cities? How do those spatial distributions change over time? With this kind of analysis, researchers may begin to predict where additional points of activity will appear given the historical development of patterned violence. One cautionary note is necessary: although spatial analysis can facilitate understanding of and predictions about spatial patterns over time, it is not designed to assess the relationship between variables. In other words, if researchers were interested in examining whether the implementation of a particular policy halted the spread of terrorism in a specific region, they could use spatial analysis to observe patterns over time but not to statistically determine the significance of those changes.

To conduct spatial analysis, researchers need data that include geographical coordinates and, for more sophisticated analysis, user-friendly software with the capacity to assess data as the research question requires. There are a number of different sources that will aid the new researcher in working with geospatial data and in selecting appropriate analytical techniques and software. Recommended sources include De Smith, Goodchild, and Longley's *Geospatial Analysis: A Comprehensive Guide to Principles, Techniques, and Software Tools* and Haggett, Cliff, and Frey's *Locational Analysis in Human Geography.*

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28   See, for example, Jacqueline Cohen and George Tita, "Diffusion in Homicide: Exploring a General Method for Detecting Spatial Diffusion Processes" *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 15, no. 4 (1999).

RESEARCH QUESTION: HOW DO BEHAVIORS CHANGE OVER TIME? ARE THERE DISTINCT GROUPS THAT EXPERIENCE SIMILAR CHANGES? WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE BEHAVIORAL CHANGES?

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: LIFE-COURSE ANALYSIS.

One area of interest involves looking at how behaviors change over the life course or over time. Life-course analysis consists of several different modeling options. One method that is particularly relevant for terrorism research is trajectory analysis. This method gives researchers the opportunity to explore the trajectory or course of a variable over time as well as the influence of other variables on that course. Group-based trajectory modeling is particularly relevant, as it allows for the identification of distinct groups with similar trajectories of a phenomenon of interest, the assessment of the impact of different variables on that trajectory, and the influence of key factors on group membership.[29] Group-based trajectory models can be used, for example, to group extremist organizations based on their attack patterns and to identify factors that influence those patterns. It may also be used to examine geographical groups, such as nations that experience a particular kind or frequency of violence and the factors that facilitate membership in these groups.

Researchers considering this method should assess the dependent variable of interest and ascertain whether it is binary, continuous, or count—this will influence the type of model used.[30] In addition, researchers need to decide the number of groups they would like the model to identify and the shape that the trajectory can take. Making these decisions requires testing a variety of combinations to ensure the best fit. Although group-based trajectory models are necessary to answer key questions relating to extremist violence, they are not for the faint of heart. Any researcher considering their use would be best served by reviewing the pivotal piece by Daniel Nagin titled *Group-Based Modeling of Development Over the Life Course*.

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29   Daniel S. Nagin, *Group-Based Modeling of Development Over the Life Course* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

30   Similar to other analytical strategies, the characteristics of the dependent variable determine the appropriate model. Logistic models are suitable for dichotomous or binary variables, censored normal models are appropriate for continuous variables, and Poisson models are ideal for count data. Laura Dugan and Sue-Ming Yang, "Introducing Group-Based Trajectory Analysis and Series Hazard Modeling: Two Innovative Methods to Systematically Examine Terrorism over Time," in *Evidence-Based Counterterrorism Policy*, ed. Leslie W. Kennedy (New York: Springer, 2012), 122.

RESEARCH QUESTION: HOW DO THE TYPE AND INTENSITY OF GROUP TIES INFLUENCE POLITICALLY VIOLENT GROUPS?

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY: NETWORK ANALYSIS.

The last research question discussed in this chapter involves examining the structure and characteristics of social networks. Network analysis focuses on the network structure or how individuals or groups are connected or linked. It consists of two layers: a graphical component that can map the relational connections or links between people and a statistical component that allows the researcher to examine how these ties shape individual behavior, group dynamics, and collective action. For example, network analysis can be used to assess the centrality of a particular person in relation to others in the network, to detect subnetworks within the larger network, and to assess the development of networks through new links. One timely use of network analysis is the examination of online behavior through the assessment of social media sites and other websites. Another important application involves the use of computer simulations of violent networks to assess the effectiveness of proposed counterterrorism strategies on group survival and continued violence. For example, running simulations with varying counterterrorist approaches can indicate how networks will respond and adapt to state opposition.

To use this method, researchers need to define the boundaries of the network. What decides the inclusion or exclusion of specific individuals? Is this determined based on the preexisting knowledge of the researcher? Or should it be determined by the subjects themselves or more, specifically those that claim membership? Both options require some consideration. Regarding the former, the researcher may not be fully aware of the extent of the network and regarding the latter, there are those who claim and deny membership falsely.

Another issue arises if the data for the network are not complete. It is difficult or, in many cases, impossible to gather comprehensive information on terrorist networks. Results may be incomplete or misleading if key nodes and subsequent links are not included in the analysis. Fortunately, there are analytical strategies that allow the researcher to examine covert organizations when information is limited.[31]

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31 To do so, the researcher must have knowledge of traditional network structures and predictive modeling.

A third area of consideration is the ties or links included in the analysis. When using network analysis, researchers must decide if they are interested in a variety of characteristics including, among others, centrality (the number of links or connections to the node or actor), influence or strength (the influence of one node on the neighboring nodes), direction (unidirectional or bidirectional), and symmetry (equal or unequal in directional strength or influence). These decisions will determine the appropriate analytical strategy to apply to the data.

Given the graphical component of this analytical approach, researchers generally use sophisticated software to conduct network analysis. Researchers interested in the technique should exercise care when selecting the appropriate software and analytical strategy. A good place to start would be to read Wasserman and Faust's book titled *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications.*

Best practices

Ideally, by this time, the reader has concluded that carrying out quantitative research requires careful consideration and know-how but is not an inaccessible means of examining terrorism. Although this chapter did not provide an exhaustive list of all the factors that may be important when researching terrorism, it did highlight some of the key issues that regularly arise. These frequently occurring issues have resulted in a set of best practices or principles that, although applicable to all forms of research, are particularly salient when using quantitative methods. These principles are an ideal way to compartmentalize and address the various concerns raised above and, therefore, the chapter will conclude with a brief description of three particularly significant principles. These include: knowing your data, knowing your methods, and being transparent about your decisions.

Know your data. As summarized previously, knowing your data refers to a number of factors, including knowing the unit of analysis, variable definitions, the codebook and coding strategies, source information, and so on. A failure to familiarize yourself with the data can lead to erroneous decisions that make analysis difficult or subject to error. To briefly illustrate this point, this author was invited to consult on a project that involved the amal-

gamation of two datasets, the first of which was produced by a non-governmental organization and the second by a governmental organization. The two parties had been working on the project for some time before asking for assistance. Upon reviewing the datasets, it became clear that they could not be easily merged; the two parties had failed to recognize that each dataset reported a different unit of analysis (terrorist attacks for one and annual metrics of terrorism for the other) and had, up until that point, been attempting to mash them together to no avail.

Know your methods. Knowing your methods can be a difficult and time-consuming but absolutely necessary endeavor. You should consider the research question and the group of analytical strategies or models available to address the question. You will need to think about the characteristics of the dependent variable and the relationship that it is believed to have with the independent variable. With these factors in mind, you should select the method that appears appropriate and then engage in further study of it to confirm that it is the best fit for the question and the data. You may want to review studies that describe the method to ensure that you are versed in its use and, when possible, consult with colleagues who have quantitative backgrounds. Lastly: practice. This can be accomplished by finding and replicating a study that uses your chosen analytical model or method and has publicly available data. If you can replicate the results reported in the study, you are likely using the model correctly. This author's own experiences demonstrate the importance of this practice or principle. Within the parameters of a quantitative research methods course, this author gave her students an often-cited terrorism-related empirical study to critique. Although the students were expected to focus only on the relationship between the research question and variable selection, one enthusiastic student opted to replicate the analysis with the publicly available dataset. Much to the student's surprise, his results did not match the results reported in the original article. Upon closer inspection, it became clear that, although the dependent variable was ordinal, the original author had erroneously applied a regression model that was appropriate for continuous dependent variables only, resulting in biased or erroneous outcomes. The original author had reported significant results when, in fact, the relationship disappeared when the proper analytical strategy was applied. On a side note, the student did quite well in the course and continued on to become an analyst.

Be transparent. If you are transparent about the decisions that you make at key points in the research process, it lends credibility to your choice of data and methods and, thus, your results. In addition to the choices that you make, you should be explicit about weaknesses inherent in your research. If there are issues that arise in your study, you should acknowledge them and provide justification for proceeding with your research. If you do not acknowledge potential shortcomings, it is likely that someone else will. An example from this author's days as a student demonstrates this awkward possibility. An applicant for a faculty position presented his research on radical individuals to a group of quantitatively-inclined students. What the applicant failed to acknowledge during his presentation (but was pointed out by one of the graduate students) was the uncomfortable fact that he was missing information on the vast majority of his sample. The researcher had treated the missing information as a non-issue and proceeded with his analysis, concluding that his results applied to all radical individuals in his study and, to a lesser extent, to the larger population. Perhaps not surprisingly, the applicant did not get the faculty position for which he was applying.

The final message of this chapter is to pair the cautions and considerations described throughout the chapter with the best practices summarized above. Doing so will better prepare the reader to engage in high-quality and well-informed research. Doing 'bad' research can have damaging effects to the researcher, the practitioner, and the policymaker. Doing 'good' research, although difficult, can contribute in significant ways to our understanding of radical violence.

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The Data Collection Challenge

Experiences Studying Lone-actor Terrorism

Paul Gill

In 2011, the United States (U.S.) Department of Homeland Security (DHS) awarded our research team a one-year project to build a database on the antecedent behaviors of lone-actor terrorists from scratch. This chapter outlines the variety of challenges we faced from the outset of the project, how we tried to address them, and how I would do things differently if we started all over again. In particular, the chapter focuses on (1) the trade-off between definitional ideals and pragmatic constraints, (2) the limitations and opportunities afforded by a reliance on open-sources (and what I've since learned about closed-sources), (3) deciding what to collect data on and how to code what we collected, and (4) how to structure the data collection team and implement internal quality control mechanisms. The chapter then demonstrates how these decisions affect the quality and prevalence of certain variables by comparing our results to analogous studies. The chapter concludes by outlining important considerations for pursuing and understanding similar projects.

Introduction

From January 2010 to late 2012, I was a postdoctoral research fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Terrorism (ICST) at Pennsylvania State University under the Directorship of Professor John Horgan. My initial task was to lead the day-to-day research of a project entitled *From Bomb to Bomb-maker*, sponsored by the Office for Naval Research. Prior to starting the job, John Horgan shared the project proposal with me. A large component of the proposal promised systematic data collection on Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) bombings, core PIRA members, and their network links. It seemed like a very ambitious endeavor and the ever-present imposter syndrome was particularly salient before I even began employment there.

What Prof. Horgan did not mention in early communications was that he had developed a competitive internship program at the Centre. Enthused, energetic, and diligent undergraduate students applied en masse to work ten hours a week on whatever the Centre's research required. Some of those undergrads applied to obtain course credit, others purely for the experience. With this type of research support, suddenly things looked more doable. In that first year, dozens of students helped us collect data on over 5,000 PIRA bombings, 1,200 PIRA members, and the thousands of network connections between them.

During data collection, we learned many lessons, including four detailed in this chapter:

- Data availability, research feasibility, and definitional choices,
- The strengths and limitations of purely open-source data collection methods,
- Data collection and developing and testing a coding schema, and
- Quality assurance and structuring coding teams.

While it was clear that open-source efforts have a lot of promise, their utility to the research field depended on the types of questions asked of the data and the degree of organization, quality control, and manpower in the data collection process.

In March 2011, during my tenure at ICST, DHS awarded our research team a one-year project to build a database on the antecedent behaviors (those occurring prior to an individual carried out an attack) of lone-actor terrorists from scratch. The project aimed to explore lone-actor terrorism from both individual and event-driven perspectives through several rigorous data-driven analyses. This included synthesizing research on analogous cases of lone actors, creating a typology of lone actors, and cataloging their pre-attack behaviors.

We identified multiple benefits of this research for informing the development of operational considerations. First, it would provide the first empirically grounded, methodologically rigorous, multidisciplinary, and multi-level analysis of lone-actor terrorism from open source data. Second, it could provide an empirical basis—derived from analogous cases and detailed case studies—for identifying recurring pre-attack behaviors. Finally, it could inform security planning through providing an empirically informed understanding of the behaviors associated with and leading up to lone-actor terrorist attacks. It is hoped that reflections on the project as outlined in this chapter will not only provide additional transparency to our research process (as we hope to make the data fully available soon), but also guidance for future researchers setting out on similar data collection endeavors.

Project background

The mission of ICST was to engage in and promote the scientific study of terrorism and political violence. In doing so, ICST sought to create multidisciplinary, cross-national research teams, drawing strongly but not exclusively on the social and behavioral sciences to respond to needs and opportunities in the broad research areas of terrorism and counterterrorism. The Center was committed to engaging in policy relevant, yet independent and non-partisan research. The overarching mission of the ICST is to provide "actionable knowledge," defined as a conceptual basis to policy-relevant and operational counterterrorism activity.

A by-product of this mission was that we came into contact with many practitioners who would either visit us on campus or who we would see on regular trips to conferences and workshops in Washington, DC. The phenomenon then popularly known as lone wolf terrorism was a recurrent theme in these conversations. This interest in lone wolf terrorism was

partially event driven. During those initial 15 months at ICST, several incidents occurred in the U.S. that appeared to fit the moniker. They included the deliberate crashing of a plane into an IRS building in Texas, the shooting at the Pentagon Station, the shooting of police officers in West Memphis, the Times Square bombing attempt, the hostage taking at the Discovery Channel's headquarters, the Northern Virginia military shootings, and the attempted bombing of a Martin Luther King Jr. memorial march.[1] Additionally, several FBI investigations led to successful and well-publicized disruptions of so-called would-be "lone wolfs" (although in many cases the offenders in question thought they were part of an actual terrorist cell).[2]

Academic perspectives on the topic at the time remained under-researched. What existed was largely weak on methods, theory, and empirics, and, therefore, largely ill-suited for the practitioner community. This, coupled with the sense that lone wolf incidents were on the rise, and our own self-efficacy in systematic open-source data collection, pushed us to design a research project to address the disconnect between research, policy, and practice through a project examining lone actor behaviors.

Initially, my cynical, and uninformed Irish self felt the "lone wolf" problem was largely an American one. I presumed easy access to firearms, comparatively poorly regulated improvised explosive device (IED) component markets and limited but costly access to mental health care contributed to an environment prone to "lone wolf" incidents unique to the United States. While this may be true, it does not explain why similar phenomena occur in other parts of the world. On a more personal level, I also wanted to further test a basic premise underlying my PhD research: the influence of group and social dynamics on extremist behavior. Lone actors therefore seemed to be the perfect opportunity to test my framework of understanding.

While writing our proposal for DHS in early 2011, a cursory search showed many similar European incidents that had largely eluded the US headlines, including attempted assassinations of the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard and British Member of Parliament Ste-

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1   Paul Gill, *Lone-actor Terrorists: A Behavioural Analysis* (Routledge, 2015).
2   John Horgan, Neil Shortland, Suzzette Abbasciano, and Shaun Walsh, "Actions Speak Louder than Words: A Behavioral Analysis of 183 Individuals Convicted for Terrorist Offenses in the United States from 1995 to 2012," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 61, no. 5 (2016): 1228–37.

phen Timms, a bombing of a Danish newspaper office in Copenhagen, a coordinated car and suicide bombing in Stockholm, and a shooting at a Frankfurt Airport targeting U.S. Air Force personnel among others.[3] It was immediately clear that lone attacks were not exclusive to the U.S., and that there was more to the phenomenon than initial lazy assumptions suggested. We pitched our project to DHS in March 2011, responded to comments in May 2011 and started work in August 2011. One month prior to starting, the right-wing extremist Anders Breivik killed over 70 people in separate bombing and shooting attacks on a single day in Norway.

1 Lesson 1:
Definitional ideals and pragmatic constraints

While designing the project proposal, one of the first questions we faced was who are we studying. Getting a discrete definition down on paper would set the parameters for everything that followed, make all the subsequent steps in our research process (as detailed below) more manageable, and provide a foundation for later data inclusion and exclusion-related questions. It was important to get our initial definition right, and we dedicated a substantial amount of time to doing so before data collection began.

Choosing terms

The project proposal eschewed the frequently used term lone wolf terrorism for multiple reasons. First, in the animal kingdom, wolves become "lone for short periods as they move from one pack to another for mating reasons (rather than simply going it alone forever).[4] Second, wolves are usually associated with cunning, intellect, and danger—traits that should not be applied to often incompetent attackers whose actions largely depend on luck. Third, the phrase has a connotation of "coolness" that may motivate some individuals to become a "lone wolf" attacker themselves. Finally, as my colleague Bart Schuurman once said, the term is also offensive to wolves.

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3   Gill, 2014; Gill, *Lone-actor Terrorists.*

4   Gill, 2014.

Ultimately, we circled around the term lone-actor terrorism and stuck with it. To be clear, there was no shortage of alternatives. Frequently utilized terms include "freelancers", "lone operator terrorist", "solo terrorists", "solo actor terrorists", "loners", "stray dogs", "lone offenders", "menacing loners", "leaderless resistance", "leaderless terrorism", "individual terrorism", "single actor terrorism", and "self-activated terrorism."[5] Most important when selecting a term, however, is that it fit the nature of the phenomena to be studied to the greatest degree possible and is coupled with a clearly circumscribed and articulated definition.

Deciding on definitions

Initially, our proposal neglected to define what we understood lone-actor terrorists to be. In the weeks between hearing of the proposal's success and the project's start, we spent a lot of time juggling definitional ideals and pragmatic constraints. Some studies on lone actors excluded individuals with any connections to a broader network,[6] while others allowed for their inclusion.[7] Some studies used definitions allowing only one person's involvement in a terrorist plot,[8] while others allowed for the inclusion of "isolated dyads"[9] or even more accomplices in the plot.[10] Still others went as far to suggest a "lone wolf pack" to include many more individuals that operate within a co-offending network, but lacking in formal

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5   Christopher Hewitt, *Understanding Terrorism in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003); E.J. van der Heide, "Individual Terrorism: Indicators of Lone Operators" (Master's thesis, University of Utrecht, 2011); Ramon Spaaij, *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); Jeff Gruenewald, Steven Chermak, and Joshua D. Freilich, "Distinguishing 'Loner' Attacks from Other Domestic Extremist Violence: A Comparison of Far-right Homicide Incident and Offender Characteristics," *Criminology & Public Policy* 12, no. 1 (2013): 65–91; Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011); Randy Borum, Robert Fein, and Bryan Vossekuil, "A Dimensional Approach to Analyzing Lone Offender Terrorism," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 5 (2012): 389–96; Jelle Van Buuren and Beatrice De Graaf, "Hatred of the System: Menacing Loners and Autonomous Cells in the Netherlands," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (2014): 156–84; Jeffrey Kaplan, Heléne Lööw, and Leena Malkki, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Lone Wolf and Autonomous Cell Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (2014): 1–12; Richard Bach Jensen, "The Pre-1914 Anarchist 'Lone Wolf' Terrorist and Governmental Responses," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 1 (2014): 86–94; Ze'ev Iviansky, "Individual Terror: Concept and Typology," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 1 (1977): 43–63; Petter Nesser, "Single Actor Terrorism: Scope, Characteristics and Explanations," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 6 (2012); Matthew Feldman, "Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition," *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 3 (2013): 270–86.

6   Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, "The 'Lone Wolf' Disconnect," *STRATFOR,* January 30, 2008.

7   Edwin Bakker and B. A. de Graaf, "Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism: Some CT Approaches Addressed," *Perspectives* 5, no. 5-6 (2011): 8.

8   Spaaij, *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism.*

9   J. Reid Meloy and Jessica Yakeley, "The Violent True Believer as a 'Lone Wolf'–Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Terrorism," *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 32, no. 3 (2014): 347–65.

10   Hewitt, *Understanding Terrorism in America*.

connections to a formalized terrorist command-and-control structure.[11] Some definitions restrict the observation pool to those inspired by specific ideologies,[12] while others allow the inclusion of those who carried out attacks because of personal or criminal motivations.[13] Some interpretations include offenders whose political motives were not immediately obvious,[14] while others highlight the importance of who was targeted. Some, like Feldman, stipulate that non-military targets must be the target of the attack,[15] while others, like Kaplan, allow for the targeting of government agents or buildings.[16] Some allow for lone actors to be directed in some way by a wider group of individuals or a movement, while others explicitly reject this component.[17] Finally, some definitions exclude individuals with a history of mental illness.[18]

Ultimately, some of our definitional decisions were made for purely research purposes. We decided individuals needed to be ideologically inspired, but we chose not to restrict data collection to any one ideology. For the purposes of the project, we borrowed from official United Kingdom (UK) parlance with terrorism defined as the use or threat of action designed to influence the government, intimidate the public or a section of the public, or advance a political, religious or ideological cause. Terrorism can involve violence against a person, damage to property, endangering a person's life (other than that of the one committing the action), creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public.[19] In line with the UK's definition, we did not want to exclude cases based on the target of the attack. Adopting a definition that mandated an ideologically inspired action but did not restrict based on the target of that action, we determined, would allow for the possibility of comparative analysis across ideologies[20] and across targeting strategies.[21]

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11   Raffaello Pantucci, *A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists* (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2011): 19–22.

12   Bakker and de Graaf, "Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism, 8.

13   Jeffrey D. Simon, *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2013); Aaron Richman and Yair Sharan, eds., *Lone Actors - An Emerging Security Threat* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, NATO Science for Peace and Security Series, 2015), 3.

14   George Michael, *Lone Wolf Terror and the Rise of Leaderless Resistance* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012).

15   Feldman, "Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism, 270–86.

16   Jeffrey Kaplan, "Leaderless Resistance," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 3 (1997): 80–95.

17   Feldman, "Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism, 270–86.

18   Burton and Stewart, "The 'Lone Wolf' Disconnect."

19   For the official UK definition, see: https://www.cps.gov.uk/terrorism.

20   Emily Corner, Noémie Bouhana, and Paul Gill, "The Multifinality of Vulnerability Indicators in Lone-Actor Terrorism," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 25, no. 2 (2019): 111–32.

21   Paul Gill and Emily Corner, "Lone-actor Terrorist Target Choice," *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 34, no. 5 (2016): 693–705.

Pragmatic constraints

Other definitional decisions we made were for purely pragmatic purposes. As additional project outputs, we promised a descriptive analysis and a quantitative analysis from which to derive a lone-actor terrorist typology. This necessitated a larger sample size than what a more restrictive definition would allow. While lone actors (e.g. those operating completely independently of a group yet claim the attack on behalf of a group/movement or, alternatively, those that may have radicalized within a wider group but subsequently left and carried out terrorist acts outside of a formal command and control structure) would form the core of our data collection, we needed to extend our definition a bit to increase our sample size. We, therefore, decided to also include "lone dyads" (e.g. pairs of individuals who operate independently of a formal group, conceiving, developing, and carrying out terrorist related activities without the input from a wider network) and "solo terrorists" (e.g. individuals who are specifically trained and equipped by a terrorist group, but who attempt to carry out the actual attack alone) to broaden the sample size.

Conceptually, these two categories were similar to and maintained the integrity of more traditional definitions of lone-actor terrorists both in terms of undertaking an attack on their own (in the case of "solo terrorists") and in terms of having been inspired to carry out an attack outside of the confounds of an actual group (in the case of the "lone dyads"). Put simply, both "lone dyads" and "solo terrorists" each operated in a manner one step removed, independent of, and/or divested from larger terrorist operations and group command structures. Based on our PIRA data collection experience, we stopped short of including "triads" (groups of three individuals involved in a terrorist attack absent commands or input from a broader terrorist group) and larger co-offending networks (or "lone wolf packs") because of serious concerns about the availability of data given the involvement of multiple plotters in an attack, an issue discussed further later in this chapter.

We also made the pragmatic decision to specify that the individual needed to be lone at the time of the attack rather than throughout the radicalization process. Determining whether an attacker acted alone during the attack itself is simple. It is a discrete moment, a single day, and therefore much clearer and less resource intensive to identify and study. A consistent problem arose, however, in cases where a single individual was arrested and convicted

for plotting an attack, giving the appearance of relevancy, but in which it later became clear that other individuals, notably confidential informants, played a key role in shepherding the plotting of an attack. In these cases, the sole arrested individual may have sincerely felt as though they were a part of a group in plotting the attack, and therefore, given our own definitions, would not fall within the category of a "lone actor."

Data availability

For data availability issues, we additionally restricted our data geographically to those who planned their attack within the "West" (e.g. Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand); there simply was not enough material and language proficiency available on non-Western cases. Fortunately, subsequent collaborative projects have demonstrated some of the ecological and cultural validity of our findings on Palestinian lone actors.[22] The field could benefit from further collaborations to build out this study in additional contexts.

Knowing that each of these decisions had the potential to sway results in any given direction, we also decided to code each of these important criteria to allow for alterations in our definition. Doing so granted us flexibility in later adapting the research using a new definition (e.g. the author's later decision to exclude solo terrorists and lone dyads from the definitional criteria) or in cross-checking validity by comparing results among different definitional permutations (which is now a relatively common request).

Prior to data collection, and after narrowing our definitional criteria, we also examined previous academic literature on lone-actor terrorism to construct our research or "actor" dictionary – a list of offenders fitting our previously established criteria. Beyond previous literature, we sourced additional offender names through tailored search strings and applied to LexisNexis. Initially, we were restricted to English language resources; however, in later projects we were able to collaborate with Dutch, German, Danish, and Polish colleagues with the requisite language skills. More individuals were also identified through the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) developed by the National Consortium for the Study of Terror-

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22   Simon Perry, Badi Hasisi, and Gali Perry, "Lone Terrorists: A Study of Run-over Attacks in Israel," *European Journal of Criminology* 16, no. 1 (2019): 102–23; Badi Hasisi, Simon Perry, Yonatan Ilan, and Michael Wolfowicz, "Concentrated and Close to Home: The Spatial Clustering and Distance Decay of Lone Terrorist Vehicular Attacks," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2019): 1–39; Simon Perry, "The Application of the 'Law of Crime Concentration' to Terrorism: The Jerusalem Case Study," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2019): 1–23.

ism and Responses to Terrorism (START), as well as through lists of individuals convicted of terrorism-related offenses.

During our attempts to construct an actor dictionary, however, we ran into another data constraint. The data available through LexisNexis—upon which we primarily relied when populating our dictionary and dataset—only contained limited information on terrorist events that occurred prior to 1990. Even the more basic task of simply identifying lone actors that did not dominate the news prior to 1990 is a rather difficult challenge given the relatively limited records from decades prior. As such, we decided to further limit the population of the study to post-1990 events and offenders.

Reflecting on the definitional choices, parameters, and constraints that limited the scope and reach of our study, a few key points are particularly salient. First, regardless of the subject of a particular study and the seeming relevance of the data gathered within it, both researchers and consumers of research should pay close attention to foundational definitional choices and their impact on database construction and the information housed within said database. It is not hard to imagine two parallel studies on the same topic setting forth two very distinct sets of contrasting results based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria established in their initial definitions. We return to similar issues in the concluding section of this chapter. Second, in many cases, the definitions chosen will be dictated by both pragmatic and data-related constraints. Researchers and research consumers should pay close attention to how the availability of data may limit the research query and, therefore, research findings.

2 Lesson 2: Relying on open sources
Opportunities and limitations

As I noted earlier, my early ICST experiences convinced me of the utility of open source data, which proved even more useful when studying lone actors. Given the particularly low rate of, and therefore heighted attention to, lone-actor terrorist attacks, the volume of granular, behavioral data made available through public media and reporting on individual lone actors tends to be much higher as compared to actors who operate on behalf of a specific group and/or within ongoing campaigns of violence where trials and convictions

are a weekly occurrence. For example, we were able to obtain educational data for 65% of the our lone-actor sample. This is, compared to less than 10% of our sample of Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) members, for whom level of education could generally only be inferred from the individual's occupational status.[23] The relatively higher level of granularity in data on lone actors made available through the media and open reporting makes open source materials a particularly rich repository of information with which to study and understand individual behaviors and characteristics.

Open-source data opportunities

How does open-source data compare to closed-source data? Does it provide sufficient information on violent extremists? Following our research for DHS, our research team carried out another project using closed-source data in collaboration with the Greater Manchester Police.[24] Findings from this closed source study replicated broadly similar results as identified in other studies that utilized open source data collection efforts. Based on this, we might conclude that outcomes from open source data, when properly collected and handled, may be more accurate than commonly perceived. However, it is possible that this may only be true in studies on lone actors in which, as noted earlier, openly available data tends to be far richer and more closely covered by the media.

In addition, because open-source data is freely available to the public, open-source collection initiatives also offer the bonus of research process replicability—wherein other researchers are able to replicate the exact methods of data collection and analysis used in another study—rather than just attempt to test or replicate research outcomes. Replicating research processes can be more difficult when using a completely closed-source data collection protocol, given that access to the data necessary to replicate the study is not widely available.

Collating closed-source data, moreover, can—and proved to be—an onerous and time-consuming task, one surprisingly more complex than comparable open-source initiatives.

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23   Paul Gill and John Horgan, "Who Were the Volunteers? The Shifting Sociological and Operational Profile of 1240 Provisional Irish Republican Army Members," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 3 (2013): 435–56.

24   Paul Gill, Emily Corner, Amy McKee, Paul Hitchen, and Paul Betley, "What Do Closed Source Data Tell Us About Lone Actor Terrorist Behaviour? A Research Note," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2019).

Missing data during closed-source collection was a common problem for many of the same reasons it is in open-source initiatives. Complicating our own closed source data collection efforts was that, in our Manchester study, each UK police force maintained their own internal data and reporting systems in idiosyncratic ways, which slowed the process of merging the data into a single repository. Despite this, however, closed-source data provided more granular insight than open sources in areas like leakage (e.g. instances in which lone actors told third parties about their attack plans), bystander observations, and information on engagement with extremist materials. This level of granularity in closed sources supplied us with the information we needed to more fully examine our questions and behaviors of interest among lone actors than that in open sources alone.

Open-source data limitations

Despite its promise, open-source data is not without its challenges. First, open source samples tend to only include information on individuals who planned or conducted incidents reported in the media. It is, therefore, possible that open source data contains important gaps when it comes to incidents that either (a) led to convictions but did not register any national media interest or were only reported in more local sources that were not included in the LexisNexis archives (in the case of our research specifically), or (b) were intercepted or disrupted by security forces without a conviction being made or word of the incident getting out. Second, the level of detail in open-source reports varies significantly across incidents and across publications, limiting data collection to only what is available and can reasonably be collected for each case.

Finally, when using only open-source information, it is often difficult to distinguish between missing data and variables that should be coded as a "no". Given the nature of newspaper and open-source reporting, it is unrealistic to expect each biographically-oriented story of a lone actor to contain lengthy passages that detail every variable or behavior the offender in question did not exhibit (e.g. the offender was not a substance abuser, a former convict, or recently exposed to new media influences, etc.). Definitive "no" answers were a rarity (less than 5%). This percentage was generally uniform across most variables we included. In our project, we usually coded answers as a definitive "no" in situations where inaccuracies were reported earlier in the news cycle and later rectified about a particular offender.

Our work with the Greater Manchester Police suggests that regularly finding definitive "no" answers may necessitate access to more in-depth closed-source data. Therefore, as a necessary practice, we typically treat each variable in the analysis dichotomously—e.g. the response is either a definitive "yes", or not enough information to suggest a "yes" and, therefore, a "no".

It is important for researchers and research consumers to realize and accept the fact that no dataset is perfect. The key is to approach databases skeptically, with an eye towards detail. Researchers building databases, in particular, should work to mitigate potential source limitations, triangulate resources, and again provide the transparency necessary for outside readers to contextualize the data presented and the findings drawn from it.

3 Lesson 3:
Deciding on variables and developing a coding schema

Overall, deciding the variables to collect data on in each of the individual cases proved our biggest project challenge. Ultimately, we ended up compiling variables from a number of places into a codebook to systematize and guide our interns' data collection and coding efforts. To do so, first we pulled pertinent socio-demographic questions from other ICST data collection projects. Second, we read everything available on lone-actor terrorism and formulated questions for the codebook based on the hypotheses within these publications to test the validity of some commonly held assertions within the literature.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, we looked to fields outside of traditional terrorism studies. Notably, we read Fein and Vossekuil's "Assassination in the United States"[25] (although consumed and obsessed over the elegance of their paper may be more precise). Although focused on individuals posing a risk of violence to public figures, the study offered parallels to how we could frame questions to understand lone-actor terrorist behavior. The authors demonstrated how risks could be conceptualized as "the end result of an under-

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25   Robert A. Fein and Bryan Vossekuil, "Assassination in the United States: An Operational Study of Recent Assassins, Attackers, and Near-le-thal Approachers," *Journal of Forensic Science* 44, no. 2 (1999): 321–33.

standable, and often discernible, process of thinking and action,"[26] and laid the ground-work for defining and measuring every step in the mobilization to violence. With this as our guide, all we needed to do was characterize and map each potential step in said "process of thinking and action."[27]

Fein and Vossekuil's paper also provided a gateway into the wider and thriving **threat and risk assessment and management literature**, which had, until then, largely been siloed from terrorism studies. This introduction was influential to our data collection and later analyses to the extent that my current research group now conducts public figure threat assessment research alongside colleagues at the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre.[28] Influenced by Fein and Vossekuil, we even decided to publish our initial lone-actor paper in the same outlet, *The Journal of Forensic Sciences*, rather than a traditional terrorism-oriented publication. It is important that terrorism researchers look to, draw insights from, and engage in fields outside of terrorism studies alone. There are plenty of fields that have already constructed frameworks and drawn insights that are highly relevant to the field of terrorism studies—we do not always have to reinvent the proverbial wheel. Likewise, there is plenty of insight that other fields can draw from our work on terrorism studies.

Once the codebook was largely constructed, we piloted our data collection on a small number of lone-actor cases and made notes of behaviors that appeared relevant but were not in our initial codebook. No codebook is perfect; having the time to pilot the codebook increases the chances of catching obvious and less-than-obvious issues that may otherwise arise. Testing the codebook also gave us a sense of how long it would take teams to code cases so we could estimate the workload accordingly.

The first case we looked at was Daniel Tovey, a right-wing extremist in the U.K. with apparent plans to ignite a "race war".[29] Understanding Tovey was complicated and, in many ways, personified our whole experience studying lone-actor terrorism. Evidence gathered by the

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26   Ibid., 321.

27   Ibid.

28   The Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC) is "the first joint NHS/police unit in the United Kingdom. Its purpose is to assess and manage the risks from lone individuals who harass, stalk or threaten public figures." For more on FTAC, see: https://www.fixatedthreat.com/ftac-welcome.php

29   For more on Tovey, see: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/oct/04/race.world

police suggested that Tovey was planning to target ethnic minorities in what appeared to be a campaign of attacks. Police found an arsenal of weaponry and bomb-making materials in his home prior to an attack occurring. In our review, we identified many factors we expected to see in a lone-actor case. He lived alone, he was not very social, he had not affiliated with any right-wing groups, and there was some serious family trauma in his past. But then came some findings that were a bit unexpected in that they were largely absent from literature on lone actors at the time.

For instance, Tovey was previously married to a Chinese woman and had dated several black women, one for over 16 years, all of whom were unaware of his racist outlook. There was a consistent pattern of, sometimes violent, quarrels with neighbors and he had a track record of obsessive behaviors and grievances. Finally, and most unexpectedly, neighbors regularly witnessed him in his garden either working out or cleaning his car wearing only a thong. The string of Tovey's behaviors, seemingly inconsequential taken individually, proved an interesting case study for questioning and coding further behavioral material. If nothing else, the project was going to give me some good stories. Tovey's case was the first we used to train our interns then and remains the first case on which new interns will be trained moving forward. It has that perfect fit of an engaging case study, a rich volume of available variables, and limited noise for coders to sift through.

Ultimately, we formulated over 180 variables in our initial data crawl and pilot. These variables spanned issues concerning socio-demographics, developmental experiences, criminal engagement, violent extremist engagement, pre-attack preparatory behaviors, and attack-related behaviors. While it is true that we could have coded many more variables, we decided to instead prioritize a more limited sampling in the interest of finite timelines and the public availability of certain types of information (e.g. volume and type of extremist content consumed by a lone attacker).[30] Over time, our variable count expanded to over 220, some of which were included to provide greater specificity on features that proved unexpectedly prevalent throughout the cases and required additional expertise to fully understand.

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30   For in-depth discussion of research processes involving coding media and content consumed by individuals convicted of terrorist crimes, see Donald Holbrook's RESOLVE Network Chapter: Donald Holbrook, *Primary Data and Individual Worldviews: Walking through Research on Terrorist Media Choices* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

For example, in a large majority of our cases, lone actors were found to have told third parties about their intended attack prior to actually carrying it out, a phenomenon other-wise referred to as leakage in traditional threat assessment. Recognizing this, we decided to gather additional information on the recipient of the leakage, the content of the leakage, how many people the lone attackers told of their violent intent, potential reasons for the leakage, what the recipient did with information from the leakage, and so on.

Similarly, we found a greater than expected presence of mental health problems across lone actor cases. To more fully understand the nature of identified mental health issues, Emily Corner, then a PhD student, joined the team and developed a coding schema for spec-ifying the specific diagnosis, diagnosis date, and associated symptoms. Follow-up projects also necessitated additional information regarding contextual factors, radicalizing settings, and individual propensity, which my colleague and officemate Noémie Bouhana expertly derived.

Selecting variables of interest and developing a coding schema can be an iterative process, and one that can constantly evolve. Developing and testing a coding schema or codebook on an initial sampling of cases can lead to the inclusion of important variables that may have been overlooked otherwise. In the same vein, consulting experts or literature outside of terrorism studies and/or outside of one's own initial research team can enrichen and illuminate important new insights from the data itself that are essential to making sense of a phenomenon and the key variables within it.

4 Lesson 4:
Coding data and quality control

Developing a clear and structured coding process is essential to ensuring quality control throughout the data coding process. In order to ensure reliable and consistent coding and minimize missing information, three independent coders coded each observation in our dataset separately. More specifically, for each lone actor, coders filled information into two Word documents. The first was the codebook with the full list of questions (which, upon

reflection, really should have been an Excel file to prevent the many headaches the Word document caused later in the project).

The second file contained the original article the coders used to extract responses to the questions in the codebook. If our coders found a relevant piece of information that answered any question on the codebook, they saved the whole original piece, pasted it into the Word file, and highlighted the relevant section in yellow for documentation. Directly after the passage, they indicated which variable(s) the highlighted section pertained to (e.g. Event Variable Number 5). While the process required additional tasks from our coders, in the end, it allowed for much faster and easier re-coding of variables if needed (e.g. mental health, leakage) and built in quality checks (more on this below).

After an observation was coded, the coding results were then reconciled in two subsequent stages. Referring to the three coders involved in the process as coders A, B, and C:

- **First,** the coding results of coder A were reconciled with the results of coder B.
- **Then,** the reconciled results from coders A and B were reconciled with the results of coder C.

Cases involving a disagreement between coders were admittedly rare, as coding a "no" response was uncommon. However, in cases where coders could not agree on the correct values for particular variables (e.g. one coder coded "yes" for a variable that another coded "no"), the differences were resolved based on an examination of the comparative reliability and quality of the original sources used by the coders. To assess source reliability and quality, we plotted sources on a continuum of reliability. For example:

Table 1: Continuum of reliability example

More Reliable	Court transcripts and associated documents that recorded final judicial decisions were deemed most reliable.
	Competency evaluations, sworn affidavits, and indictments, carried out during initial investigations post-arrest and pre-criminal trial were deemed reliable.
	Local newspaper reporting of a criminal trial, often much more detail oriented than national outlets, was also deemed reliable.
	Verbal or written statements by the terrorist or affiliated group were only deemed somewhat reliable, insomuch as they are particularly susceptible to dishonesty.
	Warrants produced prior to an arrest and expert witness reports (in the context of trials) were also considered somewhat reliable. Expert witness reports, in particular, are subject to bias and can be notoriously unreliable.
Less Reliable	We created a separate continuum for media articles at the less reliable end of the spectrum, considering personal opinion blogs highly subject to personal bias the least reliable and non-tabloid newspapers the most reliable.

Sources at the lower end of the credibility continuum can be highly questionable, subjecting the dataset to potential bias and the possibility of artificially inflating the true prevalence rate (how common the variable was across the entire dataset). Take mental health disorders

for example. In many cases, anonymous sources alluded to, but usually did not specify, an individual's strange and erratic behaviors prior to their radicalization. It is often implied and assumed that this is related to mental health problems, but the reporting is not specific.

For example, on September 23, 2014, Numan Haider stabbed and injured two counter-terrorism officers in the parking lot of a police station in Melbourne, Australia. Haider was subsequently shot dead at the scene, but there was evidence that his family previously encouraged him to seek help from a counselor for erratic behavior.[31] Their encouragement, however, seemed most likely linked to their worries over his potential radicalization rather than mental health issues.[32] Examples like Haider's fall short of confirming a mental health diagnosis, yet are often regarded as irrefutable evidence of the link between mental health problems and radicalization. To avoid perpetrating potential falsehoods, the bar for confirming evidence should be higher within research and practitioner communities.

Now that empirical evidence has demonstrated lone-actor terrorists have a greater propensity for mental health problems, questions of mental health are increasingly prevalent in media reporting on lone actors. Disturbingly low levels of evidence in a lot of reporting on lone actors depict the actor as having a mental disorder. This may inflate how often mental disorders are reported among lone actors if careful and standardized quality control mechanisms are not in place.

Concerns about over-counting the prevalence rates of certain lone actor characteristics typically stem from the quality of the source, whereas concerns about under-counting prevalence rates stem from issues of critical mass within a coding team and the range of accessible sources available. Not all databases are created equal and those that fail to report basic information about the data within them should be treated with caution. Sometimes studies lack transparency for a reason, sometimes they do so unintentionally. Either way, a lack of transparency can and has resulted in replicability crises elsewhere. Terrorism studies is not immune. Prominent databases similar to our own, even those for which we actually provided our codebook, can be vague on all of these issues and/or have stark data disparities.

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31   Cameron Houston, Tammy Mills, John Silvester, and David Wroe, "Terror Suspect Numan Haider: Heightened Alert before AFL Grand Final Weekend," *Age*, September 24, 2014.

32   Chip Le Grand, "Numan Haider Inquest: Teen Tried to Kill Policeman, Inquest Told," *Australian*, March 7, 2016.

While differences in definitional choices may impact prevalence rate counts, they are not the only factor at play.

In order to ensure accurate reporting of information and to account for discrepancies in any data presented, increased transparency, attribution, and collaboration in database efforts is needed. This is not only true for lone-actor terrorism database projects, but for all database endeavors. For example, when comparing our data to the Countering Lone Actor Terrorism (CLAT)[33] project—which utilizes a different definition, but similar variables—we identified systematic undercounting of prevalence rates as compared to our own. This includes behaviors like experiencing social isolation (CLAT reported 28% while we reported 52.9%), military training (19% vs. 26%), prior criminal convictions (33% vs. 41.2%), using the internet for tactical research (33% vs. 46.2%), bomb-making manual possession (17.5% vs. 50.4%), and leakage (46% vs. 63.9%). At face value, the reasons behind these disparities are not entirely clear. However, the presence of such disparities is concerning, particularly when it comes to ascertaining the accuracy of any data presented and its subsequent analysis. Greater understanding of the nature and cause of these disparities will ensure greater accuracy in reporting.[34]

While issues will inevitably arise in any data collection effort, ambitious data collection projects require the requisite amount of foreplaning and institutional capital—be it human, technical, financial—in order to maximize the potential of the volume of qualitative information available.

Conclusion

No matter what the topic, research has the potential to impact policy and practice. In terrorism studies and related fields, this should not be taken lightly. I have seen our lone-actor work cited to justify portions of thinking behind particular interventions, including the establishment of a joint agency response to the threat of lone-actor grievance-fueled violence

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33   For more, see: https://rusi.org/projects/lone-actor-terrorism
34   The author and associated colleagues are currently working on a systematic review.

in Australia,[35] the Canadian Secret Intelligence Service's approach to detecting individual's posing a national security threat,[36] community engagement approaches in the U.S.,[37] the adoption of gatekeepers at regional prevention units in Germany,[38] mental-health based interventions in Los Angeles and the UK,[39] family-based counselling interventions in Germany,[40] and violent extremist risk assessment tools like the TRAP-18 and VERA2R.[41] While it is promising to see research inform policy, it also means we need to be extra vigilant to ensure we get our research right. Emily Corner and I once wrote a simple sentence: specificity matters.[42] It was a very simple mantra for the research team. Influenced by colleagues like Sandy Schumann and Isabelle Van Der Vegt, a new mantra of "transparency matters" is coming to the forefront of our team. Transparently reporting the process and limitations affecting the data gathering and assessment process is crucial to not only ensure the research is responsibly conducted, accurate, and trustworthy, but also that it contains the necessary validity and caveats necessary to be used responsibly in policy and practice over time.[43]

I have seen our lone-actor research miscited to justify policy positions I find questionable. Whilst my usual reaction might be a Twitter rant, such instances always makes me question whether I could have communicated the research more effectively and clearly. Should I

35 Michele T. Pathé, Debbie J. Haworth, Terri-Ann Goodwin, Amanda G. Holman, Stephen J. Amos, Paul Winterbourne, and Leanne Day, "Establishing a Joint Agency Response to the Threat of Lone-actor Grievance-fuelled Violence," *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2018): 37–52.

36 Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Mobilization to Violence (Terrorism) Research: Key Findings* (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2018), https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/csis-scrs/documents/publications/IMV_-_Terrorism-Research-Key-findings-eng.pdf.

37 B. Heidi Ellis and Saida Abdi, "Building Community Resilience to Violent Extremism Through Genuine Partnerships," *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 289.

38 Jens Ostwaldt, "Closing the 'Critical Disconnect': The Establishment of Regional Prevention Networks at the Interface of Prevention and Deradicalisation Work Using the Example of the Federal State Democracy Centre Baden-Wuerttemberg," *Journal for Deradicalization* 14 (2018): 218–48.

39 Stevan Weine, David P. Eisenman, La Tina Jackson, Janni Kinsler, and Chloe Polutnik, "Utilizing Mental Health Professionals to Help Prevent the Next Attacks," *International Review of Psychiatry* 29, no. 4 (2017): 334–40; Jonathan Hurlow, Simon Wilson, and David V. James, "Protesting Loudly about Prevent Is Popular but Is It Informed and Sensible?" *BJPsych Bulletin* 40, no. 3 (2016): 162–63.

40 Daniel Koehler, "Family Counselling, De-radicalization and Counter-terrorism: The Danish and German Programs in Context," in *Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an Evidence-base for Policy and Practice,* eds. Sara Zeiger and Ann Aly (Perth: Curtin University, 2015), 129–36.

41 For more on TRAP-18, see: https://www.gifrinc.com/trap-18-manual/. For more on VERA2R, see: https://www.vera-2r.nl/.

42 Emily Corner and Paul Gill, "A False Dichotomy? Mental Illness and Lone-actor Terrorism," *Law and Human Behavior* 39, no. 1 (2015): 23–34.

43 Sandy Schumann, Isabelle van der Vegt, Paul Gill, and Bart Schuurman, "Towards Open and Reproducible Terrorism Studies: Current Trends and Next Steps," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 5 (2019): 61–73.

have taken more time with the abstract? Should I have put the caveats up front rather than burying them in the conclusion? Should I publish non-technical blogs to coincide with the journal article? The answer to effective translation of science into policy remains elusive. Despite this, what remains relevant, and what this chapter intends to communicate, is the importance of understanding and taking into consideration how data constraints, research processes, and the choices of a research team throughout the research process impact the strength of research, necessitate transparency around all aspects of the research process, and carry significant implications for the use of research in policy and practice.

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Building Secondary Source Databases on Violent Extremism

Reflections and Suggestions

Joe Whittaker[1]

It is often argued that a limitation to studying and challenging violent extremism (VE) is a lack of data – extremists are a difficult research population to engage in primary research. However, proponents of this argument miss the wealth of rich, secondary data available. This chapter offers a reflective analysis of creating a database of violent extremists exclusively via secondary sources, including:

- *Considerations relating to finding appropriate sources to collect data and the merits and limitations of different sources. While there is an abundance of rich data, discerning how and where to find it, as well as judging between conflicting sources, can be challenging;*

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- *The difficulties in identifying robust inclusion and exclusion criteria. Parsing through what constitutes membership in VE groups, how to define VE, what constitutes specific geographic or temporal zones, etc., is made more challenging given the nebulous nature of terrorism and violent extremism.*

- *The development of a codebook that both draws from previous literature and creates new avenues for future research;*

- *Selecting and undertaking quantitative and qualitative analysis appropriate for the data at hand; and,*

- *Ethical issues surrounding the collection and storing of personal data, as well as potential naming of violent extremists as part of the research.*

This analysis draws from the author's doctoral research, in which he created a database of Daesh actors within America. The hope is that the reflections of both the successes and failures of his own research can offer guidance for those that seek to undertake similar studies.

Introduction

It is often argued that a limitation to researching violent extremism stems from a lack of robust, primary data, leaving important questions unanswered.[2] Recently, scholars have noted access to such sources has improved, but there is still undoubtedly a long way to go.[3] The reason for a lack of primary data often stems from the seemingly insurmountable practical and ethical issues that pertain to researching dangerous, unwilling, and vulnerable

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2   Andrew Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research," in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, eds. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (New York: Routledge, 2009), 34–48; Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 565–80; Paul Gill, Emily Corner, Amy Thornton, and Maura Conway, "What are the Roles of the Internet in Terrorism?", *Vox Pol* (2015).

3   Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007–2016: A Review of Data, Methods, and Authorship," *Terrorism and Political Violence,* (2018): 1–16; Lorne Dawson, "Clarifying the Explanatory Context for Developing Theories of Radicalization: Five Basic Considerations," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18 (2019): 146–84.

actors. Although scholars should seek to conduct primary data-driven research, it is also incumbent to look for opportunities to gain knowledge using secondary sources.

For clarity, the term "primary sources" relate first-hand accounts of data. This may be a video of an event, a law, or an autobiography. "Secondary sources" rely on interpretation of events, often by analyzing primary sources themselves. This may include journalistic articles, scholars' analysis of data, or documentaries. Often in research, primary sources are considered to be more valuable than secondary ones because they the interpreting author can have a number of vested interests and biases. However, given the historic difficulties in collecting primary data on violent extremism, secondary sources have emerged as a popular avenue of research. Fortunately for would-be researchers, violent extremists' actions are often highly "newsworthy." There is often a keen appetite in the media and among the general populace to discover as much as possible about the lives of violent extremists, particularly following an attack, resulting in a wealth of rich data.

Many scholars have taken advantage of the rich data available from secondary sources and made important contributions to the field. Sageman was one of the first to utilize secondary sources to understand violent extremists, creating a database of 172 violent extremist actors in the years leading up to 2003.[4] Bakker compiled a similar database of European actors based on secondary sources to compare with Sageman's.[5] Gill and others find that while the use of the Internet is prevalent in cases of violent extremist actors, most do not "radicalize" online; the offline domain is equally important.[6] Similarly, Horgan and others establish key differences between lone and group-based actors, both demographically and in their event behaviors.[7] Below I offer reflections from my doctoral research, in which I created a database of Da'esh[8] actors in America using a range of secondary sources. The

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4   Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

5   Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in Which They Joined the Jihad* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations *Clingendael*, 2006).

6   Gill, Corner, Thornton, and Conway, "What are the Roles of the Internet in Terrorism?"; Paul Gill, Emily Corner, Maura Conway, Amy Thornton, Mia Bloom, and John Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers: Quantifying Behaviors, Patterns, and Processes," *Criminology & Public Policy* 16, no. 1 (2017): 99-117.

7   John Horgan, Neil Shortland, Suzzette Abbasciano, and Shaun Walsh, "Actions Speak Louder than Words: A Behavioral Analysis of 183 Individuals Convicted for Terrorist Offenses in the United States from 1995 to 2012," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 61, no. 5 (2016): 1228–37.

8   *Da'esh* is an Arabic translation of the acronym for the Islamic State in the Levant, also known as ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) or ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

chapter details my considerations on data collection, the importance of robust definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria, appropriate methods of analysis, and ethical challenges. In addition, the chapter outlines many of the issues, limitations, and challenges that face scholars collecting secondary data for research on violent extremism and similar studies and offer suggestions on how to ameliorate them. These include the problems caused by the different goals and incentives of the original authors to the researcher; uneven data; as well as the ethical issues that scholars face.

Data collection: Secondary sources

There are many avenues through which researchers can collect data on violent extremists from secondary sources, each offering distinct strengths and challenges, including criminal justice documents, journalistic accounts and the media, academic literature, and pre-existing databases on violent extremist actors and incidents.

Criminal justice data

Criminal justice documents are an excellent place to start to gather secondary source materials. Court transcripts and criminal complaints often provide rich, granular-level detail relating to an individual's behaviors prior to and during their involvement in terrorist activities. Prosecution and defense sentencing memorandums can also paint a comprehensive picture of an individual's upbringing and demographic information. Issues associated with accessing legal documents, however, necessarily limits the utility of their use as secondary sources. The availability of legal documents in particular differs from country to country depending on privacy norms.

In the United States, for example, many legal and court filings are available to the public via the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER). In many cases, these filings are collected and archived by researchers, such as George Washington University's Program on Extremism.[9] In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice issues press releases rich in detail on violent extremist and terrorist activity and profiles, often including criminal justice information. For example, a U.S. Department of Justice press release for Zoobia Shahnaz, a U.S.

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[9]   "ISIS in America – The Cases," George Washington University Program on Extremism, https://extremism.gwu.edu/cases.

citizen who pleaded guilty to providing material support to Da'esh, contained both a summary of the allegations against her along with her actual indictment[10].

In other countries, particularly within Europe, legal documents on individuals under investigation or convicted of terrorism-related offenses are less readily available, although most countries maintain an online service with varied access to detailed documents. However, because incidents of violent extremism are considered to be of high public interest, press reports related to the incidents are often sanctioned by government agencies in the interest of transparency. These press reports often yield rich, albeit sometimes selective, data on individuals involved in terrorist incidents. After the Westminster Bridge attack in London in 2017, for example, the UK government released a detailed report on the incident which itself contained important insights useful to researchers.[11]

Journalistic data

Journalistic data are also an invaluable source of secondary data on violent extremists, particularly in countries where court documents are less readily available. Most newspapers have courtroom beat reporters that write about the specific details of cases as they occur. For my own research, I found that local, investigative journalism offered an in-depth picture into violent extremist actors' lives and their pathways towards violent extremism. In particular, news organizations such as Minnesota Public Radio provided a wealth of information, dedicating time and resources to comprehensive research within their local community, which greatly contributed to my own data collection.[12] Online resources such as Google News and Lexis Nexus, can increase the ease of collecting journalistic resources, offering archived reporting from different sources. Users can also set up to be notified of new resources by setting up email notifications alerting them of the addition of new resources on Google News and Lexis Nexus.

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10 "Long Island Woman Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to ISIS," U.S. Department of Justice, November 26, 2018, https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/long-island-woman-pleads-guilty-providing-material-support-isis.

11 Max Hill, *The Westminster Bridge Terrorist Attack* (London: Crown, Her Majesty's Government, 2018).

12 For example: Laura Yuen, "Gulad Omar: The Path to ISIS and the Story You Haven't Heard," *MPR News*, December 22, 2016, https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/12/21/path-to-isis-minnesota-guled-omar-mpr-interviews

Academic literature

Another rich resource for secondary data is academic literature. Many in-depth case studies on individual violent extremists,[13] groups,[14] or specific incidents[15] exist in academic literature. These scholarly studies can provide important insights for researchers embarking on violent extremism studies using secondary data.

The strength, and therefore utility, of academic resources lies in their rigor, established through peer-review processes and the incorporation of theoretical perspectives. Unfortunately, however, access to many academic studies is sometimes limited, particularly because many peer-reviewed journals exist behind paywalls, and are therefore inaccessible to those who do not have institutional or individual paid-access subscriptions. Open-access articles, those which do not require a paid subscription, are steadily becoming more commonplace and a number of think tanks and organizations provide open access to all of their resources. The sheer amount of academic articles on violent extremism, even without paywall access, makes sorting through and analyzing such articles for secondary-source material somewhat difficult. For the collection and analysis of academic resources, I recommend using file storage software, such as Mendeley, which is free and includes keyword search functionalities that enable users to search through many articles for specific information (i.e. the names of violent extremist actors or incidents).

Pre-existing databases

Finally, pre-existing databases on violent extremist actors and incidents provide an easy-to-use and rich source of secondary data for those researching violent extremism. Many databases are free and available online, including the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which boasts the largest collection of data on terrorist incidents and allows users to select events

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13   For example, for Anders Brevik: Jacob Aasland Ravndal, "Anders Behring Breivik's Use of the Internet and Social Media," *Journal EXIT-Deutschland* 2 (2013): 172–85. For Roshonara Choudhry: Elizabeth Pearson, "The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad," *Policy and Internet* 8, no. 1 (2016): 5–33. For Colleen LaRose: Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney, "What's Love Got to Do with It? Framing 'JihadJane' in the US Press," *Media, War & Conflict* 5, no. 1 (2012): 6–21.

14   For example, on the Hofstad Group: Bart Schuurman and John Horgan, "Rationales for Terrorist Violence in Homegrown Jihadist Groups: A Case Study from the Netherlands," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 27 (2016): 55–63.

15   For example, on the Westgate Mall attack: David Mair, "#Westgate: A Case Study: How Al-Shabaab Used Twitter during an Ongoing Attack," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (2017): 24–43.

by date, location, and perpetrator group, using a number of different definitions.[16] Sorting by definitions is particularly useful if the research in question blurs the lines between terrorism and insurgency. The GTD offers a short description of each terrorist event and a number of corresponding quantitative variables, while also providing a sampling of journalistic resources on the event. Whereas the GTD focuses on events, databases such as the Counter-Extremism Project focus on specific actors, providing a sourced summary of their background and their path to extremism as well as information and links on known associates.[17] These databases can be particularly useful in the initial phase of identifying violent extremists for inclusion in research or the construction of a new database.

Collection challenges and limitations

Individually, these four sources of secondary data are likely to prove insufficient in gaining a clear picture of to create a database for analysis. However, they can complement each other effectively. For example, criminal justice information can offer a detailed and granular account of the events directly leading up to violent extremist attacks or arrests, such as what the actor posted on social media, whether they travelled abroad, or if they conducted training. Data from criminal justice and legal materials can be supplemented by data from investigative journalism, which often provides information from interviews with friends and family of individual perpetrators of violent extremist activities who can attest to that individual's upbringing or any recent changes in behavior. Academic materials can also offer a layer of expert analysis, incorporating theoretical perspectives, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and placing the actor within a larger movement. Finally, databases can be an excellent place both to initially identify actors or incidents to be analyzed, as well as a resource from which to triangulate data collected from other sources.

However, as previously noted, a number of problems can arise from collecting secondary data. A key fact to keep in mind when collecting any type of data – primary or secondary – is that data itself is likely to include a number of biases, inaccuracies, limited data collection priorities, and coding differentials. When using secondary sources in particular, researchers must be mindful of the fact that the original data-collectors may not—and almost always do

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16   "Global Terrorism Database (2018)," National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd

17   "Terrorist and Extremist Database," Counter-Extremism Project, https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists.

not—have the same goals as the secondary collector. Law enforcement and public prosecutors write criminal complaints to secure prosecutions, journalists write (and editors edit) articles to sell newspapers or generate clicks. Even academic works or databases are likely to have different purposes when used as data the second time around. This is problematic because the original authors may not think to include information that is vital for the secondary author, or may have used different exclusion or inclusion criteria that imbue a certain level of bias in the data they present. Consequently, using a diversity of types of sources is vital, as is attempting to triangulate data to ensure the greatest validity possible.

Similarly, some events and actors are deemed more newsworthy than others, making available data on different topics and actors unequal. Incidents of terrorism, particularly jihadist, are the subject of disproportionate news coverage,[18] as are female perpetrators.[19] I found this to be the case in my research, wherein certain types of actors and incidents had far more data available than others. For example, successful attackers received far more coverage than those that travelled to Iraq or Syria, white converts to Islam were covered more than those born as Muslims, and women involved in violent extremism were covered more than men. This runs the risk of certain demographics being artificially over-represented, which could skew analyses. There is no easy way to correct for this. To address this in my research, I removed cases that had insufficient evidence or available data after establishing the key variables that I was investigating—antecedent and event-focused behaviors.

Selecting definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria

The next important aspect of developing a research project or database is adopting accurate and representative definitions for the data included and making them transparent. Definitions are difficult to establish, notably because concepts around "violent extremism" are not universally defined or adopted. Nevertheless, establishing clear and consistent definitions that guide the research process and database construction is necessary in ensuring that the ultimate analysis and findings are accurately represented.

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18   Zachary S. Mitnik, Joshua D. Freilich, and Steven M. Chermak, "Post-9/11 Coverage of Terrorism in the New York Times," *Justice Quarterly* (2018): 1–25.

19   Conway and McInerney, "What's Love Got to Do with It? Framing 'JihadJane' in the US Press."

Defining broad concepts

The most fundamental decision any researcher faces, and particularly those within the ill-defined fields of terrorism and violent extremism, is to define the phenomenon that will be researched. I cannot overstate the importance of opting against the "you know extremism when you see it" approach. The long-lasting inability to define or reach consensus on "terrorism" has long marred the field. This lack of a coherent definition stems, in part, from political issues,[20] and it is not clear terms such as "extremism", "violent extremism", or "radicalization" are any less nebulous or politically loaded.[21] It is prudent, therefore, for scholars to be clear about exactly what they are researching. In many instances, it can be helpful to use a pre-existing definition. For example, the aforementioned GTD has three different criteria for users to choose between when searching data:

- The act must be towards a political, economic, religious, or social goal.

- There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims.

- The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities, i.e. the act must be outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law (particularly the admonition against deliberately targeting civilians or non-combatants).[22]

These criteria offer researchers different tools, depending on what they are studying. For example, if one is studying violent extremism defined as more closely resembling an insurgency, then the first definition will be more applicable, but if the topic is on a more traditional conception of terrorism, the second or third would be more appropriate. In other cases, it may be more suitable to use a governmental definition, particularly if the research is focused on a specific country. However, it may also be beneficial to deliberately eschew a governmental decision if the researcher feels that it is too value laden or problematic. For example, the British government defines extremism as "vocal or active opposition to *funda-*

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20   Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?", *Police Practice and Research* 29, no. 3 (2002): 123–33; Alex P. Schmid, "Terrorism - The Definitional Problem," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 36, no. 2 (2004): 375–419.

21   Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *International Centre for Counter Terrorism-The Hague* (2013).

22   START, "Global Terrorism Database."

mental British values."[23, 24] Ultimately, there are a number of ways in which researchers can define their phenomenon—what is important, is that what the researcher is addressing is defined clearly.

One way to bypass politically charged definitional debates is to adopt definitions based on group membership, only selecting cases in which the actor is part of a particular violent extremist organization. For example, if researching violent extremist Boko Haram actors, one would not need to distinguish between acts of terrorism and acts of insurgency, but rather include events or actors associated with the group. However, this brings about another set of problems.

Designating and defining individuals

Group membership is often more nebulous than presented, as for example, Da'esh acts of terrorism in the West in recent years. Although there are instances of "official" group members conducting attacks, the majority of cases represent smaller cells or lone actors who may have varied links to the core organization. Europol observes that "jihadist actors can be both directed by [Da'esh] or merely inspired by [Da'esh] ideology and rhetoric."[25] This means that, if a researcher were to select cases on the basis of formal group membership, it would not capture the reality of contemporary violent extremism. To ameliorate this, in my work, I followed the lead of the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism's "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States" (PIRUS) codebook:

We define "member" broadly. This includes official members, individuals [that governments] claimed were members...and includes credible media sources link to that group (but not based on pure speculation). It also includes individuals who claim membership... even if the group itself does not acknowledge membership.[26]

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23   Emphasis added by the author.

24   *Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales* (London: Crown, Her Majesty's Government, 2015), 22.

25   Europol, *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2017* (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2017), 5.

26   START, "Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) Codebook," START (2018): 6.

This criterion allows for self-identification to a violent extremist organization. Next, I established that there are two primary ways in which one can be judged to self-identify:

- **Outward:** Words or actions that display support for a group such as publicly stating it (online or offline) or attempting to recruit others or;

- **Inward:** Activities such as downloading, reading, or listening to the group's or sympathizers' media content.

Importantly, one must establish that this self-identification plays a significant role in the actor's behaviors.

Researchers must also take spatial and temporal criteria into account; that is to say, where the research is focused and when it occurred. The violent extremist movement of choice may dictate these decisions. For example, researching The Troubles in Northern Ireland already predefines a broad area and time period of focus. However, if either the area or time is too expansive to collect all of the relevant data, researchers should consider narrowing their focus to be more specific. In this case, for example, it may be more realistic to gather data on actors in Derry, Northern Ireland between 1970 and 1974. Of course, data need not always be representative, particularly when conducting qualitative analysis. However, if the focus of research is to make generalizable claims, then it must be representative. For my own research, my choice of group made establishing the date easy; I simply began from the first established incidents of Daesh in America, which dated back to around 2012. However, deciding what constituted "being in America" is more problematic as there are a number of different ways this could be interpreted. I decided that to be included, the actor must:

- Have been charged in the U.S., or
- Be a U.S. citizen, or
- Be a U.S. permanent resident, or
- Have resided in the U.S. at the time of the event.

Violent extremist movements can be complex, transnational, and nebulous. If I were to include every actor that had any relation to the U.S., then the list would be unmanageable and would likely not end up not saying much about the country of focus. Ultimately, there is no correct way to define or include/exclude data; researchers must establish their parameters for themselves using sound reasoning, stick to them, and clearly articulate them to external audiences.

Analyzing databases: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods

After collecting data and establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, the next step is deciding the most appropriate way to analyze the database using a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approach. Although there are few limits on what can be analyzed, researchers should stick to the strengths of secondary data and avoid its weaknesses. Most analyses focus on the behaviors of violent extremists, rather than, for example, cognitive factors, as rich data on the former are easier to obtain. Secondary data is not well-suited for establishing when and how actors' beliefs began to become more extreme and when they started to justify violence. On the other hand, secondary sources are more helpful in determining whether actors displayed specific behaviors, such as interacting with co-ideologues or scouting out potential targets in advance. One must be careful, however, not to over-interpret these sources given the limitations outlined above are still present. Being overly ambitious in terms of trying to establish different phases and turning points of "radicalization," is unlikely to yield robust findings if the researcher relies solely on second-hand evidence. One potential exception to this is if the researcher has access to closed-source police data which often outlines the details of the case in much greater detail.[27]

Quantitative methods

The majority of secondary database studies use quantitative measures of analysis.[28] For this method, a codebook must be created; a method of classifying content to be analyzed. In

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27   Paul Gill, "The Online Behaviours of British Terrorists," *Vox Pol* (2016).

28   For example, see: Gill, Corner, Thornton, and Conway, "What are the Roles of the Internet in Terrorism?"; Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers"*;* Horgan, Shortland, Abbasciano, and Walsh, "Actions Speak Louder than Word."

many instances, this takes the form of demographic data, such as age, gender, country of birth, employment, and criminal record,[29] often to establish whether there are any common demographic factors shared amongst these actors. Furthermore, some studies code for event-specific behaviors, such as if and how the actor used the Internet,[30] how actors plan and prepare for attacks,[31] or how far actors travel to conduct attacks.[32] While researchers should have a codebook in place before analysis, the process can be iterative, adding new coding variables as they emerge from the data.[33]

One challenge that must be considered is how to code the data in cases with insufficient evidence. For example, when coding for whether an actor chose their attack target online, open source data may not mention how such operational decision-makings were made. In some instances, scholars provide three data points – *Yes*, *No*, or *Don't Know* [34] - and remove "Don't Knows" from the analysis. Others, including myself, code dichotomously, using two data points: *Yes* or *Insufficient Evidence for Yes.*[35]

Neither method is without flaws; the former is likely to undercount both *Yes* and *No* responses, while the latter is likely to undercount *Yes* responses. I use the two-point coding system because, as explained by Horgan et al., "it is universally true in open-source coding that the number of true 'Yes's' will likely be a truer representation than the number of 'Nos'... [and] it may be especially true for behavioral factors associated with non-illegal or terrorist activities that occurred abroad." [36] This, again, is playing to the strengths of the data available; it is very difficult to prove a negative in open source-reporting. For example, a journalist will not report on many things that *did not* happen because most of them are irrelevant to the piece they are writing but is more likely to report things that *did* happen as long the variables are not too obscure.

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29   Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe*; Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

30   Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers."

31   Bart Schuurman, Edwin Bakker, Paul Gill, and Noémie Bouhana, "Lone Actor Terrorist Attack Planning and Preparation: A Data-Driven Analysis," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 63, no. 4 (2017).

32   Zoe Marchment, Noémie Bouhana, and Paul Gill, "Lone Actor Terrorists : A Residence-to-Crime Approach," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018): 1–2.6

33   Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers."

34   Horgan, Shortland, Abbasciano, and Walsh, "Actions Speak Louder than Words."

35   Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers."

36   Horgan, Shortland, Abbasciano, and Walsh, "Actions Speak Louder than Words," 1236.

There are a number of different ways to analyze data quantitatively once it is coded. Most simply, researchers can use descriptive statistics and frequencies that yield a basic over-view of the sample: the average age; what percentage used the Internet to engage with co-ideologues; how many co-offenders the actor worked with; or what percentage are male or female.

Researchers can also use bivariate tests such as Person's chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, which test the relationship between two categorical variables by comparing the fre-quencies in the categories against the frequencies that one might expect given a random distribution. If there is a statistical significance (the p value is less than 0.05) then the null hypothesis (that the variables' relationship is randomly distributed) can be rejected.[37]

For example, Gill and others found statistical significance between those that engaged with co-ideologues online and those that engaged in an offline network, which suggests that although Internet usage is prevalent within the sample, the offline domain also remains important.[38] A number of other analyses can be utilized too, such as conditional logistic regression[39] or binary logistic regression [40] to predictively model behaviors.[41]

Qualitative methods

It may, however, be more appropriate to conduct a qualitative analysis. Rather than estab-lishing a codebook prior to analysis, researchers can employ qualitative approaches, includ-ing thematic grouping based on patterns that emerge in the data. While qualitative analyses

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37   Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics*, 5th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2018). This can also be used to calculate the "Odds Ratio", which calculates the ratio of two categorical events occurring in the sample. For example, if I collect data on whether actors used social media and whether they divulged their plans to others, the odds ratio is calculated by multiplying all the instances in which actors used neither social media nor did they divulge (a) by the instances in which they did both (b), before dividing by the number of instances in which only one of the two occurred (b) (c). This is summarised in a 2 x 2 contingency table (a x d)/ (b x c). This can be used to assess how much more likely or unlikely one outcome is than another Field, 2018). For example, in "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers," Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan find that those that plot against a government target are 4.50 times more likely to use the Internet to learn about their attack than those that plot against civilian targets.

38   Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers."

39   Zoe Marchment and Paul Gill, "Modelling the Spatial Decision Making of Terrorists: The Discrete Choice Approach," *Applied Geography* 104 (2019): 21–31.

40   Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers."

41   A logistic regression is a model for predicting categorical outcomes from categorical or continuous variables. For example, Marchment and Gill (2019) used a dataset of Irish Republican Army attacks to establish which characteristics increase the likelihood that an area would be a target, finding that factors such as distance from the actor's home decreased the likelihood, and proximity to main roads and police and military bases increased the chances.

of datasets are not as representative as quantitative, the former can add valuable insight into the subject matter of focus by taking a deeper, more nuanced dive into the cases beyond that provided in a binary quantitative codebook. Various studies on violent extremism and foreign fighters have adopted this approach. For example, in their research on U.S. foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford identified three non-exhaustive themes of individuals traveling to participate in violent extremism from their data—Pioneers, Networked Travelers, and Loners—offering descriptive accounts of their lives and travel.[42] Similarly, in a study on female violent extremists, Alexander used qualitative grouping to identify three categories of female involvement in violent extremism—Plotters, Supporters, and Travelers—in analyzing the diversity of roles for women.[43] Finally, in a report on French jihadist actors, Hecker used qualitative analysis to identify individual pathways to extremism that appeared within his data sample, drawing together distinct patterns with important insights for future research.[44]

Mixed methods

For my research on violent extremists' use of the Internet, I opted for a mixed-method approach, incorporating a number of the qualitative and quantitative techniques outlined above. Mixed methods ensure that the analysis carried out benefits from both the extrapolatable and the highly nuanced findings inherent in quantitative and qualitative methods respectively. More specifically, my database research included quantitative variables and testing, as well as qualitative sorting and theory building.

Building off of the work of other studies, most pertinently Gill et al.'s research on the use of the Internet among convicted British terrorists, I analyze my dataset quantitatively by coding for online and offline behaviors related to individual interactions with violent extremist networks and behaviors indicative of learning or planning related to violent extremist activities.[45] I replicated the key variables from these studies to use as a basis of comparison

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42   Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Seamus Hughes, and Bennett Clifford, "The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq," *George Washington University's Program on Extremism* (2018).

43   Audrey Alexander, "Cruel Intentions: Female Jihadists in America," *George Washington University's Program on Extremism* (2016).

44   Marc Hecker, "137 Shades of Terrorism: French Jihadists Before the Courts," *Security Studies Center* (2018).

45   Gill, Corner, Thornton, and Conway, "What are the Roles of the Internet in Terrorism?"; Paul Gill and Emily Corner, "Lone Actor Terrorist Use of the Internet and Behavioural Correlates," in *Terrorism Online: Politics Law and Technology,* eds. Lee Jarvis, Stuart Macdonald, and Thomas M. Chen (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015): 35–53; Gill, Corner, Conway, Thornton, Bloom, and Horgan, "Terrorist Use of the Internet by the Numbers."

against my own. I also conducted an iterative stage of coding, in which I included variables not already present - such as the use of end-to-end encryption, the type of social media platform used, and the presence of undercover law enforcement agents in individual cases. Like Gill et al., I performed descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate statistical tests to analyze whether online and offline variables were independently randomly distributed. This allowed me to assess, for example, the degree to which individuals that learned the techniques necessary and/or planned violent extremist attacks online were likely to have also done so offline.

Qualitatively, I decided to analyze my data using Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM). In contrast to deductive methods of coding and analyzing against a pre-existing codebook, GTM is an inductive method aimed at creating new theories grounded in data.[46] While the majority of academic research tests theories or hypotheses in some way – looking at economic market data to establish whether rational choice theory explains a certain phenomenon, for example - GTM is undertaken with as few preconceptions as possible. Rather, GTM aims to generate hypotheses from the data itself which can be tested against future data. GTM, in essence, lets the data speak for themselves, developing a much wider and more imaginative set of research insights and questions than hypothesis testing alone.[47]

The specific grounded theory method I utilized included three rounds of coding. First, I used descriptive *open coding* to assess and code data line-by-line for the presence of online behavior. Second, using *selective coding,* I grouped the descriptive codes from the first round into larger categories. For example, I coded for each instance of an actor financing their plot during *open coding*, and then analyzed these and grouped them using *selective coding* into categories such as: cash; goods; FinTech; Cryptocurrency. Finally, I used *theoretical coding* to consider the categories developed in the second phase of coding in relationship to each other, which allowed me to construct theories from observation of the data itself.[48] Using the financing example, it allowed me to generate the hypothesis that terrorists in this sample were *not*, by and large, exploiting cryptocurrencies to fund their plots and that offline cash transactions are still most common. The inclusion of qualitative coding enabled more

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46   Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Brunswick, NJ: AldineTransaction, 1967).

47   Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.*

48   Cathy Urquhart, *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2013).

in-depth investigation of the dataset facilitating the establishment themes and theories otherwise beyond the scope of a purely quantitative codebook. For example, qualitative coding allowed me to investigate the role of the Internet in financing plots, methods that actors took to evade law enforcement online, and gender dynamics in the online domain in more depth than quantitative methods alone. There are a number of software packages that can be used to facilitate the qualitative process; I used NVivo, which offers line-by-line coding and searching. Although NVivo is not free, many educational and research institutions have it included in their set of software.

Ethical considerations

One might assume that there are minimal ethical issues involved in conducting open-source, secondary research. After all, as there is no direct contact with research subjects, many of the traditional safeguarding issues seem as if they do not apply. Similarly, if all of the data are in the public domain, privacy issues may seem less pertinent. However, while ethical issues may seem minimal on the surface, there are a number of considerations that researchers using open-source and secondary sources in studies on violent extremism must take into account.

Storing and processing personal data

First, when building and analyzing a database, the researcher is storing and processing personal data without the consent of the research subjects, which can be unlawful in some contexts, particularly within the jurisdiction of the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The GDPR does, however, offer an exemption: Article 6 (1) (e) permits processing of personal data if it "is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest".[49] Violent extremism is considered a top priority by most governments,[50] making satisfying this threshold attainable for researchers conducting studies in these territories. The principles embodied in this exemption serve as an ethical norm for researching secondary sources without consent beyond the GDPR. It is not enough to simply argue

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49   "General Data Protection Regulation, 2018" European Parliament, https://gdpr-info.eu/art-6-gdpr/.

50   For example, see: "What We Investigate – Terrorism," Federal Bureau of Investigation, https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism.
      Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales (London: Crown, Her Majesty's Government, 2015).

"the data are in the public domain, therefore anything goes." Particularly when dealing with personal information on topics as sensitive as violent extremism, researchers should strive to adopt adhere to strict ethical guidelines, whether mandated by a governing body or institution or not. Researchers should develop and/or adopt a set of defined ethical guiding principles regarding how to store, process, and publish personal information, even if derived from open-access, already publicly available sources.

Identifying individuals as "violent extremists"

One particular ethical issue that researchers should be cognizant of is how and whether to name individuals as "violent extremists" and the implications of doing so. Many legal cases involving individuals accused of terrorism-related charges that may populate a secondary-source database on violent extremism are ongoing. What is more, many individuals accused of terrorism-related charges do not ever face trial (i.e. many are deceased or allocated in a foreign jurisdiction). In addition, once-extremist actors may pay their debt to society, rehabilitate, and wish to forget their involvement; publicly naming those individuals may have consequences for the rest of their life. In any case, the tension between wanting to conduct rigorous research that includes every potential violent extremist subject identified during data collection versus the harm that erroneously naming someone as a violent extremist may cause presents a unique ethical challenge. To include only people that have been convicted or plead guilty to terrorism-related charges would result in a skewed sample, representative of only those found guilty in a court of law, undercounting others suspected to have participated in violent extremist activity but never convicted for one reason or another. At the same time, everyone is entitled to the presumption of innocence. To label an individual not found guilty by a court of law as a violent extremist contains many potentially harmful ramifications for not only the individual, but also their entire social circle.

In purely quantitative research, where results are reported numerically, this is not necessarily an issue so long as personal information on subjects is not identified in reporting on the statistics. However, in qualitative research, this issue is far more prominent. Typical privacy techniques such as anonymization and pseudonymization are not necessarily possible in qualitative studies, which require a higher degree of referencing to establish academic rigor. To protect oneself and one's research subjects, researchers undertaking qualitative

studies should make a common practice of noting which criminal cases under study are ongoing or unresolved during the coding process, and always reference that the state of the case identified when discussing findings – i.e. "x is *alleged* to have left for Iraq in June 2014." Similarly, if actors included in the database are later found acquitted of charges, researchers should at the very least reference this within their findings and database, and also seriously consider removing the individual or case from the database entirely. In my research, I removed Noor Salman – the wife of Omar Mateen, the shooter in the June 12, 2016 Pulse Nightclub attack in Orlando, Florida – from my sample after she was acquitted at trial.

Researcher self–care

A final ethical issue that researchers should consider when compiling databases with secondary sources is that of researcher self-care, both psychological and legal. In this field of study, there is a great deal of gruesome, distressing, and extremely violent content. Even research like mine, which does not focus on notably violent and distressing propaganda from violent extremists like Da'esh, carries with it the possibility of a significant psychological toll for researchers. At times, court documents may contain disturbing images of injuries sustained due to violent extremist attacks or violent still images from propaganda videos. Those undertaking this research – even those not focused on researching the most disturbing violent extremist content – may not be mentally prepared for the content that they may ultimately encounter. It is, therefore, incumbent on researchers and their affiliated institutions to find effective mechanisms to deal with this problem, both proactively and as it emerges. While access to sustained psychological care for researchers encountering disturbing images and violent extremist content is necessary, it is not always economically viable, particularly for smaller research teams or institutions. In lieu of this, institutions should consider creating environments wherein researchers can discuss distressing data without fear of burdening others. King, for one, has argued that building resilience in researchers of violent extremism is vital, suggesting the establishment of formal interventions (i.e. psychological counseling and debriefs) and also less formal interventions (i.e. monthly research team discussions in a safe and open environment).[51] Most importantly, researchers should

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51   Peter King, "Building Resilience for Terrorism Researchers," *Vox Pol* (2018).

avoid isolating themselves and researchers and institutions should work to identify options should researchers need psychological support.

Related to psychological self-care is ensuring that the research being conducted is lawful, as different countries have different legal codes dealing with violent extremist content. For example, while my research focused on Da'esh in the United States, I conducted my research in the United Kingdom (UK). This proved somewhat problematic as the two countries have vastly different interpretations with regards to the legality of violent extremist propaganda. In the UK, an individual can receive a prison sentence of up to fifteen years for accessing terrorist propaganda online,[52] whereas in the U.S., accessing terrorist propaganda is almost universally protected under the First Amendment because it does not meet the "direct incitement" criterion of *Brandenburg v. Ohio 1969*.[53] The implications of this for my research meant that a number of resources from which I gathered data contain links to content that was illegal in the UK, but not in the U.S.

To make matters even more complicated with relation to legality, criminal justice documents and sources sometimes included photos of violent extremist propaganda (otherwise deemed illegal to access in certain jurisdictions, including the UK) without any warning that it was included in the document. I encountered this a few times throughout my research. Researchers must be sure to be cognizant of local law and legal codes and how those might affect their work. While some loopholes to legal codes around violent extremist content and individuals exist for those engaged in research,[54] law enforcement may not look kindly upon propaganda that has been accessed online and downloaded to an external hard drive or printed out into hard copies. For researchers living and working in a country which proscribes violent extremist propaganda that may be accessed as a part of their study, it is best to notify law enforcement prior to beginning research, rather than deal with legal issues after accessing the content.

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52 "Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019," https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/counterterrorismandbordersecurity.html.

53 Ofer Raban, "Observations on the First Amendment and the War on Terror," *Tulsa Law Review* 53, no. 2 (2018): 141–57.

54 In the United Kingdom, for example, the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 lists "academic research" as a reasonable excuse for possessing such data, and will therefore not be prosecuted.

Concluding thoughts

Although it is possible that scholars of violent extremism will be able to continue making more use of primary sources in the future, it is unlikely that the data from secondary sources will diminish in importance. Indeed, secondary sources can and do offer rich and detailed data that produce excellent, nuanced research in areas where primary data may not be available or reliable. This chapter offered a number of reflections on using open, secondary sources to build and analyze a database of violent extremist actors, including: possible avenues for data collection and problems inherent in each, the importance of using robust definitions and clearly articulated inclusion and exclusion criteria in database construction, different methods for data analysis, and ethical challenges for consideration.

There are a number of practical suggestions that researchers seeking to use secondary sources in database construction and/or research on violent extremism should take into account:

First, software can provide invaluable assistance to scholars and it is often available at no cost or through research institutions. Whether used for literature storage (i.e. Mendeley); news aggregators (such as Google News or LexisNexus) statistical analysis, (i.e. SPSS); or qualitative coding (i.e. NVivo), technological tools for research vastly augment the ease of conducting otherwise difficult research tasks.

Second, existing literature serves as an important source of insights on good prac-tice and ideas that can be adopted for new research endeavors. It is well worth the time invested to read as many academic studies that have used similar methodologies within existing research. Doing so both reduces redundancies in existing research and provides important opportunities to build off of and supplement previous study. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Finally, it is important that researchers continually engage with others in the research community. Engaging with existing literature provides one avenue for doing this, as does attendance at research conferences and informal discussions with other researchers.

Scholars are often keen to share their experiences to prevent others from making similar mistakes in the future.

The problem of a lack of primary data, whilst improving, is unlikely to go away soon and secondary sources can, despite a number of limitations, have been, and will continue to be a vitally important type of data for understanding violent extremism.

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Primary Data and Individual Worldviews

Walking through Research on Terrorist Media Choices

Donald Holbrook

How do we measure terrorists' exposure to extremist narratives and what that suggests about their own worldviews and perspectives? While some degree of engagement with politically or religiously extreme narratives, ideologies, media and movements is seen as part of what frames the emergence of political violence, identifying and measuring these interactions pose significant methodological challenges. Former extremists, for instance, may view their prior involvement in extremism differently with the benefit of hindsight then they might have done at the time of their involvement. Large-scale analyses of online media and communities, in turn, may tell us little about how those who later engaged in violent extremist activities consumed extremist materials and what that may, in turn, reveal about their own perspectives and worldviews.

This chapter describes a research project that sought to address those issues by analyzing evidential material about individual media consumption from concluded terrorism investi-

gations in the United Kingdom. The chapter walks through decisions made by the researcher regarding study framing, data collection, and data structuring, and describes the research methods employed to process large quantities of digital and physical media material that shed light on the ideological and facilitative dimensions of the activities in question. The chapter details the challenges of navigating sensitive and inherently subjective areas of inquiry and how these challenges can be mitigated through systematizing and quantifying elements of the qualitative research. Finally, the chapter describes a ready-to-use grading framework that was developed to further analyze information compiled in the project dataset, how its strength can be assessed, and how it can be applied in other studies researching similar phenomena.

Introduction

There were two principal objectives that inspired the research described in this chapter.[1] First was to shed more light on the way in which the world looked from the perspective of the subjects that interest us, in this case those involved in terrorism and political violence, rather than the way that world is perceived by us, the external observers. Second was to strengthen our empirical evidence base of primary source material upon which our assumptions and observations about violent extremists are based.

These two objectives are important since they address key gaps in our understanding of terrorism produced, in part, by challenges to conducting empirical research on the mindset and choices of violent extremists. I sought to address these gaps by undertaking systematic research exploring the type of media publications that individuals who were found guilty of involvement in Islamist-inspired terrorism were exposed to or had chosen to consume before or during their involvement in planned acts of violence. This was a challenging

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1   Donald Holbrook, "The Terrorism Information Environment: Analysing Terrorists' Selection of Ideological and Facilitative Media," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2019): 1-23, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1583216

research endeavor for two main reasons. First, the volume of data involved meant that I had to be consistent in the choice of methods that I applied to allow for comparative and statistical analysis. Second, given that the media content that I analyzed conveyed subjective rather than objective interpretations, it was critical that my tools of measurement were as accurate as possible. I resolved to address these challenges by designing a coding framework which I cross-validated by measuring the level of agreement between different coders who applied the framework to a sample set of the data.

In this chapter I describe my research journey, starting with setting out the parameters of my research inquiry and defining key terms. I then describe how I clarified the scope of my analysis, noting the limitations that emerged once the research inquiry was narrowed and sharpened. Finally, I describe how I assembled the data and developed my research methods.

The research process described here is relevant to those interested in conducting research examining the worldview of violent extremists, in this case a sample of jihadist-inspired extremists, but also those interested in conducting systematic comparative or statistical analysis of media content or religious or political material. The lessons derived from the processes described here, moreover, may also be relevant to those researching related fields, including political protest movements. For those conducting fieldwork interviews, the coding processes described here provide insights on specific methods for coding transcripts.

Defining gaps and situating the query

Developing research and evidence concerning terrorists' exposure to extremist media is important for multiple reasons. First, little attention has been placed on examining terrorists' outlook, choices or perspectives, partly because solid information in this regard can be hard to come by. Researchers have managed to interview practicing or former extremists, an approach that has yielded invaluable insights. Despite the benefits of this approach, there is a risk that interview respondents may be dishonest or unclear about the factors that motivated them to participate in terrorist activities or political violence, particularly if they no longer feel strongly about such causes.

Increasingly, researchers have also turned to researching expressions recorded online, often through social media, to understand the individual motivations and perceptions of those participating in terrorist activities. However, the degree to which online pronouncements can be tied to specific behavior beyond the online space can be hard to assess without deeper analysis into how these online materials are consumed.[2]

Finally, studies examining terrorists' own perspectives have often focused on output from terrorist strategic communications, such as pronouncements, speeches, and publications. The purpose of these pronouncements, however, is invariably propagandistic to some degree, and not necessarily a direct reflection of how the worldview depicted in them was constructed.[3] These issues result in a gap in our current approach to understanding individual exposures to extremist media, particularly online.

Several experts have highlighted this problem. Conway, for example, pointed out that analyses of individuals' online engagement and experiences in "extremist cyberspaces" were missing.[4] This is not a new problem in our research field. While speaking about the dearth of understanding about how online outreach by terrorists actually **played out** among its intended audience at a U.S. Congressional Committee in December 2011, noted that "very little work has been done on the conduits through which [terrorist output] is distributed—and even to what extent anyone is accessing that propaganda other than counterterrorism analysts."[5] A recent UNESCO research synthesis similarly argued: "There is a growing body of knowledge about how terrorists use cyberspace. Less clear, however, is the impact of this use."[6]

This consumer-side blind-spot, in turn, is related to the second driver behind this research, which relates to the overall empirical deficit in this field of study and the weak evidence base upon which our assumptions about terrorism and terrorists are based. This, again, is not a new problem. Silke's 2004 review of terrorism research found insufficient attention

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2   Gilbert Ramsay, *Jihadi Culture on the World Wide Web* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

3   Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnel, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012).

4   Maura Conway, "Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (2017): 79.

5   Ibid.

6   Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs, and Ghayda Hassan, *Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media: Mapping the Research* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2017).

placed on rigorous empirical research, individual data generation and, especially, studies that relied on primary sources—original and first-hand information—rather than secondary interpretations.[7] Subsequent contributions, most notably Sageman's lament over the 'stagnation in terrorism research', have reiterated these concerns.[8]

There is, therefore, a dual need to: (a) develop research that documents and examines how terrorists themselves have operated in cyberspaces and made choices about the content which they consume, and (b) ensure such research endeavors strengthen our empirical understanding of terrorism through the systematic analysis of primary sources. The research, described here, sought to address these gaps by creating a systematized means of capturing, categorizing, and analyzing the online behaviors and media consumption of individuals convicted of terrorist crimes to better understand their preferences, worldviews, and exposure prior to their engagement in terrorist activities. In this chapter, I walk the reader through important aspects, obstacles, decisions, and limitations that emerged throughout the research process that are critical to understanding the benefits of the research design utilized and its applicability to similar studies.

Framing the inquiry: Defining terms and narrowing the scope

With terrorism research, it is easy to lose focus on the factors driving the inquiry. Definitions are hazy and tend to travel. Concepts such as 'radicalization' and 'countering violent extremism' have entered the fold and risen to prominence in analyses and commentary about terrorism, without their meaning being universally understood or consistently employed. I will not dwell on definitional conundrums in any detail in this chapter; indeed, such topics have filled entire books.[9] What is necessary, however, as in any study, is to clearly illustrate and demarcate the framework and scope of the research that will be conducted The initial step in this regard is to define appropriate and measurable data that addresses the research query.

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7   Andrew Silke, "An Introduction to Terrorism Research" in *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures,* ed. Andrew Silke (London: Frank Cass, 2004) 1-29.

8   Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4, (2014): 565-580.

9   Anthony Richards, *Conceptualising Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Narrowing the field of study: Selecting and defining appropriate data

To derive observable data that contains insight regarding individual exposure to different media, including extremist narratives, I resolved to focus on the types of media publications that terrorists collected before and during their involvement in violence.

Examining media publications – including written texts, audio recordings, and videos – that terrorists had collected from a wider pool of available content provided ways in which to sample their preferences and selections of material directly. Behavioral scientists refer to such concrete and sampleable outcomes of behavior recorded from when the subjects engaged in it as "permanent products".[10] Since tens of thousands of items of propaganda associated with the Islamist extremist realm alone remain available via the Internet, subjects are making choices as they select or share publications that interest them or they see as important. These patterns of selection and their outcomes constitute something we can measure, observe, and analyze to better understand terrorists' outlook and worldview.

Added to this, of course, are more recent forms of interactive social media that utilize innovations of 'Web 2.0'[11]. Given that this is very broad and somewhat muddled terrain, I first needed to make clear which aspects of this media landscape I was seeking to study. Within a fast-moving research environment, produced or published stand-alone media – recorded audio or video material and written work, whether digital or physical, 'official' or user-generated – represents a more stable example of media engagement. Tweets, Telegram posts, or other aspects of interactive communication are less stable since they disappear once a user's account is deactivated, a common occurrence when users post or promote extremist content. Published media, therefore, became my object of analysis: what types of media content that fit this description did terrorists seek to collect and what might that say about their own worldviews and perspectives?

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10   Douglas E. Kostewicz, Seth A. King, Shawn M. Datchuk, Kaitlyn M. Brennan, and Sean D. Casey, "Data Collection and Measurement Assessment in Behavioral Research: 1958–2013," *Behavior Analysis: Research and Practice* 16, no. 1 (2016): 19-33. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/bar0000031

11   A term used to describe the dawn of the 'participatory web' with new opportunities afforded by online tools to share content and interact with others through social media and other interactive channels.

Excluding social media, however, meant excluding a rich resource of terrorist output and consumption.[12] Moreover, focusing on collections of publications meant that questions about consumption of this material, i.e. the extent, sequence or way in which subjects viewed or read these publications, were only partially addressed; such queries would necessitate a more detailed case-by-case analysis that was beyond the specific scope of this research.

Selecting media types

The next content-related question I faced was which type of published material I would study. Again, to ensure that the research remained manageable in terms of scope and that I was consistent in answering my research questions, I focused on collecting and analyzing data on facilitative and ideological media. Facilitative media refers to published content that relates directly to overcoming practical challenges relevant to carrying out acts of violence, such as putting together an explosive device. Ideological media refers to material promoting religious or political interpretations or beliefs. Both are relevant to participation in terrorism and have substantial overlap, so I opted to examine both.

If terrorism or violent extremism is essentially political violence, our benchmark for measurement lies partly in the types of ideological content that terrorists seek to collect since this helps us study the political (including religiously political) context of terrorist acts. Moreover, if terrorism involves overcoming obvious constraints inherent in the planning of terrorist acts, such as devising attack mechanisms, avoiding detection and choosing targets, material that guides individuals to overcome such challenges formed an important component of study. Having decided to focus on ideological and facilitative media, I needed to further sharpen my definition and rationale for choosing both.

Sharpening definitions: Ideological media

Ideology in the context of terrorism, is a contested term, its definition varying from context to context and person to person. Given the contested nature of the concept, I needed to

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12   United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, *Global Survey of the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) by Member States* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 2016). https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/document/global-survey-of-the-implementation-of-security-council-resolution-1373-2001-by-member-states-2016/

highlight precisely the type of publications that I placed into this category and my rationale for doing so. Overall, I took a broad approach to the concept of ideology.

Some scholars view ideology in the context of terrorism as relatively ill-defined yet curiously rigid, and consisting predominantly of complex doctrine, the impact of which on individuals presupposes a degree of knowledge and sophistication.[13] The disciplines that are dedicated to the study of ideology, however, emphasize looser qualities, viewing the concept as a form or system of beliefs that tie people together in real or imagined communities, giving them a sense of belonging, collectivity and a filter to frame events and make sense of the world.[14] This latter understanding informed my approach to the topic since it more accurately captures the fluid nature of ideology which does not exist separately from processes leading to extremism, but rather imbues its components with relevance, context, and meaning.

I chose to define any items that conveyed religious, political or other ideological opinion or proscription as ideological publications. This excluded mainstream news material focusing exclusively on objective reporting as well as material consisting exclusively of unadulterated scripture without additional efforts to translate, direct, or interpret that scripture in a manner encouraging particular outcomes. The rationale behind the selection was both to limit the dataset to more manageable dimensions and to concentrate on publications more directly associated with ideological pronouncements, broadly defined.

Again, however, I needed to be explicit about the limitations that would result in narrowing the scope further. Excluding mainstream media content meant that certain individual preference patterns relating to available media, such as news filtering, were not part of the inquiry. While beyond the feasible scope of my study, mainstream media content would

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13   Clark McCauley and Sofia Moskalenko, "Individual and Group Mechanisms of Radicalisation," in *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-radicalisation and Disengagement,* eds.Laurie Fenstermacher, Larry Kuznar, Anne Speckhard, and Sarah Canna (Washington, DC: White Papers, Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment and Air Force Research Laboratory, 2010), 82-91.

14   Jonathan Leader Maynard, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in Mass Atrocities," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 5 (2014): 824-821; Michael Freeden, "Ideology and Political Theory," in *The Meaning of Ideology: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives,* ed. Michael Freeden (London: Routledge, 2007), 1-20; John Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *Ideology and Discontent,* ed. David E. Apter (Glencoe: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 47-76; Thomas Hegghammer, "Introduction: What is Jihadi Culture and Why Should We Study It?" in *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists,* ed. Thomas Hegghammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-22.

be a worthy subject for future research, as it would likely add to our understanding of how individuals involved in terrorism became informed and influenced by world events.

Sharpening definitions: Facilitative media

My facilitative category included pamphlets, books, instructional videos and other guidelines that provided information regarding the assembly of improvised explosive devices (IED), surveillance and counter-surveillance (online and offline), reconnaissance, combat and weapons training, self-defense and other related topics. It is important to note that some publications convey *both* ideological and actionable content, so these had to be categorized according to the best overall fit in each case depending on the primary focus of the material in question. For instance, a series of magazines produced in English by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula called *Inspire*, often included both actionable guidelines—such as instructions on assembling IEDs using household items as well as ideological tracts, such as articles about religious justifications for violence, updates from combatants in the field or transcripts of prominent Al-Qaeda propaganda. One infamous section in the magazine's first issue was titled "Open Source Jihad" which included an article called "Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom," conveying detailed and step-by-step instructions on assembling an IED using common household items.[15] Yet the thrust of all issues of the magazines, both in terms of volume and focus, was to convey ideological content: religious interpretations, grievances, and political narratives with the aim of mobilizing identified constituencies. Indeed, the magazine's title referred to the need to inspire the believers to rise and fight for their religion. As a result, copies of *Inspire*, and similar publications, were classified as "ideological."

Limiting research scope: Identifying and narrowing research subjects

At this stage, I had structured my research query to focus on ideological and facilitative media publications that terrorists had collected to shed light on their choices and selection patterns within the environment in which they operated. However, I still needed to establish how the subjects of my study would be selected. An individual's involvement in terrorism can take on many different roles, and individuals can travel between roles as their

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15   The article ""Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of your Mom" appeared in the al-Qaeda magazine, *Inspire,* in summer 2010.

participation in or on the margins of political violence and terrorism evolves. Individuals can seek to join militant organizations abroad, develop fund-raising efforts, produce propaganda—either on behalf of a group or on their own initiative—or engage in other support activities, without seeking to carry out terrorist attacks. Individuals' association with these activities, moreover, can be hard to ascertain, particularly—as mentioned—if most of our data relies on online personas and avatars.

To address this dilemma in my own research, I selected a group of individuals who had been found guilty by the court system, where a judge and jury assessed evidence from prosecutors and established that involvement in terrorism was proven. Furthermore, given the range of different types of activities, I concentrated my analysis on those who had sought to carry out acts of terrorism and received life-sentences or died during their attacks. Support activities and more peripheral forms of engagement in extremism, therefore, are discarded. Focusing on this 'high-end' of terrorism activities where 'actual' terrorism was planned or took place ensures greater consistency in my comparative sampling between individual cases.

Additionally, I limited my study to one jurisdiction: The United Kingdom (UK). This choice was dictated by access to data and thus points more to a practical limitation in conducting research as outlined here. Once one body of knowledge has been established, however, the groundwork is prepared for further comparative research.

Finally, my study was limited to a specific time period, between 2004 and 2017, and to Islamist-inspired terrorism alone, given that these types of activities constituted the most prominent and serious form of non-state terrorism in the time period and jurisdiction under review. Again, however, we have created benchmarks with which to incorporate other forms of ideological dispositions, such as terrorism associated with the far-right.

At this point, the first three stages of this research were complete:

- I framed my research inquiry within the existing literature;
- I defined the key terms as they would be used and approached in my research; and
- I gradually narrowed my inquiry to construct a viable set of research tasks that I could follow to answer my research questions, highlighting the limitations inherent in doing so.

The next step was to assemble my data and determine the proper methods of analysis.

Assembling and analyzing data: Clusters, filters, and categorizations

To assemble my dataset, I worked with counterterrorism law enforcement bodies in the UK who provided access to material that had been uncovered in their investigations in cases concluded in the court systems. Given that these were near-exhaustive sets of media content found in each investigation; material from digital devices such as laptops and phones, as well as physical matter, each case contained large volumes of material.

I thus limited my study to 17 distinct police investigations that were concluded in the United Kingdom. The cases were chosen as being typical of the types of Islamist terrorist plots planned or carried out in the UK during this period. The cases also spread evenly across the 13-year timeframe. This is not to say that these were the only cases relevant to the research inquiry, but they offered a comprehensive set of data, without being too voluminous to manage. These investigations involved 57 individuals who were found guilty of participating in—or seeking to participate in—acts of terrorism on their home soil between 2004 and 2017. This may seem like a very small number, but it should be noted that while large numbers of individuals have been convicted in the UK for terrorism-related offences, only a small proportion of this category includes individuals who were in the advanced stages or successful in carrying out acts of lethal violence.[16] As mentioned in the previous section, this research query concerned those involved in 'high-end' terrorist activity, not those engaged in more peripheral roles. This was a deliberate choice to ensure that the cases involved individuals planning on carrying out terrorist attacks—not just supportive of them—and thus consistent in the aspects of terrorism that we choose to study.

These 17 cases presented multiple options in terms of filtering and categorizing the data within them. My first task was to sort through the case information and identify and tag any facilitative and ideological media publications, as defined in the previous section, that

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16   As illustrated by the fact that the average prison sentence in the UK for terrorism offenses in 2017 was only five years, because such a large majority only received minor custodial sentences for peripheral and support activities, Europol, "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report" (2018), 20.

were uncovered in these cases. I found 2,397 unique publications matching my selection criteria to populate my meta-dataset. "Unique" in this context refers to the total number of individual publications found. However, several publications were found in more than one investigation, as described further in the next section of this chapter.

To create a more comprehensive understanding of terrorists' media preferences and choices, I selected two additional aspects of the cases to interrogate further. The first was the organizational context of the cases, i.e. whether individuals had operated alone or in a group. Of the 17 investigations examined, 10 involved individuals operating together as a group—50 subjects in total—while the remaining seven investigations concerned lone actors operating as on their own. The second additional aspect was the time period of the cases themselves. To gauge temporal developments, I divided the cases into three period clusters: Cluster A, between 2004 and 2006, Cluster B, between 2008 and 2013 and Cluster C, between 2014 and 2017. There were only four cases each in clusters A and B. Nine cases were concentrated in cluster C, reflecting an uptick in the number of cases under investigation from 2014 onward. This clustering divided the meta-dataset into comparable temporal components. In addition, he clusters, as temporally defined, reflected broader developments in the Islamist extremist universe, providing additional context for the examination of the activities involved in each case. For example, Cluster A reflected a period of heightened Islamist extremist activity after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent insurgency, when complex and deadly attacks were carried out in cities such as Amman, Madrid, and London. Cluster B was characterized more by discussions of "leaderless jihad" and "self-starters", who carried out attacks on their own initiative in the interests of a perceived greater whole.[17] Finally, Cluster C captured a period of renewed Islamist extremist resurgence, primarily through the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other jihadist entities exploiting areas of conflict and turmoil.

The final dataset encompassed over 2,000 unique media publications, coded to reflect their collection by both lone and group actors in three separated date clusters within the 13-year period of focus. The next step was to make sense of this material in a way that would help explain how terrorists interacted with the sources of information available to them.

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17   Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

Choosing appropriate research methods

To begin to analyze and make sense of the information within my newly created dataset, I employed a "mixed-methods" research approach of both quantitative and qualitative inquiry.[18] Such approaches incorporate the nuance of a qualitative process with the systemization and greater generalizability of quantitative processes.

There are many ways to design a mixed methods study. One crucial decision researchers have to make when designing their mixed-methods study is the "sequence decision": does the qualitative method precede the quantitative method or vice versa, or, rather, is data collection concurrent?[19] My study rested on a largely qualitative foundation, with substantial quantification of the findings. I first used qualitative methods to process media content found in the cases examined to create a dataset, after which I employed quantitative methods to analyze the information within that dataset. I chose this technique because it allowed for statistical analysis of data, and thus greater oversight and comparison between the different aspects of a study.

More specifically, the type of mixed-methods I employed concerned what Creswell and Plano Clark referred to as 'exploratory sequential design'.[20] This entails the collection of qualitative data before quantitative data is identified, a process that allows for hypotheses or "hunches" to be developed organically during the initial qualitative phase, and then tested later using quantitative means. This approach suited my study since an initial qualitative assessment of the data, through reviewing the media material uncovered, could then be used to develop more specific quantitative tools of measurements to review that same dataset again. Research instruments can also be developed during the qualitative phase that can then be used in quantitative investigations.[21]

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18   Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 635).
19   Ibid: 638.
20   John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research,* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 2011).
21   Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* 639.

Applying research methods: Category grading as a unique approach to subject-focused research

Now that I had defined the scope of my research query, defined key terms, collected my data and developed relevant research methods, I could commence with my analysis. For my study, I identified four observable features of the dataset and two elements that I wanted to measure from the 17 cases examined. The immediately observable features concerned the author and publisher of the items in question when stated in the publication. This could shed light on the origin source of the publications that terrorists had chosen to collect and crucial questions such as prominent interlocuters who appeared to hold appeal with the terrorists involved in the 17 cases examined. I additionally wanted to gauge the format of these publications – much attention, for instance, is placed on video content produced by terrorist organizations, but is this reflected in the type of material (audio, video or written) that terrorists have chosen to collect? Finally, I wanted to assess the extent to which the same media material was present in multiple cases to identify or measure the "popularity" of any one publication among the audiences within my study.

To properly assess these issues, two additional features of my data had to be measured more carefully. The first, as noted, concerned the division of the total number of publications into facilitative and ideological, following the definitions and selection criteria described earlier in this chapter. This division separated the dataset into 201 publications that were deemed facilitative and 2,196 ideological publications. Given the substantially greater proportional size of the ideological subset, I devised a system of grading to map the ideological landscape that emerged in these cases, based on an initial qualitative sampling of 10% of the publications. This type of grading, especially when underpinning quantitative analysis, poses methodological challenges that are addressed below.

CATEGORY GRADING IN RESEARCH ON VIOLENT EXTREMISM

To more fully understand the media publications that individuals accused of terrorism-related crimes self-selected prior to their engaging in violent extremist activities, I needed to develop a scale to "grade" the ideological factors within them. In doing so, I chose to categorize ideological material based on the extent to which hostility against people was promoted or endorsed with elevations in grading category dictated by escalations in such

pronouncements. In other words, I graded ideological content in a manner that highlighted differences in attitudes towards a given group of people as expressed in the material under examination, including expressions of extremism, hostility, aggression and violence.

The inspiration behind this grading was Max Taylor's Combatting Paedophile Information Networks in Europe (COPINE) scale which is used by prosecutors to grade child abuse images. This scale "aims to provide a systematic way of grading content, as it presents itself to the viewer, based on heuristic indicators pointing towards an intuitively plausible sense of escalating severity."[22]

The resulting grading framework consisted of two sets of categorizations: first, a division of ideological content into: (a) 'moderate', (b) 'fringe', and (c) 'extreme' categories; second, a further division of 'extreme' content into three subcategories, depending on the extent to which content advocated the targeting of non-combatants, and the extent to which any detail was offered in this regard. The definitions are given in Table 1.

The grading, therefore, detected an element of escalation of severity, similar to COPINE, in the ideological material useful in assessing the extent to which the worldviews of individual's who were convicted of terrorism-related offensive aligned with the severity of the jihadist media content they consumed.

Assessing ideological content, however, is in many ways more complex than assessing other types of content. For one, ideological content often is packaged in different formats, including lengthy recorded sermons or dense written tracts where precise meaning can be hard to ascertain. Furthermore, judgements of what constitutes discursive escalation, or 'extreme' discourse are, by definition, variable and dependent on benchmarks of 'normalcy' or 'general acceptance' that vary across different contexts depending on prevailing norms at a given time or place. Such judgements, moreover, are inevitably subjective and dependent on individual values that are equally colored by existing experiences, associations and perspectives. Categorization of this nature, in short, is not a perfect science or an unproblematic indication of content.

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22   Donald Holbrook, Gilbert Ramsay, and Max Taylor, "'Terroristic Content': Towards a Grading Scale," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 25, no. 2 (2019): 207. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1583216

Table 1 Grading definitions

1	**Moderate**	General published religious, political, philosophical or historical opinion containing no endorsement of violence, harming or hatred towards identified communities with generally moderate content along the lines found in mainstream religious/political texts and media output.
2	**Fringe**	Content is religiously or ideologically conservative and isolationist, politically radical and confrontational, but without any justifications conveyed for serious or potentially lethal violence in present-day scenarios. Anger and hostility might be expressed towards a given group of people, therefore, such as the 'kuffar' or immigrants, without the added assumption that these people are somehow 'subhuman' and legitimate targets of serious or potentially lethal violence.
3	**Extreme**	Material that legitimizes and/or glorifies the use of serious or potentially lethal violence to achieve particular goals, as well as the fighters and martyrs who die for the cause, with some allusion to the view that such prescriptions continue to be relevant for contemporary activists. Also included within this category is material that focuses on dehumanizing or demonizing particular communities, citing issues of race, sexuality, origin or other aspects that render such people 'subhuman' or 'animalistic' with the direct implication that their right to life is undermined. This category captures both publications advocating activist violence against troops or civilians for religious or political causes, as well as references presenting people such as Jews and non-whites as subhuman in the context of imagined or envisaged confrontation with these groups of people.
	Extreme Level 1	Serious violence (i.e. potentially fatal) is only justified/promoted/welcomed with reference to combatants or is vague, without any detail, e.g. talk about the virtues of collective violence, the 'essence' of warfare and its importance, without reference to targeting, scope or any other facilitative detail. Examples: "embrace violence but avoid killing the innocents"
	Extreme Level 2	Serious violence (i.e. potentially fatal) clearly justified/promoted/welcomed against non-combatants, but without any detail. Examples: "kill the Jews", "kill the kuffar"
	Extreme Level 3	Serious violence (i.e. potentially fatal) justified/promoted/welcomed against non-combatants and with some detail regarding facilitation, scope or direction. Examples: "carry out suicide attack against non-combatants", "target the economy, market places, tourist venues".
	Extreme Level 3b	Same as "Extreme Level 3" but with specific and directly applicable details offered, e.g. bomb-making recipes. Examples: "how to make a bomb in the kitchen of your mum"
	Actionable	Actionable, tactical, operational manuals and guidelines, not primarily ideological content

Establishing reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept. There are different ways in which reliability can be assessed, based on the type of measurement applied. The test that is most important for the grading framework described here is called 'inter-rater reliability'. As Bryman describes, this applies:

when a great deal of subjective judgement is involved in such activities as the recording of observations or the translation of data into categories and where more than one 'rater' is involved in such activities, there is the possibility that there is a lack of consistency in their decisions. This can arise in a number of contexts, for example: in content analysis where decisions have to be made about how to categorize media items; when answers to open-ended questions have to be categorized; or in structured observation when observers have to decide how to classify participants' behaviour.[23]

To test the reliability of the categories and definitions I used to further define media content (see Table 1), and therefore mitigate definitional issues as discussed above, I conducted tests of inter-rater agreement between two to three coders. During the tests, the coders simultaneously and blindly[24] graded representative sample-sets of the data I had collected. Once the tests were complete, I altered the definitions in each of my ideological content categories until inter-coder agreement on the definitions improved, using a calculator developed by Freelon[25] to determine ultimate reliability. Teams of two to three coders, including myself, therefore, graded a sample of the ideological material until the definitions behind the categories seemed as accurate as possible based on consensus within the teams. Doing this ensured that the grading system developed would reflect an objective measure, to the extent possible, of the categorization of otherwise subjective ideological content across those coding it. Such tests of reliability—wherein the definitions of categories are revisited until their overall reliability improves—are an essential prerequisite for conducting quantitative research based on qualitative criteria such as those described in this chapter.

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23   Bryman, *Social Research Methods,* 157.

24   Blind coding' refers to the application of a coding schema to a dataset by several different coders who do not compare notes on its application until all the coding is complete, in order to avoid any biases emerging during the coding process.

25   Deen G. Freelon, "ReCal: Intercoder Reliability Calculation as a Web Service," *International Journal of Internet Science* 5, no. 1 (2010): 20-33.

It is important to note that, I never reached anything approaching perfect agreement between coders. Grading results between two coders also had a higher degree of agreement than those between three. Agreement for the second phase of grading, detecting nuances of extreme content, in turn, was weaker than for the initial grading into moderate, fringe and extreme ideological publications. This serves as an important reminder that, particularly within studies that deal with largely subjective content, attempts to increase the specificity and nuance of a unit of analysis may simultaneously blur important distinctions in the interpretation or nature of the content and lead to greater divergences in understanding, which will ultimately impact the research findings. It is, therefore, important to test the reliability of concepts and definitions applied in research, and to be explicit about the extent to which that reliability is likely present in the ultimate research tool.

Despite the challenges, the development of this tool provided a means to accurately and transparently code ideological media publications emerging within my dataset in a more nuanced manner, facilitating greater understanding of what their content might reveal about the worldviews of the individuals who had consumed them, in line with my original, subject-focused research goal.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how I undertook research into primary source material related to terrorist exposure to and consumption of media. I began by elucidating why this perspective was worthwhile in terms of the knowledge gaps it filled. I then described how I undertook efforts to define my study, including: framing the inquiry to ensure my research intent and scope were clear; defining key terms, in situating my study in the relevant literature; and narrowing my research design to reach manageable proportions whilst being explicit about the limitations incurred by excluding particular research aspects.

Next, I described the dataset that was produced given these research parameters before setting out how it could be studied to shed light on my principal research query, which was broken down into more observable or measurable components. I described the elements

and stages of my mixed research methods, emphasizing the importance of testing reliability and adapting measuring tools accordingly.

While my study was focused on Islamist extremists, the processes described in this chapter are equally applicable to researchers seeking to embark on similar or comparable projects, including those interested in far right and other forms of extremism and those interested in media studies and the impact of the information environment more broadly. It is hoped that the steps described in this chapter might help and guide such future efforts. The dual objectives of this work: enhancing our understanding of involvement in political violence from the perspective of the subjects themselves and shoring up our empirical foundations in this regard will continue to be important research endeavors and worthy of added attention from scholars and students working in this field.

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Research on Islamist Extremism in the Swiss Context

Assessing & Analyzing a Sensitive Phenomenon

Miryam Eser Davolio[1]

Researching and addressing "radicalization" within smaller European countries is particularly challenging. Not only is it incumbent that research and approaches take into account analyses, findings, strategies, and measures from other contexts, they must also work to craft their own national understanding of the extent and nature of the phenomena and approaches to address it. This chapter discusses the author's reflections on experiences conducting two studies on violent jihadist[2] radicalization in Switzerland at a time of heightened concern over potential jihadist violent extremist threats.[3] In doing so, the chapter focuses on the ethical and

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2   The author uses the term "jihadist" to define violent extremist groups, including the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, that define themselves and their ideologies as Islamic and advocate for violent "jihad." The term "jihadist" can carry multiple meanings and does not necessarily connote violence or violent extremism.

3   Miryam Eser Davolio, Elisa Banfi, Milena Gehrig, Brigitta Gerber, and Burim Luzha, *Hintergründe jihadistischer Radikalisierung in der Schweiz. Eine explorative Studie mit Empfehlungen für Prävention und Intervention [Background to jihadist radicalization in Switzerland: an exploratory study with recommendations for prevention and intervention]* (Zürich: ZHAW, 2015) https://digitalcollection.zhaw.ch/handle/11475/17733; Miryam Eser Davolio, Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, Fabien Merz, Johannes Saal, and Ayesha Rether, *Research report:*

methodological challenges specific to the Swiss context, as well as issues impacting research on violent extremism more generally. The two studies—both of which the author served a role in—additionally navigated the tension inherent in researching a topic of heightened public interest and media coverage.

Given the context and the focus on jihadist extremism specifically, the research processes themselves carried risks, including the risk of inadvertently enhancing social polarization and Islamophobia in the very act of examining a phenomenon focused on minority populations in a small country. Methodological challenges additionally complicated the research, but also provided opportunities brought on by the diverse backgrounds of the researchers in terms of their disciplines, the nature of their work on violent extremism, and their sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds (from German-, French- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland). The researchers also faced demanding timelines, undertaking research during a time when concerns over a possible terrorist attack were heightened, placing additional pressure on the researchers in charge of making decisions focused on both handling emergency and ethical concerns in an accurate, institutionally prescribed manner and addressing societal concerns pragmatically. Additional issues specific to the Swiss context included: (1) the challenge of managing and safeguarding data and anonymity in a country with a relatively small population; and (2) gaining and maintaining access to the trust of research participants.

This chapter reflects on approaches to mitigate these challenges and examines the research process in retrospect from the perspective of the author. It concludes with recommendations based on the research projects focused on mitigating potential risks, particularly those to research participants and their associated demographic populations, when researching violent extremism and other sensitive topics in the Swiss context. While the chapter focuses on research conducted on violent extremism in Switzerland, its insights may have utility in addressing similar challenges elsewhere.

Updated review and developments in jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland – updated version of an exploratory study on prevention and intervention (Zürich: ZHAW, 2019), https://www.zhaw.ch/no_cache/de/forschung/forschungsdatenbank/projektdetail/projektid/2895/.

Introduction

In 2014, Swiss government officials publicly announced that a small number of individuals—fifteen suspected, but only five confirmed—had left Switzerland to fight in the Syrian conflict.[4] This announcement brought to the forefront awareness of violent jihadist radicalization in the small European country as well as questions of how to address it. While its neighbors—France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany—had experienced comparatively higher flows of foreign fighters and actual attacks, Switzerland had, to date, been spared from large-scale attacks. The question of what had rendered Switzerland unique in this respect, yet still seemingly affected by violent jihadist radicalization trends, remained a mystery. Conducting exploratory research examining the phenomenon of violent jihadist radicalization in Switzerland, therefore, required a twofold approach: (1) collecting existing information in Switzerland and similar states and (2) conducting original field research and analyzing new data in Switzerland to draw a holistic picture of the phenomenon.

The Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs commissioned a study in 2015[5] and a follow-up study in 2019,[6] focusing on potential methods of prevention of violent jihadist extremism in prisons. The research was commissioned based on concerns that radicalization could spread in prisons, which was happening in other European contexts.[7] I had the opportunity to be part of both research teams because of my similar work on prevention and intervention in previous research on right-wing extremism. These prior studies on right-wing extremism focused on the societal conditions that enabled and promoted extremist attitudes and violence and pointed to the importance of empowering civil society in responding to extremism risks among youth. They were also based on an understanding of extremism as a phenomenon that may arise in populations with indifference to implicit, or even explicit, xenophobia and/or extremist ideologies.

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4 See: Daniel Glaus and Lorenzo Vidino, "Swiss Foreign Fighters Active in Syria," *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 7 (July 2014), https://ctc.usma.edu/swiss-foreign-fighters-active-in-syria/.

5 Eser Davolio et al., *Background to jihadist radicalization in Switzerland*, 2015.

6 Eser Davolio et al., *Updated review and developments in jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland*, 2019.

7 Elizabeth Mulcahy, Shannon Merrington, and Peter Bell, "The Radicalisation of Prison Inmates: A Review of the Literature on Recruitment, Religion and Prisoner Vulnerability," *Journal of Human Security* 9, no. 1 (2013): 4-14, http://www.librelloph.com/journalofhumansecurity/article/view/johs-9.1.4/html; Humberto M. Trujillo et al., "Radicalization in Prisons? Field Research in 25 Spanish Prisons," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 4 (2009): 558-579, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550903153134.

Conducting similar research on jihadist violent extremism, however, carried with it additional implications and difficulties. First, given the political context and heightened focus on jihadist violent extremism at the time, our research inevitably carried the risk of inadvertently placing blame on Muslim minorities in Switzerland for violent extremism and, in the process, potentially exacerbating Islamophobia. In addition, heightened public interest in violent extremism and polemicized public discourse increased the difficulty of gaining access to and building trust with research participants. Switzerland's small but diverse and multilingual population posed further challenges associated with conducting research on sensitive security issues in small, multicultural constituencies.

This chapter discusses these challenges and the ethical and methodological implications they gave rise to in these two violent jihadism-focused research projects. Contextualized within dynamics ongoing in Switzerland at the time of the projects, the chapter presents the author's own reflections on the methods the research teams adopted to address those challenges and important considerations related to researcher positionality and background, as well as related to risks in conducting research on sensitive and publicized topics within a small population. finally, the chapter provides recommendations for researchers undertaking research on violent extremism in similar contexts or facing similar issues.

Context: Radicalization and terrorism in Switzerland

Unlike its European neighbors, Switzerland has yet to experience a large-scale extremist attack. For a long time after 9/11, despite attacks in neighboring countries, Swiss authorities did not appear to perceive a need for the urgent implementation of terrorism prevention measures.[8] Attitudes towards the prevention of right-wing extremism were seemingly similar. In the absence of attacks or virulent manifestations, public pressure for political reactions and prevention measures related to violent extremism and terrorism can be low. The following section provides a brief snapshot of Switzerland's experience with jihadist violent extremism, mainly related to flows of foreign fighters to fight in Syria and Iraq with the

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8   See: Darius Farman and Fabien Merz, "Das Engagement muslimischer Organisationen in der Schweiz gegen gewaltbereiten Extremismus," in *Bulletin 2017 zur Schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik*, eds., Christian Nünlist and Oliver Thränert (Zürich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zürich, 2017), 33–57.

so-called Islamic State, the majority of which occurred in 2013 and 2014.[9] The section also provides and overview of the government's response around the same time in adopting measures to prevent and address radicalization, spurred in part by incidents of radicalization and terrorism in neighboring countries.

The flow of foreign fighters

Despite its limited history of terrorist attacks, Switzerland has not been immune to the influence of jihadist violent extremist groups, including the so-called Islamic State. As of May 2019, seventy-seven (known) Swiss citizens had traveled to fight with violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.[10] Although this number is much lower than in France, Belgium, and Austria (see Table 1), the statistics are often presented without contextualizing the number relative to characteristics and the size of the populations from whence they came.

Table 1: A comparison of jihadist-motivated travelers from selected European countries[11]

Country	Jihadist-motivated travelers (Syria/Iraq since 2021)	Population (in millions)	Ratio to population (per million)	Muslim population (in millions)[11]	Ratio to Muslim population (per 10,000)
Belgium	413	11.4	36.2	0.9	4.6
Germany	1050	82.8	12.7	5.0	2.1
France	1910	67.1	28.5	5.7	3.4
Italy	125	60.6	2.1	2.9	0.4
Austria	300	8.8	34.1	0.6	5.0
Switzerland	77	8.4	9.2	0.5	1.5

9   Johannes Saal, "The Case of Jihadi Foreign Fighters from Switzerland," *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, January 9, 2020, https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/case-jihadi-foreign-fighters-switzerland-24759.

10   See: Fabian Merz, *Switzerland and Jihadist Foreign Fighters* (Zürich: Center for Security Studies, ETH Zürich, 2016), https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse199-EN.pdf.

11   Fabien Merz and Johannes Saal, "Backgrounds to Jihadist Radicalisation in Switzerland," in *Research report: Updated review and developments in jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland – updated version of an exploratory study on prevention and intervention*, edited by Miryam Eser Davolio, Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, Fabien Merz, Johannes Saal, and Ayesha Rether (Zürich: ZHAW, 2019), 7–19, https://www.zhaw.ch/no_cache/de/forschung/forschungsdatenbank/projektdetail/projektid/2895/.

12   Conrad Hackett, "5 Facts about the Muslim Population in Europe," *Pew Research Center*, November 29, 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/.

Cases of Swiss foreign fighters appeared mainly in urban centers and their metro areas,[13] but the cases were not necessarily indicative of a trend existing only within Swiss borders. One of our research team members, Johannes Saal[14] conducted research that indicated that Swiss foreign fighters were primarily in contact with jihadist groups or recruiters in countries with shared languages, i.e., radicalized individuals in the French-speaking area of Switzerland were connected to France and Belgium, while those in German-speaking areas of Switzerland were connected to Germany and Austria, and those in the Italian-speaking cantons were connected to Italy. This paints a picture of networks with strong connections abroad, rather than domestic networking clusters across Swiss language barriers.

The proportion of foreign travelers in relation to the population was greater in the French-speaking region of Lake Geneva; whereas the proportion of foreign fighters in relation to the Muslim population was largest in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino.

The government's response

While media interest in the Islamic State was high from 2015–2018, public awareness of the degree of radicalization risk in Switzerland was not. The implementation of an official national action plan took some time to come to fruition, as measures such as an extension of the Federal Intelligence Service law[15] had to pass through an extensive democratic process.[16] Moreover, Switzerland's decentralized federalist system limited the central government's capacity to lead the efforts to address radicalization, the conviction of returnees from Syria, for example, takes place at the canton-level.[17]

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13   Merz and Saal, "Backgrounds to Jihadist Radicalisation in Switzerland," 14.

14   Johannes Saal, "Das Sozialkapital Schweizer Jihadisten," *Schweizer Kirchen-Zeitung* 24 (2017): 313–314, http://g-cm.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/skz_24-2017-gzd.pdf.

15   The proposal of the new Federal Intelligence Service law included enhanced counterterrorism and diffusion of weapons of mass destruction methods by extended surveillance (monitoring email, erecting surveillance systems, or installing listening devices abroad).

16   The campaign started in spring 2016; popular vote took place on September 25, 2016. The extension of the law of the Federal Intelligence Service was accepted by 65.9 percent of the voters, and the new law took effect on September 1, 2017.

17   There are twenty-six Swiss cantons, each with legislative, judicial and executive competence. See: Julia Slater, "Managing the police in the 21st century," *Swiss Info*, April 17, 2013, https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/partners-in-crime-fighting_managing-the-police-in-the-21st-century/35508618; Simon Bradley, "Minister vaunts Swiss model to halt extremism," *Swiss Info*, April 8, 2016, https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/radicalisation_foreign-minister-vaunts-swiss-model-to-halt-extremism/42075460.

In November 2017 Switzerland finally announced its National Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalization and Violent Extremism.[18] The delay in the government's response, however, benefited to some extent from the experiences of other European countries—Denmark,[19] Germany,[20] and the Netherlands[21]—that had previously created and implemented plans and projects aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism.[22] While Switzerland's nationwide plan was delayed, several municipal administrations had already taken steps to implement prevention and intervention measures in their own jurisdictions. These included the establishment of counseling services, community policing, designated school personnel, and the establishment of other positions intended to identify and address signs of radicalization. In this context, in 2015, our first study on violent jihadist radicalization in Switzerland was commissioned by the federal government.

The research: Preparation and design

Preparation

Conducting research projects on jihadist radicalization through the Department of Social Work at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences was considered unusual at the time, as the topic is generally considered to fall under the domain of security studies. Our depart-

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18   The National Action Plan aims to create practicable pre-conditions for preventing and countering radicalization and violent extremism in all its forms, while at the same time respecting fundamental and human rights. In order to prevent radicalization and violent extremism, the aim is to achieve institutionalized interdisciplinary cooperation, for example in the form of regular roundtables. This strategy, developed at a local level (canton, region, city) and supported at a political level, is supposed to define the networks of relevant players and the common course of action in prevention, in particular in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Interdisciplinary networks are also seen as important to support the reintegration of an individual and to coordinate the measures required to achieve disengagement. A rapid and coordinated exchange of information and experiences (vertical and horizontal) between the various players is supposed to be guaranteed. Suitable instruments shall be made available and work process models defined that allow the process of radicalization towards violent extremism to be recognized and prevented. Civil society's commitment to and active participation in initiatives and projects are assessed as essential for the prevention work. See: "National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism," *Swiss Security Network*, December 4, 2017, https://www.newsd.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/50703.pdf.

19   See: Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen, *An Introduction to the Danish Approach to Countering and Preventing Extremism and Radicalization* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2015), https://www.ft.dk/samling/20151/almdel/reu/bilag/248/1617692.pdf.

20   Strategie der Bundesregierung zur Extremismusprävention und Demokratieförderung [Strategy of the German Federal Government for the Prevention of Extremism and the Advancement of Democracy], 2016, https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/109002/5278d578ff8c59a19d-4bef9fe4c034d8/strategie-der-bundesregierung-zur-extremismuspraevention-und-demokratiefoerderung-data.pdf.

21   "The Netherlands comprehensive action programme to combat jihadism," Operational Data Portal, January 8, 2016, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/44369.

22   See: "Radikalisierung und gewaltbereiter Extremismus- Bericht zur Studienreise nach Vilvoorde," Fachstelle für Integrationsfragen, Direktion der Justiz und des Innern, Kanton Zürich, accessed February 10, 2022, https://www.zh.ch/de/direktion-der-justiz-und-des-innern/fachstelle-integration.html.

ment's previous experience researching the prevention of right-wing extremism in Switzerland and Liechtenstein and its possible parallels to prevention and intervention measures regarding jihadist extremism, as well as the interdisciplinary and inter-university composition of the team,[23] were key factors in the commissioning of the study and selection of our research team. Just as in our previous research on right-wing extremism, our approach to researching jihadist extremism focused on community development and civil society strategies, given that findings suggest those areas have proven beneficial in the prevention of right-wing extremism.[24]

We began the first study commissioned by the Federal Department of Home Affairs in 2015 to explore jihadist radicalization in Switzerland. While the prospect of cooperation with Federal Police and the Federal Intelligence Service was new to most of the team, the agencies' unique knowledge of and experience with suspected and convicted extremists was fundamental to our analysis of radicalization. On the other side of the spectrum, and also essential to our research, were the service providers in direct contact with individuals at risk of radicalization—youth workers, schools, Muslim organizations, and counseling services—who were also interested in prevention and intervention methods.

The Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, the Directorate of International Law of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Service of Combating Racism in the Federal Department of Home Affairs initiated and contracted the study and, together with the Federal Police, their agents attended regular meetings with our research team and gave access to anonymized data from the Federal Intelligence Service. Our team was consequently able to analyze this data. The government's motivation in commissioning our research was the urgent need for further evidence-based knowledge to understand risk factors in the Swiss context and define and direct prevention and intervention measures. Due to the urgency

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23   In the first research project (Eser Davolio et al., *Background to jihadist radicalization in Switzerland*) researchers from the University of Geneva, Lausanne, and Zurich were involved. In the second research project (Eser Davolio et al., *Updated review and developments in jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland)* researchers from the University of Lucerne and Fribourg as well as the Center for Security Studies of the ETH Zurich were involved.

24   Miryam Eser Davolio, Matthias Drilling, and Monique Eckmann, "Local Communities Facing Right-Wing Extremism: Evaluating Intervention Approaches," in *Right-Wing Extremism in Switzerland – National and International Perspectives*, ed. Marcel Alexander Niggli (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009); Miryam Eser Davolio, "Early detection and prevention of extremism through community development programmes," in *The Fragility of Order: Essays in Honour of K.P.S. Gill*, ed. Ajaj Sahni (New Delhi: Kautilya Books, 2019), 177–92.

of the situation, the government asked us to develop and conclude the research in six months, which limited its scope to an explorative study with some specific insights.

At the time we began the study, the government had established a "terrorist tracking" task-force called TETRA,[25] composed of federal and cantonal agencies with weekly meetings to exchange information, discuss current cases, and coordinate joint strategies. A few Swiss cantons had established local programs, such as specialist units of the police force intended to build mutual trust between counseling services, schools, Muslim organizations, and the police. To cover the entire country, the government had to raise awareness of the need to implement necessary prevention measures in other cantons. Switzerland's federal system limits government power to establish measures in the cantons. Our research results and recommendations enabled these actors to define adequate prevention measures, promote them, and convince hesitant cantonal authorities to invest in them.

Research design

Study implementation first required determining a) if key stakeholders involved in prevention were aware of current developments related to extremism, b) if they knew of the factors involved in radicalization processes and extremist dynamics, and c) if they were ready to cooperate with other stakeholders to exchange information and develop common strategies.

The first explorative study in 2015[26] had two focal points: (1) at the individual level, persons at risk of radicalization; and (2) at the collective level, institutional reactions to the phenomenon of radicalization. The study asked:

1. What contexts and individual psychosocial and socio-demographic backgrounds influence jihadist radicalization of adolescents and young adults in Switzerland?

2. What resources does civil society have at its disposal for preventing and intervening in jihadist radicalization? In what manner are teachers, social workers, and Mus-

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25 TETRA members consisted of the Federal Intelligence Service (FIS), Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland (OAG), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Swiss Border Guard (SBG), State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Federal Office of Justice (FOJ), Conference of Cantonal Police, Commanders of Switzerland (CCPCS), and its affiliated National Police Command (FSTP).

26 Eser Davolio et al., *Background to jihadist radicalization in Switzerland*.

lim organizations confronted with young radicalized individuals and how do they respond? To what extent is there a need for counseling and case management? What are appropriate intervention approaches and how can they be applied to different situations and contexts?

The methodological approach consisted of four parts:

1. Analyzing the state of research on prevention and intervention through desk research and interviews with experts, ten Swiss and eleven from other European countries;

2. Analyzing a grid of socio-demographic and psychosocial data of foreign fighters from the Federal Intelligence Service (FIS) (N=66) and interviewing a returned foreign fighter;

3. Interviewing Muslim organizations and youth (N=33) to understand the relevance of jihadist radicalization and compiling their experiences and reactions; and

4. An online study of the effects of extremist propaganda and fake Facebook profiles. In addition, the FIS distributed letters to parents of the foreign fighters (translated into their presumed mother tongue) asking them to contact us, but with no success.

The second exploratory study in 2019 primarily focused on an updated review of the preceding study and questions related to new findings about radicalization processes in Switzerland, in order to determine the effect of prevention measures. The goal was also to publish new recommendations for prevention, intervention, and reintegration based on the knowledge acquired. The study focused on three main research questions:

1. What are the individual, psychological, social, and group-specific demographic backgrounds of the young people and adults who are categorized as radicalized jihadists?

2. What preventative and risk-increasing factors and contextual conditions in the prison system must be taken into account with regards to jihadist radicalization?

3. Which prevention and intervention strategies have proven effective for both bridge-building and extremism specialist units?

The research team selected the following approaches to answer these questions in this exploratory study:

1. A quantitative analysis of anonymized data from selected cases of radicalization (N=130) provided by the FIS.[27] Its defined variables were divided into four groups: (1) socio-demographic information, such as age, gender, relationship status, origin, place of residence, level of education, and occupation; (2) social context and personality including family issues, drug use, psychological abnormalities, criminality, and experience of violence; (3) radicalization factors, such as peer groups, the internet, missionary activities, and contact with Salafist preachers; and (4) jihadist activities with particular emphasis on jihadist-motivated travel.

2. Structured interviews[28] in the prison system and with experts (N=13) regarding the challenges presented by the presence of radicalized inmates for day-to-day management, combining the views of the directors and heads of security. The interviews' second focus was the role of imams and chaplains of the institutions, who are seen as potential agents of radicalization by some and as agents of prevention by others, with the aim to outline how they see their position and role in the institutions.

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27 The data was provided to the research team on the base of a data delivery contract as part of the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) to Prevent and Combat Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (see: "National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism," *Swiss Security Network*). "The sample includes 130 people in total. It is a selection by the FIS of cases that have been prioritized over the past ten years. The selected persons met the following criteria: Their place of residence was or had been in Switzerland and they could be assigned to the jihadist spectrum—if they had exercised violence or at least legitimized it ideologically in the context of their ideological and religious beliefs. The persons selected by the FIS were mainly "high-risk persons." The only exceptions were a few older cases where the term was not yet used. The FIS uses the term "high-risk persons" to designate persons who "present an increased risk to Switzerland's internal and external security." The FIS uses a combination of precise criteria where a specific connection to violence is the decisive factor. However, the group called "high-risk" does not only include violent extremists but also includes supporters and propagandists of jihadist groups. This high-risk group also includes persons who have come to the attention of the FIS due to jihadist-motivated travel as well as persons who have been identified due to indications of radicalization, whether through online activities or specific patterns of behavior." Eser Davolio et al., *Updated review and developments in jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland*, 10.

28 To meet these objectives, semi-structured interviews with five categories of people were carried out: 1) prison directors (N=6); 2) heads of security (N=2); 3) Christian chaplains (N=2); 4) Imams or Muslim chaplains (N=4); 5) external experts, such as criminologists and federal prosecutors (N=3). The sample of persons interviewed was compiled using a multifaceted approach. First, the prison directors dealing with the incarceration of detainees suspected of violating §122 of the Systematic Compilation of Federal Legislation or §260 of the Swiss Criminal Code were contacted. Second, interlocutors provided the names of prisons faced with radicalization. Third, the prison imams and Muslim chaplains were contacted. Finally, fifteen persons performing various roles in eighteen establishments in seven different cantons (three in the French-speaking part and four in the German-speaking part) were interviewed. Institutions dealing with pre-sentencing detention, custody on remand, short custodial sentences, and execution of sentences were represented. Most of the establishments accommodate only men (twelve), some have a section for women (three), two are only for women, and one for minors.

3. Structured interviews on determining means of prevention and intervention with extremism specialist units[29] (N=12), case analysis of consultations regarding suspected jihadist radicalization (N=47), and interviews with bridge-building specialist units of the police[30] (N=7) regarding the units' existing resources, areas of activity, and networking, as well as their prevention strategies for mosques and Muslim organizations.

Diversity

ENSURING INCLUSION: DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

As Erich Marks points out,[31] effective prevention strategies are generally based on the interdisciplinary cooperation of research, practice, and political institutions. This triangle functions interdependently and requires a well-functioning exchange of information in order to develop collective understanding and adoption of preventative strategies. Switzerland's relatively small population size of about eight million actually made it easier to facilitate personal contact between key actors in research, practice, and administration and informal exchanges in committees and working groups strengthened our team's triangulated cooperation. Still, in a small country without much focused on violent extremism prevention and intervention in the past, local expertise proved difficult to come by. As such, intervention strategies developed elsewhere had to be adapted to our local context.

The goal of both our exploratory studies was to analyze the impact of backgrounds and risk factors on the individual and societal level of jihadist radicalization in the Swiss context, including its connections to neighboring countries. The research team collaborated with numerous prosecuting authorities (FIS, Federal Police, cantonal police, community police, penal system), the prevention arena (intervention, counselling centers, schools, and youth

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29 A total of twelve interviews were conducted with all ten extremism specialist units (Geneva, Lausanne, Biel, city of Bern, Basel Stadt, Aargau, city of Zurich, canton of Zurich, Winterthur, and Lugano) on the existing personnel resources, the integration of the specialist unit, target groups, their consultation and casework activities, and their intervention strategies.

30 A total of seven interviews (five verbal and two written) were conducted with the existing specialist units in the cantons of Zurich, Bern, and Fribourg as well as in the cities of Zurich and Winterthur. The new specialist unit in the canton of Schwyz was also interviewed by telephone, but they had not yet obtained experience. The new bridge-building units in Lugano and Baden operating in an urban environment and the coordination unit for religious issues in the canton of Basel Stadt were not included. The content of the interviews was recorded with written notes and was analytically evaluated. The text and the interview quotes were sent to the participants for review.

31 Erich Marks, "Zur Eröffnung des 19. Deutschen Präventionstags in Karlsruhe," in *Prävention braucht Praxis, Politik und Wissenschaft. Ausgewählte Beiträge des 19. Deutschen Präventionstages 201*4, eds. Erich Marks and Wiebke Steffen (Mönchengladbach: Forum Verlag Godesberg, 2015), 43–52.

work), and Muslim organizations (umbrella organizations, Islamic and ethnic communities, and mosques).[32] We interviewed them not only for their expertise but also to determine their level of cooperation in shared efforts to address radicalization. In the years following the 2015 study, the research team witnessed a reciprocal promotion of trust and common ground, especially with regard to Muslim organizations, in the areas of policing, education, and youth work.

Of course, increased threat and stress levels increase the difficulty of improving cooperation. Cantons that had already improved their contacts with prevention actors and Muslim organizations could build on an established foundation, whereas other cantons had to start from scratch and were skeptical of the prospect of finding reliable partners from within the Muslim community. Therefore, the research project functioned as a foundation for further cooperation between actors, helping to establish mutual understanding of their positions. The Muslim organizations were in a uniquely difficult position. While seeking to identify and address potentially signs of radicalization, they were simultaneously targets of the media, which at times portrayed them as facilitators of extremism. We found that, Muslim organizations preferred to exclude individuals with radical views from their organizations to avoid negative media coverage–in doing so, relinquishing the avenues for continued contact.

This is particularly important in light of ongoing (both then and now) notably Islamophobic political actions in Switzerland, including the anti-minaret initiative,[33] put to the vote and into law in a 2009 referendum,[34] and a referendum to ban burkas in public in the Italian-speaking canton of Tessin, which was passed in 2013 and came into force in 2016.[35] In 2021, the Swiss electorate voted to outlaw face-covering headgear, de facto banning wearing burkas at a constitutional level.[36] Furthermore, there are latent and blatant Islamopho-

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32 Islam is not an officially recognized religion in Switzerland. Mosques are generally organized along ethnic lines as cultural associations, mosque associations, or foundations. They are mostly funded through donations and contributions from active members of the community—hence often find themselves in difficult financial situations—and much of their work, like youth work, for example, is done on a voluntary basis.

33 The anti-minaret-initiative was put to vote in 2009 and approved by the majority of the Swiss population. It bans the construction of any minarets in Switzerland.

34 The initiative sparked discussion in Arab countries and was officially condemned by the Arab League in November 2010. See: "Swiss Minaret Ban Violates Muslim Rights: Arabs," *al Arabiya*, December 1, 2009, https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/12/01/92878.html.

35 Adam Taylor, "In Switzerland, a 'burqa ban' has consequences—for soccer fans," *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/08/switzerland-burqa-ban-has-consequences-soccer-fans/.

36 Rim-Sarah Alouane, "Where Face Masks Are Required but Burqas Are Banned," *Foreign Policy*, March 10, 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/10/switzerland-europe-burqa-ban-referendum-coronavirus-face-masks-egerkinger-komitee/.

bic prejudices in the society, as for example toward Muslim applicants (with Arab names) which can lead to discrimination.[37]

CONSTRUCTING COOPERATION: DIVERSITY ON RESEARCH TEAMS

Conducting research with a wide spectrum of actors required a diverse research team. Our team included sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, historians, and researchers in the educational sciences, Islamic studies, and social work. Their areas of expertise included extremism, violence, Islam, prevention strategies, and community development. This diversity facilitated the establishment of cooperation among a broad range of stakeholders but also necessitated internal discussions to establish a common understanding of the project and its goals.

Our research strategy was to synthesize various stakeholder experiences with forms of jihadist radicalization. For this reason, it was important to involve not only researchers with expertise in Islam, but also those from a Muslim background (three out of our thirteen total researchers came from a Muslim background). Doing so was fundamental not only in facilitating access to Muslim stakeholders, but in providing important perspective and insight in team discussions. We had to address majority and minority views, the "othering" of Muslim communities, dominance and power, and the impact of geopolitical issues on cultural identities. Differences in experience, interpretations, and analysis that were reflected in our research team allowed us to gain deeper insights on these issues.

ADDRESSING A PARTICULARITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Conducting any type of nationally representative research in Switzerland can be complicated given its cultural and linguistic complexity and requires a similarly diverse research team. Linguistically, Switzerland is comprised primarily of four language regions: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. Our study focused on three of the four language regions and therefore required local researchers from each of these regions who were both fluent in the respective language and knowledgeable about local contexts and networks. While this was necessary for carrying out interviews among a diverse linguistic and cultural population, the benefits of the team's linguistic diversity extended beyond the interviews. For example,

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37   Eva Zschirnt and Rosita Fibbi, *Do Swiss Citizens of Immigrant Origin Face Hiring Discrimination in the Labour Market?* (Neuchâtel: National Center of Competence in Research, 2019), https://doc.rero.ch/record/324131/files/nccr_WP20-Zschirnt-Fibbi_2019.pdf.

regional team diversity raised awareness about different perspectives on social problems of young Muslims in disadvantaged quarters depending on actual regional experiences.

Challenges

ANONYMIZATION OF DATA IN A SMALL COUNTRY

Due in part to Switzerland's population, the small number of returnees to interview (N=16) presented a challenge. It would have been easy for journalists to deduce the subjects of presumably anonymous interviews and other data. This challenge made data protection and anonymization quite difficult. We sought to anonymize data to protect our testimonial sources through leaving out specific information when describing cases. However, the limited data pool made protecting subjects' anonymity even more challenging. For example, at the time of our research, there had only been three[38] cases of Swiss women foreign fighters who had travelled to Syria but reporting on their radicalization pathways and narratives without mentioning gender proved difficult. Discussions of gender and identity, including gendered dimensions of radicalization processes, were also essential to their narrative.

Additional demographic or personal identifying factors proved so distinctive and rare within the data that even if age, nationality, or location go unmentioned, the subjects could still likely be identified.[39] Yet still, these characteristics—and those of each individual—were integral to explaining their decisions to travel to fight in violent extremist conflicts in Iraq and Syria—which, while some might perceive to be irrational, were considered by them as entirely rational and necessary.[40]

Given these issues, we attempted to describe individual decision-making processes without any reference to the subject's identity. Given the small population size, we encountered similar issues in protecting the individual identities of professionals (for example street workers or prison chaplains) and experts who desired to stay anonymous. In those cases,

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38   See: Eser Davolio et al., *Background to jihadist radicalization in Switzerland*.

39   For example identifying as LGBTQI+ or Kurdish.

40   See: Miryam Eser Davolio, "Hintergründe jihadistischer Radikalisierung in der Schweiz – eine Fallstudie," in *Radikalisierung und extremistische Gewalt: Perspektiven aus dem Fall- und Bedrohungsmanagement*, eds. Jens Hoffmann and Nils Böckler (Frankfurt: Verlag für Polizei und Wissenschaft, 2017), 155–165.

however, we found it easier to conceal identities through omitting or obscuring particular details that were not deemed necessary in understanding their decision-making processes.

Conducting research on preventing extremism in the social work field requires special attention to the challenges of relationship-building, the role of social workers as client advocates, and the level of interest (of both the general society and the relevant security forces) in prevention. The extent and success of these efforts depended on the established cooperation between social work and police forces and their past experiences. This differs considerably between Swiss cantons. For example, such cooperation is common in the German-speaking area of Switzerland, based on reciprocal trust formed by experience and similar goals of youth intervention, protection, and reintegration efforts.

In contrast, we found that distance and alienation between social workers and the police are often greater in the French-speaking areas of Switzerland, which impacted our research. We ran into an issue related to this divide during our interviews with social workers in a French-speaking area about information that related to a specific subset of Muslim youth. While we attempted to present findings related to this information in a careful, non-alarmist, and fair manner without altering the words of the interview subjects, some police officers who read our report felt anxious because of the information presented. They even pressured the social workers to hand over the names of the adolescents mentioned, which the social workers refused to do. At that moment, it felt like our research project led to increasing animosity between relevant actors in the field. Fortunately, the later establishment of an interdisciplinary prevention unit in the canton of Geneva as a platform for exchange and coordinated interventions enabled actors to avoid and move beyond such confrontations and enhance shared understanding and trust, strengthening prevention measures in the area.

Research on highly sensitive and securitized topics can inadvertently cause tensions and put a target on the back of practitioners. In the aforementioned case, the social workers' view that the adolescents did not represent an imminent risk to society and their fear of losing trust with them conflicted with the police's interest in identifying potentially dangerous individuals. While the researchers attempted establish a relationship of trust with

the practitioners and present the findings without stoking alarmism, this information triggered apprehension among security forces. Even if the research report was anonymized, the security forces understood that the findings referred to dynamics within their territory (canton) and they tried to force the practitioners to give up the names of â€œdangerousâ€ individuals - but without success. This conflict underscores the importance of cooperation and trust among practitioners and security officials as opposed to animosity and forced relationships. In cantons with established cooperation between practitioners and special security units, there has been greater understanding of practitioners professional ethics and the necessary discretion. Personal level relationships can be beneficial in this regard, as establishing common ground can ease the process of sharing information, understanding the importance of confidentiality, and making decisions judiciously by weighing the possible risks and consequences of interventions together.

INTERPRETATION ISSUES & PUBLICITY

When we published our results of the second research project in 2019, one of the findings triggered a complicated chain of events. Among other results, we discovered that approximately 40 percent of the radicalized jihadist individuals with residence in Switzerland over the previous decade (N=130) lived on welfare. The term "welfare" here encompasses welfare benefits, unemployment assistance or disability insurance, and refugee assistance. We could not determine if this percentage was due to the effects of detention and difficulties of associated with social reintegration, radicalization and withdrawal from society, or the loss of a job and social disintegration. However, after our report was published, some media outlets highlighted this statistic, some even using alarming headlines that neglected the nuances within our report.[41] A direct result of this generalization of complex data was discussions that, among other things, caused the political party *Legaticinesi* in the national parliament to propose a reduction of social assistance to radicalized migrants[42]—which at last did not gain the support of other parties and did not pass.

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41   "Aiuti sociali al 40% dei jihadisti," *Corriere del Ticino*, June 13, 2019, https://avenue.argusdatainsights.ch/kundenartikel_archiv/2019-06/1053061/73821753.pdf.

42   Answer of the Swiss government to the request of reducing social welfare for radicalized individuals (in Italian): The Federal Assembly—The Swiss National Parliament Official Bulletin, National Council Special Session, May 4, 2021, https://www.parlament.ch/it/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=52848.

Jihadist radicalization is a sensitive matter with a high level of public interest, and the publication of research on the phenomenon carries with it the risk of unintended consequences. Here, the risk of stigmatizing the Muslim minority in Switzerland deserves special attention. Exploring individual and social risk factors for jihadist radicalization in Muslim communities involves a potential risk of reinforcing Islamophobia, thereby increasing the isolation of the Muslim community and damaging the possibilities for cooperation and joint intervention with them.

Research findings must always be transparent. Even a well-differentiated and reliable scientific publication cannot guarantee that readers will comprehend the presented information in the intended way. Researchers must acknowledge their responsibility in disseminating politically sensitive information to the public to ensure they do not harm the communities that are the focus of their research. This includes an increased attention to possible collateral damage, power dynamics, context and transparency as well as attention to research limitations and caveats.

Preventing violent extremism through research: Personal reflections

In 2015, the pressure to create a scientific basis of understanding the rising phenomenon of jihadist radicalization, and the urgency to develop instruments to combat and limit Islamist extremism, was very high. The research team felt the expectations—not only from government partners and funders but also from key actors (e.g., cities considered to be radicalization hotspots, police forces, social workers dealing with radicalized persons) and the media. The team was also affected by the emotionalization of the issue in the general population, who were worried about possible terror attacks. At the time, we did not know if the situation would calm down or worsen, deteriorating into a greater crescendo of violence and undermining our sense of security and civil community.

These events also weighed on the shoulders of key actors participating as experts in our research project. As authorities in public safety, they had to work much harder and far exceeded their normal workload. It was common to communicate outside of office hours

and to get an immediate answer, as all stakeholders worked intensively. Heavy time pressures burdened the research project—we had only six months and we knew that the presentations of the findings and recommendations would engender great public interest and media resonance. This increased our motivation but also exacerbated the pressure to satisfy the expectations of government funders and the public.

Furthermore, we wished to contribute constructively to methods of dealing with radicalization in congruence with the ethical guidelines of social work: to build bridges and include minorities in joint action, rather than promoting repression and exclusion (as in repressive interventions of the police forces, the exclusion of radicalizing youngsters in youth work, etc.) or blaming groups or individuals for their actions. Researchers tend to adopt impartiality towards divergent (political) positions and objectify the research topic.[43] This topic was not only of concern to social scientists but also of prime interest to security forces, the administrative bureaucracy, and politicians charged with reducing and preventing Swiss extremism. All were simultaneously concerned and engaged in seeking to better understand the phenomenon of radicalization to improve interventions.

Of course, we desired to identify and better comprehend the causes of radicalization—and here are three important tasks of researchers in this regard:

1. Avoid convenient simplifications,
2. Seek to broaden public discussion around issues associated with radicalization, and
3. Situate findings and public discussion on solid scientific grounds.

When I recall this period, it was a unique situation for all the experts working on the front line. Since Lorenzo Vidino's 2013 report on jihadist radicalization in Switzerland,[44] there had been a lack of research on this topic, which enhanced the spotlight on our own research project, even though we were newcomers in the field of jihadist radicalization. In this space of discovery and anxiety, the research team invested all their energy into the project.

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43   Such challenges have been reflected particularly in the dispute between Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel in France about the origins of and reasons for radicalization. See: Cécile Daumas, "Olivier Roy et Gilles Kepel querelle française sur le jihadisme," *Liberation*, April 14, 2016, https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/04/14/olivier-roy-et-gilles-kepel-querelle-francaise-sur-le-jihadisme_1446226.

44   Lorenzo Vidino, *Jihadist Radicalization in Switzerland* (Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), 2013, https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CH_radicalization_report.pdf.

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter afforded a rare opportunity to reflect on the specificity of the Swiss context and its implications for research on extremism and strategies against it—and a quite singular chance to disclose such self-referential findings to an interested international public, hopefully of help to other researchers. The chapter discussed the conditions of engaging in research on jihadist radicalization in Switzerland in 2015 and again in 2019, including the implications for research design in countries with small populations and challenges and considerations based on the author's experience, including the following:

- **Research on jihadist radicalization in small nations must be based on both** international state-of-the-art research and evidence-based experience in prevention and intervention. On the other hand, it must consider the nation-specific context of radicalization, possible historical and/or political grievances, and the resources and conditions for establishing prevention measures.

- **The small, federalist nature of a country like Switzerland can limit both research** and measures addressing radicalization. It can also offer special access or direct contact, networking, and proximity to key stakeholders. Furthermore, a small population facilitates relationship building and overview of the key actors working on extremism.

- **Research projects in federalist states require efforts to include all cantons and** their stakeholders, which are not concerned to the same extent by the threat of extremism.

- **Research on the community development approach to extremism is focused** on involving all concerned stakeholders. The collaborative involvement of stakeholders contributes to a sensitizing process and helps to detect possible obstacles for cooperation, such as a lack of trust and other factors to be taken into account for joint interventions.

- **Most of the aforementioned ethical questions and obstacles may emerge** regardless of a given nation's size. But the protection of privacy in a small data set in a context where the subjects are known in the mass media presents an extremely

demanding challenge. Other small nations, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria, likely encounter similar research challengesâ€"on extremism and social research in general.

- **The presence of more than one national language can influence the approach** to the topic or to the field of practice. Researchers often gravitate toward researching in their own language but can benefit from research in areas or regions in other languages as well.

- **A research team should not only represent multilingual abilities but also different** disciplinary and cultural backgrounds (especially ethnic or religions backgrounds in order to provide insight and balance the research process).

- **Dissemination of the research results in mass media must be handled with sensitivity.** The communication of findings on jihadist radicalization enjoys a high level of public attention, and information can easily be distorted or misinterpreted, creating or enabling Islamophobia.

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Lab-in-Field Experiments for the Reintegration of Violent Extremists

The Promise of Prosocial Evaluation

Cameron Sumpter

When an inmate leaves prison following a sentence for terrorism offences, their reintegration will depend on whether they can function as a relatively social member of their community. Obstacles such as stigmatization exist for all former convicts, but among steadfast extremists these barriers will be mutual, if they continue to perceive the ingroup-outgroup dichotomy that fed their extremism in the first place. A simple but effective means for determining the likelihood that returning prisoners will act prosocially towards the 'other' could be the use of so-called lab-in-field games, which provide small incentives to learn how individuals behave in a given situation, rather than just eliciting their sentiment. This chapter outlines the potential for such an approach. It draws on field research conducted in Indonesia in 2018, which involved interviews with 28 former convicted terrorists, regarding their practical experiences with reintegration and interactions in the community.

Introduction

The societal reintegration of (violent) extremists is becoming a critical section of the counterterrorism policy spectrum in a range of nations. Average terrorism-related prison sentences are getting shorter in the United States, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[1] Sentences vary across Europe but the typical length in several states is fewer than ten years, particularly when probation periods are factored.[2] Australia is facing an increase in scheduled terrorism-offender prison releases over the next five years.[3] And thousands of ISIS supporters from dozens of nations are now subsisting in vast camps in northern Syria, many vying for repatriation.[4]

Research has shown that reoffending rates among violent extremists may be lower than those for other crimes.[5] But the loaded impact of terrorism adds weight to any related case of recidivism, while heaping pressure on programs aimed at rehabilitation and facilitating post-release transitions. Risk assessment instruments designed for terrorism offenders have become sophisticated in the past ten years or so, but their complexity can also prove a hindrance. Practitioners require advanced training, the associated interviews are time consuming, and persistent uncertainty surrounding terrorism risk factors creates an element of doubt that could arguably outweigh the requisite effort in some contexts.[6]

A practical supplement to specialized risk assessment tools could be the use of so-called lab-in-field experiments, which have been adopted by researchers and development practitioners since the 1970s to establish levels of prosocial behavior among different sample

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5   Andrew Silke and John Morrison, "Re-Offending by Released Terrorists: Separating Hype from Reality," *ICCT Policy Brief*, September 2020, https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/09/Re-Offending-by-Released-Terrorist-Prisoners.pdf.

6   See for example: Randy Borum, "Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2, no. 2 (2015): 63-87; Sarah L. Desmarais, Joseph Simons-Rudolph, Christine Shahan Brugh, Eileen Schilling, and Chad Hoggan, "The State of Scientific Knowledge Regarding Factors Associated With Terrorism," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 4, no. 4 (2017): 180-209.

populations.[7] Recently, these behavioral science exercises have been highlighted for their potential to evaluate preventing violent extremism initiatives.[8] While inadequate for measuring specific risk, lab-in-field experiments could be effective in gauging the likelihood that an individual will assimilate with a community following release from prison or repatriation, the development of those already trying, and the impact of associated programs. They may even provide evidence of disengagement from violent extremist networks.

This chapter will explore the utility of lab-in-field experiments for assessing the reintegration of violent extremists. First, it will outline relevant theories of radicalization which emphasize the social nature of the process and the formation of ingroup-outgroup perspectives and preferences. It will then describe the design and function of lab-in-field games and provide examples of applicable research projects, before illustrating how and why this approach could be employed for possibly reforming violent extremists. This final section will draw on the author's field research into the societal reintegration of former prisoners convicted of terrorism offences in Indonesia, where several hundred individuals have been released or repatriated in recent years.

Us versus them

The study of terrorism and its drivers is a contentious field, with definitional uncertainty and schools of thought influenced by broader political discourse. One of the few points of consensus in the analysis of 'radicalization,' for example, is that no single profile or straightforward pathway can explain the process towards violence. Instead, an array of psychological, relational, and structural conditions are potential ingredients, depending on the temporal context and environmental circumstances.[9] But a prominent theme among some of the discipline's most influential scholars is the fundamentally social nature of becoming and remaining a member of a violent extremist network.[10]

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7   Hans Binswanger, "Attitudes Toward Risk: Experimental Measurement in Rural India," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 62, no. 3, 1980.

8   Georgia Holmer, Peter Bauman, with Kateira Aryaeinejad, "Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programs," *United States Institute of Peace*, September 6, 2018, https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/09/measuring-monitoring-and-evaluating-pcve-programs.

9   See: Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICCT Research Paper*, March 2013, https://icct.nl/publication/radicalisation-de-radicalisation-counter-radicalisation-a-conceptual-discussion-and-literature-review/.

10   See: Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011).

For Marc Sageman, terrorist organizations comprise groups of individuals who most often know each other through long-standing friendships or family connections, and further develop resolute bonds based on trust and mutual affection.[11] The draw of membership to a clandestine association can also be driven by a desire for the development of belonging, solidarity and acceptance—particularly among young people seeking direction.[12] Relationships may grow stronger through reciprocated activism, and eventually a collective social identity supersedes that of the individual, establishing a dedicated loyalty strengthened through cycles of group activity, peer pressure, and communal protection.[13]

This subordination of individual identity to that of the collective "provides the most powerful lens to understand terrorism psychology and behavior," according to Jerrold Post.[14] Social and organizational dynamics not only shape the process of incremental individual involvement; John Horgan has argued that perceptions of group factors play perhaps the most critical role in decisions to engage in terrorist activity and maintain involvement.[15] While a strong social identity formed within a group establishes devotion to collective goals, radicalization is often a sustained reaction to perceived threats to the ingroup from real or imagined outgroup adversaries.[16]

Ingroup-outgroup divisions exist among an array of everyday identity markers, from fans of sporting teams to musical taste; but as J.M. Berger explains, extremists remove all associated subjectivity, defining outgroup beliefs and practices in sharp contrast to those of the ingroup.[17] Any common grey space is subsumed by either black or white. Perceiving themselves to be morally superior, the ingroup loses their ability to see the world from the perspective of the 'other,' and outsiders are demonized through narratives of threat and/or

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11   Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 24.

12   Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism: Instrumental and organizational approaches," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 20.

13   Remy Cross and David A. Snow, "Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types," Journal of Strategic Security 4, no. 4 (2011): 120; Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology* 2, no. 2 (2000): 414; Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," Terrorism & Political Violence 24, no. 1 (2012): 16; See also, The Lord Alderdice, "The individual, the group and the psychology of terrorism," *International Review of Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (2007).

14   Jerrold Post, "'When hatred is bred to the bone:' the social psychology of terrorism," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 26, no. 4 (2010): 15. https://doig.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2010.05694.x.

15   John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 5.

16   Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008).

17   J.M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), Chapter 3.

persecution.[18] Any sympathy for outgroup members, or even attempts to understand their position, will be deemed a betrayal of loyalty to the extremist ingroup, leading to accusations of "whose side are you on?"[19]

It may be natural to uphold such an exclusivist mindset when a person spends significant time with other ingroup members (offline, online, or both), but perhaps less so when frequent social interactions are more varied. Researchers suggest that it is "considerably harder to demonize the 'other' when one has the opportunity to meet, play, and work together for a substantial length of time."[20] Managed carefully, societal reintegration initiatives following a prison sentence for terrorism offences or repatriation from a camp in Syria could provide these types of regular engagements. Actual and potential constructive interaction between (former) extremists and people outside their perceived ingroup can be measured by determining testable preferences for prosocial behavior.

Do unto others

Prosocial behavior describes acts such as helping, sharing, donating, cooperating, and volunteering.[21] While behavioral reciprocity has been branded a universal norm since at least the 1960s, prosocial behavior may be also performed "without conscious, explicitly felt anticipations of reciprocated rewards," provided the associated costs are not overly taxing.[22] Whether learned as good practice in childhood or through some innate social function of being human, people often simply help other people. Selfless acts to benefit others may be common to virtually every culture on earth, but not unconditionally. Researchers have found that actors behave more prosocially to members of their ingroup than perceived outsiders, across a variety of contexts.[23] One study concluded the strength of an individual's

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18   Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011).

19   Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 156.

20   Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel, and Alan S. Waterman, "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 552.

21   Arthur P. Brief and Stephan J. Motowildo, "Prosocial Organisational Behaviors," *Academy of Management Review* 11, no. 4 (1986): 710.

22   Alvin Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (1960); Leonard Berkowitz and Louise R. Daniel, "Responsibility and Dependency," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66, no. 5 (1963).

23   Jim A. C. Everett, Nadira S. Faber, and Molly Crockett, "Preferences and beliefs in ingroup favouritism," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 9, no. 15 (2015).

identification to a particular group impacts the way they balance individual and collective interests.[24]

Such findings are the result of experiments involving behavioral science games, which are becoming popular policy tools for development practitioners seeking increased program efficiency and more effective targeting.[25] Among the first so-called lab-in-field experiments in this discipline were conducted in the late 1970s to measure the effects of risk-taking on behavioral outcomes among farmers in India.[26] In recent years, these experimental exercises have been played with a range of target populations in different contexts, from young football players with experience of conflict in Sierra Leonne, to juvenile delinquents in Chicago, to snack food consumers in rural Thailand.[27] While the design and variation of the actual games played are only constrained by the creativity of the researchers, many are based on a few classic examples.

The Dictator Game is generally a two-player exercise in which one person must decide how to divide a prescribed amount of money between themselves and the other player, which tests altruism and fairness preferences. A majority of players have been found to transfer roughly 20 per cent of the allotment.[28] Slightly more complex is the Ultimatum Game, where the first player decides what portion to offer the second player, before the potential recipient chooses to either accept the division so that each player receives something, or refuse (and punish), resulting in neither player receiving anything.[29] A third common exercise is the Trust Game, in which player one again decides how much of an allotted sum to

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24   Delia Baldassarri, and Guy Grossman, "The Effect of Group Attachment and Social Position on Prosocial Behavior. Evidence from Lab-in-the-Field Experiments," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 3 (2013).

25   Pamela Jakiela, "What Are We Learning from Lab-in-the-Field Experiments in Developing Countries?," *Center for Global Development*, June 6, 2019, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/what-are-we-learning-lab-field-experiments-developing-countries.

26   Hans Binswanger, "Attitudes Toward Risk: Experimental Measurement in Rural India," American Journal of Agricultural Economics 62, no. 3, 1980.

27   Francesco Cecchi, Koen Leuveld, and Maarten Voors, "Conflict Exposure and Competitiveness: Experimental Evidence from the Football Field in Sierra Leone," *The University of Chicago* (February 2016); Sara B. Heller, Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold A. Pollack, "Thinking, Fast and Slow? Some Field Experiments to Reduce Crime and Dropout in Chicago," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017); Antonia Grohmann, and Sahra Sakha, "The effect of peer observation on consumption choices: evidence from a lab-in-field experiment," *Applied Economics* 51, no. 55 (2019).

28   See: Daniel Kahneman, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard Thaler, "Fairness as a Constraint on Profit Seeking: Entitlements in the Market," *The American Economic Review* 76, no. 4 (1986): 728-741.

29   Steven D. Levitt and John A. List, "What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preference Reveal About the Real World?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (2007): 155.

give to player two, which is then multiplied by a predetermined number, before player two decides how much of her acquisition to give back to player one.[30]

These descriptions are bare-boned representations of what are often more creative designs deemed appropriate for the specific experiment at hand. Beyond altruism and fairness, the games test for motivations such as conditional reciprocity, inequity aversion, and risk-taking in a social setting.[31] Lab-in-field exercises are generally simple to run, relatively inexpensive, and genuine (while small) financial payoffs tend to ensure that participants consider their decisions carefully and seriously.[32] Of course, there are a number of caveats and complications that need to be considered with any experimental design. Particular moral and/or cultural considerations may influence results, as well as the type and degree of scrutiny a player receives as they make their decisions (even simply from the person conducting the experiment).[33] Appropriate control groups also play an important role in determining specific preferences and presenting convincing comparisons.[34]

Examples from the (lab-in) field

While projects using behavioral science laboratory experiments in communities focus on a diverse range of issues, studies looking at post-conflict dynamics or prison populations may offer examples relevant to the reintegration of violent extremists. Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii researched the impact of Nepal's ten-year civil war on social cohesion in areas affected by wartime violence.[35] After mapping applicable communities and randomly selecting an even number of conflict-affected and not-conflict-affected townships among 48 identified districts, the team played four lab-in-field games to discern differences in sentiment. For instance, a dictator game asked subjects to donate a portion of money to an unnamed local

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30   Matteo M. Galizzi, "On the external validity of social preference games: a systematic lab-if-field study," *Management Science* 65, no. 3 (2018).

31   Levitt and List, "What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preference Reveal," 154-155

32   Armin Falk and James J. Heckman, "Lab Experiments Are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences," *IZA Discussion Paper* No. 4520 (2009): 3-4.

33   John A. List, "Why Economists Should Conduct Field Experiments and 14 Tips for Pulling One Off," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (2011).

34   Kurt Braddock, *Experimentation & Quasi-Experimentation in Countering Violent Extremism: Directions of Future Inquiry* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.1.

35   Michael J. Gilligan, Benjamin J. Pasquale, and Cyrus Samii, "Civil War and Social Cohesion: Lab-in-the-Field Evidence from Nepal," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 3 (2014): 604-619.

family in need, while another tested the willingness to gamble on reciprocated cooperation. The project ultimately concluded that "community-level exposure to fatal civil-war violence increases community-level social cohesion."[36]

An earlier study in post-war Bosnia used similar methods to measure cooperation across ethnic divisions; or more specifically, whether "ethnic groups from Bosnia exhibit norms of fairness that are different for their ingroup then for an outgroup."[37] A form of the dictator game was again used to have participants decide how much of an allocated sum of money (often a day's average wage) to share with an anonymous counterpart from a different ethnic group, and how much to keep for themselves. The authors highlighted research suggesting that members of different ethnic groups often discriminate against others based on perceived trust. But through their experiments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they found evidence of "considerable fairness both within and between ethnic groups."[38] This was deemed comparatively convincing, as the findings from the game-based study relied on actual behavior rather than previous research that focused on eliciting attitudes towards outgroups in Bosnia.[39]

In Italy, a team of researchers conducted prisoner dilemma games with actual prisoners (and control groups of students) to test varied levels of behavioral cooperation among regular prisoners and convicted members of the organized criminal group, the Camorra. Nese et al. employed both a 'one-shot' prisoners' dilemma game and a second involving three participants with the possibility of third-party punishment.[40] The games used tokens worth €0.30, which were later paid out to students or credited to the inmates' prison accounts.[41] A three-way comparison showed the *Camorristi* displayed higher degrees of cooperativeness than both students and regular criminals respectively and a stronger tendency to punish defectors than the unaffiliated inmates, who demonstrated an opportunism in sharp contrast to the honor codes of the Camorra.[42]

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36   Ibid, 616.

37   Sam Whitt and Rick K. Wilson, "The Dictator Game, Fairness and Ethnicity in Postwar Bosnia," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (2007): 655-668.

38   Ibid, 662.

39   Ibid, 666.

40   Annamaria Nese, Niall O'Higgins, Patrizia Sbriglia, and Maurizio Scudiero, "Cooperation, punishment and organized crime: a lab-in-the-field experiment in southern Italy," *European Economic Review* 107 (2018): 86-98.

41   Ibid, 91.

42   Ibid, 97.

Another applicable example is a longitudinal lab-in-field experiment to determine changes in prosocial behavior among prison inmates who had successfully completed a rehabilitation program in California.[43] Trust and dictator games were played with 80 inmates—38 control subjects and 42 who took part in a specific program called Guiding Rage Into Power (DRIP), which explores the origins of violent behavior and develops positive coping mechanisms.[44] The games were administered before and after the one-year course. The research team concluded that "trust [had] significantly increased in GRIP participants compared to the control group."[45] The authors argued their findings suggested the program effectively strengthened the prisoners' prosocial preferences and attitudes, which would potentially foster their rehabilitation and post-release reintegration.[46]

Each of these examples offers food for thought when considering how lab-in-field experiments might benefit initiatives aimed at facilitating the reintegration of violent extremists following prison sentences or repatriation. To further outline the possible benefits, it will be practical to consider how these processes play out. Recent experiences in Indonesia provide a useful case study.

Connections, commitment, and community

Given the importance of social dynamics and relational bonds among expert conceptions of radicalization theory, the modern history of Islamist militancy in Indonesia offers a pertinent example. While the jihadist movement has its origins in the Southeast Asian nation's fight for independence in the 1940s, a significant period came in the 1980s, when dozens of Indonesians made their way to the Afghan-Pakistan border where they trained and studied with the mujahideen. Most returned to Southeast Asia in the 1990s, extending and transferring their training in the Southern Philippines, and injecting themselves into remote conflicts back in Indonesia, which erupted following the end of President Suharto's long reign of power in the late 1990s.[47]

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43   Mario A. Maggioni, Domenico Rossignoli, Simona Beretta, and Sara Balestri, "Trust behind bars: Measuring change in inmates' prosocial preferences," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 64 (2018): 89-104.

44   See: Insight-Out, "Guiding Rage Into Power: A One-Year Accountability and Healing Program," https://grip-traininginstitute.org

45   Maggioni et al., "Trust behind bars," 99.

46   Ibid.

47   See: Solahudin, *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013).

Experts on the subject have highlighted the importance of strong personal ties among militants, established in Afghanistan and later in the Philippines.[48] When aspects of communal conflict on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi radicalized in the early 2000s, observers stressed that the solidarity formed overseas was "almost certainly more important than ideology or money in facilitating partnerships among jihadist groups."[49] These links grew stronger through common business interests, enrolment in certain Islamic boarding schools, and, crucially, inter-movement marriage, which created a "complex web of familial relationships" and entrenched the exclusivist ingroup identity.[50]

To some extent, the 2010s rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the Middle East altered ideological, strategic, and tactical dimensions of the jihadi movement in Indonesia, but personal relationships have remained central to recruitment and network cohesion. Research by Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten Schulze found that social bonds were the "common thread in encouraging entry as well as fostering commitment" to the militant networks.[51] Drawing on a dataset of 106 Indonesians, the authors identified four primary pathways to involvement: small religious study groups (known as *pengajian*); family connections; participation in domestic conflict; and close-knit boarding school communities. For Indonesian ISIS supporters, like those from a range of nations, true commitment involved abandoning their former social networks and travelling to Syria for a new life and identity.[52]

Counterterrorism, incarceration, and reintegration

In October 2002, coordinated bombing attacks in a nightlife district on the resort island of Bali killed over 200 people. The Indonesian government quickly bolstered its anti-terrorism legislation, and with support from foreign partners, established what became highly effective counterterrorism capabilities within the national police force. A unit called Special Detachment 88 (Densus 88) has been particularly successful, arresting and prosecuting well

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48   International Crisis Group, "Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous," *ICG Asia Report no. 63*, August 26, 2003, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/jemaah-islamiyah-south-east-asia-damaged-still-dangerous.

49   International Crisis Group, "Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi," *ICG Asia Report no. 74*, February 3, 2004, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-backgrounder-jihad-central-sulawesi.

50   Sulastri Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah: Of Kin and Kind," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2010): 164.

51   Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E. Schulze, "Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organizations," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018): 1.

52   Ibid, 7.

over a thousand people on terrorism related charges. Legislative updates in 2018 provided additional powers to conduct investigations and further avenues for prosecution. Barring sporadic, small-scale attacks mostly aimed at police themselves, the ISIS-energized jihadist networks in Indonesia have been quite efficiently thwarted and dismantled in recent years.

The Indonesian prison system thus has seen hundreds of prisoners convicted of terrorism pass through its gates. A small minority are serving lengthy sentences for involvement in serious crimes and attack plots, but most are in for relatively limited periods, especially those who secure remission by cooperating with authorities. In a 2020 report looking at recidivism among convicted terrorists in Indonesia, data from the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) showed that of the 825 individuals sentenced for terrorism offences between 2002 and May 2020 94 had either been re-arrested on terrorism charges, travelled to join ISIS, or otherwise engaged in violent extremist activity.[53] Over 120 prisoners were scheduled to be released by the end of 2020, and a further 150 in 2021.[54] Several hundred Indonesians have also been repatriated by the Turkish government since 2017, after failing to join ISIS in Syria.[55]

Inmates who decide to cooperate are exposed to initiatives aimed at de-radicalization in prison. Those who return from abroad and could not be prosecuted have undergone a one-month program to prepare them for reintegration.[56] Much of this work from the Indonesian government is conducted by the national counterterrorism agency, *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme* (BNPT). The agency sends officers to visit some of the responsive former prisoners at home, offering modest seed grants to help start a business.[57] Small non-governmental organizations (NGOS) also provide assistance, which may not be as well-resourced as state efforts but are fortified with local networks and more frequent engagements. Complicating matters, however, are similarly charitable organizations that

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53   Institute for the Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Terrorism, Recidivism and Planned Releases in Indonesia," *IPAC Report No. 66*, September 4, 2020.

54   Ibid, 10.

55   Chaula Rininta Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme for Indonesian Deportees: A Vacuum in Coordination," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18 (Spring 2019).

56   Ibid.

57   Cameron Sumpter, "Reintegration in Indonesia: Extremists, Start-ups and Occasional Engagements," *ICCT Perspective*, February 19, 2019, https://icct.nl/publication/reintegration-in-indonesia-extremists-start-ups-and-occasional-engagements/.

are loosely connected to the jihadist movement and seek to keep (former) prisoners and their families engaged in the networks.[58]

Community and stigmatization

Together with colleagues from the University of Indonesia, I conducted a study in 2018 that sought to learn how recently released convicted terrorists cope with life on the outside. Through interviews with 28 former prisoners, we asked about their practical experiences in terms of finding paid employment, reconnecting with their family and friends, accepting assistance from state and civil society organizations, and being welcomed or shunned by people in the community.[59] An important distinction among Indonesians released following terrorism sentences is whether they agreed to comply with certain requirements while in prison. Cooperation would lead to participation in targeted rehabilitation activities and subsequent reintegration support—in contrast to those who refused to cooperate with the government, remained steadfast to their convictions, and ignored attempts to engage.

The majority of those interviewed for our project comprised the former, which suggests their level of commitment to the extremist cause was lower than those who reject interaction with the authorities. Many of our participants may have decided on their own to disengage from the movement following a cost-benefit analysis behind bars or through disillusionment over their network's tactics or leadership. Others may have been strategically cooperating with outsiders in order to reap the benefits while they consider a role change or a retirement from activity, given they had already sacrificed their freedom. As only one interview was possible with each individual, and we were skeptical of receiving truthful answers about illegal activity, we decided to avoid asking about their ongoing commitment to any ideology, organization, or movement. We were most interested in understanding social acceptance and stigmatization.

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58   V. Arianty and Muh Taufiqurrohman, "Extremist charities spread in Indonesia," *East Asia Forum*, March 17, 2020, https://www.eastasi-aforum.org/2020/03/17/extremist-charities-spread-in-indonesia/.

59   Cameron Sumpter, Yuslikha K. Wardhani, and Sapto Priyanto, "Testing Transitions: Extremist Prisoners Re-Entering Indonesian Society," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019).

An early BNPT blueprint for deradicalization and reintegration following prison stated that meetings would be held with relevant community stakeholders to prepare for the return of former extremist inmates to the given neighborhood, but such occasions are rare in practice.[60] Coordination generally depends on existing relationships among government officials, police, and local authorities. Sometimes community leaders known as Rukun Warga (RW) or Rukun Tetangga (RT) are involved in managing a prisoner's return, while in other cases they may not even be aware of the individual's presence or the type of crime they had committed.

Acceptance: A two-way street

Half of our project's participants were living in communities in and around the nation's capital and largest city, Jakarta. The other half were in a small city in Central Java called Surakarta (or Solo), which has a history of militant Islamism in certain neighborhoods. Generally, the prisoners returning to the greater Jakarta area reported feeling ostracized by their communities, while the Solo natives largely felt accepted. The sample size of 28 was probably too small to make any concrete claims about this distinction, but accounts of individual experiences illustrated the extent to which reintegration following a prison sentence is a fundamentally social process, ideally requiring acceptance and engagement from both sides. Most of the participants may well have already disengaged from the movement in terms of intent to commit violence, but their responses showed they often saw themselves as outcasts from broader society.

One man who was released in 2015 after serving five-and-a-half years for firearm trafficking said when he went home: "it's not like someone just returning to their village from Jakarta—I mean, they don't welcome us gladly. They may be polite in person but in their heads is a question mark… They keep their distance if we approach them or try to talk to them. It's difficult to start interacting again."[61] Another younger militant who walked free in 2017 after almost five years inside was frustrated that he couldn't find a job: "It's impossible," he said.

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60   See: Deputi Bidan Pencegahan, Perlindungan dan Deradikalisasi, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (2013), *Blueprint Deradikalisasi*, 84.

61   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

"Not even my friends trust me, let alone a new employer."[62] Others felt repudiated from both the general public and their former network. An ex-prisoner who served five years of an eight-year sentence said: "I received stigma from friends in my old community—the ISIS people. They accused me of being an infidel, godless, hypocrite and so on. Then I also got it from society, because they consider us criminals... I ended up moving to a new house because of negative rumors in the community."[63]

Those who returned to an area without being noticed tried to conceal their history: "We still hide the fact I was in prison from the neighbors," said a former who served just over four years of a seven-year sentence. "Because they're new people and I'm worried they won't accept us," he explained.[64] "None of the neighbors knows about my background," revealed another. "If they knew, they would be rude to us—that's why I try to hide it."[65] An ex-Jemaah Islamiyah member released in 2014 moved back to a community full of family members who supported him, but he struggled to fit in with wider society: "Negative stigma is the main obstacle... The terrorism stigma is there, right, so when I apply for jobs—well, many people are still afraid of us."[66] Another said he found it hard to develop new relationships outside his old network: "I feel excluded actually, but that's just how it is."[67]

Some of the participants claimed to have made attempts to prove themselves and gain the trust of their communities. One man who served ten years for accommodating a wanted terrorism suspect said he consciously tries to overcome ostracism. "If I see that anyone is keeping their distance from me, I would treat them—invite them for a meal... the important thing is that we open ourselves up for communication."[68] Taking initiative following release, another former said he visited the neighborhood head as soon as he returned. "I also got actively involved in neighborhood watch patrols," he claimed. "Interacting with others depends on ourselves, right," added a man released in 2016 after three years behind bars. "If we open up, then, Inshallah, we can change. But if we stay exclusive, well, we'll always

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62   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
63   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
64   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
65   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
66   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
67   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
68   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

be kicked down by the government."[69] Another former militant acknowledged that earning acceptance takes time, recalling that people at his local market were initially afraid of him. "After seeing our behavior for one year, they start to think: Oh, they're normal people."[70]

Sentiment, behavior, and reception

The interviews also revealed attitudes towards and experiences with reintegration assistance and the tribulations of trying to start a small business to make ends meet and focus on something constructive. From the answers outlined above, it is fairly clear that social acceptance was important to many of the participants, which is encouraging, but also raises further questions. Above all, it is difficult to know whether (or the extent to which) they were telling the truth. While the conversations were relaxed and they appeared authentic, the desire to be considered positively by others could be a practical concern to facilitate day-to-day activities and function in the local economy. Seeking acceptance does not necessarily mean one intends to reciprocate that faith. Perhaps this is too cynical, as some of the participants seemed to have genuinely pursued new relationships, but attitude change is more effectively observed through behavior than sentiment.

This is where lab-in-field experiments would be useful. A majority of the former prisoners we interviewed appeared to have disengaged from violent extremism, and most may have been on personal journeys of deradicalization as they adapt to post-prison life. Playing experimental games with such participants would therefore expect to demonstrate quite diverse prosocial behavior. They could reveal accurate interpretations of how former members of an extremist network now view people who they once considered the 'others' of an outgroup. Similar to the study with prisoners in California, longitudinal lab-in-field games could be employed before and after a deradicalization program or course of reintegration assistance, together with a control group to evaluate effectiveness. Experiments could also be conducted among community residents to measure attitudes toward prospective returning prisoners. Results could then be factored into locally tailored reintegration programs.

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69   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)
70   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

It would be most revealing to conduct lab-in-field games with uncooperative violent extremist prisoners as they finish their sentence and face freedom. Inmates who refuse to sign declarations of loyalty to the state, which are required to apply for remission and receive parole in Indonesia, would be an ideal target population, and could be held up against those who met the requirements. Outgoing prisoners choosing to remain ideologically aligned to their movement are difficult for BNPT officers to engage when they return home, as programs and assistance are voluntary. Militant jihadist organizations in Indonesia tend to brand any engagement with the government, or civil society organizations, as an unacceptable betrayal of the ingroup and pressure members to reject any associated assistance. Convincing hard-liners to play behavioral science games may be difficult, but given the financial incentive involved, a carefully framed experiment conducted by the right people might grant participation even among the more extreme. Findings would identify individuals capable of outgroup sympathy and therefore those more likely to undergo a process of change under certain conditions.

Conclusion

Radicalization to violent extremism is most often a social process with deeply antisocial outcomes. As people replace their individual identity with that of a group's, they demonize anyone outside the ingroup through discrimination and support for organized violence. After spending several years in prison for the pursuit of communal goals, an individual's commitment to the cause may have waned, at least to the point where everyday interaction with outgroup members becomes possible, and even cordial. Alternatively, the prison experience may have reinforced their dedication to the extremist ingroup, and any post-prison outgroup social engagements are either avoided or endured for purely practical reasons. Determining an outgoing prisoner's mindset along these lines is clearly helpful in theory, but not easily gleaned in practice.

Risk assessment instruments for violent extremist offenders are important tools for targeting rehabilitation programs effectively and making decisions regarding parole, ongoing threats, and required surveillance. The most prominent and effective examples are based on a method known as structured professional judgement, which involves a combination of

detailed metrics and personal interpretation (science and art). Relevant agencies in Indonesia have been trialing different risk assessment suggestions for years, but procedures are time consuming and require a level of expertise that is not always readily available. Lab-in-field experiments are not a substitute for risk assessment, but these incentivized games can provide telling evidence of an individual's likely social behavior in the real world, and the prospect of productive reintegration outcomes.

Key takeaways for researchers

Based on the insights from this chapter, researchers pursuing similar studies should take into account the following:

- **Lab-in-field experiments such as the dictator game can be used to determine** levels of prosocial behavior.

- **Measuring empathetic behavior can provide evidence of potential reintegration** outcomes and possibly indicate signs of disengagement from violent extremism.

- **Participant and control groups should be clearly defined, including, for example,** cooperative former prisoners convicted of terrorism, uncooperative former prisoners, members of receiving communities, and the general public.

- **Gameplay incentives need to be sufficiently valuable to ensure that decisions** are taken seriously.

- **The identity and behaviour of the person facilitating each game is important,** as perceptions towards them and the general dynamics of their presence can impact in-game decisions.

- **Games should also take place in neutral locations with limited spectators who** could influence the choices made.

- **Various versions of lab-in-field games measure different prosocial preferences** so experiments must be designed with specific groups in mind, taking into account variables such as culture and socio-economic factors.

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Section 3.

Perspectives on Methods

Section 3 | GUIDE FOR READERS

What's in this section for you?

For researchers:

This section will help researchers better understand various methodological approaches to research on violent extremism and their suitability and drawbacks in different environments. The section also provides important information about potential methodological and analytical biases and ensuring researcher and research participant safety and security.

For non-researchers, policymakers, & practitioners:

This section provides a starting point by which to make sense of how different methods and means of analysis work in practice and how they may impact research results for more critical and informed reading and decision making. The section also provides insight on some common (and less common) methodological approaches useful in better understanding their potential benefits and limitations.

Section 3 Overview
METHODS & ANALYSIS FOR RESEARCH & ASSESSMENT

The chapters in this section address a key number of issues, such as:

- *basic and advanced research principles and methods, including how to develop, refine, and understand research questions; analytical approaches; datasets; and overarching ethics for policy-relevant P/CVE research.*

- *the imperatives of research contextualization for more nuanced and context-driven P/CVE research.*

- *the complexities and characteristics of policy-oriented P/CVE research and developing research proposals and methods that best contribute to knowledge on both individuals who mobilize to violent extremism and the communities impacted by it.*

- *how to apply a transparent, contextualized, and ethical approach to P/CVE research for a more critical approach to research.*

- *how to assess P/CVE initiatives, particularly in conflict-affected societies, and design and implement a competent and responsive assessment plan.*

Introduction

Research principles and best practices are well-established and can be transferred across sectors and disciplines. But the study of VE and P/CVE has specific challenges that make this edited volume and this section essential reading. We need to approach the basics with rigor while also recognizing that, despite this being a relatively new area of study, demands on research generally are becoming increasingly complex and we must respond accordingly. Approaches to P/CVE data collection have changed over the course of its short life, shifting the emphasis from secondary research, which can have disadvantages—e.g., lacking context, presenting dated information, and potentially affected by biases—to a greater focus on primary data, which also faces specific challenges, be they ethical, analytical, or definitional. As Morrison explains in his chapter, there is now a plethora of available data, and it is the rigor of collecting that data that is now under scrutiny. Further, as Winterbotham and Pearson acknowledge, the field requires not just data, but access to affected communities and a respect for the knowledge and expertise resident within those communities. Still, how to ethically access data, participants, and information and ensure transparent methodologies and analytical approaches requires further discussion.

This section, therefore, offers an accessible toolkit to address these challenges for a range of actors, including researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and consumers. It recognizes that, to raise confidence in the P/CVE knowledge base, particularly given that this information can be used to fuel multi-level policy decision-making, basic research methods must not only be understood, but they must also be contextualized and associated with the complexities and specificities of P/CVE and affected communities. By taking time to refine research questions, analytical approaches, datasets, and overarching ethics, researchers will be able to contribute to improving methods and knowledge on both individuals who mobilize to violent extremism and the communities impacted by it, and therefore improve the evidence-based knowledge on the subject matter.

Certain recurrent themes dominate the five chapters that comprise this section—all of which are specific to P/CVE research methods and analysis—and emphasize the need for specific methods training in this field. The definition of common terms in this field is often

contested, highlighting the need for: (1) P/CVE researchers to contribute to establishing more standardized terms, and (2) individual studies to clearly state their own definitions for key terms utilized. This is compounded by the fact that P/CVE researchers originate from many different disciplines and thus draw on terms used conventionally in their own areas. Indeed, this is a theme that threads through findings throughout the book. Additionally, key terms and definitions can differ from the Global North to the South, from urban areas to rural, from institution to institution, and from funders to researchers. The chapters in this section provide information and advice on how to contribute to the body of knowledge on violent extremism, given its newness as an area of study, its multidisciplinary nature, and the diversity of locations and stakeholders involved.

Another topic requiring attention when designing and conducting P/CVE studies is the context. Discussions on context-specific methods and analyses thread through these chapters emphasizing the need to consider local level factors and epistemologies. The chapters also acknowledge that, by gaining and relaying contextual information, researchers can build reliable datasets on a multitude of key issues, including grievances among communities that may trigger radicalization or incentives, which may encourage participation. Through proper contextualization, readers are not just gaining useful and specific information about geographical, demographic, or socio-economic settings, and thus an accurate picture of VE contexts, but also contributing to reducing stereotypes, inferences, and generalizations in research findings. Researchers thus have solid grounds on which to build recommendations, inform policymakers, and make research in this field valuable, transparent, and rigorous, especially in such a quickly evolving field.

Accessing data is another priority theme throughout the chapters and links to the many discussions on contextualization. Without access, researchers can be forced to rely on secondary data, which has the above-mentioned drawbacks and limitations. However, having access to participants does not mean greater understanding of the reasons an individual may decide to support violent extremism. As discussed in section 2, it is possible that their narratives are inaccurate or incomplete or may be influenced or skewed by events occurring simultaneously, further emphasizing the need for accurate contextualization.

But the main theme linking all these chapters is ethics. Ethics is already a major challenge in most disciplines but particularly so when conducting research associated with radicalization and affected communities, where there is a risk of inadvertently misreporting on VE dynamics and actors, and of retraumatizing affected communities. Researchers must therefore be particularly sensitive to their obligations to do no harm and to respect individuals involved in or associated with the research.

While much of the discussions focus on the need to protect individuals, the chapters also highlight the negative effects of over-interpreting findings and not remaining within the scope of the original analysis. To avoid this, it is critical to have a thorough understanding not only of the data (as discussed in Section 2) but also of the analytical approach used. Building on the other key themes mentioned above, implementing ethical good practice concerning VE data analysis will also raise confidence in the resultant findings.

Section overview

The six chapters build on one another in terms of methodological complexity and provide helpful and accessible guidance on relevant approaches and analysis for P/CVE research. While experienced P/CVE researchers will enjoy the chapters separately, researchers and consumers of research who are new to the field might benefit from reading them in the order they are presented. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the chapters build on one another.

Figure 1: Section 3 Chapter Flow and Connectivity
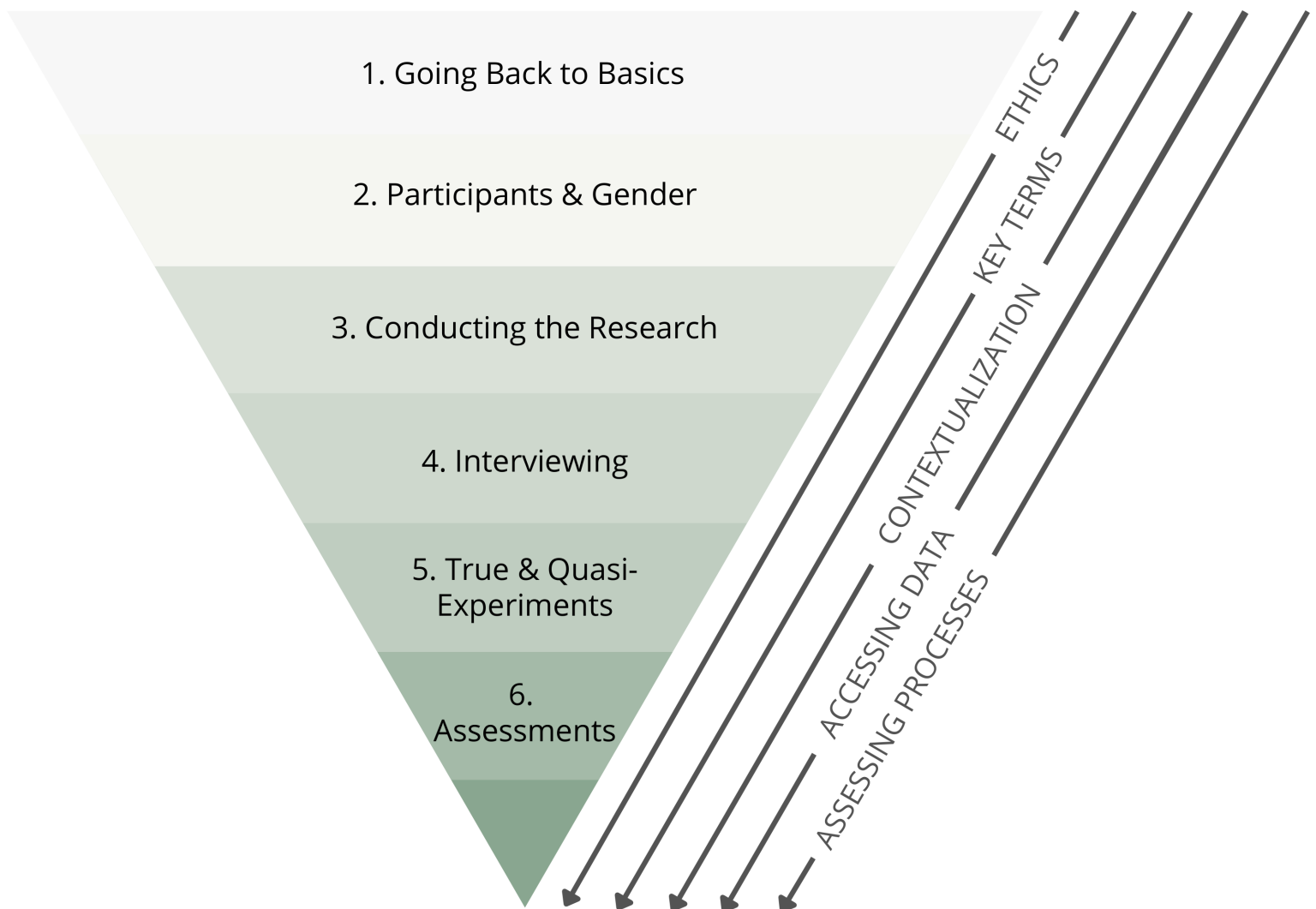
Going back to basics: Research on violent extremism

In her chapter "Going Back to Basics: Research on Violent Extremism," Kris Inman provides a clear and accessible step-by-step approach to research, relating it to violent extremism with examples. Stressing the importance of the "who", "how", "why", "where", or "what" in VE research, Inman guides readers through the basics of research methods, formulating research questions, and defining key terms. While this may all appear simplistic, she stresses

that "the power of going back to basics, even for experienced researchers, should not be underestimated."[1] She then walks readers through the basics of research design, providing practical tips for data collection; avoiding pitfalls in surveys; anonymizing not just names, but also identifiers; and accounting for potential bias in research. As with all research, any issues with data collection and the impact or bias they might have on the collected data should be recognized, accounted for to the best extent possible, and made transparent. Inman concludes with the need for P/CVE researchers to be particularly sensitive regarding the ethics of research.

When discussing analysis and measurement, Inman raises the many complexities of P/CVE research, including its hyper localized nature, difficulty in measuring attitudes when measuring behaviors would be more appropriate, and applying data from one level of analysis to another. Inman provides helpful tips on how to conduct research but also explains that when associated with P/CVE, those tips might or might not work, emphasizing how complex study is in this area and how it can be distinct from other fields of research due to its many specificities.

Gender analysis and VE research

In her chapter "Demystifying Gender Analysis for Research on Violent Extremism," Phoebe Donnelly emphasizes that an accurate picture of VE contexts can only be achieved in a meaningful and useful manner by disaggregating the many populations under scrutiny according to gender. The benefits of this may be obvious but many researchers may shy away from gender analysis simply because they are unsure of where to start. This helpful tool by Donnelly explains why gender analysis is so important in VE research, why its inclusion is essential, and why it must be conducted correctly. While much in the chapter will be valuable to many sectors and disciplines, Donnelly makes her analysis and recommendations on gender analysis particularly relevant to VE using careful examples and references. She stresses that gender analysis does not focus only on women but also includes the

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1   Kris Inman, Going Back to Basics: Research on Violent Extremism (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.5, 2.

"particular experiences, expectations, relationships, and access to power for men, women, boys, girls, and sexual and gender minorities (SGMs)."[2]

The very term "gender" is problematic as it is often perceived as meaning women, or looking at an issue through a female lens, but researchers need to consider other genders systematically. "Gender should not be seen as a code to simply add women—commonly referred to as 'add women and stir'—without a deeper analysis of power dynamics or ideas about masculinities and femininities."[3] Nonetheless, women must not be homogenized or stereotyped and the very involvement of women in multiple roles in violent extremist organizations must be considered from the project design stage. Donnelly concludes with three helpful examples illustrating how authors have incorporated gender analysis in their research and in writing up their findings.

The "Radical Milieu" and participatory methodologies

The third chapter by Winterbotham and Pearson, "The Radical Milieu: A Methodological Approach to Conducting Research on Violent Extremism," shifts the emphasis from more general research areas to the heart of the topic. The authors discuss a specific methodology, the "Radical Milieu," which draws on participatory methodologies to gain information from those with lived experience of others who have been radicalized, to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on P/CVE. "The milieu approach is based on the understanding that if research on violent extremism is conducted in geographical locations where significant cases of radicalization have occurred, it will include participants who could produce knowledge of radicalization based on their own direct or indirect experiences, such as the lived experiences of friends, colleagues, and family members."[4]

Drawing on three case studies, a five-country study, a study on radicalization amongst IDPs, and research on the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants in Russia, the chapter discusses how to operationalize the "Radical Milieu" method and how to address concep-

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2   Phoebe Donnelly, Demystifying Gender Analysis for Research on Violent Extremism (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2021.2, 3.

3   Donnelly, Demystifying Gender Analysis for Research on Violent Extremism, 7.

4   Winterbotham and Pearson, The Radical Milieu, 7.

tual and methodological issues that may occur during data collection and analysis. It covers mitigating possible risks (such as data security and anonymizing participants), accessing participants, overcoming "research fatigue," and the research methods and analysis to be used. The authors also emphasize the need not to focus solely on primary data but to triangulate this with secondary data to verify information and resultant findings. This will ensure cross-verification and reduce overreliance on only one type of data.

Analyzing interviews with terrorists

Yet, if researchers are to access participants, they need to be aware of appropriate interview techniques to use in such sensitive settings and how to analyze the data. Morrison approaches "Analyzing Interviews with Terrorists" in the fourth chapter, explaining that first-hand interviews are needed as they complement large quantitative datasets, but the analysis of each must differ. Again, much of this chapter would be useful for researchers, even beyond those focused primarily on VE, as it discusses how to choose the most appropriate qualitative analytical approach for interviews (e.g., thematic analysis, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, grounded theory), but it also discusses at length the importance of ethics, analytical integrity, and researcher wellbeing when interviewing. He stresses the need for specificity at all stages: research questions, population choice and samples, time, location, individual roles, and context clarifying why each of these points is relevant to P/CVE research with appropriate examples. Interviews are generally analyzed using qualitative methods and data collection is eased by the increase in primary source interviews. Nonetheless, Morrison invites greater transparency from researchers in their methodological and analytical approaches to ensure rigor, accuracy, and accountability.

Experimentation and quasi-experimentation in CVE

In his chapter, "Experimentation & Quasi-Experimentation in Countering Violent Extremism: Directions of Future Inquiry," Kurt Braddock introduces researchers of P/CVE, terrorism, and political violence to these two methodological approaches. Both approaches aim to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between independent and dependent variables, yet, a true experiment, unlike the quasi-experiment, assigns participants to different condi-

tions at random. Braddock describes how they can be utilized to critically analyze two topic areas: (1) terrorist-produced material, and (2) assessing interventions intended to challenge terrorist ideologies. He provides a detailed explanation of the key differences between true and quasi-experiments and considerations around when each can be used and how projects can be designed.

These methodologies have multiple advantages and can significantly contribute to the rigor of P/CVE research. However, they cannot be undertaken without due care and attention and the extensive references to ethics found in the other chapters dominate here. These approaches are not for the inexperienced researcher. While care must be taken in all research approaches, this is especially so in the case of experiments that may risk exposing individuals to potentially harmful materials (e.g., terrorist propaganda) or distributing benefits unequally (e.g., exposing some individuals to positive terrorism prevention practices, but not others). Thorough preparation is needed, in collaboration with institutional ethics boards and with researchers who have prior experience using these approaches, prior to their implementation.

Conducting P/CVE assessment in conflict environments

In the final chapter of this section, "Conducting P/CVE Assessment in Conflict Environments: Key Considerations," Clarke discusses the complexities of assessing P/CVE projects against the background of a significant increase in P/CVE initiatives over recent years. Drawing on the case of Afghanistan, where there is a history of P/CVE research and programming, Clarke helpfully tracks each stage in the assessment process from assessment design to implementation. He also touches on potential negative impacts if due care is not taken. This chapter is particularly relevant in this section as it brings together the learning on research methods in previous chapters and prompts readers to apply its considerations – as a form of self-assessment to their own research projects. This information is provided as accessible and useful checklists to consider at each stage of the assessment that include considerations for ensuring the relevance, ethical nature, and uniqueness or complementary nature of P/CVE assessments conducted within this field. Still, as Clarke notes, assessments and

related studies should ultimately be "tailored to the needs of stakeholders and end users in order to add value."[5]

Conclusion

Research on VE and P/CVE can be simplified and more valuable if transparent and contextually appropriate methodologies are followed throughout, from the design stage to implementation. This section has enabled readers to reflect on their own current practices, the purpose of their projects, and how they can conduct them in an ethical manner.

As with all research, the fundamentals must be observed. No solid design can be constructed without a corresponding scaffold. Contacting the correct participants in the appropriate manner, selecting the best data collection tool, and applying a justifiable method of analysis is essential for all research. This is particularly so in a new field where researchers face innumerable challenges, working in areas of heightened risk.

While these chapters are the mere tip of the iceberg of literature on research methods and analysis (which we also recommend you consult), they apply these approaches to P/CVE research and enable researchers to make sense of its multiple complexities. The chapters build on one another in terms of methodological complexity. Experienced P/CVE researchers may enjoy the chapters separately, while new researchers to the field might benefit from reading them in the order they are presented. By providing accessible considerations around the many stages of research, this section encourages readers to engage in a process of self-reflection about the methodologies and analytical approaches used in this space, including their limitations, benefits, and implications.

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5   Colin P. Clarke, Conducting P/CVE Assessment in Conflict Environments: Key Considerations (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.3, 16.

Going Back to Basics
Research on Violent Extremism

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This chapter reviews research fundamentals, from formulating a research question to research ethics, which are easy to overlook in applied research conducted to understand countering violent extremism (CVE). The chapter offers examples of good and bad research practices, as well as practical ways to improve research designs by going back to the basic principles for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. While the chapter can serve as a practical guide for sound research design, it goes beyond the nuts-and-bolts of research and discusses why these research best practices are important for policymakers and for moving our knowledge of CVE forward.

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Introduction

It is exciting and rewarding, but also challenging, to work in the field of countering violent extremism (CVE). As a relatively new field at only about 10 years old, we face a lot of pressure to implement effective CVE responses as violent extremism (VE) around the world continues to increase, despite the kinetic counter-terrorism efforts of the past 20 years. We are continually in search of evidence about what works and what does not, what is scalable and sustainable, and what unintended consequences lurk behind best intentions. In the face of rapidly evolving VE groups like the Islamic State, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, and other local terrorist activities around the world, it can seem like we are always at least one step behind and constantly re-creating the wheel in our responses to VE. One area where we can avoid the latter, and thereby address the former, is in how we conduct research on CVE. Research best practices and principles are well-established and transfer across sectors and disciplines. This chapter reviews some of those best practices that, when adopted in research, improve the capacity of applied researchers and analysts to support CVE policy and programs and other peacebuilding efforts.

Studying and responding to VE requires innovative and flexible approaches that can deal with the complexity of VE dynamics. However, when innovating in the research sphere, applied researchers and analysts often forget the basic tenants of research design. These tenants include formulating a non-normative question that answers "who," "how," "why," "where," or "what"; clearly defining concepts in the research question; designing a research approach that appropriately measures those concepts; systematically collecting and analyzing data to answer the research question with evidence; clearly discussing inference based on the evidence; and respecting ethical standards.

The power of going back to basics, even for experienced researchers, should not be underestimated. While innovation is necessary in research on VE, innovation must build on a solid foundation of basic research techniques. Failure to hold on to the basics inhibits practitioners from building the body of knowledge required to develop a sophisticated understanding of VE, and thereby hampers advancing responses to VE. Moreover, it hinders us from providing solid evidence to policy makers.

Formulating the research question

The strength of the body of knowledge around a topic like VE depends on the strength of the individual research projects that contribute to that knowledge. The strength of an individual research project begins with the formulation of a good research question. Good research questions are clearly articulated; non-normative, asking about what **is**, rather than about what should be; and clearly establish whether the research in question is intended to describe, explain, predict, or proscribe the topic. How many CVE reports and research articles can you recall that clearly articulate a research question? Chances are if you take time to reflect on this question, you will find that many reports and research articles you can think of do not ask a research question.

Pick an article on VE or CVE and see if you can identify a question mark in the introduction. If there is a clearly articulated research question, is it a good one? Is it researchable? In our field, a lot of research questions are formulated as "yes/no" questions, such as "Do women support Boko Haram?" or "Is poverty a driver of violent extremism?" Yes or no questions do not meet the standards of good research questions because research questions need to orient the audience to whether the research is about describing, explaining, predicting, or proscribing the phenomena in question.

One way to reformulate the question "Do women support Boko Haram," is to reflect on what you as the researcher (or as a policymaker, donor, or implementer) want to know about the relationship between women and Boko Haram. Do you want to know whether some women support Boko Haram? If so, a better way to formulate the question is "In what ways do women in Northern Nigeria support Boko Haram?" and possibly also "what are the demographic characteristics of women who support Boko Haram?" Or, do you want to know why some women support Boko Haram? In this case, a better way to ask the question is simply "why do some women in Northern Nigeria support Boko Haram?" Do you want to compare women's support to Boko Haram across the territories within which Boko Haram is active? If so, then you may ask a research question like "How does women's support of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin differ for support in Northern Nigeria and why?"

Related to posing a good research question is posing an appropriate number of questions. Good, solid research asks one question (or at most two closely related questions) at a time and then thoroughly investigates that question. One of the first things I learned as a graduate student in methods classes was the KISS principle: Keep it Simple, Stupid. This applied to several topics in methods, but the very first one was the number of research questions we asked in our research. One research project cannot do justice to three research questions (unless you're writing a book). It certainly cannot do justice to 15 research questions, which is often what those of us conducting VE assessments are asked to do.

If you find yourself having to answer multiple research questions in the same report, and you only have a few weeks to write it, then what inevitably happens is you find a few pieces of evidence—often anecdotal—to answer each question. In other words, the evidence for each question is thin and the knowledge gaps section becomes a laundry list of the need to develop further evidence to most of the research questions in your own assessment. There is not time to systematically and thoroughly answer every single question in a report that asks more than one or two questions—not to mention that if you **did** answer every single question in a rigorous manner, you would probably pen a 1,000-page treatise and no one would read it.

Keeping research questions simple and clear and the number of questions to no more than two is how researchers go about building a body of knowledge. Academics call this a research agenda: an outline of research questions that will guide the study of a given topic. One research project answers one (or at most two) question(s). Then academics move on to the next related question that logically flows from and builds upon previous research. It is the accumulation of knowledge over time through this simple and systematic method of developing a research agenda that moves forward the world's knowledge on most topics of our time—from climate change to medical research.

USAID has a similar strategy of building up an existing body of knowledge through learning agendas.[2] However, because learning agendas tend to be project-specific and systems and processes are not built to aggregate knowledge **across** projects, intentions of deeper knowledge growth remain stymied by a lack of systematic processes to share knowledge

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2   Learning Lab, USAID, accessed September 1, 2019. https://usaidlearninglab.org/

from learning agendas with other practitioners and donors outside of USAID. Meta studies are valuable; however, they cannot replace the good old practice of limiting research questions to one or two per project and producing a coherent and systematic research agenda due to their post-hoc nature.

In sum, the first research principle is to generate questions that ask "who," "what," "where," "why," or "how" which facilitate describing, explaining, predicting, or proscribing. The second principle is to only pose one or two research questions per project and develop a plan for follow-on research that builds up a body of knowledge over time.

Defining terms

Properly understanding complex phenomena requires building up a body of knowledge. Take high blood pressure, for example. The causes of high blood pressure are numerous and complex; the effectiveness of individual or combined treatments for high blood pressure—behavioral changes, diets, and medications—are equally numerous and complex. Scientists and physicians have come to develop a sophisticated understanding of the causes of high blood pressure and what to do about it through hundreds of studies conducted over time that developed the evidence base needed to understand and address this health condition. Fortunately for those who suffer from high blood pressure, there is a common definition of what the phenomenon is and there is an accepted way to measure it. This facilitates the study of causes and treatments by systematizing the definition and measurement of the disease across the vast research body.

Because VE and CVE are complex social phenomena, CVE researchers have struggled to find common definitions.[3] The term terrorism alone has over 250 definitions.[4] This multiplicity of definitions makes accumulating a body of knowledge about the causes and treatments of the disease—in this case, VE—far more difficult for at least three reasons: 1) CVE researchers and practitioners hail from multiple disciplines and define terms based on their respec-

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3   For further discussion of definitional issues, see J.M. Berger's contribution to this edited volume: J.M. Berger, "Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play," RESOLVE, June 23, 2019, https://resolvenet.org/research/researching-violent-extremism-state-play

4   See Alex P. Schmid, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. London, UK: Routledge, 2011, Appendix 2.1 "250-plus Definitions of Terrorism."

tive fields; 2) how Westerners define VE may not be relevant to rural villages with active violent extremist organizations (VEOs); and 3) governments and civil societies around the globe define VE and CVE differently. This section discusses each issue in detail, then offers a way forward to address it.

First, researchers tend to approach VE and CVE based on assumptions, definitions, and theories by experts who import concepts and research designs from their respective fields.[5] The result is a variety of definitions and theories derived from different disciplines, rather than one interdisciplinary definition and theory. Similarly, CVE programs—such as those directed at increasing social cohesion, legitimacy, and resilience—are equally difficult to define in a uniform fashion across disciplines and projects.

Second, because most of the concepts, theories, and measurements are developed by experts (usually from Western perspectives), they may or may not be relevant to realities on the ground, thus they may not be valid. For example, experts may suggest that a reduction in VE should be measured in violent attacks or deaths, where fewer attacks would suggest a reduction in VE. However, when local communities in Afghanistan were asked what indicators they use to understand a reduction in VE, they offered responses such as "the ability of women and girls to move about safely in the community"[6] and the presence of satellite dishes for television. Third, national governments across the globe define VE and CVE differently in accordance with their own legal frameworks and priorities; even national agencies within the same government adopt different definitions of these terms. Civil society actors also tend to define these concepts differently.

Fortunately, social scientists are not strangers to a lack of consensus about defining research concepts for complex social phenomena. Social scientists have long struggled to commonly define concepts such as democracy, war, insurgency, legitimacy, trust, etc. They deal with definitional ambiguity through paying careful attention to situating their definitions within a line of established scientific inquiry that similarly defines the concept. Good social science always clearly defines the key concepts of research, a practice that CVE research should adopt and make into a best practice. Conversely, bad social science does not clearly define

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5   Belquis Ahmadi and Eliza Urwin, "Measuring Peace and Violent Extremism," *U.S. Institute of Peace*, March 16, 2018, 1.

6   Ahmadi and Urwin, "Measuring Peace and Violent Extremism," 2.

terms, and often suffers from conceptual slippage – when the study begins by referring to a concept in one way, but then shifts the concept multiple times throughout to the point that, at the end of the study, the concept is completely different.

Applied physical scientists who study topics that obey natural laws and laws of physics have the National Institute of Standards and Technology to guide their practice in a systematic way.[7] While we are unlikely to ever enjoy this level of systemization of our definitions due to the complex social nature of our research foci, the State Department offers some level of standardization of US-based foreign assistance programs (including peace, security, democracy, and governance, where CVE programs typically get categorized).[8] However, this does not account for how other donors define their foreign assistance, or for how other government agencies define these terms. As a practice, we should strive to come closer to standardization because how we define our terms largely determines how we measure them and, therefore, how the findings add up to a body of knowledge on the phenomenon at hand.

Research design

Once the research question(s) and definition(s) are clear, the research design should follow. Research design refers to the researcher's plan for each element that will be used to examine the research question, including definitions, measurement, data collection, data management, analysis, and reporting. It is essentially the recipe for how the researcher plans to go about conducting the study from start to finish. These elements of research design are nearly universally articulated in published quantitative research. However, in qualitative research, it is hard to find the same level of detail on how the researcher went about collecting, measuring, and analyzing data. As Zeev Maoz wrote over 15 years ago about qualitative case studies:

> *There is nearly a complete lack of documentation of the approach to data collection, data management, and data analysis and inference in case study research. In contrast to other*

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7   National Institute of Standards and Technology, U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed September 1, 2019, www.nist.gov

8   See the Standardized Program Structure and Definitions website at https://2009-2017.state.gov/f/c24132.htm.

research strategies in political research where authors devote considerable time and effort to document the technical aspects of their research, one often gets the impression that the use of case study absolves the author from any kind of methodological considerations. Case studies have become in many cases a synonym for free-form research where everything goes and the author does not feel compelled to spell out how he or she intends to do the research, why a specific case or set of cases has been selected, which data are used and which are omitted, how data are processed and analyzed, and how inferences were derived from the story presented. Yet, at the end of the story, we often find sweeping generalizations and 'lessons' derived from the case.[9]

The absence of these details in research makes it impossible to evaluate the merits of the research design and, therefore, the validity of the findings. And so, we are left with a lot of dubious research in our practice that probably should not contribute to a body of knowledge on VE. The following sub-sections on data collection, measurement, and inference offer ways to guide researchers to both improve research and to more systematically write about their research and findings.

Data collection

What kind of data do you need to collect to answer your research question and how are you going to collect it? That is really the essence of the data collection plan. Here are a few issues that have plagued field researchers to keep in mind.

1 Pitfall #1:
Failure of the data collection tools

Data collection tools, such as surveys are no longer just the traditional pen and paper methods of olden days. Technological advances have made deploying surveys electronically much easier, which can vastly boost response rates (especially if the data is needed within a short timeframe). Surveys can be emailed, filled out on a website, collected over the phone,

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9   Zeev Maoz, "Case Study Methodology in International Studies: From storytelling to hypothesis testing." In *Evaluating Methodology in International Studies: Millennial reflections on International Studies,* ed. Frank P. Harvey and Michael Brecher (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 455-75.

and deployed on mobile devices. However, researchers need to make sure that if they are going to use technology to deploy the survey, the technology works. Do mobile devices have sufficient battery power? How will they be charged? Does the internet work? With regards to the population, are the participants literate? Is the survey written in a language that the participants speak, read, write, or otherwise understand? Is the language spoken amongst the population a **written** language? If not, how will you deal with administering the survey? If the data collection tool is an interview or focus group discussion (FGD), do the data collectors have the materials needed to capture this data, such as pens and paper and functioning Dictaphones to record the content?

2 Pitfall #2:
Enumerators misbehaving

Enumerators,[10] sometimes intentionally but more often unintentionally, make subtle choices in the field that substantially affects the respondents' answers, including altering the wording of the questions, probing for specific responses, or asking guiding questions. In one field research project I conducted in Senegal, the research assistant (RA) I hired to conduct the FGDs argued with the participants and demanded that they change their opinions. In these situations, oversight of the enumerators or research assistants is critical. Because I observed the first FGD, I was able to have a polite conversation with the RA to let him know how I needed him to conduct the remaining discussions and we only lost the data from the first group. I also learned that I needed to train enumerators that I had not previously worked with, no matter their self-reported previous enumeration experience.

3 Pitfall #3:
Inability to keep track of respondents

If the data collection tool is a panel survey or interview, i.e., a survey or interview that asks the same respondents questions over time, then researchers have to keep track of the respondents, which poses a pervasive problem. It is essential to have a solid plan for keeping in touch with respondents prior to deploying to the field, including keeping respon-

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10   *Enumerators* are the people hired to go out and collect data in the field if the researcher does not collect the data themselves.

dents' contact information in a safe and secure place.[11] Researchers need to consider how they will guard the privacy and anonymity of the respondents, especially for respondents participating in sensitive research topics such as VE. The best practice here is to keep a document that codes the respondent to a number, e.g., "Jane Doe = respondent 1." This document should be kept separate from any data collected on the respondent. In the data itself, only the label "respondent 1" would be associated with the responses. If the response is reported, it should be cited as "Respondent 1." See the ethics section below for more on this, but if in doubt, consult the local Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the best practices in guarding respondents' identities.

Finally, because research on VE and CVE can be extremely sensitive, respondents may give false identities to the researchers. This can pose a practical challenge to those who need to provide evidence to their funders that they contacted real people for the study. The best way I have found to deal with this is to ensure that respondents understand my own process for guarding their data (communicated through informed consent – see more below in the ethics section) and to provide them with a written document, called a "Participant's Bill of Rights." This "Bill of Rights" clearly outlines what their rights are as participants in the study and provides contact details for superiors and the delegating institution so that they can report any violations of their rights that occurred in the study.

4 Pitfall #4:
Failure to consider potential bias in the data collection

The way data are collected can itself cause bias. Who asks the questions, to whom we ask questions, how questions are asked, response options, and question order are common ways the act of collecting the data can skew findings or undermine data collection efforts.

First, who asks the questions is important. I'm a westerner working in West Africa. When I ask local community members questions, they may be less forthcoming to me than they

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11   Adapted from Dean Karlan and Jacob Appel, *Failing in the Field: What we can learn when field research goes wrong*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016)

would if someone from their own country asked them the same question. Therefore, if I want to collect data from local community members, I will opt to hire local enumerators to gather the data rather than doing so myself. However, if I want to collect data from West African officials, I might opt to do it myself because officials may be more forthcoming with me than they would with one of their constituents (or they may hope to improve relations with the US government through participation in the study, etc.). Researchers need to think through what potential biases may be created based on **who** is collecting the data and then be able to either mitigate it or caveat the findings. Researchers should always document bias.

Second, whom will you ask questions? How will you recruit participants and verify their identity to validate their inclusion? When and where will you meet with your study participants to collect their data? Put another way, what is the process for study inclusion? Here are some considerations you will want to make as you create the study inclusion plan:

- If you intend to conduct a survey, will you use a representative sample or a snowball sample? Will you survey the general population or officials?

- If you intend to conduct interviews, will you interview officials, former combatants, security services, civil society, students, etc.?

- Where will you gather data? Will you remain in the capital and ask elites their opinions about why some communities in their country are vulnerable to VE, or will you include data collection with residents of those communities?

- Will you only collect data from vulnerable communities or will you include more resilient communities?

- What are the implications for analysis of each of these decisions?

In creating the plan for study inclusion, researchers need to think through what kind of data they can get from different types of respondents and then make sure that they have adequate representation across respondents when the data collection is complete. Researchers should also think through how decisions about study inclusion will impact the data analysis and findings.

Finally, how the researcher asks the question can impact the data collection. To help explain why this is an issue, let's take a concrete example. Say you want to know about a community's grievances. One way to go about this is to create a close-ended survey that asks, "In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing this community" and then offer a list of options, e.g., "access to education," "security," "access to electricity," "access to health-care," etc. Giving options that participants can choose from has the benefit of easing the data analysis because the responses are already provided and easy to code.

However, giving options means that you, the researcher made *a priori* decisions about grievances existing in the community. What if you miss the actual grievances because you forced respondents to choose from your list of potential grievances? The way to get around this potential omission is to ask open-ended questions. Here, we ask the same question but don't offer a list of options. This allows respondents to articulate grievances in their own words. We might discover that, actually, the grievance is that local officials don't speak local languages, so the community can't communicate with their own local government (this is a common grievance we have heard in the Liptako-Gourma region of the Sahel). The draw-back of this approach is that it makes data analysis more onerous because the open-ended responses—which are qualitative in nature—need to be coded, which is a time-consuming and labor-intensive process.

Question order can also impact the data collection. In a survey, if you first ask about griev-ances and then immediately ask about satisfaction or trust in government, you are likely priming the respondent to give more negative responses than they may actually have, because you've just asked them about their problems and then you asked them to rate their government. There are volumes written about the nuances and issues with ques-tion order in social science research; suffice it to say, every detail of the question ordering and wording needs to be carefully considered and decisions intentionally weighed, docu-mented, and caveated.

The key takeaway for the basic principles of data collection is to have a well-laid plan with contingencies for when things inevitably go wrong in the field. If the data collection has hic-cups in the field, it does not necessarily mean the research needs to be entirely scrapped. It means that in the report researchers need to detail any issues that arose with data collec-

tion, document any potential bias it caused in the data itself (see more on bias below), and caveat the findings accordingly.

Research ethics

The Declaration of Helsinki (1964)[12] established international ethical standards for medical research and serves as the foundational guideline for conducting research that involves people. Originally, the Declaration pertained to medical research. Social science experiments such as the Milgram Experiments (1963)[13] and the Stanford University Prison Experiment (1973)[14] raised considerable ethical violations taking place in the social sciences and in the United States. Such experiments led to the Belmont Report (1974),[15] which set out national ethical guidelines for any research involving human subjects, which also extend to research on animals. Today, any research conducted using US federal money that is subject to 45 CFR part 46—known as the Common Rule—is legally required to be reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for ethical compliance. Most countries around the world that are signatories to the Declaration of Helsinki have their own IRBs; researchers need to check the ethical guidelines and compliance laws within their own countries and the countries of study.

Most research involving people is legally bound to comply with the international and national regulations of research ethics. More importantly, practitioners of CVE should be particularly sensitive to respecting the rights of study participants and should weigh the risks and benefits of having people participate in research. CVE research is sensitive and can put lives at risk. Furthermore, many of the people in our research have already gone through unspeakable trauma, and we should not inflict more on them in the name of research. Therefore, CVE researchers should carefully consider the potential risks to which we subject our research participants. Readers can learn about ethical guidelines through their local IRB

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12   "The Nuremberg Code," Ethical Principles for Medical Research, accessed September 1, 2019, https://sites.jamanetwork.com/research-ethics/index.html

13   Saul McLeod, "The Milgram Shock Experiment," *Simply Psychology*, 2017, https://www.simplypsychology.org/milgram.html

14   Saul McLeod, "The Stanford Prison Experiment," *Simply Psychology*, 2018, https://www.simplypsychology.org/zimbardo.html

15   "Belmont Report," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed September 1, 2019, https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/index.html

or through exploring the US Department of Health and Human Services online resources.[16] Here, I outline a few of the more common ethical issues that arise in CVE research.

First, researchers need to consider ethnical issues around study recruitment. Does the study in any way compel participation? For example, if you are interviewing former combatants in prison, are they compelled by the prison to participate? If so, that is a potential violation of their rights. What is the compensation for participating in the study? Is the compensation so high that it becomes a source of compulsion to join the study? Second, what are the risks and benefits to participants for engaging in the study? Do the benefits outweigh the potential risks to your participants? Third, depending on the study location, will the participants be overheard by others and does this pose ethical (or validity) issues? If you are working in communities experiencing an active VEO presence, how will you ensure VEOs do not find out who your study participants are? Field research conducted inside communities under active VE threat are vulnerable, and to keep both the research participants and enumerators safe, these questions need to be seriously considered. Fourth, as discussed above, how will the researcher safeguard the identity of participants?

Obtaining informed consent from each study participant is the best way to ensure your study remains ethically above board. Informed consent is a document that you and the study participant each sign. This document clearly states your information, your institution, your qualifications, the funder of the study, how the data will be processed, stored, analyzed, and reported, what the risks and benefits are to the participant, what the participants rights are (e.g. they have the right to not participate in the study or leave the study at any time without penalty, etc.), and provides contact information to your superiors and your institution so that the participant can report any ethics violations or negative consequences of participating in the study. You should also always obtain permission to use photographs of people. If you take photos of children, you should obtain their permission and their parents' or guardians' permission.

As with the other research basics mentioned in this chapter, it is incumbent upon us to think through these ethical considerations and have a well-laid plan to address them. Fail-

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16   "IRB Registration," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed September 1, 2019, https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/register-irbs-and-obtain-fwas/irb-registration/index.html

ure to adhere to ethical standards can have repercussions that reverberate not just for the study that violates ethics, but for future studies and programs and individual lives. Be assured that any ethical violations will contaminate the research pool and future researchers will not have the same access to data. It will also sully any programming that goes into the community based on the research findings. In the worst cases, it may adversely impact your study participants or the larger community.

Measurement

Some readers must be thinking: "but I do qualitative research. I don't measure things." I respectfully beg to differ. As King, Keohane, and Verba wrote over 25 years ago, qualitative and quantitative approaches are simply "two styles of research, one logic of inference."[17] Setting aside the advances in qualitative research where concepts are now measured through coding or set theory analysis,[18] the basic principles of measurement apply to qualitative research. This is because the basic principles of measurement rest on a foundation of logic. Logic applies to all research, quantitative and qualitative alike.

Ideally, CVE practitioners would have a unified set of metrics to apply across similar types of programs to build a body of knowledge that uses definitions and measures key concepts the same way. However, the field is not there yet.[19] In the absence of agreed definitions for the core concepts of VE and CVE, exercising care about how we measure the definitions we use is especially important. The main principles of measurement are validity and reliability that, when adhered to, help standardize research practice. Failure to think through measurement issues often results in researchers falling back on measuring outputs, such as number of beneficiaries, or proxies of outcomes, such as community cohesion, support for the use of violence, or anti-American sentiment. Such proxies typically leave CVE practitioners little insight into a beneficiary community's actual experience with VE.[20] Furthermore, without a

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17   Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

18   See, for example, King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry;* and Ragin, Charles C. 2000. *Fuzzy-Set Social Science*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

19   Peter Romaniuk, "Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism," *Global Center on Cooperative Security*, September 2015, 35–36.

20   Ahmadi and Urwin, "Measuring Peace and Violent Extremism," 1–2.

unified set of metrics, it is virtually impossible to provide evidence to support theories of what does and does not work under different contexts.

VALIDITY AND ACCURACY

Validity, or accuracy, describes the closeness of a measurement to the true value. This is the basic idea behind construct validity, which I discuss below. Two other important types of validity for our research practices are internal and external validity. This section discusses all three types of validity and issues we face in measuring VE and CVE.

CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

Construct validity means that the research tool measures the concept you want it to measure. It lies at the heart of one of the biggest challenges to the CVE field: measuring what VE is and what it means to counter VE. Our research and evaluation questions are almost always about a behavior, i.e. committing acts of terrorism, violent events, or the process of becoming radicalized. Yet, most of what our field considers cutting edge research does not measure behavior. Instead, we rely on attitudinal measurements—often about what respondents think they will believe in the future—in surveys and list experiments, such as whether respondents support a VEO or think that violence is sometimes justifiable; sometimes we simply rely on anti-American sentiment. While this may serve as a proxy measure (we need to do more research to evaluate this) in the absence of measuring actual behavior, we need to always caveat such research and be straightforward about the extent of its meaningful contribution to explaining VE behavior.

Measuring attitudes, however, is wholly appropriate for attitudinal questions in our field. For example, we may want to know: What are people's beliefs in X? What are citizens' perspectives of the government and other power brokers—including VEOs—in their country? What are citizens' grievances? Yet, measuring attitudes about these topics is difficult. First, people may interpret attitudinal questions differently. Even with surveys, perhaps the most standardized and systematized tool for data collection in CVE research, it is difficult to ensure that respondents will interpret even the simplest questions the same way. This is even more problematic when we add in language translations of survey responses. Study inclusion, who asks the questions, and how the questions are asked (see discussion above) can also affect responses to attitudinal questions and therefore the measurement.

Second, attitudes change. As Zaller and Feldman point out, survey research assumes that respondents have reasonably well-developed opinions for the questions posed to them and that "the standard view (of public opinion research) is that when survey respondents say they favor X they are simply describing a preexisting state of feeling favorably toward X."[21] However, changes in responses to the same question when asked repeatedly, responses that change when trivial changes are made to question or responses, reactions to the context within which the questions are posed, and changes in responses when the question ordering is changed call this critical assumption into question. These behaviors suggest that respondents provide answers off the top of their heads. Asking a respondent the same question days, weeks, or months apart–while she can be influenced by events in her environments—can illicit inconsistent responses, making the measurement unreliable and invalid.

Third, surveys may not be internally invalid (see definition below) in the event that the questions are idealistic—based largely on Western democratic ideals—that do not capture valid attitudes. Another challenge to the internal validity of surveys (as well as interviews and FGDs) is human psychology. For example, people tend to want to give the answers they think will please others (social desirability bias).

These issues raise the need for survey creators and enumerators to have formal training in the psychology of surveying to know how to deal with them. Experience with surveying is not a substitute for this critical training; instead, it more likely guarantees that researchers will rely on shortcuts and employ poor instruments.

Internal validity

Internal validity refers to whether the results from research are valid (true) for the study subjects. While we normally think about internal validity in experiments or quantitative research, it is equally important to consider in qualitative research. Qualitatively, we often rely on interviews and FGDs with officials and civil society organizations (CSOs). For example, when conducting VE assessments to inform program design, we tend to contact informants that our donors or governments know. Having conducted dozens—if not hundreds—of

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21   Stanley Feldman and John Zaller, "The Political Culture of Ambivalence: Ideological Responses to the Welfare State," *American Journal of Political Science*, 36(1) 1992: 268-307.

these interviews and FGDs , I am skeptical that they are internally valid. Study subjects are intended to be populations vulnerable to VE or VEOs, but, this technique does not actually collect information from vulnerable populations. Instead, the method collects information from elites about their opinions of vulnerable populations.

We hear over and over how it is youth and poor people who are vulnerable, with very little evidence or firsthand knowledge to support this assertion. Consequently, donors create programs for youth and poor people based the opinions of elites or accessible populations on their vulnerability, when, in reality, youth and poorer populations may or may not be vulnerable. Moreover, individuals may not even be the right unit of analysis; we may need to be looking at vulnerable communities instead. Overreliance on elites for data collection can render the research internally invalid—i.e., the results from the research do not hold for the study subjects (vulnerable populations) we want to know about. Put another way, we simply have the wrong study subjects in our research.

For example, I was once on a positive youth development program working with poor, uneducated youth in Tunisia. These youth had been identified as a population vulnerable to VE through the assessment that preceded the program design. That assessment relied on desk study of existing studies (which almost entirely consisted of elite interviews and FGDs with CSOs) and a few additional elite interviews, mostly with other implementers. After we started the program, the Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism (CTRET) published a study that reviewed the court documents from a sample of one thousand alleged terrorist in the Tunisian court system to determine the demographic characteristics of these alleged terrorists.

Contrary to what the interviewees in our assessment told us—that the vulnerable population in Tunisia were poor, uneducated youth—this study showed that 40 percent of the alleged terrorists held university degrees and an additional 33 percent held secondary diplomas.[22] Although the age category of youth is often so broad to include anyone aged 15–35 or 15–40, the study revealed variation across smaller age categories: 204 people were between the ages of 18 and 24, 275 were between the ages of 25 and 29, and 243 were

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22   "A large proportion of terrorists in Tunisia are university graduates (study)," Agence Tunis Afrique Presse, October 26, 2016, https:// www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Society/8362201-a-large-proportion-of-terrorists-in

between the ages of 30 and 34. Most of the thousand people in the study were men (965), although there were also 35 women. More than half (536) were single, 24percent (239) were married, and 1 percent were divorced or widowed. What this meant for the Tunisia project was that the focus on the poorest, least educated communities was missing a large part of the vulnerable population, which included many middle-class and educated Tunisians.

The difficulty we face as practitioners and researchers is that we conduct assessments to identify the vulnerable populations for our programming. If we do not know who the vulnerable population is, how can we include them in our assessment? In this way, we face a sort of chicken-and-egg problem: we want to include data from vulnerable populations to design adequate programming, but we need to conduct the assessment to first identify the vulnerable population. Despite this challenge, what the previous Tunisian example suggests is that we can think through more critically who are our study subjects are and how to gather different kinds of data to ensure internal validity.

External validity

External validity is also known as generalizability, meaning the results from the sample hold true for the broader population. Though this principle is usually assigned to the realm of quantitative research, it is relevant for qualitative research as well. For example, if we conduct an FGD with youth in a certain neighborhood, we need to be careful to either evaluate whether the findings are valid for the whole neighborhood or we need to attribute the findings just those who participated in that specific FGD.

External validity is a difficult principle for CVE practitioners because so much of VE—and therefore research on VE—is hyper-localized. What researchers may find driving VE in one village may not be the same thing driving VE in a neighboring village. The implication is that the response to VE must be tailored to address the specific drivers across different subnational units. Therefore, many of our research findings are not generalizable. This is not a critical failure for our research. Rather, it points to the need for researchers to be very precise about how to communicate findings and to avoid making sweeping generalizations.

Precision refers to the closeness of agreement among a set of measurements. Researchers often use it synonymously and interchangeably with reliability. Both reliability and precision mean that if the measurement is taken again—say, by another researcher—the values will be the same. In the attitude discussion above, reliability issues arise when the measurements of attitudes change over time. In qualitative research reliability and precision mean that if an interview is conducted again or conducted by a different enumerator, the evidence will be the same. Reliability can even be extended to the types of informants. That is, if the same kinds of informants are interviewed, will their information be about the same? Following, documenting, and sharing the data collection, measurement, and analysis plan is the best practice for achieving reliability.

Inference

What logical conclusions do we draw from the evidence? This is the basic principle of inference. In research on VE and CVE, there are three common kinds of inference flaws: relying on outputs to infer about outcomes; using attitudinal measurements to infer about behavior; and using evidence from one level of analysis—such as country context—to infer about another level of analysis—such as individuals.

In monitoring and evaluating (M&E) CVE programs, the tendency to rely on outputs (such as number of participants in a training) rather than on the program interventions' outcomes (such as the effect the intervention had on reducing VE) results in lacking a strong evidence base about CVE impact. The reliance on outputs in USAID is partly a function of responding to the donor because CVE programs inevitably include a few foreign assistance indicators (aka F-indicators)[23] that are almost solely output indicators. This is largely because measuring outputs is the only way to standardize measurement of foreign assistance. However, outputs do not show impact for complex social phenomenon such as VE and responses to VE. Therefore, we cannot say that because we trained a certain number of beneficiaries, we had an impact on VE. In our practice, we have to move far beyond reporting the number of beneficiaries or services and toward measuring outcomes.

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23   See Standard Foreign Assistance Indicators, U.S. Department of State, Archived, accessed September 1, 2019, https://2009-2017.state.gov/f/indicators/

As discussed above, our reliance on attitudinal measurements—instead of behavioral ones—in research on CVE means there is little evidence about what changes behavior. Put another way, just because we may evoke an attitudinal change does not mean we had any impact on behavior. We cannot use evidence about attitudes to infer about behavior. At the end of the day, it is behavior that needs to change to effectively counter VE. As several scholars have pointed out, people can hold radical attitudes without ever engaging in violent or radical behavior and not all terrorists radicalize.[24]

Finally, ecological fallacy, or making inferences from data or evidence at one unit of analysis (usually a context measurement) to draw conclusions about another unit of analysis (usually individuals) is a common pitfall in our practice. In the early 2000s, a popular hypothesis was that poverty drives terrorism. This hypothesis was borne out of country level studies examining the correlation between national incidents of violence and a variety of national poverty measurements (such as GDP and inequality). Many national-level studies since then have demonstrated this is not the case[25]. Nevertheless, inferences that poverty drives terrorism were extended to the individual level: poor people are more likely to be terrorists.

However, studies at the individual level have demonstrated that many people who commit terrorist acts come from middle class or prominent families and that they commit terrorist acts for a number of different reasons. "One of the most significant understandings gained from academic research over recent years is that individuals involved in terrorist activities exhibit a diversity of social backgrounds, undergo rather different processes of violent radicalisation and are influenced by various combinations of motivations."[26] In sum, we cannot infer findings about one level of analysis based upon evidence from another level of analysis.

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24   Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research." *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4) 2011: 37-62; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, 2008: 415–33; Fernando Reinares, *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism: A Concise Report Prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation*, European Commission, 2008.

25   See, for example, James A Piazza, "Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18(1) 2007: 159-177.

26   Reinares, *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*, 11; see also McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization"; Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II"; Schmid, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*.

Implications for policy and practice

To understand the implications of conducting poor research for policy and practice, it is instructive to borrow lessons learned from established fields. Take for example, the medical practice. For thousands of years, esteemed and charismatic people practiced medicine by prescribing treatments based on anecdotes, biases, and probably a lot of psychological traps, such as confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance.[27] Early advances in public health happened through policies aimed at combatting urban issues such as sanitation, housing, and infectious diseases—not by doctors. Only in the past 25 to 30 years, with the advent of better research technology—especially randomized experiments—has medicine moved to an evidence-based practice. Many old guard physicians rebuked this transition; only more recently, as those physicians left the field, has evidence-based practice really taken hold.[28]

While evidence has moved the medical field forward, it also shed light on **what not to do**. According to Harvard health care policy professor Anupam Jena, about 15% of the time science leads to medical reversals.[29] The inconvenient fact is that the human body is a complex organism, which makes diagnosing and treating health problems difficult. Similarly, CVE deals with complex social phenomena within multiple complex systems, which makes it more challenging to investigate. We need to follow the standard practices of evidence-based research to generate the knowledge base needed to get a better handle on how to intervene effectively in response to VE and to know what not to do.

For CVE, experienced policymakers and senior military professionals have mismatched skillsets to these challenges. They cut their teeth on foreign policy during the Cold War era, when the great threat was another nation-state—a challenge that states have had practice dealing with for centuries. Trained to address state-level threats, senior policymakers have made underwhelming decisions on countering terrorism, a complex non-state actor problem. As the recent Congressional mandate to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to

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27   Confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret new evidence in a way that conforms to previously held beliefs. For example, if you believe your child is messy, each time they leave their clothes on the floor and toys strewn throughout the house will confirm that belief. Cognitive dissonance refers to the discomfort people feel when their beliefs contradict their behavior. For example, smokers may have cognitive dissonance around smoking. They may believe smoking is bad for their health and desire to quit but they continue smoking.

28   For an engaging discussion about this evolution, see the 3-part Freakonomics Podcast "Bad Medicine," 2016, http://freakonomics.com/podcast/bad-medicine-part-1-story-98-6/.

29   See Freakonomics Podcast "Bad Medicine," 2016, http://freakonomics.com/podcast/bad-medicine-part-3-death-diagnosis/

set up a task force on VE in fragile states demonstrates, the response to terrorism has not stopped VE from spreading around the globe.[30] The USIP Task Force findings and recommendations point to the need to do more prevention and less countering.[31] Time will tell whether high-ranking decision makers will head this call to change.

Meanwhile, across the board, government seems to increasingly respond better to evidence than experience or expert opinion. There is a growing drum beat from the U.S. Congress to show evidence-based impact of CVE programming. Most importantly, there is a real human need to craft better responses to help build peace for the people living under the siege of VEOs. Going back to research basics to provide the most solid and rigorous evidence possible, and systematically building a body of knowledge off the findings of this evidence base, is how researchers and analysts can do their part to improve the overall response to VE and contribute to a more peaceful world.

30   Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, "Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A new approach," *U.S. Institute of Peace*, February 26, 2019. https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/02/preventing-extremism-fragile-states-new-approach

31   Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, "Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A new approach"

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Demystifying Gender Analysis for Research on Violent Extremism

Phoebe Donnelly[1]

Incorporating a gender analysis into research on violent extremism and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) leads to more accurate conclusions about violent extremism and violent extremist organizations (VEOs). When scholars, policymakers, and activists pay attention to gender dynamics, they gain new insights about power, identities, and relationships. Researchers cannot ignore the gender dimension of violent extremism because VEOs understand the importance of gender and leverage ideas about gender for their own advantage. Despite the clear benefits from incorporating gender into the research process, most researchers are not trained on gender analysis and therefore cannot envision what it looks like in practice. This chapter outlines some of the key steps in a gender analysis, including asking questions about the different experiences of men, women, boys, and girls; tracing power dynamics; recognizing intersectional identities; analyzing context; and challenging existing knowledge and conventions. The goal of this chapter is to demystify gender analysis so that it becomes an approachable tool researchers choose to use to gain a more accurate picture of contexts of violent extremism.

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Introduction

Researchers and practitioners have long been aware of the ways in which gender and violent conflict intersect. More recently there has been an increase in research around gender dynamics in contexts of violent extremism, specifically around the role women and girls play in violent extremist organizations (VEOs)[2] and forms of gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrated by VEOs.[3] Without gender research, it would be difficult to make sense of the composition of VEOs, how they are able to recruit and retain members, why they choose different forms of violence, and what happens when they start to lose territory. Researchers and practitioners who focus explicitly on gender cannot be the only ones incorporating gender analysis. Governments, donors, and scholars have recognized the value of a gender analysis and are encouraging incorporating gender into an analysis of contexts of violent extremism.[4] While this is a positive step, it should not be assumed that most researchers know how to do a gender analysis or understand the specific components and concepts encompassed within it. Gender analysis is a tool and a skill like any other used to analyze complicated contexts, including those where VEOs operate.

This chapter aims to show scholars and policymakers the key components and processes of gender analysis, provide useful information and examples in designing a gender analysis, and demonstrate how a gender analysis can lead to a better understanding of contexts where violent extremism is present. It describes some of the key steps of a gender analysis, like asking questions about the different experiences of men, women, boys, and girls; tracing power dynamics; recognizing intersectional identities; analyzing context; and challenging existing knowledge and conventions. A gender analysis pays attention not only to

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2   Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, "Explaining Extremism: Western Women in Daesh," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 1 (February 2018): 45–68, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2017.13; Hilary Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Weapons, Witnesses* (London: Zed Books, 2017); Laura Sjoberg, "Jihadi Brides and Female Volunteers: Reading the Islamic State's War to See Gender and Agency in Conflict Dynamics," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, May 18, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894217695050. May 18, 2017, 0738894217695050, https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894217695050; Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, "Explaining Extremism: Western Women in Daesh," European Journal of International Security 3, no. 1 (February 2018

3   Ariel I. Ahram, "Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS," *Survival* 57, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 57–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1047251; Phoebe Donnelly, "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups," *Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University*, 2019, https://search.proquest.com/docview/2247226328; Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (2014), http://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/article/828/707/.

4   See e.g. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 calling for attention to women, peace, and security in contexts of terrorism and violent extremism, http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2242.

women, but to the particular experiences, expectations, relationships, and access to power for men, women, boys, girls, and sexual and gender minorities (SGMs). In addition to looking at women, men, boys, and girls, in a gender analysis, one examines different ideas about masculinities and femininities. Throughout, this chapter primarily references four gendered groups: men, women, boys, and girls. This practice is not to deny the existence of gender or sexual minorities (discussed in greater detail in Table 1). However, the binaries of men and women or boys and girls are often essential to VEOs that usually privilege what is considered masculine in contrast to that which is considered feminine.

Given the confusion over many of the terms associated with a gender analysis, the chapter begins by summarizing some of the most useful concepts and terms related to violent extremism and gender. It then provides an overview of specific gender topics worth considering when embarking on a gender analysis based on how VEOs use gender and how preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) implementers think about gender in their policies and programs. In the following section, I provide concrete guidance on gender analysis research design and dissemination strategies, sharing some of my own mistakes and successes in using a gender lens in field research in East Africa. I share brief insights from my own research, and in Appendix 2, I highlight more detailed examples of gender analysis in research projects in contexts of violent extremism from researchers based across Africa. The goal of this chapter is to motivate readers to undertake gender analyses on violent extremism not because of external pressure, but because doing so increases their own understanding, and that of others, working to address violent extremism.

Key concepts and connections

Definitions are important to scholars seeking to understand violent extremism and gender and how the two intersect. Extremism is one of the most challenging terms to define, and there is no definition agreed upon by scholars or policymakers.[5] J.M. Berger defines violent extremism as "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for violent action against an out-group... the need for violence against an out-

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5   *Terrorism* has no agreed upon or precise definition with policymakers or scholarship, and labeling groups *terrorists* has political implications related to the U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist Organization list. For these reasons, I use the term *violent extremist organizations (VEOs)* throughout this chapter rather than terrorists or terrorism.

group is not conditional or situational."[6] Gender identities and sexual orientation, as emphasized by Berger, are a key focus for extremists.[7] Since violent extremism is at its core focused on identity, and gender is an essential aspect of identity, the two concepts are closely linked.

Labels and definitions are especially important to clarify in research using a gender lens, because terms around gender are so frequently misused. Table 1 includes a listing of key terms and definitions that should be consulted and considered prior to undertaking any gender analysis.

Table 1. Key terms and definitions

Gender	**Gender** is a *socially constructed* identity related to women, men, boys, girls, as well as non-binary gender identities. I use socially constructed here to emphasize that there is nothing inherent about these labels, but instead they are interpreted by social dynamics and cultures. **Gender** does not just refer to people—language, TV shows, or news coverage can also be gendered. **Gender** also not only refers to relationships between males and females in a society, but to the construction, order, and power dynamics associated with femininity and masculinity within that society.[8]
Sex	**Sex** is used to reference biological differences between men, women, and non-binary gender identities. Carol Cohn describes the relationship between sex and gender: "Gender insists that, however much is biologically given, societies construct a much greater set of differences than biology dictates, and that those socially constructed differences, in turn, legitimate a social order based on the domination of men over women, and some men over other men."[9]
Masculinity	**Masculinity** as described by David Duriesmith is "a set of attributes that socially define the normal or acceptable range of behaviour for those of the male sex."[10] Scholars often use the term **masculinities** to emphasize the range of behavior associated with the male sex that exist in a society.

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6   J.M. Berger, Extremism (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2018), 46. For more, see also: J.M. Berger, Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.3.

7   Berger, *Extremism*, 40.

8   Carol Cohn explains that "gender is not simply a set of ideas about male and female people and their proper relations to each other; gender is, more broadly, a way of categorizing, ordering, and symbolizing power, of hierarchically structuring relationships among different categories of people, and different human activities symbolically associated with masculinity or femininity." See: Carol Cohn, "Women and Wars: Toward A Conceptual Framework," in *Women* & War, ed. Carol Cohn (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 3.

9   Cohn, *Women and Wars*, 7.

10   David Duriesmith, "Is Manhood a Causal Factor in the Shifting Nature of War?: The Case of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front," *International Femin*ist Journal of Politics 16, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 241, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2013.773718.

Hegemonic Masculinity	**Hegemonic masculinity** is the form of masculinity that is most privileged and enjoys the most benefits and power in a society.[11] Hegemonic masculinity is **normative** in that "men are taught they should aspire to and judge themselves by it, and state and society in turn judge and assess them against it…"[12]
Protest Masculinity	**Protest masculinity**, as described by Duriesmith is, "a construct through which men are able to stake a claim to manhood through exaggerated masculine practices."[13] Frequently men who engage in protest masculinity are frustrated with their inability to fulfill models of hegemonic manhood.
Femininity	Interestingly, even within research focused on gender, there is less of a discussion about **femininity** and its definition.[14] Adjusting Duriesmith's definition of masculinity,[15] we can think of femininity as a set of attributes that socially define the normal or acceptable range of behavior for the female sex.
Gender Essentialism or Biological Determinism	**Gender essentialism** is the idea that "beings or things have innate characteristics that are largely unchanging."[16] Similarly, **biological determinism** is defined as "the idea that our biology determines our destiny as genes simply play out their programs."[17]
Sexual Violence	**Sexual violence** is a term focused on physical violence used frequently to denote rape but covers a broader subset of harm. One of the most useful explanations of sexual violence comes from the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset. This publicly available dataset tracks instances of conflict-related sexual violence committed by armed actors from 1989-2015.[18] In the SVAC dataset sexual violence is defined, based on the explanation from The Rome Statute used by the International Criminal Court, and includes 1) rape, 2) sexual slavery, 3) forced prostitution, 4) forced pregnancy, and 5) forced sterilization or abortion. SVAC also uses the additions by the scholar Elisabeth Wood (2009) of 6) sexual mutilation and 7) sexual torture.[19]

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11   Duriesmith, "Is Manhood a Causal Factor in the Shifting Nature of War?," 243.

12   Chris Dolan, "Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States- A Case Study of Northern Uganda," in *Masculinities Matter! Men, G*ender and Development, ed. F Cleaver (London & New York: Zed Books, 2002), 60.

13   Duriesmith, "Is Manhood a Causal Factor in the Shifting Nature of War?," 243.

14   Carrie Paechter, "Rethinking the Possibilities for Hegemonic Femininity: Exploring a Gramscian Framework," *Women's Studies International Forum* 68 (May 2018): 121, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.03.005.

15   Duriesmith, "Is Manhood a Causal Factor in the Shifting Nature of War?," 241.

16   Laura J. Shepherd, ed., *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (London: Routledge, 2013), 239.

17   Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War Syst*em and Vice Versa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 52.

18   "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict," accessed January 8, 2021, http://www.sexualviolencedata.org/.

19   For more information on the SVAC dataset, see: Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås, "Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Introducing the SVAC Dataset, 1989–2009," *Jo*urnal of Peace Research 51, no. 3 (May 1, 2014): 418–28, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343314523028.no. 3 (May 1, 2014).

Gender-Based Violence	**Gender-based violence (GBV)** is a broader term that includes sexual violence but also covers other forms of harm. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's definition is helpful, geared towards humanitarian practitioners: "an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between females and males." The Inter-Agency Standing Committee gives examples of GBV that include sexual violence but also practices such as female genital mutilation, honor killings, and widow inheritance.[20]
Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGMs)	**Sexual and gender minorities (SGMs)**, according to a definition in a report by International Alert is, "people whose sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual practices fall outside traditional norms. It may also refer to people who are perceived as such by others, resulting in similar social exclusion and vulnerability."[21]

Misunderstanding or misusing the above terms is problematic not only because it is inaccurate but because it can limit analysis. A fundamental misconception in this field and others is that a gender analysis is only about women. When a project or grant wants a "gender component," most researchers and practitioners read that as a need to include women. I hesitate to critique any approach that leads to the inclusion of women because it is important to be asking, "where are the women?"[22] (and girls) when women are so frequently excluded from conflict analysis. Angela Raven-Roberts explains that "asking the question 'Where are the women?' not only helps us see the specificity of different women's lives in war; it also reveals that we need to *look at war* differently to see its gendered features and gendered impacts."[23]

Including women and girls should be one part of any gender analysis, but not its only component. When researchers are looking to better understand a context of violent extremism, it is useful to use a gender lens that not only looks at dynamics related to women and girls (and more broadly femininities) but also seeks to understand men, boys, and masculinities.

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20   Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Women, Girls, Boys, and Men: Diffeent Needs- Equal Opportunities," Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, December 2006, 12.

21   International Alert, "When Merely Existing Is a Risk: Sexual and Gender Minorities in Conflict, Displacement and Peacebuilding," 2017, 5.

22   The idea of asking this question in conflict environments was pioneered by Cynthia Enloe. See e.g.: Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women's Lives* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

23   Angela Raven-Roberts, "Women and the Political Economy of War," in *Women & Wars*, ed. Carol Cohn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 39.

The problem is not that we see the term gender and then think to incorporate women into the research project, but that the gender analysis stops there. Gender should not be seen as a code to simply add women—commonly referred to as "add women and stir"[24]—without a deeper analysis of power dynamics or ideas about masculinities and femininities.

Another common misunderstanding relates to critiques around gender essentialism. It is not that ideas around gender essentialism are never or even rarely true, but that they stop the analysis. An example of a common gender essentialist notion is that there is something biologically distinct about women that makes them more peaceful than men and less likely to support violence. Challenging gender essentialism is not saying that there are not trends in which women are less likely to support violence than men, but that this is not because of innate biological characteristics. If there were innate biological characteristic making women more peaceful, then it would be impossible to explain the large groups of women who are violent or have participated in and supported wars (for example the women playing an active role in ISIS).[25]

Joshua Goldstein carefully analyzes whether there are links between war and gender that can be biologically explained. He writes that "to the extent that biology *is* destiny, that destiny is diversity… biological systems are extremely complex, flexible, and varied."[26] In a gender analysis, rather than simply linking women and peace automatically, researchers can ask what might make this pattern true in the context they are examining. That questioning will lead to a more thoughtful and useful analysis rather than falsely assuming biological links between women and peace or men and violence. In conclusion, understanding key terms is a first step in a successful gender analysis because it requires researchers to consider different ideas about identities (like masculinity and femininity) as opposed to focusing on biological traits (sex) and making simplistic conclusions based on gender essentialism.

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24 This phrase is often used when discussing flawed ways of incorporating gender into policy ideas and refers to the concept that instead of challenging existing ideas and engaging in a gender analysis, policymakers just add women into existing programs or ways of thinking. For a discussion of this concept, see e.g. Laura Shepherd, "Feminist Security Studies," in *The International Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Allen Denemark and Renée Marlin-Bennett (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191842665.001.0001/acref-9780191842665.

25 For a discussion of women's role in ISIS and a history of women's roles in VEOs see, Kanisha Bond, Kate Cronin-Furman, Meredith Loken, Milli Lake, Sarah E. Parkinson, and Anna Zelenz, "The West Needs to Take the Politics of Women in ISIS Seriously," *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/04/the-west-needs-to-take-the-politics-of-women-in-isis-seriously/.

26 Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, 132.

Process, skills, and mindset: What makes a gender analysis?

To understand the process of gender analysis, I find it useful to view it as a mapping exercise that:

1. **involves asking questions** about the different experiences of an environment for men, women, boys, and girls. These questions will focus on experiences, expectations, and relationships.

2. **requires tracing power dynamics.** Gender is a way of "structuring power,"[27] and so it is important to understand who has access to different forms of power. In contexts of conflict where VEOs are operating, a common mistake is to only see power in terms of who is leading a group or who has access to weapons. It is useful to take a broader view of power and to recognize power differentials not only between men and women, but also between women, between men, between boys, and between girls.

3. **recognizing intersectional identities** (see textbox 1 below). Gender is one way to structure power, but one's access to power, in all of its forms, differs based not only on one's gender, but also on one's religion, class, education, race, ethnicity, age, and many other markers. A gender analysis does not treat women as a monolithic group but asks questions about different experiences of women, men, boys, girls, and SGMs.

4. **is context dependent.** Although different countries, states, and VEOs, have similarities and influence each other, it is important to avoid assuming that different environments will have the same gender dynamics. Expectations about femininity and masculinity vary based on different environments, time periods, and social groups. While it is useful to make comparisons across contexts, it is also essential to recognize where contexts diverge in gendered expectations.[28] A gender analysis also examines patterns over time and recognizes that ideas about gender are changing and co-dependent.

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27   Cohn, "Women and Wars: Toward A Conceptual Framework," 3–4.

28   For example, hegemonic masculinity (see table 1) has certain consistent traits across many contexts. Usually, hegemonic masculinity involves ideas about being able to provide for one's family or protect one's family. However, what this provision looks like and what type of protection a man is expected to provide will look different across contexts.

5. **challenges existing knowledge and conventions.** A gender analysis can require a researcher to look for new or innovative sources of information. This is because, as J. Ann Tickner notes, "much of our knowledge about the world has been based on knowledge about men."[29] One way to incorporate different data would be speaking to women in a society who might be ignored in research designs because they are not in positions of public power. Researchers might also have to be creative about getting information about women and hearing from women.[30]

Intersectionality

A common question related to incorporating gender into a research design is why incorporate a gender lens instead of a race lens or an ethnicity lens. Researchers can and should examine different identity markers. Having a gender lens helps a researcher better use additional lenses related to identity. For example, general ideas about being a Muslim "person" are not as useful in understanding contexts of violent extremism on their own because there are different ideas about being a Muslim man or Muslim girl. Gender and religion can work together to enhance our understanding of the ways in which VEOs rely on identity.[31]

The concept of intersectionality is useful in explaining the ways in which different identity markers interact. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge explain that:

> *Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences... When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.[32]*

The objective of incorporating a gender analysis into a research project is not to take away from the examination of other divisions or signifiers related to identity and power. Instead, the goal is to use gender analysis as one of many tools to understand dynamics in complex environments of violent extremism.

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29 J. Ann Tickner, *Gendering World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 4.

30 For example, in my own research, to get perspectives on women associated with VEOs, I read memoirs of women associated with the groups and reviewed court transcripts. Reading memoirs by women forcibly married into the Lord's Resistance Army allowed me to understand how the women themselves interpreted life in the LRA including relationships with their co-wives, relationships with their children, and other details that might be commonly feminized and left out of academic research. See: Evelyn Amony, *I Am Evelyn Amony* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015); Grace Acan, *Not Yet Sunset: A Story of Survival and Perseverance in LRA Captivity* (Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 2017).

31 See e.g., Maleeha Aslam, *Gender-Based Explosions: The Nexus Between Muslim Masculinities, Jihadist Islamism and Terrorism* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2012).

32 Patricia Collins Hill and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 2.

Importantly, gender analysis also entails specific preparations and requirements from the researcher, including:

1. **Avoiding stereotypes or assumptions.** This is not just because stereotypes are politically incorrect or offensive. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."[33] When doing a gender analysis, researchers should be prepared to be surprised or proven wrong. When researchers rely on preconceived ideas, they miss key patterns (e.g. the use of women as spies or new ideas about masculinity focused on resisting VEOs).

2. **A willingness to see different forms of power, particularly of women.** In my own research on gender and al-Shabaab, I had preconceived ideas about the ways in which Somali women were denied power in societies under al-Shabaab control. However, when I actually examined the dynamics in Kismayo, Somalia, a society ruled by al-Shabaab for five years, I realized that al-Shabaab saw women in Kismayo as powerful and threatening. In particular, al-Shabaab saw businesswomen as uniquely powerful and therefore tried to recruit, exploit, and extort them.[34]

3. **Approaching the analysis with an open mind.** Open-mindedness is especially important for researchers seeking to understand gender in a foreign context. As an outsider, researchers should be aware of their own positionality and bias[35] and the ways in which ideas about power, masculinities, and femininities are inherently part of the way they see the world and understand other environments.

Gender and violent extremism: Key considerations

There are various ways in which VEOs rely on, manipulate, and are forced to consider gender dynamics, many of which are documented in a growing body of academic research and

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33 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, TED Talk, 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language.

34 Donnelly, "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups," 173–82.

35 Certain schools of research place a higher emphasis on "positionality" or the way in which a researcher's own identity relates to their research environment. Even for those outside of this positivist tradition, it is useful to closely examine the ways in which one's identity influences how they are viewed by interview participants.

findings.[36] While there are a variety of ways gender analysis can be featured in research on VEOs, there are a few categories that are particularly useful to consider when planning one's research.

Gender and VEO membership and support

Most analyses of VEOs assume that the group is composed of and made possible by men and boys. The most obvious questions asked when incorporating gender into the study of VEOs is whether women are members of the VEO. While a gender analysis is more than just adding women, it can be a useful starting point to challenging one's assumption about what a VEO looks like. In carrying out a gender analysis, it is useful to investigate women and girls' VEO membership and to also examine the ways in which the roles of women and girls' in VEOs influence those of the men and boys. For example, the "desperation hypothesis" asserts that VEOs may start including women and girls when recruitment is low.[37] Recruiting women and girls not only adds new group members by broadening the recruitment pool to female members, but can also encourage more men and boys to join a VEO because of ideas around masculinity and the perceived shame if women and girls are seen as braver than the men in society.

Usually, researchers start by asking if women and girls are in combat or leadership roles in a VEO. There have been detailed studies examining the roles women (and girls) play in different types of rebel groups.[38] Women and girls in rebel groups perform multiple roles at once and therefore it can be hard to define women and girls' roles with one label. However, women and girls inside VEOs are usually labeled based on their feminized domestic roles such as "mothers" "wives," or "sex slaves." These simplistic labels limit analysis because

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36   Omer Aijazi and Erin Baines, "Relationality, Culpability and Consent in Wartime: Men's Experiences of Forced Marriage," *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, September 5, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijx023; Dyan Mazurana, "Women, Girls, and Non-State Opposition Groups," ed. Carol Cohn (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram*.

37   Dara Kay Cohen, "Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in the Sierra Leone Civil War," *World Politics* 65.03 (2013): 383-415.

38   Susan McKay and Mazurana, Dyan, *Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War* (Quebec: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004); Mazurana, "Women, Girls, and Non-State Opposition Groups"; Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 03 (August 2015): 488–506, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313; Alexis Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Roos Haer and Tobias Böhmelt, "Girl Soldiering in Rebel Groups, 1989–2013: Introducing a New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 3 (May 2018): 395–403, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317752540.no. 3 (May 2018

mothers and wives in particular can also perform other key functions for VEOs. In contrast, researchers do not label male members of rebel groups only as "husbands" or "fathers." Research by Megan Mackenzie into the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, for example, demonstrates that men perform violent combat roles alongside support roles.[39]

Women and girls' roles inside a VEO are commonly labeled "support roles" and are not viewed as essential to the group as masculinized combat roles. In their study of women and girls' roles in the Lord's Resistance Amy (LRA), Jeannie Annan and her co-authors found that 14 percent of females in the LRA were principally engaged in combat. Annan et al. explain:

> *While a rate of 14 percent females primarily engaged in combat may seem to suggest that females are performing non-essential roles within the LRA, such a simplistic assessment would be incorrect. We can compare this break-down to professional armies, such as the United States military, where only 15-20 percent of forces actually engage in active combat and the overwhelming majority serve crucial back-up and logistical roles in service and support units.[40]*

The investigation of the ways in which women and girls support VEOs usually stops at an examination of whether women and girls are visible members of the organization in combat or leadership roles. This, in turn, can discount the important role they play in providing key support to a VEO. In my research into al-Shabaab's control of Kismayo, interview participants labeled women as the most important supporters of al-Shabaab.[41] Even though women weren't combatants or even labeled "members" of al-Shabaab, they were essential to the group's survival due to their work in key areas related to finances and logistics.

Other scholars such as Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson and Alexis Henshaw have analyzed women in non-combat roles in violent organizations.[42] Some examples of key roles that

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39   Megan Mackenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

40   Jeannie Annan et al., "The State of Female Youth in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY) Phase II," April 2008, 34–35, http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/the-state-of-female-youth-in-northern-uganda/.

41   Interview with female peace activist and soldier, September 24, 2017.

42   Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013): 418–32, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000208; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*.but neglects to explain the timing or nature of participation. Support and logistical apparatuses play critical roles in sustaining armed conflict, but scholars have not explained role differentiation within militant orga-

women and girls have fulfilled include spying, logistics, transporting weapons, hiding male members, cooking, cleaning, healthcare, education, recruitment, indoctrination, and fundraising. The types of roles and the individuals who fulfill them will vary based on context. It is possible the group has women and girls filling roles and performing tasks researchers did not even know a VEO needed. For example, traditional analyses of a VEO might not immediately consider the importance of feminized tasks like healthcare or educating new members. Researchers would also benefit from looking at the support roles men and boys fulfill for a VEO that might be ignored because of the focus on men and boys' combat roles. Discovering new requirements for the successful operation of a VEO is an example of the way in which gender analysis enhances researchers' understandings of VEOs.

Researchers also should not assume who fills what roles without examining the specifics of a context. For example, al-Shabaab has different rules about what they see as appropriate roles for women based on nationality and location.[43] Despite al-Shabaab's conservative ideas about female sexuality in areas under its control, the group partnered with local sex workers in Kenya to gain intelligence.[44] Similarly, even though al-Shabaab prohibits women from operating businesses in areas under their control, they covertly rely on women in their fundraising efforts across the world. In Kismayo, businesswomen were essential to al-Shabaab.[45] In the US, women in Minnesota have been charged with fundraising and sending money and supplies to al-Shabaab.[46] The women convicted in the US did not see their roles as "support." In the trial transcript from the case one of the defendants describes her fundraising work as a form of jihad.[47]

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nizations or accounted for the structures, processes, and practices that produce discrete categories of fighters, soldiers, and staff. Extant theories consequently conflate mobilization and participation in rebel organizations with frontline combat. This article argues that, to understand wartime mobilization and organizational resilience, scholars must situate militants in their organizational and social context. By tracing the emergence and evolution of female-dominated clandestine supply, financial, and information networks in 1980s Lebanon, it demonstrates that mobilization pathways and organizational subdivisions emerge from the systematic overlap between formal militant hierarchies and quotidian social networks. In doing so, this article elucidates the nuanced relationship between social structure, militant organizations, and sustained rebellion.","container-title":"American Political Science Review","DOI":"10.1017/S0003055413000208","ISSN":"0003-0554, 1537-5943","issue":"3","journalAbbreviation":"Am Polit Sci Rev","language":"en","page":"418-432","source":"DOI. org (Crossref

43   Katharine Petrich and Phoebe Donnelly, "Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab's Shifting Relationships with Women," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, September 19, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1649814.

44   Petrich and Donnelly, Worth Many Sins.

45   Donnelly, "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups," 173–82.

46   Donnelly, Wedded to Warfare, 198–202.

47   United States of America v. Amina Farah Ali and Hawo Mohamed Hassan, Lori A. Simpson 18 (United States District Court District of Minnesota 2011).

All VEOs rely on women and girls in some way to help their cause. Simply because women and girls' roles does not fall into existing categories does not mean they are less important to a VEO. If researchers go into an analysis of a VEO with the assumption that the group needs women and girls, they will better understand the group structure and operations.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS:

- Create a list of the types of activities the VEO you are studying needs to survive and consider who fills the different roles—men, women, boys, and girls—while accounting for contextual factors.

- Actively look for the ways in which women and girls are supporting a VEO.

- Pay attention to the labels used to describe the roles of women and girls in a group and assess whether they fully encompass the contributions of women and girls (for example, labeling someone a wife inside a VEO is often insufficient because wives are also doing other key tasks like handling logistics or providing healthcare support).

- Be aware of and resist preconceived ideas that women do not participate in violence on their own accord or that men and boys are not needed for specific non-combat roles.

Organizational structure and supporter relationships

Most VEOs have rules about how members should interact with each other. In security studies research, scholars ask questions focusing on how a VEO is organized and examine group leadership, whether the group is hierarchical or networked, and how cohesive the group is.[48] An essential component of VEO success relates to how members interact with and support each other. A commonly ignored component of group organization relates to gender.

Gendered ideas can create specific hierarchies among and between men, women, boys, and girls in VEOs. For example, in the LRA in Uganda, ideas about masculinity and the relationship between men and boys affected the group structure. Higher ranking men in the LRA wanted to show their power over lower ranking men in the LRA. One key sign of status

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48   See e.g., Peter Thompson, *Armed Groups: The 21st Century Threat* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014) for ways to analyze armed groups.

in the LRA was the number of wives a male commander had.[49] Male commanders also controlled the marriages of other men in the group.[50]

In Boko Haram, women's marital status was a way to differentiate among women inside the group. Hilary Matfess writes that unmarried women in Boko Haram were called *mustadafin* or the weak and downtrodden.[51] Matfess notes that there was a lack of sexual abuse against the *mustadafin* and instead Boko Haram members saw these women as new members of their religious order in need of education. The treatment of the *mustdafin* is an interesting pattern to highlight in research, especially when most simplistic views of Boko Haram would assume sexual mistreatment of all women inside and around the group. However, a deeper examination of group gender dynamics reveals Boko Haram had distinct practices related to treating and managing women. This pattern also provides insights into Boko Haram's broader command and control structure and strategic objectives. Matfess explains:

> *The lack of sexual abuse against mustadafin suggests that insurgents identify their education as a strategic objective—the abducted women are not merely sexual slaves or a means of attracting young men to the insurgency (although this is certainly the case in a handful of cells). By and large, the women in the sect are considered members of a new religious order that is cultivating radical social change.[52]*

Another example of the link between group organization and gender dynamics is that in many VEOs, the status of a woman or girl is based on the rank of her husband. For example, in Kismayo, interview participants noted that the only female members of al-Shabaab were the ones married to al-Shabaab members.[53] The most powerful women in the group were the ones married to the most powerful ranking male commanders. The power of being a wife of a high-ranking al-Shabaab commander was gendered and often meant that women were granted additional resources, forms of physical safety, or control over other women and girls in al-Shabaab.

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49   Khristopher Carlson and Dyan Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, May 2008), 42.

50   Carlson and Mazurana, "Forced Marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda."

51   Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Weapons, Witnesses*, 119.

52   Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram*, 120.

53   Donnelly, "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups," 173–74.

- Any organizational analysis of a VEO will benefit from examining how different members are categorized and treated and what that reveals about the group's strategy and ideology, including along gender lines.

- When researchers seek to understand group power dynamics and organization, they should ask questions about what gives a man, woman, girl, or boy power inside the VEO and how that power is expressed.

Interacting with non-members

VEOs also consider gender in their rules (or lack of rules) on interacting with non-members in their areas of operation. Ariel Ahram writes about how ISIS uses different forms of sexual violence to assert supremacy over other rival armed groups and to build cohesion amongst its members.[54] In particular, Ahram examines ISIS' enslavement of females (particularly Christian and Yazidi women and girls from the Mosul area) and sexual violence committed against men and boys.[55] ISIS was intentional in considering the implications of these forms of sexual violence, and ISIS's documents show a "profound concern for the legalities of sexual relationships with slaves and ensuing issues of paternity."[56]

In contrast to ISIS' use of sexual violence, other VEOs may have strict regulations about the treatment of civilians, especially along sexual and gender lines. Elisabeth Jean Wood documents why and when certain armed groups[57] refrain from sexual violence, even when opposition forces use it or the group uses other forms of violence against civilians.[58] One of Wood's examples is the lack of sexual violence by The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, whose leadership banned the use of sexual violence. Wood argues that this ban is reflective of existing social norms that condemn sexual relations between unmarried persons, cross-caste relations, and rape of non-spouses.[59] These two examples

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54   Ahram, "Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS," 67.
55   Ahram, "Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS," 65–66.
56   Ahram, "Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS," 67.
57   Wood's focus is not only VEOs but also different types of armed groups.
58   Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When Is Wartime Rape Rare?," *Politics and Society* 37, no. 31 (2009): 131–62.
59   Wood, 148–49.

(ISIS and LTTE) demonstrate two very different models for the ways VEOs consider gender relations in their engagement with non-members.

Finally, in studying interactions of VEOs with civilians, and especially their use of violence against civilians, it is useful to analyze particular forms of violence against SGMs (see table 1). Emerging research by Meredith Loken and Jamie Hagen identify at least 23 violent groups that use targeted killings, sexual violence, torture, and abuses against SGMs.[60] International Alert explains that nationalist and extremist propaganda often uses SGMs as scapegoats that VEOs claim are trying to destroy traditional cultures.[61]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS:

- Consider what forms of violence are used or not used by VEOs against boys, girls, men, and women as well as different groups of boys, girls, men, and women, who are not members of the group.

- Inquire how VEO leadership reacts to certain forms of violence against non-members. Ask, for example, what forms of violence are ordered, condoned, or prohibited against men, women, boys, and girls.[62]

- Analyze particular forms of violence against SGMs and why VEOs would target SGMs with certain forms of violence.

Gender and P/CVE programs: Key considerations

In contexts of violent extremism, a gender analysis is essential to inform P/CVE efforts.[63] In this section, I devote more space to findings related to *women* and P/CVE, given the danger-

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60   Meredith Loken and Jamie Hagen, "Violence Against Gender and Sexual Minorities During Conflict," *Unpbulished Manuscript*, 2020.

61   International Alert, "When Merely Existing Is a Risk: Sexual and Gender Minorities in Conflict, Displacement and Peacebuilding," 25.

62   For more information on the ways in which sexual violence can be a strategy or practice of an armed group, see: Dara Kay Cohen, Amelia Hoover Green, and Elisabeth Wood, "Wartime Sexual Violence: Misconceptions, Implications and Ways Forward," *United Institute of Peace*, Special Report 323, February 2013, https://www.usip.org/publications/2013/02/wartime-sexual-violence-misconceptions-implications-and-ways-forward.

63   Although I focus on P/CVE in this section (and the activities are closely linked) there is also useful research on gender and counterterrorism and counterinsurgency activities. See, for example, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "The 'War on Terror' and Extremism: Assessing the Relevance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda," *International Affairs* 92, no. 2 (March 2016): 275–91, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12552; Laleh Khalili, "Gendered Practices of Counterinsurgency," *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 4 (October 2011): 1471–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051000121X.

ous assumptions and misunderstandings associated with them. However, when scholars, policymakers, or program designers are examining the intersection of gender and P/CVE, they rarely look at men or masculinities.[64] Therefore, a greater research agenda focusing on masculinities in P/CVE is needed.

The biggest weakness in most analyses of P/CVE is that they simplify women's roles in P/CVE and rely on essentialist ideas about women.[65] Even the fact that scholars and policymakers think about "women" and P/CVE broadly demonstrates a flaw in the analyses. Similar attention to the study of "men" and P/CVE is rare—instead research focuses on different types of men or boys and their varied relationships with VEOs. Two points stand out when considering women in P/CVE. First, a context-based analysis is indispensable when considering women's roles and relationships with VEOs and their societies. Second, women are a diverse group with different access to power and diverging interests across different contexts.

On one side is the common belief that women are powerful forces in the domestic sphere through their roles as wives and mothers.[66] For P/CVE policymakers, women are often viewed as "an entry point to the private sphere of the home."[67] Because of their leadership in the domestic sphere, women can be useful allies in P/CVE programs. However, citing two pilot projects on women and P/CVE, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat found that the women interviewed actually felt that their voices were not heard within their homes.[68] Oudraat explains that "gender inequality is the greatest obstacle to women playing a role in preventing or countering violent extremism."[69]

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64   Unfortunately, programs related to P/CVE and masculinity have been criticized within the US. See, for example: Abdi Latif Dahir, "The Alt-Right Is Mad about a Trump Program Linking Violent Extremism in Kenya to Masculinity," *Quartz Africa*, accessed June 6, 2020, https://qz.com/africa/1186457/trump-state-dept-spends-600000-on-kenya-masculinity-extremism-project/. Promundo is one organization that is doing ongoing work on masculinities and violent extremism. See: Abby Fried, "Promundo Partners with Vital Voices on New Initiative Examining Masculinities and Violent Extremism," August 27, 2018, https://promundoglobal.org/new-initiative-masculinities-violent-extremism/.

65   Phoebe Donnelly, "Improving the Relationship Between WPS and CVE Policies," *The Global Observatory,* October 20, 2020, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/10/improving-relationship-between-wps-and-cve-policies/

66   Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extreimsm: The Role of Women and Women's Organizations," in *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (The Global Center for Cooperative Security, 2016), 23.

67   Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, "Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism: Avoiding Instrumentalisation and Furthering Agency," *Gender & Development* 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 106, https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2017.1279823.

68   de Jonge Oudraat, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extreimsm: The Role of Women and Women's Organizations," 24.

69   de Jonge Oudraat, 24.

The second perspective on women and P/CVE emphasizes recognizing women's agency and interests (not just through their relationship with men). Jennifer Philippa Eggert writes that, "it should be acknowledged that women have agency, interests and skills just as men do. Women should be included in [counter-radicalization] processes as society cannot afford not to tap into their talent and expertise as practitioners, academics and leaders."[70] Additionally, women who might not be labeled as "practitioners," "academics," or "leaders" still have interests and opinions that are useful to consider in P/CVE policy, programs, and research.

Another concern with the view of women as the entry point into the home for P/CVE programs is that it can put women in danger and can place blame on women if their children or husbands are recruited by VEOs.[71] The overemphasis on mothers as the main way women should be engaged in P/CVE programs is especially problematic. Sophie d'Estaing writes that "Over-focusing on the role of women as mothers in PVE/CVE is based on a narrow and over-simplistic understanding of the causes of extremism, and the solutions. In addition, it takes the focus away from the business of good governance and the role of the state in preventing violent extremism."[72] The intersection of P/CVE and gender should not stop at recognizing on women's duties within the home but see women as a diverse group with agency and insight into violent extremism.

P/CVE programs must be designed with the understanding that women can play key roles in VEOs. P/CVE programs should consider women's motivations for joining VEOs for preventing recruitment in communities.[73] Additionally, when designing deradicalization or amnesty programs for members of VEOs, policymakers should devise gendered strategies and tailor them to women who may also be leaving a VEO with children.

Finally, P/CVE programs are frequently created without consideration of security practices and policies of the states where they are being implemented. It is essential to recognize and evaluate state responses to violent extremism and the ways they effect men, women,

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70   Jennifer Philippa Eggert, "The Roles of Women in Counter-Radicalisation and Disengagement (CRaD) Processes," n.d., 6.

71   Giscard d'Estaing, "Engaging Women in Countering Violent Extremism," 107.

72   Giscard d'Estaing, 108.

73   For more on the ways and which men and women's motivations for joining VEOs differ see, Laura Sjoberg and Reed Wood, "People, Not Pawns: Women's Participation in Violent Extremism Across MENA," Policy Brief USAID, September 2015.

boys, and girls differently. For example, in my own research on al-Shabaab in Kenya, many young male interview participants did not think violence from al-Shabaab was the biggest threat to their safety. Instead, several Kenyan interview participants were worried about extrajudicial killings and arrests by Kenyan police and security forces, framed under the guise of CT or P/CVE measures.[74] Even policies that do not seem "gendered" have different impacts on different genders. For a further example, Lama Fakih examines the ways U.S. "soft" counterterrorism initiatives, specifically the anti-terrorism finance regime, negatively impacted women's rights in Somalia.[75]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS:

- Use a context-based approach to understand the agency of women across different environments.

- See women as political actors and do not confine their roles to the private sphere.

- Consider how counterterrorism policies or programs could affect men, women, boys and girls differently.

Gender analysis research design

Ideally, considerations about gender occur at the beginning of the process, throughout the research process, while writing, and while disseminating, publishing, or completing the project. This section highlights some of these considerations, including for research questions, ethics, and dissemination. The framing is based on feminist methodologies.[76]

Research questions

An essential part of incorporating gender into a research project is considering how the research topic could or does affect men, women, boys, and girls in different ways. In contexts

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74 See e.g., Abdullahi Hassan, "Kenya must act now to stop extrajudicial executions," *Amnesty International,* September 9, 2018, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/kenya-must-act-now-to-stop-extrajudicial-executions/.

75 Lama Fakih, "8 Soft Measures, Real Harm," *National Security*, n.d., 190.

76 See e.g, Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, eds., *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

of violent extremism here are some common questions that can supplement or be a part of the research design:

- How do VEOs manipulate, sustain, or break with norms around masculinity or femininity? Why do they choose this path?

- How does the behavior of VEOs affect men, women, boys, and girls differently?

- How do men, women, boys, and girls support or resist VEOs?

This is only a sample of potential questions, but each of these questions would enhance any research project related to VEOs. Embedded in each of these questions is the assumption that women's and girls' lives and experiences matter.[77] Too often in research, especially around security issues, "women's experiences have been deemed trivial, or important only in so far as they relate to the experiences of men and the questions they typically ask."[78] Part of the process of incorporating a gender lens will involve challenging assumptions about what kinds of questions are traditionally asked and what kinds of questions "matter."

Field research preparation and ethics

Gender considerations should be a part of research preparation, especially for research with human subjects. Before starting a research project, consider how to reach multiple different types of participants. The perspectives of women and girls are often left out of research projects designed by male researchers focused on security. Sometimes there are logistical reasons for this, such as cultural norms around male researchers speaking to women alone. However, one way to overcome this barrier is by collaborating with a female researcher or research assistant. This extra step is not just about equity but gaining a more accurate picture of contexts of violent extremism. VEOs are conscious of the ways in which their behaviors and actions affect or are interpreted by women and girls, therefore researchers should also be considering this element. It can be helpful to detail information about the identity of interview participants without compromising anonymity, including gender (see Appendix 2 for detailed example).

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77   Ackerly, Stern, and True, 25.
78   Ackerly, Stern, and True, 25.

Field researchers must consider their own status and identity and how it will be interpreted in the environments where they operate. It is important to be honest about how researchers' identities affect research participants. Feminist research stresses the importance of acknowledging one's identity and that "acknowledging the subjective element in one's analysis, which exists in all social science research, actually increases the objectivity of the research."[79] It is useful to also consider the type of access researchers are gaining to interview participants and how other researchers might lack this same type of access.

Dissemination

Finally, during the writing and publication phases, researchers again should ask in what ways the research project will affect men, women, boys, and girls differently and in what ways can they communicate their findings to men, women, boys, and girls. In my own research in northern Uganda, I began thinking about dissemination and the purpose of my research earlier than I expected. In discussions with former members of the LRA many women asked what my research would do to help them. I did not predict the ways in which I would struggle with how to answer this question and my answer was influenced by the context in northern Uganda.[80]

Conclusion

While gender analysis is a skill that takes practice, the essential components of a gender analysis rely on skills most researchers already have. In a gender analysis, a researcher asks questions (some of which they might not be able to answer in their project), traces power dynamics, looks at different types of identity markers and how they influence power, examines local contexts, and challenges existing knowledge and conventions. Finally, gender analysis helps researchers working on violent extremism produce stronger findings and policy recommendations.

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79   Ackerly, Stern, and True, 27.

80   For more information on this process and my methodology overall see Donnelly, "Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups."

Appendix 1: Table summarizing research participants

Table 1: Interview Participants by Location[81]

Interview location	Number of interviews	Breakdown by type of interview	Breakdown by gender of participant
Kenya	47	25 Key informant interviews (KIIs) 22 Interviews with affected community members	KIIs: 11 women, 14 men Comm memb: 13 women, 9 men
Somalia	45	40 Interviews 5 Life stories[82]	34 women* 10 men *1 woman interviewed twice
Uganda	32	32 Interviews with affected community members	21 women 11 men
Key informants [by phone, skype or outside key field locations]	24	23 Al-Shabaab focused 1 LRA focused	11 women 13 men

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81   Donnelly, 56.

82   In the life stories, the field research team started with a guiding question, such as, "tell me about your life since the start of the clan conflicts in 1991?" This data is more focused on an individual's personal experiences and relationships. The field research team asked clarifying questions about the interview participants' experiences but did not ask the interview participant to provide input on general research topics.

Appendix 2: Illustrative examples of gender analysis in contexts of violent extremism

Example 1: Integrating gender into research questions and design

Chitra Nagarajan's analysis of insecurity in the Zamfara region of northwestern Nigeria demonstrates how to integrate gender into research questions at the start of a project. Nagarajan conducted an analysis commissioned by the UK government with a focus on current conflict patterns and recommendations for ways to promote peace, public safety, and security. Nagarajan's list of research questions at the beginning of her report demonstrates how to incorporate gender into a broader research project on security. Her research questions are:

1. What are the root causes of violence and insecurity? What are the key grievances held by different groups and how do they manifest in violent and non-violent ways?

2. What is the impact of violence and insecurity on people (differentiated according to age, disability and gender)?

3. What are the gender dynamics around conflict and how do gender norms and realities drive violence and/or peace?

4. What are the factors (including government, security force and community action) bringing people together and/or promoting peace and stability?

5. Who are the key actors with influence, means and motivations to mobilize groups and resources into collective action for peace or for violence and what are links between them?

6. What are the potential trajectories, both positive and negative, around peace and security?[83]

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83   Chitra Nagarajan, "Analysis of Violence and Insecurity in Zamfara," February 2020, 6.

The third question in Nagarajan's list clearly addresses gender dynamics, but there is an opportunity in each of her questions to consider different impacts and influences of men, women, boys, and girls.

Nagarajan also considered gender dynamics in her data collection. She interviewed men and women, but notes it was difficult to get even numbers of men and women as interview participants. She writes that "Ensuring gender balance was challenging as most civil servants, politicians, civil society members and people involved in violence are men. However, all women were interviewed individually, with more time spent with them."[84] Nagarajan speaks openly about the challenges in integrating women in equal numbers in her research design, but also discusses her efforts to overcome these challenges. There are cases where it may be difficult to have an equal number of men and women interviewed, but it is possible, as Nagarajan did, to get rich information from the women who one is able to interview. Nagarajan did not use the fact that women were not in traditional positions of public power as an excuse to not interview women. Instead, Nagarajan saw the fact that women were not in these forms of power as a research finding and a way to expand the research design.

Example 2: Contextual analysis of local gender dynamics

A detailed contextual assessment is useful for understanding the contexts in which VEOs are operating and gender is an essential part of a socioeconomic context. Rehema Zaid, a student and activist in Kenya, conducted a detailed gender analysis of Kwale County a coastal region in Kenya. Kwale County has a presence of local and international NGOs focused on P/CVE because it is a sight for recruitment by violent armed organizations.[85] In her dissertation, Zaid conducts a gender analysis of Kwale county and highlights patterns in Kwale county related to education levels across gender, land ownership dynamics, divorce rates, age of marriage, domestic violence and associated justice mechanisms, and female headed households.

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84   Nagarajan, 7.

85   Rehema Zaid Obuyi, *Role of Women in Countering Violent Extremism in The Case of Kwale County, Kenya* (Africa Nazarene University, 2020), 8.

Zaid asks the question of how the cultural and gender dynamics of the community of Kwale County would limit or enable women's participation in P/CVE activities.[86] Zaid doesn't start her study with the assumption that women can participate in P/CVE activities, as many P/CVE programs created by the international community do. Instead, Zaid looks at community dynamics first to determine the best ways women can participate in P/CVE activities. Zaid even gives the possibility that at this point in this community it may not be beneficial for women to engage in P/CVE activities.

She explains that the participation of women in P/CVE activities is the goal of her work in the region, but that goal can only be achieved "when predisposing and background factors such as policy, CSO community support and culture are supportive to their engagement/involved in P/CVE. Where these 3 factors are responsive, then women's participation in P/CVE will be attained, otherwise there shall be a scenario where women shy away from engaging in P/CVE."[87] Leaving open the possibility that at this time women could not participate in P/CVE programs also demonstrates Zaid's flexibility and open-mindedness. The goal is not to keep women out of the P/CVE process, but to consider other steps to take in the community to support women's engagement.

Example 3: Relying on women's expertise

Fathima Badurdeen's study of women recruited into al-Shabaab in the coastal region of Kenya is an example of taking female interview participants experiences and voices seriously as a part of analyzing a VEO. Badurdeen interviews women who identified as returnees from al-Shabaab as well as key informants to describe the relationship between female recruiters and females who were recruited (some through deceptive measures). Through the use of biographical narratives, Badurdeen examines women's everyday lives, both in the public and private sphere.[88]

Badurdeen's article also includes lengthy quotes from her interviews, which helps amplify female interview participants' voices. Rather than having a researcher interpret what is

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86   Zaid Obuyi, 8.

87   Zaid Obuyi, 12.

88   Fathima Badurdeen, "Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network: Stories of Women Being Recruited by Women Recruiters in the Coastal Region of Kenya," *The African Review* 45, no. 1 (2018): 22.

important from the interview transcript or what the interview participant means, including text from the female interview participants gives them ownership over the message. The article provides essential insight into al-Shabaab recruitment, demonstrating the seriousness and energy of recruiters targeting women. Like each of the gender analyses in this section, Badurdeen's article does not only teach us about women and al-Shabaab, but provides a more complete understanding of the group's recruitment techniques and strategies.

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The Radical Milieu
A Methodological Approach to Conducting Research on Violent Extremism[1]

Emily Winterbotham & Elizabeth Pearson

One of the biggest challenges to conducting research on radicalization to violent extremism is how to further knowledge in the absence of easy access to radical individuals. This lack of access makes it particularly difficult to fulfill the demand for original data on radicalization to violent extremism and on strategies to counter it.

*This chapter presents the Royal United Services Institute's (RUSI) effort to overcome this challenge. RUSI's **milieu approach** takes into consideration the importance of the context in which specific cases of radicalization take place. This is based on an understanding that research participants within these areas are able to relay contextual information about potential grievances or broader incentives impacting radicalization. The chapter highlights that these participants are frequently able to share actual knowledge of radicalization based on their lived*

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1   This piece draws on Pearson's chapter on the milieu approach in Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham, and Katherine Brown. *Countering Violent Extremism: Making Gender Matter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

experiences and knowledge of events affecting friends, colleagues, and family members. This approach additionally recognizes the expertise of local communities and positions authorities to learn from them.

The chapter presents the theoretical basis and the practical implications (site selection, identifying and accessing participants; selecting research methods; and analyzing data) of applying the milieu approach using case study examples of research conducted by RUSI. These include a five-country study (UK, Canada, France, Germany and the Netherlands) on gender and radicalization, research on radicalization among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Iraq, and the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants in Russia. The chapter highlights the challenges faced, ways of overcoming them, and key takeaways and recommendations for those interested in applying the milieu approach.

Introduction

Studying violent extremism is fraught with conceptual and technical issues. Conceptually the work is contentious—illustrated, in part, by the absence of consensus on definitions of key terms, including terrorism and violent extremism.[2] The low volume of incidents and the relatively small number of individuals in any one location affected by violent extremism mean that empirical and causal explanations for radicalization are hard to assert. Violent extremists are diverse in psychology and sociology and tend to follow individualized, context-specific pathways towards violence. This makes it difficult to definitively answer the questions of how and why a minority of individuals in a specific country joined Daesh, for example. This challenge is made particularly acute in the absence of a sample of violent extremists to interview and without longitudinal studies and ethnographic fieldwork to con-

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2   J.M. Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

duct.[3] One of the biggest challenges to conducting research on violent extremism is, therefore, technical: data is difficult to come by.

In the absence of easy access to radicalized individuals, many studies rely on secondary-source data[4] and might, therefore, lack the context-specific data key to understanding radicalization processes.[5] The question therefore arises: what is the value in researching radicalization if we can't access the radicalized? This chapter addresses this technical issue and provides a solution—albeit an imperfect one—to the challenge of generating original data about violent extremism without interviewing violent extremists. It also addresses a related key research challenge—participant fatigue, which is particularly prevalent in research on jihadist extremism. The approach outlined in this chapter seeks instead to empower local communities, acknowledging the radicalization expertise resident within those communities, rather than imposing "expert" knowledge from the government or other elite institutions in a unidirectional manner.

The chapter outlines a research methodology employed by RUSI known as the milieu approach. The approach takes into consideration the context in which radicalization takes place and is based on engagement through research with a *milieu*, or broad community base. The approach draws on a concept devised by Malthaner and Waldmann (2014)[6] who use the term "radical milieu" to describe the community in which radicalization takes place. While Malthaner and Waldmann understand the milieu as a narrow community sharing some values with extremists, RUSI's approach engages the wider community affected by radicalization and acts of violence. We apply this understanding to research on violent extremism, conducting research in the communities and areas most affected by radicalization and violent extremist activity. Ultimately, the approach seeks to recognize local knowledge, applying focus group methods to enable communities to safely share knowledge and concerns.

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3   Mohammed Elshimi et al., *Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia* (London: RUSI, 2018).

4   Andrew Glazzard et al., *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review* (London: RUSI, 2015).

5   Andrew Glazzard, Sasha Jesperson, and Emily Winterbotham, *Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism: Literature Review* (London: RUSI, 2015): 46.

6   Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu: Conceptualizing the Supportive Social Environment of Terrorist Groups," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 12 (2014): 979–98.

The chapter details the methodology behind the radical milieu approach, drawing on three key research case studies focused on jihadist violent extremism.[7] These include: a five-country study (UK, Canada, France, Germany, and the Netherlands) on the gender dynamics of violent extremism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), research on radicalization among IDPs and host communities in Iraq, and research on the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants in Russia. The chapter outlines the benefits of the milieu approach, which include accessing individuals with direct experience of radicalization whilst exploring the context and shared grievances among people in areas where radicalization happened.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of the milieu approach. The approach deprioritizes interviews with violent extremists. A key concern, not easily reconciled, is that in carrying out radical milieu research we unavoidably reproduce some of the worst mistakes of P/CVE by following the contested logic of some programming: that grassroots Muslims communities naturally know more about violent extremism. Indeed, not all jihadist extremist actors emerge from Muslim communities, and it is important that P/CVE interventions recognize this. Despite these limitations, the methodology has enabled RUSI to gather primary data on jihadist extremism to advance our understanding of radicalization in a range of different countries and contexts. Therefore, we present here our lessons learned in this field—lessons that we hope others will be able to adapt, refine, and improve.

The chapter is structured as follows: the first section briefly introduces three case studies from which the study is drawn. The second section explores the challenges of conducting research on violent extremism, setting the stage for the third section, which introduces the theory underpinning the milieu approach. The fourth section outlines the different techniques of the approach, including how to mitigate the risks involved, how to access research participants, what research methods to use, and how to analyze the data. The conclusion summarizes key lessons and recommendations for conducting research using the milieu approach.

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7   The five-country research study also included research on the far right.

Case studies

The radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants in Russia[8]

This research project, conducted in 2017, aimed to enhance the understanding of radicalization and violent extremism among labor migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Russia. It developed an evidence base on factors that contribute to radicalization and violent extremism among those communities in Russia to improve policy on preventing violent extremism. The project also established the context of radicalization of labor migrants in Russia. The researchers conducted 218 interviews (67 Uzbeks, 83 Kyrgyz, and 68 Tajiks) with migrant labor workers, experts, and local officials in thirteen cities across seven regions in Russia, employing the milieu approach in the selection of research sites.

The gender dynamics of violent extremism and countering violent extremism: A five-country study[9]

This comparative analysis explored not just women's roles, but the gender dynamics of radicalization and counter-radicalization in five contexts: Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (UK). RUSI conducted qualitative field work between October 2015 and January 2016, inclusive, in ten cities where significant incidents of radicalization had occurred across those five countries. The research focused on Daesh-inspired extremism. Radicalization to extreme-right movements was secondary due to challenges in gathering data. The project mapped the gender dynamics of the radicalization of men, women, and teenagers who join radical movements and provided recommendations on how to engage with gender in work with the wider communities to counter violent extremism.[10] Researchers conducted some 41 anonymous focus groups. In total, more than 217 people took part in the focus groups, including men, women, and youths aged 16 and over (for reasons of consent). Researchers also interviewed five families or mothers in families with children who had traveled or attempted to travel to Daesh's "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, the research teams carried out individual interviews with people working

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8   Elshimi et al., *Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia*.

9   Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation: A Milieu Approach," *The RUSI Journal* 162, no. 3 (2017): 60–72.

10   Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism: Making Gender Matter.*

in P/CVE delivery either for local authorities or in civil society organizations, as well as journalists with a knowledge of the field.

Radicalization and mobilization in Iraq

This unpublished study took place in fourteen communities in six governorates of Iraq—Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah—between March and May 2017. The research aimed to better understand the Iraqi landscape and Iraqi community dynamics in relation to extremism, radicalization, and mobilization. It explored recruitment into a range of different paramilitary or armed groups including Daesh. It also aimed to inform policymakers' understanding about the effects of widespread mobilization and radicalization into these groups on sectarianism, demobilization, and future cycles of violence.

The research, therefore, explores people's lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs, which called for a primarily qualitative methodology. This led to the production of fourteen separate community profiles based on interviews conducted with 220 men and women in the 14 communities and 38 focus groups. This research, in contrast to the others, also included 28 interviews with members of armed groups, excluding Daesh, in an effort to understand individual pathways into armed groups and contrast these experiences and narratives with broader community understandings of mobilization and recruitment.

Setting the stage: Researching violent extremists

Research on violent extremism should increase our understanding of radicalization processes and the context in which these take place. If P/CVE programs are to adequately respond to the contextual factors of violent extremism, they should focus on identifying causality (to the extent possible).

Radicalization is a contested term with various definitions, but it is commonly understood as a non-linear, fluid, and often idiosyncratic social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist ideologies.[11] If radicalization is recognized as an

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11   This definition is adapted from the European Union's brochure, STRIVE for Development: Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism (revised edition, 2016), for details of the EU's P/CVE programming.

individual and complex process, where access to violent extremists is restricted, it begs the question: what is the value in researching radicalization if we can't access the radicalized? Access to data may be restricted for a number of reasons. Some individuals may no longer live in the chosen research site, may be under criminal investigation, or may be facing prosecution and, therefore, beyond the access of researchers. Other individuals may be unwilling or afraid to engage with researchers. As a result, a majority of studies that rely on secondary-source data and research on violent extremism can often appear impressionistic or biased and lack the context-specific data key to understanding the radicalization process.[12]

In the absence of strong empirical data, particularly outside Western contexts,[13] radicalization studies (at least until recently) embodied an implicit assumption that what works for a terrorist dataset in Western Europe also works in the Middle East and North Africa, for example. Yet context-specific research on violent extremism is intrinsic to furthering our understanding, as concepts such as radicalization and violent extremism often mean different things to different people in different regions, communities, and contexts. In fact, critics point to the dangers of the concept of radicalization given that it emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology while underplaying the wider circumstances—root causes, grievances, and social factors.[14]

Though academics and policymakers debate the extent to which root causes or grievances are causative factors or merely serve to justify or legitimize violent extremism, they are widely accepted to at least contribute to radicalization processes.[15] Exploring these broader factors, which may affect many people—not just the radicalized individual—focuses attention on the concept of shared grievances, shared experiences, and the context where radicalization takes place. Extremist groups reach out to wide pools of people and are known to specifically target potentially aggrieved" like-minds".[16] If our preventive efforts to counter

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12 Andrew Glazzard, Sasha Jesperson, and Emily Winterbotham, *Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism: Literature Review* (London: RUSI, 2015): 46.

13 Ibid.

14 Mark Sedgwick, "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 479–94; John Horgan. *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2014; Glazzard et al., *Conflict and Countering Violent Extremism.*

15 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, (New York, NY: UNDP, 2017).

16 Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 797–814; Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 7–36.

radicalization are to resonate, and ultimately succeed, they need to emerge from accurate understandings of the issues communities face.

In fact, access to a cohort of violent extremists might not inevitably lead to a greater understanding of the reasons an individual decides to support violent extremism. In Afghanistan and in Pakistan, Ladbury found that although young men become Taliban combatants for a range of reasons (religious sentiment as well as financial gain, protection, and tribe-based allegiances), their peers can radicalize them into presenting their cause *only* in terms of Islam and conceptualizing their struggle *only* in terms of jihad.[17] In this explanation, and following Sageman's model of radicalization into jihadist groups,[18] ideological radicalization happens *after* mobilization or recruitment, not as a cause. This tendency was also noted in our Iraq study: respondents tended to identify their reasons for joining armed groups in ideological or utopian terms, irrespective of their original motivations.

The discussion above does not downplay the significance of conducting research with radicalized individuals. Much of the literature on the limitations of existing research emphasizes the relative paucity of primary source data and recommends more focus on accessing it.[19] Those opportunities should rightly be pursued. However, even when violent extremists discuss their paths into groups, their narratives may not be accurate or complete—primary data can be augmented through research on the wider context of the radicalization process.

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17   Sarah Ladbury, *Women and Extremism: The Association of Women and Girls with Jihadi Groups and Implications for Programming*, Independent paper prepared for the Department of International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office UK Department of International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2015).

18   See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

19   For more on the limitations of terrorism research, see Adam Dolnik, ed., *Conducting Terrorism Field Research: A Guide* (London: Routledge, 2013); Andrew Silke, "The Devil You Know: Continuing Problems with Research on Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 4 (2001); John Horgan, "The Case for First-Hand Research," in *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures,* ed. Andrew Silke, (London: Routledge, 2004), 73–99; James Khalil, "A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42, no. 4 (2017): 429–43; Peter Neumann and Scott Kleinman, "How Rigorous Is Radicalization Research?" *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 4 (2013): 360–82.

The milieu approach

The milieu approach devised by RUSI had four aims:

- To establish the context in which radicalization takes place,
- To understand the possible contributing factors in an individual's decision to engage with a violent movement,
- To reframe communities impacted by P/CVE practices as people with knowledge, and
- To empower those communities to share their knowledge in order to contest existing practices.

The term milieu is used here to describe the broadest communities from which violent actors emerge. "Pyramid" models of radicalization conceived initially by McCauley & Moskalenko,[20] understand that while very few people become terrorist actors, the terrorist network is larger. Networks include people with roles that do not involve carrying out the final attack. Those people are drawn from a yet wider community of people who do not actively support terrorism, but who might have sympathies for its causes or its actors. This is the *radical milieu*—the "social setting" of radicalization.[21]

In this chapter the milieu engaged is much broader still and should not be understood as supportive or potentially supportive of terrorism. The concept of the radical milieu in P/CVE terms encompasses the community regarded as "vulnerable" to radicalization. In practice, this "community" is often constituted of other diverse communities—families, people of faith, and youth, for instance. They can also be vulnerable to P/CVE practices and their underlying assumptions. RUSI engages with these people in its research on radicalization on the basis that they may feel targeted by counter-radicalization projects and research practices, as well as the consequences of young people joining Daesh or other groups. The so-called *milieu approach* prioritizes ordinary men and women who constitute these communities and their views and experiences.[22]

20　Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008):415–33.

21　Malthaner and Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu," 979.

22　Pearson, Winterbotham and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

Originally designed by Pearson for the case study conducted with Winterbotham on gender and violent extremism (detailed above),[23] the methodology is rooted in existing literature and aims to explore people's experiences of extremism in relation to the communities they inhabit. While people living in these communities may not be directly involved in or impacted by violent extremism, their contribution is not purely theoretical. The lived experiences of these research participants are impacted by radicalization in concrete ways: people they know of have been recruited or radicalized and local places they frequent or inhabit are particular sites of radicalization. Individuals in the milieu may also share some of the structural or social grievances, or be able to give insights into, the potential incentives underlying radicalization based on their own lived experiences and own knowledge of events affecting friends, colleagues, and family members. They may also be directly affected by everyday discourses related to extremism and terrorism. They are the communities that governments have repeatedly sought to engage to prevent terrorism. As such, their perceptions regarding what is likely to work (or not) in terms of prevention efforts is highly important.[24]

The milieu approach method

The milieu approach is based on the understanding that if research on violent extremism is conducted in geographical locations where significant cases of radicalization have occurred, it will include participants who could produce knowledge of radicalization based on their own direct or indirect experiences, such as the lived experiences of friends, colleagues, and family members. RUSI's studies evidence the value of the milieu approach as a methodology. In the gender and violent extremism five-country project, no interviews were conducted with those who had been recruited or radicalized. Despite this, half of the focus groups (13 separate groups) in communities affected by radicalization into violent jihadist groups—including Daesh—included participants with some experience of radicalization in their family or community. Research participants were also targeted by or had some contact with recruiters. In France, for example, a girl described how a Daesh recruiter contacted

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23   Ibid. Thanks to Dr. Katherine Brown for providing much discussion and input into the idea of the milieu approach and its advantages in the field.

24   Ibid.

her online.[25] In Germany, parents and young people described recruiters approaching teen-aged boys in the street.[26]

Similarly, in the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants study, 10% of respondents from Uzbekistan had first or second-hand knowledge of radicalization processes. In Iraq, though it was not always possible to gain accurate information due to security concerns about naming Daesh, it was clear that a significant proportion of research participants knew people who had joined the group in particular areas. For example, in Sulaymaniyah, 8 out of 27 people knew members of Daesh. In one IDP camp in Diyala, 6 of 14 interview-ees knew someone who had joined Daesh, whilst focus groups included people with direct experience of living under Daesh.

The milieu approach also rests on the concept of shared grievances. Conducting research in the wider population or milieu could shed light on broader societal grievances. The studies implemented demonstrated that rich sources of information come from the communities that exist around some radicalized people and their families. They are a source not just of opinion but experiences accessible only in the local context.

At RUSI, we address the issue of radicalization through an analytical framework based on a typology that groups factors mobilizing people towards violent extremism into four cate-gories: structural motivations, enabling factors, group and network dynamics, and individ-ual incentives.[27] Causality, we argue, is rarely the result of one factor. Instead, causality is understood through identifying correlations between violent extremism on the one hand and structural factors, individual incentives, and enabling and group factors on the other.

RUSI applies this model to research on violent extremism. Following the above typology, structural motivators by definition affect many more people than those eventually joining an extremist group. The research is based on the belief that the same structural or social grievances will likely affect some research participants in the radical milieu in a similar way to radicalized individuals. It is also possible to gain information on enabling factors from a

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25   Pearson and Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation."

26   Ibid.

27   This model is an adapted model proposed by James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation, RUSI Whitehall Report 2-16, June 2016.

wider community around "radicalized" individuals—for instance, people in the community may know of radical preachers or sites of radicalization. The milieu approach, therefore, starts to build a picture of the radicalization process, and also recognizes the knowledge, agency, and expertise in the communities around the radicalized.

All of the studies mentioned gathered information on structural factors that contribute to violent extremism. In the gender and violent extremism project, participants suggested that radicalization was embedded within broader contexts where gender norms influence responses to Daesh propaganda. Though all participants rejected Daesh, Muslim women participants described perceived injustice, marginalization, exclusion, and experiences of Islamophobia as possible factors in the radicalization of young women in particular. Participants described a milieu in which they believed Daesh messages addressing issues of women's marginalization in the West had a chance of resonating. Some women expressed empathy for others who had traveled to join the group due to this, while opposing Daesh, and the women who joined them.[28]

In Iraq, though all interviewees also condemned Daesh, Sunni Arab participants argued the group had emerged under the pretext of protecting Sunnis. In areas where the government was accused of targeting Sunni Arab communities with house raids, arrests, and detention, it created a perception of sectarian-driven discrimination and repression. Anecdotes about people who had been radicalized further evidence these broader community understandings:

> *I know someone who worked in coal farms. He was falsely accused of killing a person in the army. Then the military forces immediately executed him and tied his body to a military vehicle and roamed the streets, prompting his younger brother to join Daesh because of the suffering and injustice [caused] by the Iraqi army.*

This approach proved to generate valuable information on radicalization processes and experiences. However, it is not without challenges. The ensuing sections outline practices we have employed at RUSI to overcome the methodological challenges with data collection.

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28   Pearson and Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation."

Putting theory into practice: Operationalizing the milieu approach

1 Choosing communities of participation: Research site selection & data gathering

Selecting sites & navigating "risk factors"

One of the biggest challenges in applying the milieu approach is ethical: conducting research in the milieu around radicalized individuals can risk reproducing the stigmatizing logic of P/CVE practices. The targeting of P/CVE interventions has long been contentious. For those seeking the causes of violent extremism in the West, there is little compelling evidence to justify the broad community-based approaches to P/CVE that target large populations of immigrant-heritage Muslims. Many Muslims have contested their construction by governments as a suspect community,[29] and rejected the logic of P/CVE projects as securitizing and alienating them.[30] The implicit assumption of those implementing many P/CVE activities that Muslims are the demographic most at risk of radicalization not only stigmatizes Muslim communities, but risks ignoring non-Muslim individuals or groups vulnerable to radicalization.[31]

This was a particular challenge during our five-country study on gender and radicalization. Once again, we as researchers were engaging with these same "Muslim communities" to talk about P/CVE practices, even though high numbers of converts had traveled to join Daesh.[32] The P/CVE logic is that violent jihadist groups seeking to recruit in the West tar-

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29   Jamie Bartlett and Jonathan Birdwell, *From Suspects to Citizens: Preventing Violent Extremism in a Big Society* (London: Demos, 2010); Marie Breen-Smyth, "Theorising the 'Suspect Community': Counterterrorism, Security Practices and the Public Imagination," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2013): 223–40; Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London/New York: Verso Books, 2014); Naaz Rashid, "Giving the Silent Majority a Stronger Voice? Initiatives to Empower Muslim Women as Part of the UK's 'War on Terror'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 4 (2014): 589–604.

30   Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming*; Stuart Croft, *Securitizing Islam: Identity and the Search for Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Pearson, Winterbotham and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

31   Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson, "Different Cities, Shared Stories: A Five-Country Study Challenging Assumptions Around Muslim Women and CVE Interventions," *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (2016): 54–65.

32   Pearson, Winterbotham and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

get propaganda to Muslim-heritage families with an immigrant background and that, in terms of numbers, those involved in violent jihadist plots more often come from that background.[33] To move beyond the stigmatization of particular communities, we ensured that site selection was determined not by demographics, but by engaging with the geographical hubs where radicalization had occurred. The sites selected were known to be confronting radicalization issues.

Targeting sites of radicalization and not demographics also resisted anticipating who was vulnerable to radicalization, and who might have "insider" knowledge of what radicalization means and is. This meant that we came across and subsequently interviewed three mothers in Germany who were not Muslim and whose children had converted to Islam and subsequently became radicalized. The women provided an important perspective on assumptions about radicalization and P/CVE practices. These mothers revealed their unique experiences in grappling with a challenge that they felt they had no exposure to and for which they tended to be excluded from discussions around because they were not Muslim. They also highlighted their perceptions of limited support mechanisms available, including that of the local mosque and local community initiatives, because they were non-Muslims and therefore not the immediate targets of P/CVE activities.[34] The women's interviews revealed the ways in which the framing of radicalization links particular (immigrant) experiences with extremism and excludes white youth or other youth without a Muslim heritage from discussion of vulnerability.

In the context of radicalization to Daesh, which saw a significant minority of converts travel to Iraq and Syria, this revealed an important gap in P/CVE provision. For these mothers, the effects of a racialized P/CVE discourse and practice were to exclude them from access to knowledge, and to put their sons—and therefore perhaps wider society—at risk. Furthermore, the women echoed the suggestion from focus groups within Muslim communities that radicalization was not solely a problem for "Muslim communities" to address; it was an issue that affected youth across society, albeit a tiny minority. Radicalization was conceived, therefore, as a whole-of-society issue.

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33   Joana Cook and Gina Vale, *From Daesh to Diaspora: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2018); Petter Nesser, "Toward an Increasingly Heterogeneous Threat: A Chronology of Jihadist Terrorism in Europe 2008–2013," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 5 (2014): 440–56.

34   Pearson and Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation."

Research on radicalization aims to explore why, how, and where people radicalize, to identify so-called "risk factors" and to distinguish those who might be more vulnerable to radicalization. A second dimension to the concept of at-risk is the idea that a person needs special care, support, or protection because of the threat of violent extremism. For example, a "safeguarding" discourse is prevalent in P/CVE in the UK.[35] Meanwhile, RUSI research on the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants suggested that illegal migrants in Russia were more at risk to radicalization and exposed to a greater range of vulnerabilities than legal migrants. At the same time, however, the paper observed that caution must be exercised: the Saint Petersburg Metro suicide bomber, Akbarzhon Jalilov, had Russian citizenship.[36] In the five-country study, friendship groups emerged as important in radicalization. In the Netherlands the role of friendship circles was strongly emphasized, and participants described how groups of friends became interested in Daesh together and encouraged one another.[37]

DATA SECURITY AND PARTICIPANT RIGHTS TO PRIVACY

Identifying risk factors is inevitably sensitive. Risk-factors should not be used to profile or stigmatize particular groups. Additionally, in carrying out research on radicalization it is important to ensure participants do not come under increased scrutiny from both violent extremist groups and government actors. Our research in Russia on the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants ran the risk of supporting a securitized rhetoric at that time, framing migrants as a threat. Several interviewees stated that police attention had increased since the Saint Petersburg bombing of April 2017. Others worried about police raids and complained that migrants were being treated "as if we are all guilty."[38]

In Russia, anticipating that both the research teams and participants might face increased attention from local authorities due to the research, we worked to mitigate this by seeking permission to conduct research. Though this could carry certain risks in raising awareness

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35   See Lynn Davies, "Security, Extremism and Education: Safeguarding or Surveillance?" *British Journal of Educational Studies* 64, no. 1 (2016):1–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1107022; Boora Singh, *Safeguarding from Extremism: A New Approach Post 7/7* (Paragon Publishing, 2015).

36   Elshimi et al., *Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia.*

37   Pearson and Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation." This echoes the research of Marc Sageman, and his "bunch of guys" radicalization model, see: Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

38   Ekat 8 interviewee in Elshimi et al., *Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia.*

of the study itself, we deemed this risk less than if the authorities were to learn of the study at a later date. The study was framed so as to reassure local authorities that we were discussing issues relevant to migrants, including issues of radicalization, but that we would not be gathering or recording any intelligence. Research participants were also assured that their participation and their identities and information were confidential, as we explain further below.

In other contexts, without obfuscating the intended aims of the project, we avoided discussing issues that are too sensitive, at least at the outset. For example, in Iraq, research took place in a conflict context. Local research teams requested that questions about Daesh specifically would not be asked. In such sensitive contexts, we found that the focus of initial data collection efforts should be on building rapport with project beneficiaries. With sufficient trust, researchers were able to adopt a more sensitive line of questioning. To build trust and relationships and ensure transparency, we worked with a local team, one known to the communities, and were able to remain present in these areas for prolonged periods of time to gather data. Building relationships and trust takes time. Where time and resources are limited, it may not be feasible nor appropriate to conduct this type of research.

All research projects on sensitive topics such as violent extremism face data privacy concerns. Given these concerns, the identity of participants must remain confidential—participants cannot be directly identified. We have employed various tools and guidelines for securing participant data. First, it is critical to separate personally Identifiable Information (PII) from all other data sources as early as possible. In RUSI's research, participants are coded immediately so that their PII data is not stored. If working with external research organizations or consultants, it is therefore important to train them in this practice from the outset. It is also standard practice to destroy multiple copies of research transcripts once the research is completed. RUSI also often refrains from naming the specific communities, districts, or areas where we conduct research to further protect research participants' anonymity. For example, only countries, not cities, were named in the five-country study. Cities were named in the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants, but specific areas of those cities remained unidentified. In the Iraq study, only the governorates were named, and sites were labeled "urban" or "rural".

Concerns about security can create hinder access to research participants. RUSI has tried two approaches: (1) going through gatekeepers known to the community and conducting the research ourselves, or (2) working with research teams with local knowledge and access to communities. In the gender and violent extremism project, not all researchers were from the countries or areas of the research sites. We therefore decided to work primarily through gatekeepers (mosques, community groups, women's groups) to identify participants. All research subjects were selected on their willingness to participate and engage in the subject area. This approach was challenging, and the recruitment experience became an important part of the research process. For instance, gatekeepers reported that people suffered "research fatigue" with the subject matter and with what the participants felt was the constant association of Islam and Muslim communities with issues related to Daesh—we explore this further in the next section. Another important finding was that people did not attend some of the focus groups. At times, a minority of gatekeepers—understandably—were not willing to facilitate access to contacts without assurance that there would be some benefit, either to the community, the group, or the gatekeeper because of these issues. Gaining access to respondents was, therefore, difficult. Nevertheless, this process became a crucial part of the research findings. Importantly, participants knew they could engage honestly with the researchers, all of whom were radicalization experts. The quality of the data gathered therefore was higher compared to what it may have been if we had not taken this approach.

The second approach we adopted is based on the acknowledgement that it is sometimes difficult for external researchers to conduct research on sensitive subjects, including radicalization. There is often local hostility to research conducted by "outsiders". We address this by working with local researchers who are known to the community or have networks they can draw on but are not usually radicalization experts. In the Central Asian labor migrants study, interviewers selected respondents on the ground, either going to areas where labor migrants were known to gather or reaching out to their personal networks to identify labor migrants. In Iraq, the research teams knew the communities well and were able to identify potential interviewees—self-selecting and attained through a process of snowball sampling and word-of-mouth. In the five-country study, the work of a Dutch researcher with both

expertise on radicalization and excellent access to local communities produced rich data. Participants opened up about issues faced due to the loss of a number of local youths to Daesh, including their feelings of frustration and depression at their inability to prevent it.

There are limitations to relying on local researchers, not least the absence of oversight of data collection methods. In some instances, outside a Western context, the quality of data gathered was not as high as it could have been with another approach. Still, in many contexts, the local connections these researchers maintain are vital and their local under-standing enhances the quality of data gathered. To ensure the quality of the data, we recommend working closely with local researchers during data collection. In the Iraq study we adopted a participatory approach that focused on building the capacity of local research-ers. We communicated and explained not only the project methods but spent time to train the researchers on the theory of radicalization. We also developed research tools together and allowed time for joint reflection and analysis of findings.

Concluding thoughts

This section discussed the implications of site selection, the identification of research par-ticipants and the various ethical and security-related implications of this type of work. This can be summed up in four key recommendations:

- **Avoid stigmatization by adopting a geographical not a demographic approach** to site selection. This approach also enables the participation of previously unidenti-fied individuals or groups of individuals in the research.
- **Assess the risks posed by this type of research for all individuals and commu-**nities involved. In some cases, it may be better to inform local authorities and be transparent (to the degree that is possible) about research objectives to avoid rais-ing suspicions. In other cases, it may be wise to avoid asking questions that are too sensitive until trust is gained on both sides. Building and gaining trust requires time, commitment, on-the-ground presence, and, consequently, resources.
- **When conducting research as outsiders, spend time gaining the trust of the** local gatekeepers and ensuring a collaborative approach. When working with local researchers, we recommend a participatory approach that builds local research capacity.

- **Protect the identity of research participants—safeguarding participant iden-**
  tities is essential. We found it useful to code participants rather than recording PII
  data. We also strongly suggest against identifying individual research sites.

2 Research Methods:
Interactive and Participatory Approaches

Research methods should be designed to suit the research context. When conducting research in Western countries, we had to confront the challenge of research fatigue.[39] Muslim participants in the gender and radicalization study were tired of being framed by governments in extractive terms with the expectation of compliance. Potential Muslim focus group participants we contacted often responded with criticism of these agendas and told us that we were guilty of adopting the usual assumptions: that Muslim communities have the answers and are somehow closer to the problem of Daesh or Al Qaeda.[40]

To overcome research fatigue, the research had to create space for communities to speak openly about their concerns and provide a platform for participants to feel their views would be transmitted to P/CVE implementers and policymakers. It was important that we actively listened to people and enabled them to contest their designation as suspect communities and articulate their resistance to the research. We selected focus groups, a research method we felt was appropriate to facilitate a naturalistic environment and generate discussion.[41] Carrying out the research validated our assumptions—we found that focus groups created a discursive space where participants felt able to share opinions collectively.[42] However, as we later confirmed, a skilled facilitator is important to be able to encourage discussion

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39   Tom Clark, "`We're Over-researched Here!' Exploring Accounts of Research Fatigue within Qualitative Research Engagements'," *Sociology* 42, no. 5 (2008): 955–59.

40   Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

41   Nancy Grudens-Schuck, Beverlyn Lundy Allen, and Kathlene Larson, *Methodology Brief: Focus Group Fundamentals* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Extension Community and Economic Development Publications, 2004): 12.

42   Synneve Dahlin Ivanoff and John Hultberg, "Understanding the Multiple Realities of Everyday Life: Basic Assumptions in Focus-group Methodology," *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 130; Frances Montell, "Focus Group Interviews: A New Feminist Method," *NWSA Journal* 11, no. 1 (1999): 44–71; Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown *Countering Violent Extremism*.

whilst ensuring that the conversation stays on topic. When interviews were conducted, they followed a semi-structured format with a set of fixed and open-ended questions.

Both methods ensured that participants were free to take the discussion in different directions and discuss issues that were relevant to them. As a result, we gathered information we otherwise did not consider on the role of the media, concerns about child grooming, and the role of the English language in migrant communities, as well as the data on terrorism that we originally sought.[43] This method also allowed participants in contexts, such as the UK, to develop the conversation in a way they were comfortable with. For instance, in the UK, support for Daesh is criminalized, which made participants nervous. This nervousness became part of a natural focus group conversation, led by participants who talked about the ways in which discussion of Daesh had become "taboo" in Muslim communities, even in the home. This was an important finding for reflections on the possibilities for P/CVE approaches that rely on open and honest communication around Daesh to succeed.

The focus group also served as a space for communities to express resistance to research objectives and government preventive efforts. In some cases, gatekeepers told us that participants would only take part if they could express resistance to the themes of the research. We told them this was fine, and indeed, found that much anger was expressed against government, the media, and researcher focus on Muslims because of security issues. This research fatigue was evident across country contexts. In the UK and Germany, gatekeepers and participants routinely asked if we would allow participants to challenge state approaches, dominant narratives, and our own work. In many cases the voluntary participation in focus groups actually depended on this guarantee of freedom to anonymously speak out against state, institutional, and media practices. Those making this request also expressed anger over the continued association of Islam with extremism and the need to conduct more research on the issue of radicalization.[44] However, participants also described feelings of catharsis at the ability to express these feelings, see their feelings noted by researchers, and know that their resistive narratives would be part of our report and included in later academic work.

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43   Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.
44   Ibid.

The contrast with RUSI's research in Iraq demonstrates, however, the need for context sensitivity in identifying appropriate research methods. Contrary to academic understanding that focus groups can help discuss sensitive issues, in Iraq, research participants were reluctant to speak openly in groups for fears they would be reported. Therefore, we conducted fewer focus groups and primarily utilized individual interviews. A pilot study was also conducted in each governorate to mitigate against security concerns and to inform and tailor research methods and interview guides. In conducting research on P/CVE and radicalization, one particular method cannot be relied upon for use in every context; each research strategy is only one tool from a range of techniques to be applied according to the needs of the context.

Concluding thoughts

This section reflected on the significance of selecting research methods, which we recommend be contextually defined. Specifically:

- **In some contexts, to address issues of research fatigue and encourage a discursive approach to data gathering, focus groups can be a useful tool, enabling the expression of resistance identities and creating a discursive space where participants felt free to express a range of views, including challenging the research project itself. To successfully employ this method, however, requires a skilled and trusted facilitator.

- **In other contexts, particularly where there are imminent security concerns,** participants may not feel comfortable talking in a group. Individual interviews may, therefore, be more appropriate. These interviews can be semi-structured with open-opened questions to ensure that the participant can take the interview in the direction they want.

3 Analyzing the Data: Battling Bias

Interviews with the wider milieu and the radical milieu, rather than with violent extremists themselves, leave the data open to analytical challenges. Information provided may be based on limited information, hearsay, limited perceptions and prejudiced assumptions. Data can also be affected by social desirability bias: the desire of respondents to be viewed favorably by researchers and give socially or politically appropriate responses (though these limitations can also arise when interviewing violent extremists themselves). As suggested above, given that violent extremist views and even extremist views are outlawed in many countries, respondents may hesitate to give honest responses regarding their attitudes and behaviors because they feel embarrassed, judged, and, in some cases, persecuted. Recognizing this bias is often difficult. To address this, researchers should remain conscious that bias may present and ensure that the analytical process triangulates different data sources to expose any biases or inconsistencies in the data gathered.

The milieu approach classifies participant data in four ways, outlined in **Figure 1**, each with a different relationship to radicalization and different evidence.

Figure 1: Participant Data Classifications[45]

Group 1	Participants with direct engagement with radical movements.
Group 2	Participants who know someone who has been radicalized or recruited.
Group 3	Participants who have heard of someone who has been radicalized or recruited (through second-hand sources or informed opinion, e.g. expert opinion).
Group 4	Other participants who have no personal knowledge (that is to say, knowledge obtained from the media, word of mouth, or hearsay) of radicalization or recruitment.

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45   Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*; Elshimi et al., Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia.

The views of participants in Groups 1 and 2 are typically prioritized, but rare. To compare lived and perceived experiences of radicalization, data from so-called expert participants is subsequently contrasted with interviews or focus groups based on indirect knowledge. RUSI's gender and violent extremism project included interviews in Germany with the non-Muslim mothers of young converted men who had been prevented from travelling to Daesh. In the Netherlands, we conducted interviews with the Muslim-heritage families of some of those who had successfully travelled. These in-depth case study interviews with people from very different backgrounds were compared and further triangulated with research findings from community focus groups to strengthen our analysis. The consistency in stories heard from these case studies about how their children had radicalized (quickly, hard to notice, stemming from feelings of discrimination, alienation, etc.) alongside the perceptions of radicalization expressed by participants in Groups 3 or 4, strengthened our ultimate research findings.

This reflects the benefits of the milieu approach: even those without direct experience of radicalization tend to have informed opinions due to their exposure in the areas they inhabit. The aim here was not always to produce veracity through findings, as this was not always possible. In dealing with family narratives about the radicalization of children, the research was able to establish facts, including, for instance: the speed of radicalization, who made the contact to Daesh, where first contact was made, and what action the police took. Families and communities often reported these same details. However, we also wanted to understand community perceptions of radicalization motivations and processes. P/CVE relies on working with community assumptions. We noted the often-strong gendered assumptions that were made, as well as the differences in perception between, for instance, younger and older women. Our research provided detailed information on the logistics of radicalization, but also on the likely community responses to particular P/CVE narratives to inform a more holistic picture of radicalization dynamics.

The triangulation process also enabled us to collect information that we later determined to be unsubstantiated. For example, in the research on the radicalization of Central Asian labor migrants, interviewees who had no direct experience of radicalization (i.e. Groups 3 or 4) emphasized the significance of economic hardship, poverty, or material incentives in radicalization processes. When comparing these opinions with data from Group 2 inter-

viewees, RUSI's analysis observed that money and material incentives were not an explanation; rather ideational, ideological, and spiritual factors featured in their responses.[46] Nonetheless, understanding community perceptions is crucial to the prospect of successful P/CVE work.

We also found it beneficial to complement community interviews with expert interviews, particularly with P/CVE intervention providers, in the interest of further triangulating data. Experts, primarily practitioners, provide contextual working knowledge of the process of radicalization and the people being radicalized in a particular area, from their own experience. This data can be compared to the narratives elicited in focus groups or other interviews, of those who know people who have radicalized and broader community understandings of radicalization. In addition, RUSI always conducts literature reviews at the beginning of its research projects. Findings from academic literature are then used to draw comparisons with our own research findings throughout the process of analysis.

Concluding thoughts

This final section explores the data analysis process. We acknowledge that limitations exist in all forms of research. In our research, we find it important to recognize the existence of social desirability bias as well as the different experiences and knowledge of research participants. To overcome these challenges, we recommend the following:

- **To resist presenting perceptions or assumptions that may be wrong or biased,** adopt a schema to categorize research participants that differentiates between their proximity to a radicalized individual or group of individuals (see Figure 1). This allows for the extrapolation of similarities and differences in the data and the identification of areas in which data is consistent—where conclusions can be drawn—and the observation of any inconsistencies stemming from bias or lack of information.
- **Narratives so not always produce "truth". While the facts and details of radi-**calization matter, P/CVE initiatives interact mainly with communities and their perceptions. Exploring and recording community perceptions, even when they are not necessarily based on fact, therefore, becomes as important a part of research as the gathering of verifiable information and facts.

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46   Elshimi et al., *Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia*.

- **Employ a range of methods and include a diversity of data sources—secondary** academic literature alongside primary data—to triangulate and verify information as much as possible. This does not need to be a never-ending process. Inconsistencies are usually relatively easy to identify when compared across sources. Peer-reviewed academic literature can also be used to interrogate data gathered or to suggest further avenues of research for future study.

Conclusion

The milieu approach is a valuable, but by no means perfect, research method. This chapter analyzed and suggested responses to the various conceptual and methodological issues that can arise during data collection and analysis. These include:

- Concerns about stigmatization, securitization, and the safety of research participants,

- Issues in data collection as external researchers versus working with local research teams,

- Issues concerning research fatigue, suspicion, hostility and fear among research participants, and

- Challenges in determining data validity and separating out "truth" from assumptions, biases, and prejudice.

A final challenge we raise here, and in the forthcoming book further detailing the milieu approach, is one that has implications for how many international stakeholders apply P/CVE policies themselves, as well as for further reflection and testing of the method.[47] The milieu approach was vital in exposing the assumptions involved in P/CVE initiatives and of participants to the fundamental definitions of terrorism and radicalization. This was evident in the resistance of Muslim communities to our research in some cases in the five-country project. It was also evident in the ways in which we were able to implement the approach. The five-country research project also engaged the milieu approach on issues of far-right extremism, yet with some difficulty. This is because the—white—communities around pockets of far-right or radical right violence did not consider themselves responsible for

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47   Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

this minority activity. People in geographical locations affected by far-right extremism or white supremacy do not see this as their concern—simply on the basis of being white—and, consequently, were reluctant to engage in research. If, following this logic, they would be unlikely to participate in preventive community-based activities, why do we presume that Muslims should behave any differently? This clearly raises questions about the applicability, not of the approach, but of the assumptions of too many international P/CVE programs and policies.

The milieu approach is a valuable research tool. As this chapter reveals, it has enabled us to address the data gap in violent extremism research in a range of different country contexts. The approach works when based on an understanding of participatory consent. It draws on participatory methodologies and places the audience or the beneficiaries at the center of all discussions on knowledge development and sharing. Our participants frequently told researchers that there should be more such opportunities for similar guided discussions. We found that (Muslim) communities in areas where radicalization has taken place are concerned and want to engage, but they are alienated by governments and the media framing the debates around violent extremism. Engaging and gaining the trust otherwise stigmatized communities takes time and resources. The milieu approach works best when engagement with research participants takes place over an extended period of time. The approach is also enhanced by working with local actors—whether gatekeepers or research organizations—and ensuring that their insights are drawn into the processes of design and analysis. It is important that neither group perceives the data gathering process to be extractive, but a process facilitating the sharing of information or capacity. The success of the milieu approach therefore rests on engaging communities as sites of expertise and subjectivity, not simply in reductive terms as target populations, which is too often constructed in government interventions.

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Analyzing Interviews with Terrorists

John Morrison

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Just as a very simple marker when me and you [author] were PhD students the first thing you would hear at conferences and so on, and in reviews in the literature, was 'there was no data', 'there is no data', 'no data.'...You don't get questions anymore about lack of data. What you get questions about is inter-coder reliability, 'what were your original sources?' So even the questions you are being fielded are far more sophisticated. That's a massive leap in the small ten years that I have been engaged in it.[1]

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1   Paul Gill, Interview, *Talking Terror* (Season 1 Episode 15, 2017).

Introduction

For years the dominant narrative has been that there is a dearth of primary sources in terrorism studies.[2] This is now changing. The talk about the scarcity of data is gradually being replaced by discussions of a "data revolution"[3] and a "golden age"[4] of terrorism research. We are now publishing more research based on the analysis of primary source data than ever before.[5] Included in this has been some ground-breaking interview research with recent and former terrorists—research that could define how we think about terrorist involvement for years to come. With this increased access to data, if our research is to have any analytical value and concurrently respected both within and outside of academia, we need to actively consider how we analyze it.[6]

Analytical considerations must be guided by the research questions we are trying to answer. In order to be most effective, research questions and analytical considerations need to be thought through before data collection even begins and thus guide the data collection process. Afterall, if terrorism studies is to continue to advance as a field, then we need to demonstrate that when we do have access to these data that we are analyzing them appropriately. In this needs to be an appreciation for what our data can and cannot tell us. This appreciation for the limits of the data and the separate analytical techniques will only serve to strengthen the research. As the opening quote from Paul Gill intimates, we are now moving away from those continuous refrains of "there is no data" and we must now have more sophisticated discussions about how to make best use of the data when we do have access. This applies to both qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

Large datasets invariably give us a broad, but shallow, understanding of terrorism and terrorist actors. They allow for us to get a broad understanding on trends in terrorist activity, and the demographic categories of terrorist actors, their targets, and their victims. These

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2   Andrew Silke, "The Road Less Travelled: Recent Trends in Terrorism Research," in *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*, ed. Andrew Silke (Routledge, 2004), 186-213. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203500972.ch10.

3   This was the theme of the 2019 annual international conference of the Society for Terrorism Research.

4   Andrew Silke and Jennifer Schmidt-Petersen, "The Golden Age? What the 100 Most Cited Articles in Terrorism Studies Tell Us," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 4 (2017): 692-712.

5   Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007–2016: A Review of Data, Methods, and Authorship," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32, no. 5 (2018): 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1439023.

6   Thomas Hegghammer, *The Future of Terrorism Studies*, Talk at Intelligence, National Security, and War, Naval War College, RI, 2013.

are, of course, invaluable resources to have. However, first-hand interviews can give us the depth of understanding missing from these sources. These two approaches to terrorism research are significantly different. We must therefore not fall into the trap of applying the same analytical criteria when assessing the value of the findings from the research.

First-hand interviews are hugely important in the establishment and development of our understanding of terrorist actors and their motivations. For these interviews to bring value to the field they do not need large sample sizes. We have seen fascinating and enlightening individual case studies based on the interviews with just one person.[7] However, in order to get the most out of the valuable data gained from these interviews, researchers must consider how we best approach and present the analysis of the interview data. There are excellent examples of this throughout the field already, some of which will be addressed in this chapter.

This chapter discusses some of the issues that need to be taken into consideration when analyzing these first-hand interviews, including the importance of specificity, different available analytic techniques, the role of triangulation, and ethical practices. Some of the points raised in the chapter may seem overly basic. However, if we get the basics wrong at the beginning of the analytical process it is difficult to regain any analytical value to the research. The issues addressed should by no means be considered an exhaustive list of recommendations, and in fact should not be seen as uniquely relevant for analyzing inter-views with terrorist actors. Many of the recommendations contained in this chapter will be relevant across a variety of fields and with a diversity of categories of interviewees.

The insights in this chapter are based on my own experiences interviewing Irish republican paramilitaries who had previously been involved in the Troubles[8] in Northern Ireland. The chapter is equally influenced by engaging with the ever-growing interview-based research from within terrorism studies literature and having the repeated envious feeling of 'I wish I had done things that way.' My own inter-disciplinary background in psychology, interna-tional relations, and criminology, and the approaches to analysis of interviews from each of

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7 John Horgan, Mary Beth Altier, Neil Shortland, and Max Taylor, "Walking Away: The Disengagement and De-radicalization of a Violent Right-wing Extremist," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 9, no. 2 (2017): 63-77. https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2016.1156722.

8 John F. Morrison, *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism: The Role and Impact of Organizational Splits* (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

those disciplines has also guided me in the focus of the chapter. This, therefore, does not include consideration of other equally relevant disciplines, and their approaches to interview analysis.

Specificity matters: Considerations for research design and analysis

In their analysis of the role of mental health in terrorism studies, Paul Gill and Emily Corner made a short but hugely important statement: "Specificity matters."[9] This statement is applicable across terrorism studies and academia as a whole. In the analysis of interviews we need to consider the role of specificity across each stage of the interview process.

Specificity in research questions

We must be specific about what exactly our research questions are asking. Specificity brings with it a realistic focus as to what is achievable. For example, if our research question is "what leads a person to turn to political violence?"[10] we are potentially setting ourselves up for failure. The broadness of this question makes it close to impossible to answer. As Jessica Stern notes, the difficulty in answering such a broad question is not unique to terrorism scholarship, when compared against researchers in other fields trying to predict human behavior.[11] However, if we are specific in relation to who, where, and when we are talking about, then this becomes more achievable, if still extremely challenging.

Specificity in population choice and samples

The focus on specificity in the development of research questions will help us decide what research methods and analytical techniques are available to us. This can also help us to clearly identify our population and develop our interview samples. The population is the entire group from which individual interviewees could be recruited from. In contrast,

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9   Paul Gill and Emily Corner, "There and Back Again: The Study of Mental Disorder and Terrorist Involvement," *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 237. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000090.

10 Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 565-80. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.895649.

11 Jessica Stern, "Response to Marc Sageman's 'The Stagnation in Terrorism Research'," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no.4 (2014): 607-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.895654.

the sample is the actual group of individuals who are interviewed. The more specific and focused you can be in determining these categories, the more powerful your later analysis is likely to be.

When considering the specificity in terms of a population and sample, one can consider a variety of questions. What is your population? Are you focused on all terrorists? All terrorist supporters? If the population you select is as broad as "all terrorist supporters", you are unlikely to be able to find anything meaningful in your research. Similarly if you identify your population as being all members of ISIS, or the Provisional IRA, or the LTTE, or any other terrorist group, your data and subsequent analyses are unlikely to provide as in-depth an insight into the actions and decision-making process of the membership of the chosen group. However, if in place of these broad base populations you define your population in more specific terms, doing so will more likely to lead to analytical success.

Specificity in time

In order to identify a population, we can consider a range of different factors outside of purely which group an individual was a member of or which ideology they supported. Instead of such broad selections, we need to consider what population is the most relevant for the specific research questions. One important consideration is the issue of temporality. When was the individual active? When were they radicalized? When were they first engaged in terrorist activity? When did they disengage? In defining our population(s), we must be able to specify the timeframe of the relevant activity we are considering. The decision-making processes at one stage of an organization's evolution and existence is likely to be significantly different to another. If your research is trying to understand why people joined the Provisional IRA, for example, the reasons are likely to be different across different periods of the organization's existence. This should in no way deter us from interviewing across time-periods. Appreciation for the importance of timing, however, will provide the opportunity for in-depth within group comparisons and therefore, greater opportunity to assess the effects of context on individual and group actions.

Specificity in location

Alongside temporality must be an understanding of the importance of place. Where were the individuals active, radicalized, and/or disengaged? Location must not just consider the countries, provinces, towns, or villages where people are active—it can be much more focused than this. If deemed relevant, interview populations could be from one specific part of a town or village, as small as a street or a housing estate. To illustrate the importance of recognizing the value of place, one could consider the extreme comparison between two individuals, same age, same gender, same employment status both joining IS in 2020. One is joining from Raqqa, and the other from London. While they are both ostensibly joining the same group at the same time with similar backgrounds, the reason(s) behind their decisions to join could be drastically different based on their lived experiences as a result of where they are from.

The importance of place is not just relevant in these clear transnational disparities in international terrorist groups. In my own research on Irish republican groups, it is clear on analysis that the reason why someone joins an Irish Republican paramilitary can be as much based on local grievances, as on the nationalized aims of the groups. Therefore, the rationale of someone joining in Derry City may be different to those joining in Belfast, and especially different from those joining in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, or any other city south of the border. This is even before one compares rural to urban areas. And, even within cities, we appreciate the potential for different localized grievances effecting people's decision-making processes. Taking Belfast as an example one may need to consider the differences between someone's decision making processes in Ardoyne in comparison to the Lower Falls Road, two places barely two miles apart from each other. One's consideration of time and place may not always need to be this fine-grained. Consideration of the research aims alongside the population will decide how focused these will need to be.

Specificity in individual roles

Alongside the consideration of time and place, interviews can also consider the roles played and positions held within the organization by members of the population. As has been

often noted, terrorists are not homogenous.[12] A focus on role and position shows a respect for this heterogeneity. Focusing on a wide variety of terrorist roles can also provide greater clarity as to who our findings may actually relate to, as well as define who a chosen sample can, and cannot, be compared to both within and outside of a particular terrorist organization. By providing this respect for heterogeneity, focusing on specificity of an individual's role moves us away from the often times nebulous discussions about "the terrorist."[13] It can thus allow for a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a terrorist and the different interpretations and experiences that comes with it.

Specificity in interview context

When conducting and analyzing interviews with terrorist actors, the role of context must always be considered. While it is clear that we need to understand the context of their involvement, as discussed earlier, we must also be aware of the context(s) in which the interviews are conducted. Interviews do not take place in a vacuum. There are a variety of contextual factors which can and do influence the data collected. An awareness of context can assist in our analysis to ascertain any role the context may have played on an individual's responses and the direction the interview took.

Relevant contexts can refer to national, local, and individual issues and situations. An awareness of context can range from an understanding of significant news events and the influence they can have on individual responses, to being cognizant of the role that an interview location or timing can play. For example, interview-based research that takes place within a prison, or another detention facility, must always consider the effect this setting can have on participants' responses. Therefore, the restricted nature of this and similar settings needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing responses. When and where possible, it would be beneficial to have a non-detained control-group, if relevant for the specific research questions.

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12 Petter Nesser, "Toward an Increasingly Heterogeneous Threat: A Chronology of Jihadist Terrorism in Europe 2008–2013," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 5 (2014): 440-56. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.893405.

13 If we are to gain an in-depth understanding of those involved in terrorism the concept of "the terrorist" is overly simplistic and does not reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of terrorist actors.

The very first interview I ever did in this area was with a leading member of a dissident Irish republican organization. This was an individual who had a long history of involvement in the Irish Republican Movement. The opening question of this interview was 'how did you first become involved in Irish republicanism?' In an answer that lasted approximately 7 minutes they continuously emphasized the role of the Irish language in strengthening their affiliation to the movement and as a demonstration of why they were a 'true republican.' Being unaware of the context would lead one to place great emphasis on the role which the Irish language played in this individual's initial involvement. However, on the day that the interview took place, there was extensive discussion within the local media about the level of spoken Irish of a leading member of Sinn Féin, the party the interviewee had left a number of years previously. Eight months later I re-interviewed the same individual, and once again asked that opening question. At no stage in this interview did they mention the role of the Irish language. However, they did emphasize other issues which had been raised in the original interview. This re-interview, and the awareness of the context in which it took place, assisted with the interview analysis.

Similarly, in her analysis of the life histories of those who disengaged from Indonesian jihadists organizations, Julie Chernov Hwang exemplifies the application of the re-interview. By re-interviewing participants three to five times in her excellent research she gained some traction in dissipating the effects that the interviewing context(s) may have played on her analysis, and also provided opportunities for her to gain trust with the interviewees, enabling them to speak more openly.[14] We are not all fortunate enough to be able to re-interview participants. However, even if we are, we must never ignore the role that the interview context can and does play.

Analytical techniques: Fundamentals and examples

The above outlines a number of elements relevant for researchers when choosing the appropriate analytical technique. Some of the considerations listed above will be more relevant for some analytical techniques than others. We have a variety of analytical techniques to analyze interviews. However, a 2016 assessment of reporting practices in journal

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14   Julie Chernov Hwang, *Why Terrorists Quit: The Disengagement of Indonesian Jihadists* (USA: Cornell University, 2018), xiv.

articles featuring interviews with extremists found that 65.9% of the sample of articles analyzed were entirely or almost entirely absent of a transparent analytical method. This was explained as being the result of the majority of interviews being qualitative and descriptive in nature, and therefore not being held to the same analytical standards as quantitative analysis.[15] Even with this, somewhat debatable, caveat one would have expected that there would, as a bare minimum, be an acknowledgement of what approach was utilized. This lack of analytical rigor and transparency would not be acceptable in most disciplines. so why is it deemed as acceptable in terrorism studies? Focusing on psychology of terrorism literature in particular, Orla Lynch and Carmel Joyce note that "much of the psychological literature on terrorism could be described as tokenism and would be readily disputed, perhaps even rejected, if attempts were made to publish it in key psychological journals."[16] Without clear analytical processes in place, similar claims could be made about other disciplines as well when it comes to interview research.

There are a range of rigorous and theoretically grounded analytical techniques available to researchers from across a wide variety of disciplines. For this area of research to improve its reputation both within and outside of academia,[17] we need to demonstrate higher levels of analytical sophistication and transparency. This will assist in strengthening the replicability of the research, alongside the strengthening of readers' confidence in the appropriateness of the research approach(es) taken. Below, I briefly outline and introduce three of the various analytical approaches that can be used in interview analysis. There are a range of other analytical approaches which could have been chosen for illustration of the options out there. Therefore, the selection of these three does not advocate them as being "better" approaches than those excluded. It is only the research aims and available data that can help us decide which approach is best for a specific research project. When choosing the

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15   Daniel J. Harris, Pete Simi, and Gina Scott Ligon, "Reporting Practices of Journal Articles that Include Interviews with Extremists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 7-8 (2016): 602-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1141009.

16   Orla Lynch, and Carmel Joyce, *Applying Psychology: The Case of Terrorism and Political Violence* (USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 1-2.

17   Thomas Hegghammer, "The Future of Terrorism Studies," *Talk at Intelligence, National Security, and War*, Naval War College, RI, 2013.

appropriate analytical approach, there are certain fundamentals that need to be first considered:

1. Is the analytical technique appropriate for the data?
2. Is the analytical technique appropriate for the research question(s) or hypotheses?
3. Do you, as the researcher(s), have the relevant training and expertise to utilize the analytical technique appropriately?

If the answer to each of these ostensibly simple questions is "yes," then the appropriate technique has been chosen. Within question 2, researchers need to address whether their research is inductive[18] or deductive.[19] This will provide further guidance as to what approach will be suitable for your specific project. Some analytical approaches are particularly designed for either inductive or deductive research, as outlined below.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical approach that can be used across a wide range of research questions. It can be applied when working with large qualitative datasets and when working in research teams as well as by individual researchers.[20] At its most basic level it provides researchers with the ability to analyze, organize, describe, and report themes identified in the data.[21] As with many of the analytical techniques available, there are a variety of approaches to thematic analysis. In reality thematic analysis is an umbrella term for a cluster of approaches to analyzing qualitative data. The approaches share the focus of identifying patterns of meaning within the analyzed data.[22] Therefore it is imperative that in presenting our analytical approach we emphasize which form of thematic analysis was used and what steps we took throughout the analytical process. The theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis means that it can either be inductive or deductive in nature.

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18   Inductive research is aiming to develop a theory.
19   Deductive research is designed to test a pre-existing theory.
20   Lorelli S.Nowell, Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules, "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1609406917733847.
21   Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.
22   "Thematic Analysis: A Reflexive Approach," The University of Auckland, accessed July 23, 2020. https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/thematic-analysis.html.

Thematic Analysis in Research

In their analysis of social networks, leadership, and change in al-Muhajiroun, Kenney et al. utilized thematic analysis to analyse their qualitative interview dataset.[23] They approached the research in a deductive manner to test a series of hypotheses developed from organizational sociology. The data gathered was the result of Kenney's ethnographic research with the extremist group. The analysed data included qualitative interviews, and secondary sources including newspaper reports and ethnographic fieldnotes. This thematic analysis approach allowed the research team to address how al-Muhajiroun members respond to governmental pressure and adapt both in terms of their operations and organisational make-up.

In their analysis of deradicalization programs in Indonesia, Milla et al. applied a quantitative version of thematic analysis for 89 interviews with terrorist detainees.[24] While closer to the traditional content analysis, this quantitative variation of thematic analysis allowed the researchers to identify that the adoption of alternative identities mediated a decline in support for jihad as war, thus predicting positive attitudes towards the deradicalization program.

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23   Michael Kenney, John Horgan, Cale Horne, Peter Vining, Kathleen M. Carley, Michael W. Bigrigg, Mia Bloom, and Kurt Braddock, "Organisational Adaptation in an Activist Network: Social Networks, Leadership, and Change in al-Muhajiroun," *Applied Ergonomics* 44, no. 5 (2013): 739-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2012.05.005.
24   Mirra Noor Milla, Joevarian Hudiyana, and Haykal Hafizul Arifin, "Attitude Toward Rehabilitation as a Key Predictor for Adopting AlterNad tive Identities in Deradicalization Programs: An Investigation of Terrorist Detainees' Profiles," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2020): 15-28. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12380.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative research technique, with theoretical backgrounds in phenomenology,[25] hermeneutics,[26] and idiography.[27] The predominant application of this approach is within health psychology.[28] When applied appropriately, IPA allows for researchers to gain insight into how interviewed individuals make sense of their social circumstances.[29]

 IPA does not aim to achieve an objective record of the object or event under discussion.[30] Due to its phenomenological approach, it focuses on how the interviewee thinks and what they specifically deem to be important and relevant about a particular issue. Within terrorism studies, examples of the types of questions with which for which IPA would be useful for analyzing include, but are not excluded to:

- What does being involved in a terrorist group mean to individual members?
- In what way, if any, are individuals' identities affected through their involvement with a terrorist group?
- How do terrorists perceive the utility of violence?

These types of questions lend themselves to being analyzed using IPA because they necessitate an understanding of how those involved in terrorist groups interpret their own world. They are not seeking to obtain some form of objective truth.

Throughout the application of IPA is the understanding that during the analytical process the researcher plays an active role in a dynamic process.[31] Within IPA it is not pertinent that the interviewee is presenting a verifiable truth, what is most important is that they are dis-

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25 The study of how people perceive themselves and their own lived experiences.

26 The methodology of interpretation, particularly concerned with the interpretation of texts.

27 Idiography refers to thr study of the unique personal experiences of the individual and human nature. See, for example: Jonathan A. Smith and Virginia Eatough, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology*, eds. Evanthia Lyons and Adrian Coyle (UK: SAGE, 2007), 35-64. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446207536.

28 Jonathan A. Smith, "Beyond the Divide between Cognition and Dscourse: Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Health Psychology," *Psychology & Health* 11, no. 2 (1996): 261-71. https://doi.org/10.1080/08870449608400256.

29 John F. Morrison, *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism: The Role and Impact of Organizational Splits* (USA: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

30 Jonathan A. Smith and Mike Osborn, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a Useful Methodology for Research on the Lived Experience of Pain," *British Journal of Pain* 9, no. 1 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1177/2049463714541642.

31 Ibid.

cussing their own interpretation of specific topics and events.[32] As this approach is based on participants' interpretations of their lived experiences, it is most readily used when interviewees discuss important life events and experiences.[33] When considering a topic such as radicalization, IPA is a particularly useful technique as it is designed to deal with ambiguous topics that are emotionally charged for the interviewee. IPA is, generally speaking, inductive in nature[34] and is most commonly used for small sample sizes. The IPA approach is still only sporadically applied within terrorism studies. Yet, we have in recent years seen some interesting research utilizing it.

IPA in Research

*In their **analysis of disengagement from paramilitary loyalism**, Ferguson, Burgess, and Hollywood used IPA in their analysis of eleven biographical-narrative interviews.[35] The analysis of these interviews with former paramilitaries through IPA allowed for them to identify the "complex interplay of external and internal factors involved in assisting or hindering disengagement from armed paramilitary groups," alongside their commitment to building a peaceful future for Northern Ireland.[36] By using IPA the researchers were able to provide a comprehensive perspective of their participants' interpretations of disengagement. However, they do emphasize that the application of IPA can only provide the researchers and readers with "a partial analytical account rather than a fully definitive account,"[37] thus not allowing for the results to be applicable to a broader generalized population.*

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32   Jonathan A., Smith, Maria Jarman, and Mike Osborn, "Doing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods*, eds. Michael Murray and Kerry Chamberlain (UK: SAGE, 1999), 218-40. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446217870.n14.

33   Jonathan A. Smith, *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (UK: SAGE, 2003).

34   Katie Reid, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, "Exploring Lived Experience," *The Psychologist* 18, no. 1 (2005): 20-23.

35   Neil Ferguson, Mark Burgess, and Ian Hollywood, "Leaving Violence Behind: Disengaging from Politically Motivated Violence in Northern Ireland," *Political Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2015): 199-214. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12103.

36   Ibid, 211.

37   Ibid, 212.

Grounded theory

The purpose of grounded theory is to construct a theory "grounded" in data. The data must be systematically collected and analyzed to be deemed appropriate for use. By definition grounded theory is inductive in nature, as it is seeking to develop a theory rather than test one. Through the review of the data, which can include more than just the interview data, repeated concepts are identified and thus coded. During the analytical process of this approach the initial codes evolve and are grouped into broader concepts and categories as more data is collected, reviewed, and re-reviewed. These emerging categories then become the foundation for the new theory.[38] To date grounded theory has not been applied extensively within terrorism studies.

> ### *Grounded Theory in Research*
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> *In her 2019 article, Dornschneider demonstrates the applicability of grounded theory to the **analysis of ethnographic interview transcripts**. In the analysis of interviews with 93 participants and non-participants in the Arab Spring in Morocco and Egypt, both open and axial coding was applied. The emerging theory was able to differentiate between participants and non-participants. The analysis showed the considerations of violent and non-violent activists focused on state violence and rational choice calculations. By contrast, non-violent activists considered a range of other factors including, but not excluded to, self-sacrifice and state negligence. In her concluding remarks Dornschneider emphasizes that the application of methods and analytical techniques such as grounded theory increases the analytical rigor of research, concurrently accentuating the transparency of our analysis.[39]*

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38   Kathy Charmaz and Linda Liska Belgrave, "Grounded Theory," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosg070.pub2.

39   Stephanie Dornschneider, "Analyzing Ethnographic Interviews: Three Studies on Terrorism and Nonviolent Resistance," *International Political Science Review*, November 21, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0192512119884091.

Triangulation: Meanings, processes, and purposes

One of the great benefits of analyzing a public-facing topic like terrorism is that it provides us with the opportunity to triangulate data sources. Triangulation requires clarity on the purpose of the process. Triangulation is a term so common now in social science that its meaning and value can be misconstrued as universally accepted. Yet, a review of the literature demonstrates at least four distinct meanings, processes, and purposes:[40]

1. **Triangulation as validity checking:** by analyzing data from different sources that independently apply distinctive pressure on validity, it is possible to reduce the possibility of false conclusions.

2. **Indefinite triangulation:** collecting a series of accounts on the same event from multiple people. Indefinite triangulation can demonstrate that these accounts were developed from different perspectives, be they physical, temporal, or biographical.[41]

3. **Triangulation as seeking complementary information:** utilizing different methods to analyze a specific topic. These different methods can provide a different understanding of the topic under investigation and thus a provide a fuller understanding.

4. **Triangulation as epistemological dialogue or juxtaposition:** using and comparing different methods with fundamentally different perspectives on how the social world is constructed does not result in either validation or a more complete understanding. Instead, it can illustrate contrasting interpretations of the social world.[42]

Within terrorism research, and social science research in general,[43] the most common contemporary manifestation of triangulation is to seek complementary information. Nevertheless, there remains space for triangulation as a form of validity checking. We oftentimes have access to a wide variety of data-sources outside of our primary source interviews. This

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40   Manfred Max Bergman, "Troubles with Triangulation," in *Advances in Mixed Methods Research*, ed. Manfred Max Bergman (London: Sage, 2008). https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857024329.

41   See: A. V. Cicourel, K. H. Jennings, S. H. Jennings, K. C. W. Leiter, R. MacKay, H. Mehan, and D. H. Roth, *Language Use and School Performance*. New York, NY: Academic Press, 1974.

42   Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (UK: Sage, 2018).

43   Bergman, "Troubles with Triangulation".

can be from the breadth of the interview data, event-related data, organizational publications, manifestos, social media activity, organizational financial information, survey data, or a variety of other data sources. However, this validity checking style of triangulation assumes that there is a single reality which can be identified and observed by using different sources and methods.[44]

If and when we are to use triangulation as a form of validity checking, we must again return to our original research question(s) and analytical techniques. Do they lend themselves to there being an objective truth as the answer(s)? Or would it be more accurate for there to be varying interpretations and influences? How we develop our research questions and view the knowledge to be gained from the data will in turn define how we approach and conceive the triangulation process. Therefore, when triangulating our data, methods, and/or sources we must always ask: to what end are we doing this? This reflection will provide a clearer understanding for the researcher, reader, and reviewer, as to the integrity and purpose of the overall methodological and analytical approaches.

Ethics: Analytical integrity and researcher wellbeing

When we discuss research ethics, we are more often than not referring to the data collection stage of research, and understandably so. We need to be constantly aware of the researchers' obligation to do no undue[45]harm to the participants, the researchers, or any other individuals either directly or indirectly linked to the research. This obligation does not end once the final interview or focus group has been completed. It continues into the analytical and dissemination stages of the research.

Ethics and analytical integrity

Throughout this article there has been a call for analytical integrity—integrity, about what our data and analysis can and, at times more importantly, cannot tell us. This call for integ-

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44   Ibid.

45   The qualifier of "undue" is included purposely. It is important to acknowledge that carrying out an interview on the subject of terrorism, whether as the interviewer or the interviewee, can be a distressing experience. It would therefore be too restrictive to have the assumption that no harm or distress will be caused through this form of research. However, the researcher has the ethical obligation to all involved that the distress caused is not excessive, and if it is, that appropriate support structures are in place.

rity has been presented as a means by which this field can become more academically credible. But it is more than that. It is also the ethical obligation of the researcher(s). Research in the area of terrorism studies has the potential of influencing domestic and foreign policies. We therefore have an ethical obligation not to over-interpret any findings and to stay true to the original data and within the limits of the analytical techniques. This necessitates an in-depth understanding of both the data and the analytical approach employed.

Ethics and researcher wellbeing

Alongside this has to be a consideration for the well-being of the researcher. The topics covered in interviews in terrorism studies can be extremely upsetting and distressing. It is important to acknowledge the effect it can have on the researchers as well as the participants. This effect is most obvious at the point of carrying out the interview. However, these interviews can also be very distressing at the point of analysis. It is important for the researchers to consider how best to manage this, even developing a protocol to address these potential harms. The researcher has an ethical obligation to have these protocols in place for all of the members of their research team, especially for the most junior members of the team.

For the most harrowing interviews I have completed, I always consciously have a break, of even a few weeks, in between completing the interview and the beginning of transcription and analysis. The purpose for this is to provide myself with the opportunity to distance myself from the immediate emotional response to the original interview. This allows for greater analytical objectivity during the analysis. Ethics and the well-being of the researcher and participants has to be to central to each stage of the research from planning to data collection, from analysis to dissemination.

Conclusion

As a community of researchers, we have to constantly be considering how we can improve the quality, transparency, and replicability of our research. We have seen great progress made in recent years in relation to primary-source research,[46] including the gradual increase

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46   Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007–2016."

in first-hand interviews. However, this increase in primary source interviews has not been accompanied with a transparency in analytical approaches.[47] If we are to develop as a field of study, we need to be producing research that is transparent in methodological and analytical approaches. Without analytical transparency and rigor, we leave ourselves open to criticism and the value of our research and its findings being questioned both within and outside of academia. Transparency of approach provides us with the opportunity to show off all the great work we have done. It should therefore not be shied away from; it should be embraced as it can result in the greater respect for our work.

This chapter has attempted to present the reader with a variety of considerations when approaching interview analysis. Primary source interviews are predominantly analyzed via qualitative approaches. However, that should not be seen as synonymous with minimizing analytical rigor as compared to quantitative analysis. The form that this rigor takes is different when comparing the two families of approaches. But this difference should not be considered as a value judgement. On the contrary, rigorous qualitative analysis is just as important and at times more analytically demanding than the equivalent quantitative analysis. The depth of understanding to be gained from well-designed qualitative analysis can provide us with invaluable insight into terrorist experiences and decision making. We must always strive to approach both our methodology and analysis in ethical ways. Not only does this help protect the researcher and participant(s) from any undue harm, it also allows us to have greater confidence in the analytical interpretation of the data.

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47   Harris, "Reporting Practices."

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Experimentation and Quasi-Experimentation in CVE
Directions of Future Inquiry
Kurt Braddock

Experiments and quasi-experiments have been staples of the social sciences for decades. Researchers in dozens of disciplines leverage these methodological approaches to empirical inquiry to investigate research questions of all types. Although many terrorism researchers are from disciplines that have used experimental approaches in the past, these approaches have only rarely been used to study terrorism-related phenomena. This is unfortunate, given the wide array of issues that would benefit from observation via an experimental and/or quasi-experimental lens. This chapter builds on previous calls for the use of experimentation in terrorism studies by identifying two topics for which experimentation and/or quasi-experimentation would serve well: 1) analysis of terrorist material and 2) evaluation of countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. In addition, the chapter discusses the optimal methodological approaches for studying these topics and how those approaches might manifest in practice. This section will highlight challenges that researchers and practitioners may encounter in implementing their own experimental approaches and ways to overcome them.

Experimentation and quasi-experimentation in CVE

In 2018, the British Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) —part of the Home Office—evaluated 33 deradicalization programs in the United Kingdom (UK).[1] These programs—most of which fell under the auspices of the UK's oft-criticized Prevent initiative—had previously been reported as having success rates of 90% or higher, though these claims of success came from the programs themselves. The BIT's findings were not nearly as optimistic. The evaluation found that of the 33 programs intended to uncouple participants from their radical beliefs and attitudes, 31 had no effect, or worse, were counterproductive. Even the two programs that the BIT found to be potentially useful did not definitively yield the intended effects. Simon Ruda, director of home affairs and international programs with the Behavioural Insights Team, said some ideas "sounded good" but only "tended to work by chance—there was no grounding in psychological research that could potentially lead to impactful projects."[2] Stated plainly, there was no empirical evidence to suggest that any of the Prevent-related de-radicalization programs—even the ones that were evaluated favorably—produced their intended effects.

Failures among programs intended to challenge terrorist ideologies are attributed to several reasons. For one, and related to the BIT's findings, programs largely fail to achieve their intended outcomes because their practices are not empirically tested and, therefore, are not founded on any kind of evidence base.

Too often, intervention programs like those described above do not employ practices that are scientifically proven to be effective. In terrorism studies, where a failure to implement effective practices can cost time, money, and potentially lives, it is critical to ensure that all efforts are demonstrably useful. To this end, it can be beneficial to use experimental and quasi-experimental methods to test terrorism prevention practices.

In this vein, this chapter offers a brief primer on experimental and quasi-experimental methods in the study of terrorism and related issues. Specifically, the chapter suggests

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1   Fiona Hamilton, "Most Programmes to Stop Radicalisation are Failing," *The Times*, last modified June 6, 2018, accessed September 2, 2019. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/most-programmes-to-stop-radicalisation-are-failing-0bwh9pbtd.

2   Ibid.

some areas of empirical research within terrorism studies that may benefit from the application of these methods and describes some challenges that researchers may encounter when pursuing similar lines of research. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of some of the ethical considerations involved in the use of experimental and quasi-experimental methods. First, however, it is necessary to understand the nature of experimental and quasi-experimental methods and the distinctions between them. The next section provides a brief summary of these methods before turning to their application to the study of terrorism and political violence.

A brief introduction to experimental and quasi-experimental methods

Both experimental and quasi-experimental methods help demonstrate whether some treatment induces a change in a group of individuals subjected to it. This treatment can take many forms, ranging from carefully designed interventions implemented in a laboratory setting to real-world events that participants encounter in their everyday lives. Although both experimental and quasi-experimental methods share similar goals, their implementation is substantially different. Most notably, experimental and quasi-experimental designs differ based on whether the researcher is able to randomly assign research participants into the necessary different conditions for the sake of comparison.

If the researcher has the means and resources to assign participants to different conditions at random (commonly referred to as random assignment), the study is a true experiment. As an example, consider a case in which a researcher wants to examine whether exposure to white nationalist propaganda affects audience beliefs and attitudes about African Americans. Suppose the researcher has access to 500 individuals that she or he can use to test this possibility. For a true experiment, the researcher would have the means to randomly assign these 500 individuals into two conditions: a treatment group exposed to white nationalist propaganda treatment and a control group not exposed to such propaganda. The researcher would then compare the beliefs and attitudes of the two groups following the respective administration of the treatment and control. If the researcher is able to fulfill all of these conditions, the study is considered a true experiment.

True experimentation hinges on the assumption that assigning participants to conditions randomly controls for confounding variables (e.g., personality traits, demographic variables, psychological characteristics, previous exposure to treatment materials) that might also or otherwise affect the measured outcomes. Random assignment into study conditions ensures that any of these confounding variables are evenly distributed across all study conditions, thereby controlling their potential effects on outcome measures.

In some cases, however, random assignment to study conditions is not possible. This is particularly true within terrorism studies, where a significant amount of research is designed to examine the effects of certain stimuli in real-world contexts, away from controllable laboratory settings. In these cases, quasi-experimentation can be a valuable method for answering research questions. Like true experimentation, quasi-experimentation is designed to provide the researcher with data to compare the effect of some treatment on a group of research participants to a controlled baseline consisting of individuals who have not received the treatment in question. Unlike true experimentation, however, participants are not assigned to study conditions at random. Therefore, a researcher cannot assume the different groups to be equivalent, given that potential factors can influence participants' presence in one group (treatment) or the other (control) that cannot necessarily be accounted for.

For example, assume that a researcher wishes to evaluate the influence of an anti-radicalization message televised in a Middle Eastern country. To do so, the researcher will need to ask whether participants have seen the anti-radicalization message in question. Those that have seen it will constitute the treatment group; those that have not will comprise the control group. Although this practice will provide the researcher with two distinct groups that differ in having seen the anti-radicalization messaging, other factors may have contributed to individuals' exposure to the treatment (or not) that can skew their responses.

For instance, individuals in the treatment group may be of a higher socioeconomic status than those in the control group, given that the latter may lack the resources to possess a television. Perhaps individuals who reported having seen the anti-radicalization messaging simply remember that they were exposed to it because of some familiarity with the message source. There are several potential outside influences that might cause individuals to be drawn to a treatment or control group in a quasi-experiment. It is critical to recognize

that these influences cannot be controlled for to the same degree that they could be in a true experiment.

However, this is not to suggest that quasi-experiments are somehow inferior to true experiments. Both true and quasi-experiments are useful to the extent they are suited to the study in which they are implemented and optimize the resources available to the researcher. In this regard, it is important to note that both design types are comprised of more refined research designs that are based on how the experimental manipulation (treatment) is administered and the point at which the researcher can measure salient outcomes in the experimental process. Table 1 includes examples of some true experimental and quasi-experimental research designs.

Table 1: Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Research Design Examples

True Experimental Design Examples	• Pre-test/post-test design (without a control group) • Pre-test/post-test design (with a control group) • Post-test only design (with control group) • Solomon Four-Group Design
Quasi- Experimental Design Examples	• Non-equivalent groups design • Proxy pre-test design • Switching-replications design • Regression point-displacement design

To explore the utility of some of these research designs in terrorism studies, the following section will discuss potential areas of inquiry that could benefit from the use of experimental or quasi-experimental methods. In the course of discussions, the section also describes the organization and implementation of some of these design types in greater detail, as well as some challenges a researcher may encounter in operationalizing them. Note, how-

ever, that a comprehensive discussion of all experimental and quasi-experimental designs is beyond the scope of this chapter. The interested reader can find detailed descriptions and illustrative examples of all the aforementioned experimental and quasi-experimental designs in a January 2019 research brief completed for the International Centre for Counterterrorism at the Hague.[3]

Experimentation and quasi-experimentation in terrorism studies

Opportunities and challenges

For several years, researchers have bemoaned a lack of primary data available to answer salient questions about terrorism and political violence. Although the use of primary data sources has become more prevalent within terrorism studies in recent years, a significant number of studies still rely on secondary data sources. Unfortunately, many studies also continue to rely on speculation.

To explore the extent of this problem, Bart Schuurman evaluated the methodological approaches employed in studies appearing in nine prestigious peer-reviewed journals that focus on terrorism and political violence between 2007 and 2016.[4] Schuurman demonstrated that the use of primary data sources grew more popular in that time frame; by 2016, nearly 60% of all studies appearing in the nine journals featured primary data, representing an increase of more than 10% from a decade prior. However, only 22% of the studies based on primary data between 2007 and 2016 featured any statistical analyses of the data. Of these statistical studies, more than two-thirds used statistics simply to describe the prevalence of a phenomenon. They did not feature inferential statistical analysis, which allows for the extrapolation of research findings to the larger populations from which samples are drawn. All told, Schuurman showed that only about 7% of all papers published in the nine leading terrorism journals featured the use of methods that produced inferential

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3   Kurt Braddock, *A Brief Primer on Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Methods in the Study of Terrorism*, ICCT Policy Brief (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague, January 2019). Available from https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICCT-Braddock-Brief-Primer-on-Experimental-Methods-Study-of-Terrorism-January2019.pdf.

4   Bart Schuurman, "Research on Terrorism, 2007-2016: A Review of Data, Methods, and Authorship," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018).

statistical analyses. These results clearly suggest there is ample room for the use of methods that produce data for inferential analyses.

As I have argued elsewhere, experimental and quasi-experimental methods can produce data on which inferential statistical analysis can be applied.[5] However, the question remains as to what areas of empirical inquiry would be best served by these methodological approaches and, relatedly, what sorts of challenges researchers will face in exploring those areas. This section describes two areas of terrorism research that could benefit from experimental or quasi-experimental methods. First, it explores the potential use of experimental methods to empirically investigate the effects of terrorist-produced material. Second, it raises the possibility of using quasi-experiments to evaluate various interventions intended to challenge terrorist ideologies. The section also highlights specific study designs that can be employed to optimally address relevant research questions and discusses some of my own experiences overcoming practical and methodological challenges in studying each.

Using experiments to evaluate the effects of exposure to terrorist material

Within the field, there is a significant body of research on terrorist propaganda. Most of this work takes the form of content analyses intended to explain the inherent themes of different terrorist groups' stated ideologies,[6] deduce terrorists' intentions from their language style,[7] or explore how terrorist propaganda is used to achieve strategic goals.[8] Other areas of research include describing how terrorist propaganda is policed on the internet,[9] identifying extremist networks based on propaganda output,[10] predicting terrorist activity

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5   Braddock, *A Brief Primer on Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Methods in the Study of Terrorism.*

6   E.g., James P. Farwell, "The Media Strategy of ISIS," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 56, no. 6 (2014): 49–55.

7   E.g., Max Abrahms, Nicholas Beauchamp, and Joseph Mroszczyk, "What Terrorist Leaders Want: A Content Analysis of Terrorist Propaganda Videos," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 11 (2017): 899–916.

8   E.g., Samantha Mahood and Halim Rane, "Islamist Narratives in ISIS Recruitment Propaganda," *The Journal of International Communication* 23, no. 1 (2017): 15–35.

9   E.g., Javier Argomaniz, "European Union Responses to Terrorist Use of the Internet," *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no. 2 (2015): 250–68; Mehmet Nespi Ogun, "Terrorist Use of the Internet: Possible Suggestions to Prevent the Usage for Terrorist Purposes," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 7, no. 2 (2012): 203–17.

10   E.g., Jytte Klausen, Elaine Tschaen Barbieri, Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, and Aaron Y. Zelin, "The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun's Propaganda Campaign," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 1 (2012). ; Akemi Takeoka Chatfield, Christopher G. Reddick, and Uuf Brajawidagda, "Tweeting Propaganda, Radicalization and Recruitment: Islamic State Supporters' Multi-Sided Twitter Networks,"

from a group's propaganda,[11] and using different rhetorical analysis tools to gain a deeper understanding of terrorist language.[12]

Each of these lines of research contributes to our knowledge about terrorist propaganda and its effect on audiences, governments, and rival groups. However, there has been little to no empirical work to evaluate the psychological effects of terrorist propaganda at the individual level. In other words, terrorism researchers have yet to employ methods that empirically demonstrate whether and how terrorist propaganda affects its audiences psychologically. This critical avenue of research can be effectively pursued with true experimentation.

When researchers have access to research participants with which they can test the efficacy of terrorist messaging, they can use several true experimental designs. First, a standard pre-test/post-test design with no set control group can provide some information about the effects of terrorist stimuli. In this research design, there is only a single condition into which participants are allotted. Though this seems to be contradictory to the spirit of experimentation—comparing a treatment group's responses to a control group's responses—a simple pre-test/post-test design has a no-treatment control built into it. In a pre-test/post-test study evaluating the effects of terrorist material, the researcher would gauge participants' responses on outcome measures at two points in time: before and after exposing participants to the material. This research design treats the entire sample as both the control group (i.e. responses provided before stimulus exposure) and the treatment group (i.e. responses provided following the stimulus exposure). The researcher would then compare the post-exposure responses to the pre-exposure responses to approximate the effect of the treatment.

A similar design—a pre-test/post-test design with a control group—is structured in a similar fashion but includes a second condition in which participants are not exposed to terrorist material. Both the treatment and control groups would provide responses to outcome measures before the former is exposed to terrorist material. Following the exposure, both

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in J. Zhang and Y. Kim, eds., *Proceedings of the 16 Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research: Digital Government and Wicked Problems: Climate Change, Urbanization, and Inequality* (New York: ACM, 2015): 239–49.

11   Stephen G. Walker, "Anticipating Attacks from the Operational Codes of Terrorist Groups," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 4, no. 2 (2011): 135–43.

12   James W. Pennebaker, "Using Computer Analyses to Identify Language Style and Aggressive Intent: The Secret Life of Function Words," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 4, no. 2 (2011): 92–102.

groups are again measured on salient outcome variables. By structuring the experiment this way, a researcher can compare the treatment group's post-test scores to two other values: the treatment group's pre-test scores (as in the standard pre-test/post-test design) or the control group's post-test scores. Although this may seem redundant, there are benefits to having both comparisons. If the researcher is concerned that participants had been sensitized to the purpose of the study and provided responses to outcome measures based on what they believed were the "right" answers, they can compare the post-test scores of the two groups to investigate the possibility. Alternatively, if the researcher is concerned that assignment into the two conditions was not random (and the groups are therefore not equivalent), they can revert to comparing the treatment group's post-test scores to its pre-test scores.

When a researcher is concerned about the respondent sensitization to the purpose of a study resulting from participants' exposure to a pre-test, a post-test only design can be useful. In this kind of experiment, the researcher would randomly assign participants into two conditions, one in which participants are exposed to terrorist material and one in which they are not. After exposing the treatment group to the terrorist material, both groups provide responses to outcome measures. This allows the researcher to evaluate the psychological effects of the terrorist material on the treatment group relative to the responses of the control group, who serve as the baseline for measurement.

The creation and implementation of these design types is relatively straightforward. However, they, and other true experimental designs intended to measure the effects of terrorist material, share a key challenge. To effectively evaluate the impact of terrorist material on vulnerable audiences using true experimental methods, researchers must expose audiences to that material in an ethical way that minimizes the likelihood of the propaganda causing psychological harm to participants and its potential contribution to radicalization processes.

Research suggests that simple exposure to terrorist material is likely not sufficient in itself to motivate an individual to seek out opportunities to engage in political violence.[13] How-

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13   For example, research on ISIS propaganda has shown that its efficacy is driven not exclusively by the content in the messages, but by how well the group targets recruits who are prone to those messages. That is, the effectiveness of ISIS propaganda hinges on the interaction

ever, the potential for such material to contribute to radicalization processes[14] often leads to concern—both on the part of the researcher and the Institutional Review Boards that govern their research—that unmitigated presentation of terrorist propaganda to participants can lead those participants to seek out the groups mentioned in the material. Luckily, there are multiple strategies that can help reduce the likelihood of this occurrence. In coordination with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Penn State University, I have employed three such strategies, each designed to make it difficult, if not impossible, for a research participant to pursue opportunities to support the group that produced the material used in treatment conditions.

The first and simplest solution to avoiding this problem involves masking the name of the terrorist group if it appears in the stimulus material. By hiding the group's name outright, it removes the possibility that research participants can seek out information about that group following their participation in the study. For instance, in one study I evaluated the persuasive efficacy of propaganda produced by the National Alliance, a racist, white-nationalist group. I retained the ideological statements included in the group's messages but removed any information from the stimulus that might allow participants to seek further information about the group itself. In this way, participants were exposed to National Alliance propaganda, but could not identify the National Alliance as the source.

A similar solution involves using stimulus material from terrorist groups that no longer exist. Using this strategy, researchers can reveal the name of the group if it suits the study's needs without risking participants' joining that group because of the persuasive strength of their propaganda. In the same study as referenced above, another treatment condition involved exposing participants to propaganda from the Weather Underground Organization (WUO). Even with the knowledge that the propaganda came from the Weather Underground, research participants could not seek out members of the group; it disbanded in 1977.

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between message content and how well that content addresses the needs (e.g., need for identity) of specific audience members. See, for instance, Dylan Gerstel, "ISIS and Innovative Propaganda: Confronting Extremism in the Digital Age," *Swarthmore International Relations Journal* 1 (2016): 1–9.

14   Kurt Braddock, "The Utility of Narratives for Promoting Radicalization: The Case of the Animal Liberation Front," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 8 (2015): 38–59.

Although this strategy circumvents the possibility that message recipients would seek out the group that produced the material to which they were exposed, researchers may be concerned that participants could seek out contemporary groups that espouse similar ideologies, engage in a lone-actor attack on behalf of the ideology they were exposed to, or seek to form their own extremist group. Though this is a nonzero risk, there are some psychological fail-safes to prevent participants from doing so. Most notably, the effort required for participants to apply their experience with the extremist propaganda to a search for other, similar groups (or the formation of their own) is likely great enough to prevent them from doing so. Of course, close consultation with the researcher's IRB is critical. The IRB is uniquely suited to gauging the degree to which the risk of these negative outcomes outweighs the benefits of the results produced by the research in question.

Finally, should the researcher feel it necessary to attribute statements or actions to a specific terrorist entity, it may be necessary to name one in the experiment's stimulus materials. In this case, the researcher can create a terrorist group attributed to the treatment content. Using this strategy, the researcher makes up a name for a fictitious group, replacing the name of the real group in the treatment with that of the fake one. By using this strategy, the researcher provides participants with no outlet to pursue following their exposure to the propaganda—the group does not exist.

To illustrate, in a study I performed evaluating the persuasiveness of terrorist propaganda to audiences of different types, I attributed a narrative produced by Hamas to a group I called the "Cerbenia Freedom Alliance." I chose this fictitious name after running a pilot test of several potential names that I wanted participants to find geographically and culturally ambiguous. I did not want participants to attribute the group's name to any specific culture, ethnicity, or ideology, so I presented pilot participants with 10 candidate names and asked them to report their assumptions about (a) the group's geographic location, (b) the ethnicity of the group's members, and (c) other cultural factors. Of the 10 names, the "Cerbenia Freedom Alliance" option produced the greatest variation across the three response sets—making it the most ambiguous.

These three strategies—used together or independently—can help mitigate the possibility of terrorist stimulus material's persuasive appeal leading to action on the part of research

participants. That said, it is critical to recognize that exposing research subjects to inherently persuasive ideological material (which terrorist propaganda is designed to be) can trigger interest in the ideology that underpins that material, regardless of the researcher's efforts to prevent it. The three strategies outlined above may protect against participants seeking out opportunities to support the groups that produced the treatment material. However, the ideas that serve as the basis for that material may also be fundamental to other groups' ideologies—groups that participants could seek out (or support through the performance of a lone-actor attack) if they are inspired by the treatment to which they were exposed.

Given this risk, it is critical that any researchers who expose participants to terrorist material also engage in a comprehensive debriefing process designed to counteract the persuasive appeal of that material. It is strongly recommended that the researcher closely coordinate with their IRB to produce an effective debriefing procedure. Typically, a debrief will overtly reveal the purpose of the study to participants, thereby breaking the illusion of the cover story to which participants were exposed. Following this revelation, the debrief should pro-vide the participants with information that allows them to contact the researcher or the institution's Office of Research Protections (ORP) in the event they feel as though they have been harmed in any way by virtue of their participation.

In CVE studies, it would benefit researchers to explicitly warn participants that they may experience psychological changes in response to their participation, and if that occurs, they should contact the researcher or the ORP immediately. This debrief can be a deciding fac-tor in whether the IRB decides that the study's benefits outweigh its potential risks. More importantly, however, it is part of a system of tools intended to ensure that a CVE study is performed as safely and ethically as possible. For more information on this topic, see the section titled "A Note on the Ethics of Experimentation and Quasi-Experimentation in CVE" below.

Using quasi-experiments to evaluate counter-radicalization and de-radicalization interventions

As indicated above, performance of true experiments requires the researcher to guarantee that participants can be randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions to account

for variation in factors that could affect study outcomes. By randomly assigning partici-pants to conditions, a researcher can be (reasonably) sure that these confounding variables are evenly and normally distributed within all study conditions, thereby ensuring that their respective influences on outcome variables are controlled.

Unfortunately, the analysis of phenomenon in terrorism studies generally (and CVE specifi-cally) often precludes the kind of control that permits true experimentation. Most research on CVE is performed in real-world contexts on real-world subjects who are not amenable to random assignment into groups. When a researcher is unable to randomly assign partici-pants to conditions, quasi-experimental methods can be useful.

Quasi-experimental methods typically involve choosing a treatment group and comparing it to a control group that is as closely matched to the treatment group as possible. Despite matching the treatment group to the control group in terms of salient characteristics (e.g., demographic variables), the groups cannot be assumed to be equivalent because they were not randomly assigned to their respective conditions. To illustrate, let us consider a few contexts in which quasi-experimentation might be useful.

In contrast to the studies described in the previous section, where the primary focus was to experimentally evaluate the potential negative effects associated with exposure to terrorist material, some researchers may be interested in assessing the potential positive effects associated with interventions designed to challenge terrorist ideologies. The last decade witnessed a substantial increase in research on programs to prevent the adoption of radical beliefs and/or attitudes or engagement in violent activity (often referred to as counter-rad-icalization) or persuade participants to abandon their commitment to terrorist ideologies (often referred to as deradicalization).

Existing counter-radicalization research has focused heavily on critiquing government poli-cies aimed at preventing the assimilation of terrorist ideologies (e.g. the UK's Prevent initia-

tive)[15] and describing budding counter-radicalization campaigns.[16] Emergent private organizations such as Moonshot CVE[17] and the Stabilisation Network[18] have also become active in the realm of countering violent extremism, developing and implementing their own programming to challenge terrorist messaging.

In the case of deradicalization, researchers have expended a substantial amount of effort to evaluate government-run programs intended to rehabilitate those who have been arrested for terrorism-related offenses. Research on programs in the Middle East,[19] Europe,[20] Southeast Asia and the South Pacific,[21] among other regions, has grown increasingly prevalent since the first initiatives emerged in the mid-2000s. Although most of the research on deradicalization describes extant programs, some researchers also sought to inform future efforts.[22]

Notably absent from the research on counter-radicalization and deradicalization efforts are empirical studies on the psychological effects of the practices that comprise these programs. This is troubling, given that the relative success of counter-radicalization efforts and deradicalization programs hinge on the psychological effects they exert on their participants. Researchers might effectively fill this research gap using quasi-experimentation to

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15   E.g., Christopher Baker-Beall, Charlotte Heath-Kelly and Lee Jarvis, eds., *Counter-Radicalisation: Critical Perspectives* (London, UK: Routledge, 2015); Anthony Richards, "The Problem with 'Radicalization': The Remit of 'Prevent' and the Need to Refocus on Terrorism in the UK," *International Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2011): 143–52.

16   See, for example, Abdul Basit, "Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalization and De-Radicalization Initiatives," *IPRI Journal* 15, no. 2 (2015): 44–68; Tom Pettinger, "De-Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization: Valuable Tools Combating Violent Extremism, or Harmful Methods of Subjugation," *Journal for Deradicalization* 12 (2017); Omar Ashour, "Online De-Radicalization? Countering Violent Extremist Narratives: Message, Messenger and Media Strategy," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4, no. 6 (2010): 15–19.

17   http://moonshotcve.com/

18   https://www.stabilisation.org/

19   John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 267–91; William Sheridan Combes, "Assessing Two Countering Violent Extremism Programs: Saudi Arabia's PRAC and the United Kingdom's Prevent Strategy," *Small Wars Journal* (2013). Available from https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/assessing-two-countering-violent-extremism-programs-saudi-arabia's-prac-and-the-united-king; Marisa L. Porges, "Deradicalisation, the Yemeni Way," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 52, no. 2 (2010): 27–33.

20   E.g., Daniel Koehler, "Family Counselling, De-radicalization, and Counter-Terrorism: The Danish and German Programs in Context," in Sara Zeiger and Anne Aly, eds., *Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an Evidence-Base for Policy and Practice* (Perth, Western Australia: Hedayah and Curtin University, 2015): 129–36; Jean-Luc Marret, *Prison De-radicalization and Disengagement: The French Case,* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, ICSR Project on Deradicalization in Jail, 2009).

21   E.g., Milda Istiqomah, "De-Radicalization program in Indonesian Prisons: Reformation on the Correctional Institution," paper presented at the 1st Australian Counter Terrorism Conference, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia, December 5-7, 2011; Clarke R. Jones and Resurrecion S. Morales, "Integration versus Segregation: A Preliminary Examination of Philippine Correctional Facilities for De-Radicalization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 3 (2012): 211–28.

22   E.g., Stefanie Mitchell, "Deradicalization: Using Triggers for the Development of a US Program," *Journal for Deradicalization* 9 (2017): 101–25; Jessica Stern, "Mind over Martyr: How to Deradicalize Islamist Extremists," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (2010): 95–108; John Horgan and Mary Beth Altier, "The Future of Terrorist De-Radicalization Programs," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 13, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2012): 83–90.

determine whether and how deradicalization and/or counter-radicalization efforts achieve their intended outcomes.

In choosing and implementing a quasi-experimental study design to gauge program effectiveness, the researcher must fulfill their responsibility to not only limit potential psychological harm to program participants, but also ensure that any psychological benefits derived from intervention materials are afforded to all participants involved in the study. This can prove difficult if a researcher wishes to test the efficacy of an intervention against a control group that does not receive that intervention. Luckily, there is a study design that ensures the validity of the study's findings, exposes all research participants to stimulus material that could produce positive psychological outcomes, and allows for the longitudinal evaluation of an intervention treatment's efficacy. This study design, which has long-been used in medical and educational studies where provision of intervention benefits to all participants is critical, is called the switching-replications design. [23]

In a study featuring a non-equivalent switching-replications design (i.e. participants are not randomly assigned to conditions), each condition serves as both treatment and control. To illustrate, let us assume that we want to evaluate the degree to which a psychological counseling program reduces beliefs and/or attitudes consistent with a terrorist ideology. In a two-phase switching-replications quasi-experiment, the researcher would measure all participants' beliefs and attitudes prior to exposing half of them (Group A) to the counseling intervention. Following this, the researcher would again measure all participants' beliefs and attitudes to compare Group A's responses to those who did not receive counseling in the first phase (Group B). Then, participants in Group B would receive the counseling intervention and participants in Group A would not. The researcher would again measure all participants' beliefs and attitudes and compare Group B's responses (i.e. the treatment group in Phase 2) to Group A's (i.e. the control group in Phase 2).

By structuring the study in this fashion, the researcher can (a) guarantee that all participants would receive the benefits associated with the psychological counseling intervention, (b) measure the effect of the counseling intervention on the participant groups, and (c)

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23   E.g., Theodoros Pesiridis, Panayota Sourtzi, Petros Galanis, and Athena Kalokairinou, "Development, Implementation and Evaluation of a Disaster Training Programme for Nurses: A Switching Replications Randomized Controlled Trial," *Nurse Education in Practice* 15, no. 1 (2015): 63–67.

determine whether the intervention's effects persisted over time. The switching-replication quasi-experimental design is particularly useful for the evaluation of extant counter-radicalization practices and deradicalization programs, given the demand for empirical data supporting (or refuting) the effectiveness of these programs' practices. Although researchers can use a switching-replications design in a true experiment by isolating and testing the specific activities these programs undertake, coordination with extant programs to quasi-experimentally test their practices as part of their real-world interventions is a rare opportunity to gather primary data from the interventions intended participant targets.

The switching-replication design has several advantages for the study of CVE intervention programs. However, researchers should be aware of potential difficulties associated with implementing this type of a quasi-experiment. As noted above, researchers can gather valuable data from real-world targets of CVE interventions by working closely with governments and NGOs that design and execute counter-radicalization and deradicalization programs. Unfortunately, some entities, particularly governments, are reluctant to allow for empirical investigation into their CVE practices.[24] Without viable connections to individuals in governmental and non-governmental organizations implementing counter-radicalization or deradicalization initiatives, gaining access to targeted participants can be exceedingly difficult.

Finally, the very nature of the switching-replications design requires that the researcher make observations for all treatment and control groups at several points in time. As such, to employ this design either experimentally or quasi-experimentally, researchers will need to ensure they have sufficient time to expose all participants to the intervention in question and take corresponding measurements.

A note on the ethics of experimentation and quasi-experimentation in CVE

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24 In particular, government-regulated de-radicalization programs have been notoriously non-transparent about their practices and the effectiveness of those practices. Most evaluations of the programs' efficacy come from the governments themselves, and are often founded on unclear benchmarks for success, nebulous definitions for "de-radicalization," and unreasonable claims of effectiveness. See John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists?" for a synopsis of these issues.

Unlike research methodologies that have been more prevalent in the study of terrorism and related issues, the use of controlled experimentation and quasi-experimentation requires a careful consideration of several ethical issues that may arise. Although these considerations are important in all research domains, they are doubly critical in terrorism studies where an inattention to certain details can result in dangerous outcomes.

Experimentally testing the efficacy of terrorist propaganda requires exposing participants to some form of it, which can risk inducing belief and attitude changes in participants consistent with the ideologies we mean to challenge. Exposing participants to material (or counter-messaging) that depicts or describes violent scenes or scenarios can impose psychological strain on research participants. Real-world quasi-experimentation with at-risk communities risks criminalizing the individuals that comprise those communities. The ethical researcher must consider these kinds of issues when using experimental methods.

As outlined above, a researcher's first step towards ensuring that a CVE-focused study is performed ethically is to coordinate with his or her IRB University IRBs are trained to evaluate research studies on the basis of the risk posed to participants and the benefits that would result from the study's performance. In this way, IRBs are critical tools for identifying potential risks that the researcher may overlook and ensure that the performance of research does not cause more harm than it solves.

Still, consultation with an IRB and consistency with its guidelines are the bare minimum that researchers should do to guarantee a study's adherence to ethical practices. Although experimental work in CVE is a relatively new prospect, researchers in similar domains (e.g. crime sciences) have used experiments and quasi-experiments to test interventions for years. Terrorism researchers using experimental or quasi-experimental methods would benefit from the experience of scholars from these disciplines. As such, researchers of issues related to CVE may consider involving experts who have dealt with similar ethical issues. Formal research collaborations (including authorships) may not be necessary, but at a minimum, CVE researchers should solicit advice from those with salient experience.

Finally, in addition to relying on external institutions (i.e. IRBs) or individuals (i.e. seasoned researchers) for guidance on how to navigate the waters of performing ethically sound CVE

scholarship, CVE researchers can incorporate checks in their study protocols that further protect against negative outcomes for participants. For instance, for studies that risk participants' adoption to extremist beliefs and attitudes, researchers can engage with research subjects following their participation. The first step in doing so is the aforementioned debrief process, where the researcher not only reveals the purpose of the study, but also provides the participant with contact information in the event they notice changes in their thoughts or behaviors. Depending on the nature of the study, some researchers may go a step further by re-contacting research participants in the future to measure psychological outcomes.

No research study is completely free of risk. However, the risks associated with experimental work in the CVE domain requires meticulous attention to all possible negative outcomes and the development of measures in order to mitigate them. Close coordination with Institutional Review Boards, solicitation of feedback from researchers who have dealt with ethical issues in the past, and the development of measures for gauging respondents' psychological responses to participating in the research represent three ways that this can be achieved.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter sought to introduce researchers of CVE, terrorism, and political violence to experimentation and quasi-experimentation and describe briefly how researchers can employ these methods to answer critical research questions about terrorist messaging and efforts to prevent and counter radicalization. However, the chapter covers only a fraction of the methodological possibilities for researchers who wish to use an experimental or quasi-experimental design to evaluate terrorism-related issues. Interested readers should seek out further literature and guidance on experiments and quasi-experiments to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their designs, benefits, and drawbacks.[25] It is only with a greater understanding of these valuable methodologies that can generate more scientifically-sound data on radicalization, terrorism, and the prevention of both.

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25   See Kurt Braddock, "A Brief Primer on Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Methods in the Study of Terrorism"; William M. K. Trochim, "Design." https://socialresearchmethods.net/kb/design.php; Thomas D. Cook and Donald T. Campbell, Quasi-Experimentation: Design & Analysis for Field Settings (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

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Conducting P/CVE Assessments in Conflict Environments

Key Considerations

Colin Clarke[1]

This chapter provides guidance for those conducting research to assess initiatives aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in conflict environments. This chapter will provide an overview and background of P/CVE assessment and, using the case of Afghanistan as an illustrative example, present some of the key challenges and opportunities inherent in them, particularly those conducted in conflict zones. The chapter then discusses some of the key considerations that those embarking on an assessment should keep in mind when designing and implementing their studies, as well as potential workarounds to some of the more significant issues and recommendations for those conducting assessments or embarking on similar studies.

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Introduction

The whole notion of P/CVE remains somewhat controversial in policy, academic, and government circles. This has especially been the case in the United States (U.S.).[2] Some have even derided P/CVE efforts as a "cottage industry" notable for the "lack of any workable recommendations it produced."[3] Untold sums of money have been poured into these efforts, distributed with little oversight to a range of stakeholders, some of which lack the backgrounds and skills necessary to effectively measure the efforts they purport to work. Few would debate that P/CVE is difficult, especially because this type of programming is often ill-defined and risks overly securitizing the issues and populations it is meant to address.[4] To avoid the misallocation of funds, or worse, interventions that are actually harmful in the environments they are implemented, however, it is essential to carry out P/CVE assessments. This is even more vital in areas that are or have recently experienced active conflict—where the negative ramifications of ill-suited P/CVE programs can be even greater.

Carrying out P/CVE assessments, however, is no simple task, even in the best of circumstances. In areas of heightened risk—including areas experiencing active or recent conflict, violence, tension, and fragility—the challenges facing assessors are even more difficult to mitigate. Using Afghanistan as an illustrative example, this chapter discusses the added importance of P/CVE assessments in high-risk environments and provides an overview of key considerations, challenges and opportunities, and recommendations for those seeking to conduct, use, or learn from them.

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2   James Zogby, "CVE in the US: More Harm Than Good," *Huffington Post*, July 24, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cve-in-the-us-more-harm-t_b_7868180.

3   Kim Ghattas, "Talking Loud and Saying Nothing," *Foreign Policy,* August 4, 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/04/four-problems-with-obama-countering-violent-extremism-cve-isis/.

4   Chris Bosley, *Injecting Humanity: Community-Focused Responses for People Exiting Violent Extremist Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2019), https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/08/injecting-humanity-community-focused-responses-people-exiting-violent.

The assessment imperative: Measuring and evaluating P/CVE efforts

P/CVE assessment—defined here as the measurement and evaluation of efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism—provide necessary information on the overall effectiveness of P/CVE programs and mechanisms.[5] This information is essential in helping scholars, practitioners, and policymakers gain a better understanding of what works and what does not when it comes to efforts to address violent extremism, craft best practices and lessons learned, and identify potential opportunities for more effective policy and programs.

The necessity of conducting rigorous assessments, however, is not without challenges—be they from the donor, analytic, or related to access, safety, data availability (and reliability) and local capacity.[6] In some cases, the donors themselves can be an obstacle, either discounting the importance of assessment or lacking the understanding to appreciate how critical assessment is in the overall design of the program. Unfortunately, for some, doing something is considered good enough, while assessing actual impact is disregarded as too difficult, costly, or inconvenient. When assessment is considered a mere afterthought or ignored entirely, the result is often a research design that mislabels the phenomena it purports to measure, and thus reaches conclusions that are often disputed, disparaged, or worse, blatantly false.

Taking stock of these challenges, while also laying out realistic and pragmatic benchmarks toward progress, are part of a bevy of important considerations to take into consideration when designing the assessment component of a P/CVE program, particularly those involving analysis of human attitudes, behaviors, and relationships. These considerations are even more important in conflict environments,[7] where the challenges can be heightened, as can be the risks associated with bad or counterproductive P/CVE programming. Afghan-

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5   For more on this, see: Todd C. Helmus, et al., *RAND Program Evaluation Toolkit for Countering Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL243.html.

6   Georgia Holmer and Peter Bauman with Kateira Aryaeinejad, *Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programming* (United States Institute of Peace, 2018), 8–10, https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/09/measuring-monitoring-and-evaluating-pcve-programs.

7   See, for example: Luke Kelly, *Lessons Learned from Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) Programmes Amid Ongoing Conflict,* K4D Helpdesk Report 668 (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5db80ed1e5274a4aa423ea2d/668_lessons_from_CVE.pdf.

istan's experience with P/CVE efforts illustrates some of these heighted challenges and the importance of planning strategies to mitigate them when carrying out P/CVE assessments.

Afghanistan and P/CVE assessment

In some ways, Afghanistan is the ideal laboratory for measuring the efficacy of P/CVE programs. A country suffering from more than three decades of continuous civil war and insurgency, Afghanistan had long been plagued by violent extremist conflict. Some of Afghanistan's most salient drivers of violent extremism are thought to be grievances stemming from frustrations over physical insecurity, government corruption, poverty, and growing income inequality.[8] As one of the poorest countries in the world—ravaged by ongoing, decades-long conflict, high levels of unemployment, and scarce socioeconomic opportunity for its overwhelmingly young population[9]—the prospects for future extremism and radicalization in Afghanistan could be immense, and the potential implications dire. Reporting suggests that the Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-KP) has capitalized on some of these dynamics, paying Afghans as much as $500 per month to fight on behalf of the group, an attractive salary for would-be fighters.[10]

P/CVE efforts in Afghanistan

While Afghanistan has a long track record with P/CVE research and programming, it has not always been a successful one. Beginning around 2012, following more than a decade of relentless counterinsurgency operations, both the U.S. and British governments began investing more resources into the emerging concept of P/CVE in Afghanistan. Funding was dedicated toward a range of initiatives, including media messaging, interfaith religious dialogue, and an Afghan-centric P/CVE policy that was supposed to account for local context and culturally-specific indicators that could be tailored to Afghanistan's unique ethnic land-

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8   Marisa L. Porges, "Radicalization Processes in Afghanistan," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 1 (2012), https://ctc.usma.edu/radicalization-processes-in-afghanistan/.

9   Afghanistan's demographic composition is of particular note—more than half of the population (about 55%) is under 25 years old, while three-quarters is under 35. For more, see: MercyCorps, *Does Youth Employment Build Stability? Evidence from an Impact Evaluation of Vocational Training in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: MercyCorps, 2015), https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/MercyCorps_AfghanistanINVEST_ImpactEvaluation_2015.pdf.

10   Dawood Azami, "Why Taliban Special Forces are Fighting the Islamic State," *BBC News*, December 18, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35123748.

scape specifically. While these initiatives sound promising, they have largely been "conducted in a 'siloed' fashion, with donors independently funding initiatives without a coherent approach...what research does exist is often the proprietary information of either NATO or embassies, and is not shared, perhaps ironically, for security purposes."[11]

In late 2015, the Afghan government began its own P/CVE strategy, an initiative undertaken by Afghanistan's Office of the National Security Council (ONSC). Efforts by the ONSC were complemented by assistance offered from a range of other stakeholders, including provincial leaders, an inter-ministerial working group, and members of the Afghan media.[12] P/CVE programs in the country, however, have historically been initiated from the top-down, with consultation from religious leaders, village elders, prominent politicians, and other elites on program design and metrics for success.[13] The primary beneficiaries of and populations affected by these programs, it seems, have no say in their design or implementation. What is more, while the focus of P/CVE programming in the country is nearly always on the violence perpetrated by the Taliban and other violent non-state actors, corruption plays a significant role in Afghans' collective grievances, and is cited by some as their most pressing grievance when compared to others.[14] The Taliban's propaganda and messaging frequently highlight government corruption and use this as a tool to radicalize and recruit new members into its organization.[15]

Top-down and government-led P/CVE strategies, therefore, may not always be the most effective means of addressing violent extremism and could risk furthering already present grievances. This, coupled with the heightened consequences of implementing counterproductive programming in the midst of ongoing conflicts in the country, further underscores the necessity of conducting P/CVE assessments to understand the context and ensure that

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11   Eliza Urwin, "Everyday CVE Indicators: A Case Study from Afghanistan," in *Contemporary P/CVE Research and Practice*, eds. Lilah El Sayed and Jamal Barnes (Hedayah and Edith Cowan University, 2017), 244–60, https://s3-eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/hedayah-wp-offload/hedayah/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/17114200/File-222018131552.pdf.

12   Counter Extremism Project (CEP), *Afghanistan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism* (CEP, 2020), 27, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/country_pdf/AF-04082020.pdf.

13   Eliza Urwin and Belquis Ahmadi, *Measuring Peace and Violent Extremism: Voices from an Afghan Village* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2018), 244, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/pb244-measuring-peace-and-violent-extremism-voices-from-the-afghan-village.pdf.

14   Porges, "Radicalization Processes in Afghanistan."

15   Reza Fazli, Casey Johnson, and Peyton Cooke, *Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2015), https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR379-Understanding-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism-in-Afghanistan.pdf.

P/CVE programs are addressing violent extremism, rather than contributing to it. It also underscores some of the difficulties and potential pressures facing such assessments.

Challenges to P/CVE assessment in Afghanistan

Beyond the analytical issues that plague P/CVE assessments in general, in Afghanistan, which has been subjected to active conflict for decades, additional and potentially more dire issues face the measurement and evaluation of P/CVE efforts. As in other conflict settings, issues associated with the safety and security of researchers and research participants, access to reliable information, and the necessary resources and expertise further complicate assessment efforts in the country.

Frequent attacks and flare-ups of violence pose numerous safety and security issues for researchers, as do hostile attitudes toward journalists, media workers, researchers, and others who seek to collect and analyze data related to P/CVE and terrorist organizations.[16] Afghanistan, in particular, has been an unsafe environment for researchers and journalists. In 2018 alone, an especially dangerous year, thirteen journalists were killed in the country.[17] Security concerns have also limited a number of studies and research projects (not just those limited to P/CVE), as well as the locations permissible for data collection to only a few select provinces and territories.[18] Recent developments related to the U.S.-Taliban peace deal may only exacerbate ongoing security risks, making the medium-to-long term prospects for stability in Afghanistan extremely tenuous.[19] This makes the prospect of conducting P/CVE research a particularly precarious endeavor for scholars, academics, and policy practitioners, with implications for the availability, reliability, and type of data collected, and, therefore, the quality of the assessment.

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16   Such hostilities are not unique to the case of Afghanistan. For more, see: J.M. Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 9, https://resolvenet.org/research/researching-violent-extremism-state-play.

17   "Journalists Killed in Afghanistan Since 1992," *Committee to Protect Journalists,* https://cpj.org/asia/afghanistan/.

18   For just one example, see: Sara Pavanello, *Multi-purpose Cash and Sectoral Outcomes,* (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018), https://www.unhcr.org/5b2cfab97.pdf.

19   David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "A Secret Accord with the Taliban: When and How the U.S. Would Leave Afghanistan," *New York Times*, March 8, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/08/world/asia/taliban-afghanistan-annexes-peace-agreement.html.

Conflict aside, there are other challenges to conducting P/CVE programs in Afghanistan, including low literacy rates, the tendency to spread news by word-of-mouth and the lack of resources to confirm whether rumors have validity or are altogether false.

P/CVE assessments: Some key considerations and recommendations

While it is important to remain sober about the litany of challenges in P/CVE assessment in and outside of active conflict zones, it is perhaps even more critical to be able to recognize and take advantage of any opportunities or workarounds that present themselves throughout the process. Drawing on examples from the Afghanistan case study above, as well as the author's own experience, the guidelines and considerations below outline important areas of focus for those seeking to conduct P/CVE assessments in conflict—and even non-conflict—environments, be it Afghanistan or elsewhere. The considerations guide readers through key areas throughout the assessment process and provide a framework for those embarking on these studies. While the list is not exhaustive, it does provide readers with a starting point and key questions to consider.

Understand the environment

SITUATE THE ASSESSMENT IN AN OTHERWISE CROWDED FIELD

As P/CVE efforts have received greater attention and funding over the past several years, they have multiplied significantly. This multiplication in P/CVE activities poses potential issues, but also potential opportunities. With more actors seeking to conduct P/CVE initiatives and research, there are more opportunities for redundancy, a lack of standardization both within and across disciplines, and the exacerbation of programmatic or research "fatigue" amongst P/CVE participants—where participants are included in P/CVE efforts or studies too frequently, adversely impacting their response rates and potentially contributing to response bias or decreased validity. A potentially positive outgrowth of having multiple entities conducting P/CVE assessments, however, is that different actors may very well be collecting different kinds of data and/or concerned with measuring or evaluating different target audiences or local populations. Multiple organizations can also lead to compe-

tition, which, in turn, can reduce cost and improve quality, at least over the long-term. No organization should dominate the market on P/CVE assessment; however, the very nature of operating in a conflict zone or post-conflict environment requires special skill sets, adequate resources, and access to potentially valuable data.

This also opens the possibility of discerning a multi-layered view of dynamics related to terrorism and insurgency, including who supports it and why. A recent report by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), for example, delves into micro-level detail on selected individual-level motivators related to individuals that joined the Afghan Taliban.[20] The categories delineated in the report include adventure, belonging, status, revenge, a fear of being targeted by other violent extremist entities, and material enticements, which provide useful information and a possible example for others, including those looking to conduct assessments, to follow.[21] As an additional example, according to a report titled *A Roadmap to Progress: The State of the Global P/CVE Agenda*, in terms of available literature on P/CVE interventions according to country, there are 16 reports on Afghanistan, tied with Indonesia for the most of any non-Western country.[22] While this number highlights quantity with no sense of overall quality of these reports, what it does indicate is that organizations and firms have figured out how to overcome many of the challenges of operating in Afghanistan to conduct their work.

Importantly, assessors should also map out relevant, but non-P/CVE-focused activities that may have useful insights on the context or the assessment process. The international community has a longer track record and greater experience with programs similar to P/CVE, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs. In contrast to P/CVE, many DDR programs have taken the shape of peacebuilding processes conducted at the level of group behavior and dynamics where cooperation is incentivized through the removal or mitigation of punitive measures.[23] Some scholars and practitioners have argued

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20   James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, *Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation,* RUSI Whitehall Report 2-16 (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2016), https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/20160608_cve_and_rr.combined.online4.pdf.

21   Ibid.

22   The report notes that the top three countries for reports are, in order, the United Kingdom (54), the United States (22) and Australia (16). See: Eric Rosand et al., *A Roadmap to Progress: The State of the Global P/CVE Agenda* (The Prevention Project and Royal United Services Institute, 2018), https://organizingagainstve.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCCS_ROADMAP_FNL.pdf.

23   Naureen Chowdhury Fink, "The Blue Flag in the Grey Zones: Exploring the Relationships between Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in UN Field Operations," in *UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for*

that P/CVE and DDR have quite a lot in common, and perhaps a hybrid approach borrowing from each and focused on conflict prevention could be one way to achieve a breakthrough in the field.[24] While a breakthrough might be overstating the case, there could be useful lessons learned, particularly when examining past failed efforts at DDR in **specific** cases and focusing on these lessons to discern both challenges and opportunities.

Overall, understanding what work has or is already being done in a specific country context can greatly supplement or inform individual assessment efforts, both in terms of additional data and in terms of the potential to share best assessment practices in otherwise difficult conflict environments.

Considerations for assessors:

- What additional work is being conducted in a similar context?

- How is other work related to my own research?

- Is it possible to obtain further information or insight on others' work?

- How is the other work related to or possibly affecting the assessment in question?

- What lessons and best practices from others can be used, learned from, and adapted?

- Is it possible or beneficial to collaborate with other actors working in this context?

PAY ATTENTION TO THE CONFLICT CURVE

Where a location is on the conflict curve[25] can exacerbate assessment challenges. In post-conflict areas, trauma, continued insecurity, and an ebb in resources from the international community and external donors—many of whom have likely moved on to focus

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Purpose?, eds. James Cockayne and Siobhan O'Neil (New York: United Nations University, 2015), 67.

24   Dean Piedmont, *The Role of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Countering Violent Extremism*, (Zurich: ETH Zurich Center for Security Studies, 2015), https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/192304/pdf.

25   For more on the conflict curve, see: "Curve of Conflict," United States Institute of Peace, accessed April 20, 2020: https://www.usip.org/public-education/students/curve-conflict.

on other conflicts with more media attention and perceived urgency—can increase assessment difficulties.

Those carrying out assessments in areas likely to experience, currently experiencing, or that have recently experienced conflict must adopt and maintain conflict sensitivity in their approach. Conflict sensitivity is not solely conscribed to recognizing where a population or area lies on the conflict curve. Rather, conflict sensitivity requires active recognition of and attempts to understand the contexts in which they operate with the understanding that even well-intended external interventions can lead to unintended consequences, including counterproductive second- and third-order effects. Indeed, even the presence of the researcher can impact conflict and community dynamics in unanticipated ways. Being conflict sensitive, therefore, requires active self-reflection and the creation of one or multiple mitigation plans to deal with any potential fallout exacerbated by any negative impacts that might arise.[26]

There are also other, more practical and predictable challenges to conducting P/CVE assessments in conflict zones. For example, the contact information of potential participants may change, or it may be difficult to locate individuals that participated in earlier iterations of a study who may have either moved voluntarily or been forced to move because of deteriorating security conditions on the ground. As discussed in the example of Afghanistan above, rampant violence and countrywide instability have driven migration—individuals who may have taken part in the early stages of a P/CVE intervention might not be available to complete the study, thus complicating the sample size and associated results.[27]

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26   United Nations Development Group, *Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis* (United Nations Development Group, 2016),113, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDP_CDA-Report_v1.3-final-opt-low.pdf.

27   Tuesday Reitano and Peter Tinti, *Reviewing the Evidence Base on Migration and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)* (CT MORSE, 2017), http://ct-morse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/EU-CVE-Migration-.pdf.

Considerations for assessors:

- What does conflict look like in the area of study?

- How does conflict affect the methods that can be employed?

- What does that mean for personal safety and security of both assessors and eventual beneficiaries?

- How could the presence of the individual researcher or the P/CVE program itself negatively impact or contribute to conflict dynamics?

- What can be done to account for and measure second- and third-order consequences?

- What are the range of viable contingency plans available?

Assess possible measures and methods

Given the trillions of dollars spent on military and security-focused operations of the so-called Global War on Terrorism, a profound shift in thinking has occurred over the past five years. The concept of P/CVE transcends numerous sectors and does not fit squarely in any one particular field, including terrorism studies. This means that P/CVE assessments need to pay attention to the factors they are trying to assess and the methods they can use to do so.

Among the most important properties to consider when designing a P/CVE program assessment is specifying the way in which the results will (or will not) enable causal inference regarding the outputs, outcomes, or impacts of the effort. Overall, the most effective designs will be valid, generalizable, practical, and, above all else, useful for policymakers at multiple levels.[28] Still, tensions and tradeoffs always exist when prioritizing objectives.

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28   Research designs that are valid measure what they are intended to measure; generalizable designs may be extended beyond the initial sample to a broader population; practical designs will take into account the multiple constraints of a particular context; and those that are useful will offer concrete recommendations for policymakers in this field.

Researchers focused on methodology, assessment design, and program evaluation have a significant role to play in advancing the science underpinning this field, which continues to grow ever more crowded as governments and civil society organizations struggle to prevent conflict before it starts, and as more funding is allocated toward this and ancillary objectives.

Pinpoint the phenomena being measured

A particular problem plaguing assessments is the issue of the so-called "dogs that don't bark," or in other words, how does one appropriately account for the absence of something rather than its presence. The overarching challenge is "isolating the variables that might be correlated to a decline in extremist violence."[29] Without knowing this, it can be difficult to tell if P/CVE programs are effective, or if other exogenous factors play a more significant role in the outcome, especially in environments in which violent conflict is pervasive. Moreover, not all individuals who radicalize commit acts of violence, so merely looking at a decline in violent attacks could present a distorted picture of trends in extremism in a given country.[30]

An additional issue to consider is what are you measuring. Unfortunately, in P/CVE assessments, there is often a lack of sophistication surrounding the subject. Developing a clear theory of change and measurable variables can help to improve this issue; however, when those variables include indicators such as "courses held" or "individuals trained" as metrics of success in and of themselves, the meaning behind a theory of change is lost. Counting is not measurement, evaluation, or assessment and should not be portrayed as such.

There are also certain categories of questions that are more likely than others to elicit dishonest responses, especially subjects including "support for militant groups," inevitable to arise in any P/CVE pre- or post-assessment.[31] In terms of data collection, when interviews are complemented by primary and/or secondary source data, there are also considerations

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29   Georgia Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013), https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf.

30   Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism*.

31   There are a number of innovative survey methodologies that promise to improve the validity of measurements by reducing non-response and social desirability biases. See: Graeme Blair, Kosuke Imai, and Jason Lyall, "Comparing and Combining List and Endorsement Experiments: Evidence from Afghanistan," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 4 (2014): 1043–63, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12086; see also: Bryn Rosenfeld, Kosuke Imai, and Jacob N. Shapiro, "An Empirical Validation Study of Popular Survey Methodologies for Sensitive Questions," *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 3 (2016): 783–802, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12205.

that the data itself could include "a number of biases, inaccuracies limited data collection priorities, and coding differentials."[32] One of the ways to increase rigor in P/CVE assessments is to forge a closer working relationship with the academics, who often develop the tools to measure impact, and the local practitioners working in the field, who have the knowledge to contextualize findings within the cultural and community context.[33]

When conceptualizing how to prevent or counter violent extremism, there are myriad layers to consider—the extremist him/herself, their family members, the broader community, and a range of other stakeholders. This should be viewed as more of an opportunity than as something onerous, as it affords policymakers the chance to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the many levers at play when considering the nuanced nature of extremism and radicalization. One study by the United Nations, for example, found that while Taliban fighters numbered in the thousands, the numbers of youth who were unemployed, frustrated with their situations, and marginalized in Afghan society was upwards of several times that number.[34] This shows that there is a much larger reservoir for potential supporters of terrorist organizations, far beyond those under arms or actively fighting with the Taliban or similar militant groups. Assessors need to think through and operationalize not only the phenomena they are seeking to measure or evaluate, but also consider how it interacts or could be affected by the broader context, which, in conflict environments, requires further understanding of broader conflict dynamics.

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32   Joe Whittaker, *Building Secondary Source Databases on Violent Extremism: Reflections and Suggestions* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 6, https://resolvenet.org/research/building-secondary-source-databases-violent-extremism-reflections-and-suggestions.

33   Holmer, Bauman, with Aryaeinejad, *Measuring Up*, 10.

34   Vanda Felbab-Brown, "DDR in the Context of Offensive Military Operations, Counterterrorism, CVE, and Non-Permissive Environments," in *UN DDR In an Era of Violent Extremism: Is it Fit for Purpose?*, eds. James Cockayne and Siobhan O'Neil (New York: United Nations University, 2015), 44, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_ddr_in_an_era_of_violent_extremism.pdf.

Considerations for assessors:

- Spend significant effort and resources defining the scope of a P/CVE program, which can help avoid the trap of attempting to measure too wide a range of variables.

- What is the theory of change?

- What is the assessment actually trying to measure?

- What variables have others used to measure this same phenomenon?

- What are the confounding variables and how might these be mitigated?

MATCH YOUR METHODS TO THE CONTEXT

Not all assessments are simple. **Where** the assessment takes place will have a significant impact on the challenges it presents and its feasibility. This is particularly so with regard to the research methods employed in the assessment itself. Some analytical techniques that might be feasible and applicable when assessing workplace initiatives in New York City, for example, are far less feasible in conflict zones, which present an array of complex challenges to data collectors and researchers. P/CVE assessments take many forms, but, given their area of focus, tend to take place in areas either on the cusp of, actively engaged in, or just recovering from violent conflict.

This, in turn, requires that the assessor understand the environment in which they are conducting their study. Local or tribal environments, even those not currently experiencing conflict, for example, could very well prove inimical to techniques such as social network analysis, especially if the environment consists of many individuals who use colloquial names, a lack of record keeping, and non-existent procedures to verify an individual's identity and other important demographic indicators.

The risk of survey or research fatigue, noted above, is something that should be considered during the design phase of an assessment. Those conducting assessments should ensure

that there is a proper balance struck between data collection and inundating the respondent with too many questions. Doing so will help in avoiding situations in which respondents, tired of responding, provide any answer, no matter its veracity, just to finish the assessment as quickly as possible. Of course, this phenomenon is not unique to P/CVE—it is a risk when conducting other types of survey or evaluation work as well, in both combat and non-combat zones.[35]

Considerations for assessors:

- Recognize the limitations of certain social science methods in conflict zones and avoid "cherry picking" methods from other sectors that can lead to additional errors

- On which population(s) does the assessment focus?

- What are the cultural considerations to keep in mind?

- Are there limits to which methods can be used? If so, what are these limits?

- What are the challenges to obtaining the information needed?

- Are there significant constraints on movement and how will those impact the study?

- What other studies are running in parallel? What can be done to avoid "survey fatigue"?

CONSIDER CONSTRAINTS ON VALIDITY

Graeme Blair et al. offer practical advice from field work in Afghanistan, stressing the importance of engaging in multiple pretests and focus groups in the areas to be sampled, as geography can be a significant determinant of levels of formal education and, thus, research approaches.[36] The authors found that Kabul and its immediate environs, while convenient, could produce a skewed and unrepresentative sample of Afghan society more broadly.[37]

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35   Christopher Paul et al., *Assessing and Evaluating Department of Defense Efforts to Inform, Influence, and Persuade: Handbook for Practitioners* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR809z2/RAND_RR809z2.pdf.

36   Blair, Imai, and Lyall, "Comparing and Combining List and Endorsement Experiments."

37   Ibid.

This is true beyond just Afghanistan, although for different reasons. Focus groups can be useful in understanding the demographics of certain segments of the population, while also being useful in the design, execution, and assessment of the results of the evaluation.

Where focus groups are the primary method of data collection, they should be moderated by a trained expert, recorded (if culturally permissible), and composed along the lines of a previously agreed-upon interview protocols. In certain settings, it may make the most sense to structure focus groups according to specific demographic categories—gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or religion—as this could help pre-empt situations in which socially or culturally bestowed honorifics influence how participants respond. This is particularly important in a setting like Afghanistan, where tribal elders could dominate the discussion, or where women's roles may be marginalized or excluded altogether.

Because a given focus group is composed of a particular demographic cross-section, it has low external validity and cannot be generalized to the population at large. Because of this, researchers should also seek to convene multiple focus groups to capture differences between groups. In conflict environments, snowball sampling has often proven to be an acceptable and feasible option and a method that can be aided by local NGO partners. Focus groups can also be used to provide greater context for "surprising survey results" or to aid in confirming correlations.[38]

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38   Matthew Nanes and Bryony Lau, *Surveys and Violent Extremism: A Practitioner Guide* (The Asia Foundation, 2018), 51, https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Surveys-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf.

Considerations for assessors:

- Consider the impact that geography has on variables such as education, which will be directly related to the focus group members' ability to understand research approaches.

- Make sure focus groups are moderated by a trained expert and recorded (if culturally permissible).

- Structure focus groups according to specific demographic categories in order to pre-empt cumbersome socio-cultural mores that could limit certain participants' responses.

CAREFULLY SELECT FACILITATORS

Who conducts the assessment matters. Facilitators are critical to the smooth functioning of research broadly and focus groups specifically. Facilitators must be able to understand a range of important issues, both socially and culturally, but also with respect to how to be an effective interlocutor. A facilitator's ability to manage and mitigate tendancies toward groupthink, the presence of a dominant or intimidating participant, and other issues that can ruin an interview session will increase the chances of successful data capture.

To the extent is it possible, one-on-one interviews are preferred over focus groups to get a better sense of what the respondent truly feels based on their own individual experiences. These interviews can mitigate challenges associated with groupthink and unseen pressures to conform to social norms, particularly prevalent in areas within a country like Afghanistan where tribes, clans, and sects hold outsized sway.

Beyond payments and the role played by facilitators, the development of local research capacity and training in P/CVE evaluation can make the difference between whether a study succeeds or fails. If facilitators can operate autonomously and without constant oversight from other research team members, locals can drive the conversation. This, in turn, can

increase the credibility of the study, free from the skewed conversations that might result with foreigners present or observing the back-and-forth.

Considerations for assessors:

- Focus on selecting the right facilitators, especially those who can understand a range of cultural and societal nuances and serve as an effective interlocutor.

- One-on-one interviews should be prioritized over focus groups to get a better sense of what the respondent truly feels based on their own individual experiences.

- Develop local research capacity and training in P/CVE evaluations, which can be difficult in the short term but pay huge dividends over time.

Facilitate information sharing

Build in mechanisms to share assessment findings

While immensely beneficial, in some cases, information on ongoing initiatives or their findings may not always be publicly available. When it comes to the many programs and studies on P/CVE in Afghanistan, for example, there remains a general lack of transparency—organizations or entities conducting programs or assessments have little visibility on similar, duplicative, or even complementary efforts occurring elsewhere in the country. Even if these organizations have been able to overcome some of the obstacles inherent to P/CVE work in the country, it is unclear just how many have and how they did so.

In fact, some researchers conducting P/CVE assessments in conflict zones do not want their work to be published, because they fear a critique of their sample size, methodology, overall research design or other related aspects of their work. If follow-on funding depends on demonstrating success, however loosely defined, there are serious risks that firms will be reluctant to circulate any findings to the contrary. This prevents follow-on academic research that could ultimately help refine and improve the process. There may also be ethical reasons for refusing to publish results, or there may be serious concerns over what

entity is funding the research and for what purpose. Assessors should consider their own restrictions to information sharing and consider alternative mechanisms for sharing their findings in an ethical and safe manner.

Considerations for assessors:

- What is the most effective means of socializing findings from the assessment?

- Will the findings from the assessment be made public?

- Are there any special considerations that would prohibit all or any part of the findings from public dissemination?

- If the findings cannot be shared broadly, is there any way to anonymize the data in the findings sufficiently to enable some type of knowledge exchange with other stakeholders?

Build rapport between government and non-government entities

There are lessons that can be learned from organizations working in conflict zones. Even if these organizations are not specifically working on P/CVE assessments, they still have experience partnering with local entities to make an impact in reducing violence. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has been at the forefront of many of these violence reduction initiatives and can provide an in-depth overview of some of the challenges and opportunities its staff have encountered in a range of conflict settings around the globe.[39]

Bringing government and non-government entities together in the same space to work on P/CVE can build rapport over time as well as person-to-person relationships that might be critical in navigating organizational bureaucracies, particularly in conflict environments. This applies not only to Western governments, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations operating on the ground, but also to local populations and elements of the local or state government in which the assessment is taking place. Working with civil society organizations can also serve to strengthen assessment findings and to "reduce

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39   United States Agency for International Development (USAID), *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles Into Practice* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2011), https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacs400.pdf.

suspicion of the state and so act as a CVE mechanism" [40] in and of itself. According to the Global Counter Terrorism Forum, "a range of actors, including civil society, (e.g., international and local partners, NGOs, religious organizations, universities, and communities) might be encouraged to take part in these efforts and this could be addressed within the appropriate legal and/or policy framework."[41]

Rosand and Skellett agree, noting that "sub-national authorities" can serve as a link between national government and civil society actors and in the process, help to facilitate both bottom-up and top-down information sharing related to P/CVE issues.[42]

Considerations for assessors:

- What expertise or access is needed to conduct the assessment?

- What government and non-government actors might be interested in the assessment?

- How can I vet partners and partner organizations wishing to participate in the assessment or access its findings?

- Are there any risks to broadening involvement?

Plan but adapt

P/CVE assessments, especially when conducted in conflict zones, often require adjustments to plans or research design "on the fly", or in stride. To mitigate disruptions, it is important for the program administrators and implementation teams to understand and plan for risk,

40   Fazli, Johnson, and Cooke, *Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan*, 14.
41   Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* (GCTF, 2013), https://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/72352/13Sep19_Ankara+Memorandum.pdf.
42   Eric Rosand and Rebecca Skillett, "Connecting the Dots: Strengthening National-Local Collaboration in Addressing Violent Extremism," *Lawfare*, October 21, 2018, https://www.lawfareblog.com/connecting-dots-strengthening-national-local-collaboration-addressing-violent-extremism.

which will likely necessitate regular risk management throughout the project cycle.[43] As J.M. Berger has observed, one of the most significant barriers to designing a comprehensive P/CVE program is defining its scope, especially as these programs can attempt to measure a wide range of variables, often too many.[44]

When conducting P/CVE assessment in conflict zones, it is crucial that, to the extent possible, the research team is both nimble and responsive. These are more than mere buzz words and can significantly impact how the assessment or evaluation is executed. In conflict environments, researchers need to remain flexible and willing to seize the opportunity to gather data wherever and however they can in what is often a rapidly changing environment.

The more non-permissive an environment becomes, the more stakeholders will want access to data, which often leads to poor data, gathered and analyzed expediently.[45] There are clear limitations to the use of social science methods in combat and tribal environments, and attempting to "cherry pick" methods from private industry, including advertising, public relations, and marketing, can lead to additional errors. In some conflict environments, particularly those with austere communications infrastructures such as Yemen, Somalia, or Afghanistan, it can also be challenging to stay in contact with respondents. Those engaging in P/CVE assessments should develop plans for dealing with this and the flexibility they need—both in terms of their research and their donor's demands—to address these issues as they arise.

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43   United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A Toolkit for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation* (Oslo: UNDP, 2018), 9, https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/oslo_governance_centre/improving-the-impact-of-preventing-violent-extremism-programming.html.

44   J.M. Berger, *Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption* (The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague, 2016), https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/J.-M.-Berger-Making-CVE-Work-A-Focused-Approach-Based-on-Process-Disruption-.pdf.

45   Some populations reside in what can best be described as "denied environments," not just because of the dangers posed to researchers by violent extremists and terrorist organizations, but from authoritarian governments that want to prevent researchers from publishing studies on these subjects.

Considerations for assessors:

- Understand and plan for risk by constantly revisiting risk management models and matrices throughout the project cycle.

- Remain nimble and responsive in order to seize any opportunities to gather data in a rapidly changing environment.

Conclusion

Rigor and resources are the two conflicting forces in designing assessment. These two forces must be balanced with utility, but assessment design should be tailored to the needs of stakeholders and end users in order to add value. In 2020, there are myriad organizations attempting to conduct P/CVE assessments (definitions will vary widely) in conflict and post-conflict environments. These efforts often come at a high cost for program sponsors and assessment design suffers when it fails to account for local sensitivities, socio-cultural conditions, and the overall security environment. To the extent possible, P/CVE efforts should view these interventions as a longer-term relationship that involves the transfer of teachable skills rather than a one-time operation to solve a problem.[46]

Despite the influx of resources over the past several years to fund research and programming related to P/CVE, there are still enormous challenges for researchers who seek to conduct a rigorous assessment of P/CVE mechanisms, especially in countries that lack both the will and capabilities to carry out these types of evaluations.[47] By taking into consideration some of the questions and suggestions outlined in this chapter, researchers and practitioners can gain a better understanding of the challenges that lie ahead and prepare for them to the best extent possible.

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46   Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism.*

47   Stevan Weine and Eric Rosand, "Repatriating ISIS Families: An Opportunity to Show that 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism' Can Work," *Just Security,* June 14, 2019, https://www.justsecurity.org/64567/repatriating-isis-families-an-opportunity-to-show-that-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-can-work/.

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Section 4.

Reflections on processes & relationships

Section 4 | GUIDE FOR READERS

What's in this section for you?

For researchers:

This section will help you to better understand the collaborative pro-
cesses and relationships that impact research on violent extremism
and experiences navigating them. The section also provides import-
ant information about how researchers may impact the contexts
in which they operate and the impact those contexts can have on
researchers themselves.

For non-researchers, policymakers, & practitioners:

This section will help you understand the relationships that impact
research on violent extremism, including the power dynamics that
can shape them. The section also provides important information for
those reading research on violent extremism that may aid in exam-
ining how these relationships can be improved and their potential
impact on resultant findings.

Section 4 Overview
RESEARCH PROCESSES AND RELATIONSHIPS

The chapters in this section address a key number of issues, such as:

- *funder considerations in determining successful research proposals.*

- *how to develop rewarding and ethical relationships with local communities and stake-holders and the importance of considering their concerns and perspectives in research.*

- *the challenges of accessing, analyzing, and interpreting extremist propaganda and means by which to transcend them.*

- *the dynamics of researcher identity and negotiating cultural and identity pathways even as a cultural outsider.*

- *trauma as a potential variable in research involving conflict-affected societies and considerations when working with traumatized communities during field research.*

- *how research priorities, relationships, and local dynamics impact findings related to violent extremism.*

Introduction

VE and terrorism research involves engagement with a diversity of factors and actors. Understanding and appropriately managing all of them is critical to success. So far, we have explored perspectives on and experiences with research design, methods, and data. Now, we turn our attention to the contextual factors, processes, and relationships that impact VE research. This section delivers an incisive discussion of the internal and external environments of VE research. It contains practical ideas on navigating these sometimes difficult environments.

But, before we dive in, it is useful to first explore the broader contexts that influence VE so we can have a deeper appreciation of their implications on research, policy, and programming. There has been a tendency to present one-size-fits-all narratives of extremist violence and their countermeasures, which has in many cases also influenced research focal themes and policy decisions. It is simple, for example, to attribute violence to an ideology while overlooking root causes, such as poverty and economic marginalization, human rights violations, unemployment, and lack of social services, among others.

There is a growing recognition that the VE landscape, which is increasingly complex, needs improved and hyper-contextualized data for more informed and nuanced policymaking. A deep awareness of the multiple layers of complexity and how they shape the various push and pull factors is critical to VE research wherever it is conducted. This section provides insights on why it is important to develop research strategies, relationships, processes, and content that are drawn from quality contextual data and interpretation. Conflict-affected societies are often traumatized and less trusting of outsiders, including researchers. It is critical, therefore, to understand how trauma and other factors—such as the researcher's cultural identity—can affect the research process. This section provides a sophisticated discussion of these factors and how others have navigated them.

This section also explores the relationship between the researcher and the research funder. There is an increasing demand for more high-quality, ethical, context-driven, and culturally-sensitive research. This section provides reflections and insight on how to maintain a productive and mutually rewarding relationship within the larger policy and social con-

texts. Those funding research can wield enormous powers: setting norms, narratives, and program foci in both programmatic and research sectors. It is useful to be conscious of the unequal power relationships that can exist given the larger social and political contexts in which research on VE takes place, which can impact relationships in the production of research and interpretation of its findings. Unrealistic timelines for research outputs, unusually frequent reporting, security and safety concerns, and mid-way changes to data-collection methods or even research design are among the factors that can tug at the seams of those relationships and influence ultimate research findings. While these dynamics may be the focus of conversations during coffee breaks, rarely are they discussed with the sincerity and openness that we have seen in this section.

The authors in this section draw from their experience to discuss a variety of questions, including how to manage research relationships, how to engage local communities and retain their trust, negotiate cultural pathways as an outsider researcher, and how to work with traumatized communities. They also discuss the imperatives of connecting global research foci to the local needs of communities. As you will see, hyper-localization is a key theme in this section, and rightly so. Some extremist issues may not always fit into stylized definitions of VE and terrorism, so an understanding of the many local contextual factors and actors that drive VE is essential to delivering policy-relevant research.

This section is also especially useful to those who are faced with the conundrum of designing context-driven or hyper-local research in conflict-affected or traumatized communities while staying within the framework of broad global VE research themes. Researchers from policy, practice, and academic backgrounds, as well as policymakers, practitioners, and various local and global stakeholders, including civil society organizations and NGOs, will find this section illuminating. It is required reading for donors who wish to make the best use of their resources to advance research and interventions that draw on quality, contextualized data, and nuanced interpretation.

Section overview

The chapters in this section are all interconnected. However, to give each chapter the distinction it deserves, it is useful to look at each of them individually. Figure 1 presents a précised overview of the seven chapters of this section.

Figure 1: Section 2 Chapter Flow and Connectivity
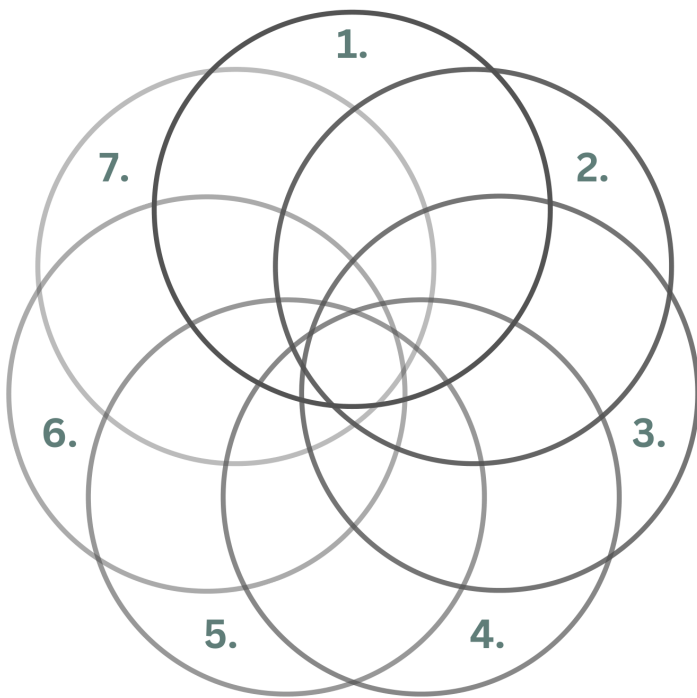
1. Researching Jihadist Propaganda
How factors including technological and cultural contexts can shape access to data, analysis, and interpretation. The discussion on researcher trauma is a must-read.

2. Commissioning VE Reseearch
Drawing on experiences commissioning VE research, what should research proposals contain and what should funding organizations pay attention to?

3. Navigating Study Constraints
External influences on research and practical tips on how to manage researcher-funder relationships and incongruent expectations.

4. Conducting Local-Level P/CVE Research
The challenges of local engagement in P/CVE research and the imperative of getting it right.

5. Research as an Outsider
The complexities of positionality, ethics, and risks and core issues that all researchers should take into account when undertaking fieldwork in a country other than their own.

6. Interacting with Trauma
How war-related trauma can affect research in post-conflict societies and important considerations for researchers interacting with traumatized groups.

7. Community-centered P/CVE Research
A case for collaboration with independent and culturally-aware community actors.

Researching jihadist propaganda

The broader technological context can have significant impacts on data availability and access when researching extremist propaganda. Charlie Winter, in his chapter, "Researching Jihadist Propaganda: Access, Interpretation and Trauma," discusses the contextual challenges that shape the research agenda on VE propaganda, including access to data and the analytical/interpretive frameworks. Winter notes how the Islamic State and al-Qaeda's technological shift from Twitter to Telegram impacted the research architecture on jihadist propaganda, as did increasing attention to the removal of VE content by tech companies. Online platform restrictions, Winter notes, limit extremists and would-be extremists' access to jihadist propaganda, but in doing so, also limit researchers' access to data. Limiting access to VE content online is, of course, a good thing, but it does impact the means and methods available to researchers tasked with studying VE dynamics for policy priorities.

In the concluding parts of his chapter, Winter reminds us that VE research can sometimes exact a significant emotional toll on the researcher. Specifically, Winter discusses the impact that prolonged exposure to harmful terrorist content can have on researchers, noting it can cause "post-traumatic stress disorder-like symptoms." Although, as he observes, the impact is, as of yet, purely anecdotal, jihadist propaganda—such as videos of executions, captive torture, and close-up photos of rotting and defiled corpses—can be extremely distressing to researchers analyzing them. Very few scholars have focused directly on the experiences of researchers undertaking qualitative VE research, although there is a growing recognition that some qualitative research can pose multiple psychological difficulties for researchers.[1] It is critical, therefore, for ethics approval processes to include considerations of the potential psychological harm that studying graphic extremist propaganda materials can cause the researcher and how this can be mitigated. Part of the ethical approval process must include an assessment of risks to the researcher before data collection, particularly in emotionally demanding research. Still, as Winter notes, the most critical care is self-care.

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1   See, for example: Virginia Dickson-Swift, Erica L. James, Sandra Kippen, and Pranee Liamputtong, "Doing Sensitive Research: What Challenges Do Qualitative Researchers Face?" *Qualitative Research* 7, no. 3 (2007), 327–53, https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107078515; Virginia Dickson-Swift, Erica L. James, Sandra Kippen, and Pranee Liamputtong, "Risk to Researchers in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics: Issues and Strategies," *Qualitative Health Research* 18, no. 1 (2008), 133–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307309007; Virginia Dickson-Swift, Erica L. James, Sandra Kippen, and Pranee Liamputtong, "Researching Sensitive Topics: Qualitative Research as Emotion Work," *Qualitative Research* 9, no. 1 (2009), 61–79, https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794108098031.

Commissioning VE research

Research on VE is not conducted in a vacuum, and often involves a partnership between researchers and research commissioners and/or funders. As much as challenges to research impact studies on VE, so too do those and other challenges affect those funding it and the decisions made around funding different VE research projects. In their chapter, Farangiz Atamuradova and Carlotta Nanni lend insight on the perspective of those commissioning research on violent extremism, with important areas of consideration for those applying for and accepting research proposals. While the chapter focuses primarily on research on VE in the Western Balkans, the lessons and advice it shares surely have relevance far beyond the region. The authors provide vital insight into decision-making processes and important considerations in developing proposals on research on VE, including through discussion of ethical considerations, political sensitivities, and the importance of contextualization in VE research.

Indeed, VE research questions may often be the subject of intense media discussions, which could involve the prioritization of certain research topics, assignment of blame, and potential stigmatization of certain communities. These factors can potentially influence research decisions and leave certain dynamics related to violent extremism unexplored and unattended to. To remedy these issues, Atamuradova and Nanni present a list of considerations for both researchers and research funders collaborating in the development of research findings aimed at shedding additional and ethically sound insight on VE dynamics.

Navigating study constraints

Several process factors are not usually considered when reading research findings, but they do have the ability to influence research outcomes. One such factor is the relationship between the researcher and the funder. David Malet and Mark Korbitz draw on their experience to present a particularly instructive discussion of how to navigate requests for alterations to research outside of the originally agreed parameters. Donors, the authors note, can also ask for alterations to research foci and findings—not necessarily because the findings are not methodologically sound—but because of donor interests, constraints,

or areas of focus. Understanding research funders is, therefore, just as essential to understanding research findings.

This chapter will be particularly useful for those navigating constraints and considerations around funding and research when overt or not-so-overt assumptions, interests and constraints are at play. As the authors point out, efforts to influence research findings to suit vested commercial, ideological, and political interests are not new. However, such efforts are rarely discussed with as much openness and candor as the authors have in this thought-provoking chapter. Malet and Korbitz invite researchers to understand and discuss sensitivities, challenges, and interests with their funders from the beginning, to understand their rights and constraints under research agreements, and to make contingency plans where needed. .

Conducting local-level P/CVE research

Research is often about managing relationships, not just with funders but also, and importantly, with the local community. Drew Mikhael and Julie Norman draw on their experiences conducting VE research in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom to provide guidance for community-focused and locally engaged P/CVE research. They rightly note that donor-led funding streams that promote understandings of violent extremism that is "decoupled from contextual factors" discourage better understanding of the problem and the role of local communities. They show why VE research must be well contextualized, community-focused, and locally engaged.

The authors, however, caution that VE researchers must be mindful of how their research affects the local community. Local communities, particularly those over-studied, can understandably see researchers as intrusive. Hence, it is appropriate to develop a sensitive local engagement plan. The authors note that local engagement is critical to building ethical and context-sensitive research, gaining access, and the trust of the local population—particularly among marginalized groups, such as women and ethnic minorities. The authors caution, however, that local engagement comes with many challenges, especially when the P/CVE research involves conflict-affected and divided societies. The chapter is certainly a

must-read for anyone interested in conducting or funding community-focused and locally engaged research on any topic, not only P/CVE.

Research as on outsider

Researchers may want to see themselves as part of the society they are studying. Of course, like most people, they want the conflict to end, but they occupy an ambiguous space. Locally, they can be seen as foreigners irrespective of how long they have lived in and studied the society. Foreign researchers, of course, can pack up and leave anytime they are done with their work or if the conditions on the ground deteriorate.

William Maley discusses core considerations for researchers in the field, including questions of positionality and the lenses through which they view the research and the society they are researching, both of which have implications for research processes and findings. He also invites researchers to consider the impact their work can have on the conflict itself. The chapter additionally explores research ethics and considerations for negotiating personal risk. This is a very important chapter, with reflections useful not only to researchers, but also to policymakers, practitioners, and donors working in foreign environments and conflict spaces.

Interacting with trauma

Trauma experienced by societies is expressed in various forms and can be manifested in numerous ways. This important chapter is drawn from the author's work in traumatized communities in Kosovo, with adults and family members of foreign terrorist fighters, where the legacy of recent conflict remains. The chapter raises the question of the connection between past trauma and VE. It suggests that understanding past trauma may aid in understanding VE.

Teuta Avdimetaj discusses the delicate pathways that researchers who study vulnerable groups and traumatized societies must navigate and the importance of considering trauma awareness training before embarking on the field research journey. Cultural sensitivity is

critical when interacting with traumatized communities as Avdimetaj's experience in Kosovo shows. This chapter is required reading for anyone studying traumatized and vulnerable groups or societies and in understanding the factors that may influence radicalization processes and the communities impacted by them.

Community-centered P/CVE research

The way we define concepts and who we interact with affects our perspectives and, ultimately, our research. Providing insight on and interrogating the nature of research partnerships and relationships—and their impact on research definitions, processes, and outcomes—this chapter provides an important conceptual landscape for understanding the imperatives of working with local community actors and important challenges and considerations when doing so. Focusing primarily on the Southeast Asian context, Matteo Vergani provides an enlightening discussion of differences, pitfalls, and opportunities when partnering with local community actors to conduct research on violent extremism, including contextual considerations when defining what actually constitutes a "community." While working with community actors can provide a variety of benefits—including establishing trust with and access to at-risk or marginalized populations who would otherwise be weary to engage with the topic of P/CVE—it also poses important risks.

Community actors, Vergani explains, are not devoid of their own biases and relationships. In some cases, community actors involved in research funded by the state or certain entities may be perceived as aligning with the state security agenda, which, in turn, may entail significant security risks and potential bias in respondent data. In other cases, community actors engaged in research on violent extremism may produce findings that are contrary to P/CVE agendas. In both of these cases, as Vergani notes, when working with community actors to produce P/CVE research and shared research agendas, "trust needs to be balanced with independence" to ensure the safety and security of those individuals and the validity of research findings. Overall, this chapter provides essential guidance for researchers studying closed societies or groups.

Conclusion

Funded VE research involves a quadrilateral relationship: with donors, multiple layers of stakeholders, the local community, and the data itself. Each relationship feeds into the other within broader political and social spaces (see figure 2). Since violent extremism affects the whole of society, policy responses can have far-reaching social, political, and strategic implications. The priorities of international donors and those of domestic stakeholders—including local officials, policymakers, civil society organizations, and affected societies—may not always agree. So, the researcher must consciously navigate the spaces in between. Whatever the case, competent research depends on access to quality and useful data, which in turn depend on a research design that is community-focused, socially embedded, and culturally sensitive.

Community-focused and locally engaging research is critical to policy and programming. Inclusive and sensitive research that recognizes and engages with gender, stigma, trauma, safety, identity, and local expectations is crucial. It can help promote dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders, contribute to the overall objective of disrupting violent extremism, and help maintain the civic space. Good research can and should contribute to expanding the civic space and disrupting the drivers of extremism.

We do not doubt that you will find this section useful, irrespective of your stage in the research process: whether you are in the process of responding to a call for proposals, concluding your research findings, funding research on VE, or critically reading research products. You will find that the authors write with conviction and a refreshing clarity not often seen in academic literature. Research consumers, funders, and producers alike will benefit from reading the chapters of this section. While the chapters need not be read in any particular order, they do explore and illuminate gaps that are often left unspoken and unaddressed.

Figure 2: The VE Researcher's Quadrilateral Relationships
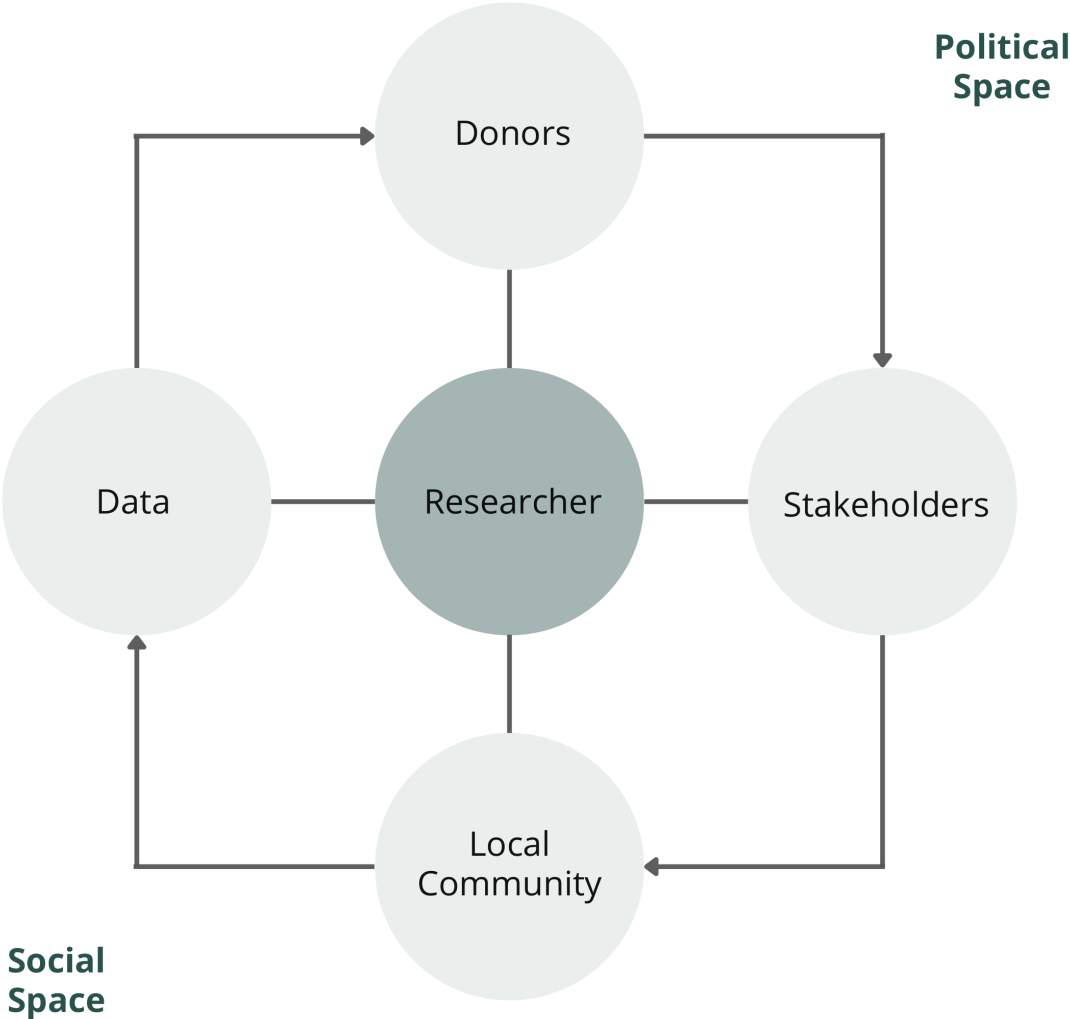
Researching Jihadist Propaganda
Access, Interpretation, and Trauma

Charlie Winter

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This chapter explores three key challenges that arise in the context of research on violent extremist propaganda. While this chapter is focused specifically on research on violent extremist materials from jihadist groups,[1] including the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda (AQ), its lessons may be of use in research on other types of violent extremist propaganda. The chapter has three sections. The first addresses the fact that most primary sources in this area are difficult to access for large audiences. This is a significant barrier to entry for most researchers and means that those who do have access to online violent extremist jihadist networks are beholden to accurately represent their observations. The next section deals with issues associated with intended meanings, polysemy, and subjectivity, addressing the issues that arise in analysis of violent extremist content. The last section focuses on trauma and the potential for research on IS, AQ, and other extremist propaganda to cause lasting psychological harm

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1   The author uses the term "jihadist" to define violent extremist groups, including the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, who define themselves and their ideologies as Islamic and advocate for violent "jihad". It is important to note that the term "jihadist" can carry multiple meanings and does not necessarily connote violence or violent extremism.

to researchers. This section also returns to the issue of researcher responsibility, specifically regarding when and how to make primary source materials available to others. This chapter aims to provide researchers of violent extremism with a set of baseline considerations to take into account early in the research process, especially in the data collection and methodology selection stages.

Introduction

The jihadist propaganda research field has boomed in recent years[2] due to two factors. First, the barriers to entry are lower today than a decade ago. As jihadists altered their online behaviors—using online platforms to further their reach and disseminate information and propaganda—they became easier to track and monitor. Second, there is increased demand for research on extremist propaganda. The security risks associated with IS and AQ propaganda metastasized in the 2010s to such an extent that it became unignorable, deemed to be directly associated with terrorist attacks all over the world.[3] This, in turn, incentivized research on the various causes and effects of extremist propaganda.

As the field has matured, three significant research challenges came to the fore.[4] The first is access. Back in 2013, 2014, and the first half of 2015, jihadist propaganda was easily accessible to nearly anyone. This ease of accessibility was due to the fact that, at that time, jihadist outreach efforts centered around open, mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. However, since mid-2015, jihadists started to favor other, lesser-known, and less-accessible platforms, Telegram foremost among them. Today, jihadist propaganda dissemination is primarily carried out behind closed doors, on apps and sites

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2   Bart Schuurman, "Topics in Terrorism Research: Reviewing Trends and Gaps, 2007-2016," *Critical Studies in Terrorism* (2018); Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Audrey Alexander, and Nick Kaderbhai, "The Impact of Digital Communications Technology on Radicalization and Recruitment," *International Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2017): 1233-49.

3   See, for example: Theresa May, "Home Secretary Theresa May on Counter-terrorism," November 24, 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretary-theresa-may-on-counter-terrorism; David Cameron, "Prime Minister on ISIL at UN General Assembly," September 29, 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-minister-on-isil-at-un-general-assembly; Theresa May, "Manchester Attack: Theresa May Terror Threat Speech in Full," *BBC,* May 23, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40023457.

4   These challenges are based on the author's own experience and perspectives as a researcher of jihadist propaganda.

that only a small number of researchers have access to. This has significant implications for the field.

The second challenge is interpretation. With the move of propaganda to less accessible platforms, researchers who do manage to access relevant data can end up acting as gate-keepers to information. These gatekeepers play an important role in illuminating trends in online jihadist activities. However, with so few researchers accessing jihadist content, the risk is high that those gatekeepers with access may bring to light, either unintentionally or intentionally, only those aspects of jihadist media they consider especially important or problematic. This risks concealing other aspects of the material that elucidate important findings or context and has significant implications for the field and puts a small group of people in a position to dictate what is happening on jihadist social media to the rest of the world, even though they may only be referencing a fraction of the total actual activity. Because of this phenomenon, content aggregators such as Aaron Zelin's website Jihadol-ogy have never been more important.[5] Notwithstanding their potential misuse by extrem-ists, these content aggregators open access to jihadist propaganda to a wider audience of researchers.[6]

The third challenge is trauma. Jihadist propaganda can be extremely distressing, as its intent is to upset viewers. However, even the most violent materials are in need of consid-eration by researchers, because they not only help us understand what drives terrorism at an organizational and individual level, but also contain valuable intelligence insights on jihadist activities.[7] The potential harm inflicted upon practitioners working on issues associ-ated with violent extremism— those employed by law enforcement agencies or technology

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5   See www.jihadology.net, which styles itself as a "clearinghouse for jihādī primary source material, original analysis, and [a] translation service."

6   This issue was hotly debated in late 2018 and early 2019. See: David Bond, "How Extremist Videos are Hitting UK Relations with US Tech Groups," *Financial Times,* December 3, 2018, https://app.ft.com/content/53ce7e78-f480-11e8-ae55-df4bf40f9d0d; Graeme Wood, "Don't Shut Down the Internet's Biggest Violent Jihadist Archive," *The Atlantic,* December 10, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/dont-shut-down-internets-biggest-violent jihadi-archive/577630/; "Hating in Plain Sight" *On the Media,* NPR, March 22, 2019, https://www.npr.org/podcasts/452538775/on-the-media.

7   See, for example this account of its potential benefits: "Jane's Militant Propaganda Analysis," *IHS Markit* (2019), https://ihsmarkit.com/products/janes-militant-propaganda-analysis.html.

companies—are increasingly well-known.[8] However, there is less awareness of how those same issues are or could be affecting academic researchers psychologically.

This chapter explores these three key challenges in detail. After providing an overview of the literature on jihadist propaganda, the chapter addresses the issues of access, interpretation, and trauma for research on violent extremism. The author analyzes each issue in general before tying it to his own experiences. This discussion provides researchers with a set of baseline considerations to take into account early in the research process, especially in the data collection and methodology selection stages.

A brief history of jihadist propaganda research efforts

There are four main clusters of jihadist propaganda research, all of which can be impacted by all three of the abovementioned challenges. The first research cluster—bulk analyses of the volume of organizational output—is production-focused and characterized by Islamic State-focused studies, particularly from authors including Zelin, Milton, and Winter. Their respective efforts revolve around analyzing the archives of previous and current official jihadist media output, similar to Kimmage's earlier examination of the strategic communications of al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State's predecessor.[9] Their findings are consistent with one another: each identifies a net decline in the amount of propaganda that has roughly correlated with—but not been necessarily caused by—the so-called caliphate's territorial contractions since 2015. The consensus, however, is not quite complete; an isolated

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8   Andrew Arsht and Daniel Etcovitch, "The Human Cost of Online Content Moderation," *Harvard Law JOLT Digest* (March 2, 2018), https://jolt.law.harvard.edu/digest/the-human-cost-of-online-content-moderation; Jennifer Beckett, "We Need to Talk about the Mental Health of Content Moderators," *The Conversation,* September 27, 2018, https://theconversation.com/we-need-to-talk-about-the-mental-health-of-content-moderators-103830.

9   Daniel Kimmage, "The al-Qaeda Media Nexus: The Virtual Network Behind the Global Message," *RFERL* (2008), https://docs.rferl.org/en-US/AQ_Media_Nexus.pdf; Aaron Zelin, "Picture or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Media Output," *Perspectives on Terrorism,* 9, no. 4 (2015); Daniel Milton, "Communication Breakdown: Unravelling the Islamic State's Media Efforts," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (October 2016), https://ctc.usma.edu/communication-breakdown-unraveling-the-islamic-states-media-efforts/; Daniel Milton, "Down, but Not Out: An Updated Assessment of the Islamic State's Visual Propaganda," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (July 2018), https://ctc.usma.edu/down-but-not-out-an-updated-examination-of-the-islamic-states-visual-propaganda/; Charlie Winter, "Apocalypse, Later: A Longitudinal Study of the Islamic State Brand," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 35, no. 1 (2018): 103-21.

account by Fisher contends that there has been no such productivity decline in the output of official jihadist propaganda.[10]

The next research cluster is content-focused and comprises mixed-methods analyses of **individual genres of propaganda.** There have been myriad explorations of English-language jihadist magazines, such as the Islamic State's *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's *Inspire*, with some also turning their attention to the former group's Arabic-language equivalents, *al-Naba'*.[11] Others, e.g. Winkler et al. and Adelman, have focused on deciphering terrorist infographics, while researchers such as Nanninga and Dauber and Robinson have concentrated on video propaganda.[12] El Damanhoury, Milton, and Anfinson are among the few to have examined the still images produced by jihadists.[13] Notwithstanding their diversity of subject matter, these genre studies often reach similar conclusions, identifying the dominant presence of mainstream Western visual rhetoric in jihadist propaganda.

The third cluster focuses on the other side of the communication equation, **exploring jihadist supporter dynamics on social-networking and file-sharing platforms.** Between 2014

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10 Ali Fisher, "ISIS: Sunset on the 'Decline Narrative'," *Online Jihad,* June 1, 2018, https://onlinejihad.net/2018/06/01/isis-sunset-on-the-decline-narrative/.

11 Haroro Ingram, "An Analysis of Islamic State's *Dabiq* Magazine," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (2016): 458-577; Julian Droogan and Shane Peattie, "Mapping the Thematic Landscape of *Dabiq* Magazine," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 71, no. 6 (2017): 591-620; Julian Droogan and Shane Peattie, "Reading Jihad: Mapping the Shifting Themes of *Inspire* Magazine," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no. 4 (2018): 684-717; Haroro Ingram, "An Analysis of *Inspire* and *Dabiq*: Lessons from AQAP and Islamic State's Propaganda War," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 5 (2016): 357-75; Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, Anina Kinzel, and Luke Walker, "Representing the West and 'Non-believers' in the Online Violent Jihadist Magazines *Dabiq* and *Inspire*," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (2018) [Online only]; Carol Winkler, Kareem El Damanhoury, Aaron Dicker, and Anthony Lemieux, "The Medium is Terrorism: Transformation of the about to Die Trope in *Dabiq*," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2016) [Online only]; Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan, and Kay L. O'Halloran, "Under the Shade of AK47s: A Multimodal Approach to Violent Extremist Recruitment Strategies for Foreign Fighters," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 3 (2017): 429-52; Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, "Changes and Stabilities in the Language of Islamic State Magazines: A Sentiment Analysis," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 11, no. 2 (2017): 109-20; Orla Lehane, David Mair, Saffron Lee, and Jodie Parker, "Brides, Black Widows and Baby-makers; or Not: An Analysis of the Portrayal of Women in English-language Violent Jihadi Magazine Image," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (2018) [Online only]; Dounia Mahlouly and Charlie Winter, "A Tale of Two Caliphates: Comparing the Islamic State's Internal and External Messaging Priorities," *VOX-Pol* (2018), https://www.voxpol.eu/download/vox-pol_publication/A-Tale-of-Two-Caliphates-Mahlouly-and-Winter.pdf.

12 Pieter Nanninga, "Meanings of Savagery," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism,* ed. James R. Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 172-90; Cori Dauber and Mark Robinson, "ISIS and the Hollywood Visual Style," *Jihadology,* July 6, 2015, https://jihadology.net/2015/07/06/guest-post-isis-and-the-hollywood-visual-style/.

13 Kareem El Damanhoury, Carol Winkler, Wojciech Kaczkowski, and Aaron Dicker, "Examining the Military-media Nexus in ISIS's Provincial Photography Campaign," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 11, no. 2 (2017): 89-108; Daniel Milton, "Fatal Attraction: Explaining Variation in the Attractiveness of Islamic State Propaganda," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (2018); Aaron Anfinson, "The Treachery of Images: Visualising "Statehood" as a Tactic for the Legitimisation of Non-State Actors," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1585818.

and 2017, jihadist activism on websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube attracted a lot of attention. Carter, Maher, and Neumann's investigation was one of the first such efforts to map supporter dynamics, followed by similarly orientated explorations from Klausen and Berger and Morgan.[14] Later research on the same issue by Conway et al. and Alexander illustrates that the presence of jihadists on mainstream platforms has declined since 2015, as new, privacy-maximizing services take their place as preferred communication hubs.[15]

The fourth cluster is strategic communications-focused and revolves around the doctrinal literature jihadists produce on information warfare—that is, the use of information, mediation, and communication to gain a competitive tactical or strategic advantage over adversaries. Relatively few have approached the study from this angle. Among them are Rogan, whose 2007 monograph on al-Qaeda's approach to propaganda was one of the first comprehensive analyses of jihadist outreach.[16] Studies by Whiteside,[17] Price and al-'Ubaydi,[18] and Milton[19] are also worth bearing in mind. Jihadist groups tend not to translate and broadcast their doctrines too widely. As a result, former and current military practitioners—those who are well-placed to access and navigate through captured document archives—have dominated this part of the research field.

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14   Joseph A. Carter, Shiraz Maher, and Peter R. Neumann, "#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* (April 2014), https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ICSR-Report-Greenbirds-Measuring-Importance-and-Infleunce-in-Syrian-Foreign-Fighter-Networks.pdf; Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 1 (2015): 1-22; J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," *Brookings* (March 2015).

15   Maura Conway, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson, and David Weir, "Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts," *VOX-Pol* (2017), http://doras.dcu.ie/21961/1/Disrupting_DAESH_FINAL_WEB_VERSION.pdf; Audrey Alexander, "Digital Decay: Tracing Change over Time among English-language Islamic State Sympathisers on Twitter," *George Washington University's Program on Extremism* (October 2017), https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/DigitalDecayFinal_0.pdf.

16   Hanna Rogan, "Al-Qaeda's Online Media Strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007," *Norwegian Defence Research Establishment* (2007), https://www.ffi.no/no/Rapporter/07-02729.pdf.

17   Craig Whiteside, "Lighting the Path: The Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016)," *International Centre for Counter Terrorism – The Hague* (2016).

18   Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Media Fitna in the Islamic State," *Jihadology,* September 2017; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Internal Conflicts in the Islamic State's Media Department: A Letter of Complaint," *Pundicity,* December 21, 2018, http://www.aymennjawad.org/21906/internal-conflicts-in-the-islamic-state-media; Muhammad Al-`Ubaydi and Bryan Price, "The Islamic State's Internal Rifts and Social Media Ban," *CTC Perspectives* (June 21, 2017), https://ctc.usma.edu/ctc-perspectives-the-islamic-states-internal-rifts-and-social-media-ban/.

19   Charlie Winter, "Media Jihad: The Islamic State's Doctrine for Information Warfare," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* (2017), https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ICSR-Report-Media-Jihad-The-Islamic-State%E2%80%99s-Doctrine-for-Information-Warfare.pdf; Charlie Winter, "Understanding Violent Jihadi Stratcom: The Case of the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (2019): 54-62.

Inherent within all of these clusters are issues of data access and interpretation It is import-ant not to understate the issue of trauma to researchers undertaking studies in each of these clusters, even if it seems less immediate because it is less tangible.

Accessing data

Between 2013 and 2015, groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda used Twitter as the initial point of dissemination for their official media output.[20] Their principal objective at that time was to maximize their visibility, so they built up broadcast networks using hashtags, specially designated accounts for disseminating new materials, and automated programs for media amplification.[21] When technology corporations and governments realized the scale of the problem, they fought back, pushing jihadists off open social media networks such as Twitter.[22]

It was in this context that the use of Telegram skyrocketed. Telegram is a social media platform owned by the Russian brothers behind VKontakte—a Facebook-like social net-work that was also once favored by jihadists.[23] Blending the broadcast functionalities of Twitter, the monodirectional information flow of Facebook, and the peer-to-peer nature of WhatsApp, it was ideal for propaganda dissemination and, in the early months of its use by jihadists, almost totally unregulated.[24] After the 2015 Paris attacks, Telegram began to take a more active stance against its use for the dissemination of jihadist content.

For researchers of jihadist propaganda, including myself, the shift from Twitter to Telegram made life much easier. There was much less counter-narrative noise, or extraneous data

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20   Zelin, "Picture or It Didn't Happen"; Charlie Winter, "The Virtual Caliphate: Understanding the Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy," *Quil-liam* (July 2015).

21   Berger, "The ISIS Twitter Census"; J.M. Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter," *The Atlantic,* June 16, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/.

22   Steven Stalinsky and R. Sosnow, "Germany-Based Encrypted Messaging App Telegram Emerges As Violent Jihadis' Preferred Commu-nications Platform," *MEMRI,* January 3, 2017, http://cjlab.memri.org/lab-projects/tracking-violent-jihadi-terrorist-use-of-social-media/germany-based-encrypted-messaging-app-telegram-emerges-as-violent-jihadis-preferred-communications-platform-part-v-of-mem-ri-series-encryption-technology-embraced-by-isis-al-qaeda-other-violent-jihadis/.

23   Tetyana Lokot, "The ISIS Internet Army has Found a Safe Haven on Russian Social Networks — For Now," *PRI,* September 12, 2014, https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-09-12/isis-internet-army-has-found-safe-haven-russian-social-networks-now.

24   Stalinsky and Sosnow, "Germany-Based Encrypted Messaging App Telegram Emerges As Violent jihadis' Preferred Communications Platform."

and content, on Telegram, and, because it had the appearance of greater security, jihadist groups were more overtly active. A good way to demonstrate what this meant is to compare the process for archiving jihadist materials from Twitter with the process for archiving jihadist materials from Telegram. When I built my first full archive of Islamic State propaganda in the summer of 2015, the group was still using Twitter for dissemination. This meant I had to spend three hours each day going through each of the three dozen hashtags the Islamic State used to tag its official materials. Many tweets using these hashtags were comprised of counter-Islamic State materials—anything from Manga cartoons[25] to hardcore pornography.[26] Sorting through this irrelevant material was a time-consuming task. When the Islamic State shifted its dissemination corps to Telegram a few months later, the same task was immeasurably easier. There was just one dissemination channel for all materials and it was monodirectional in nature. This meant that there was no noise to sort through.

This process became much more difficult over time, however. From the summer of 2016 onwards, Telegram started to become more inhospitable to jihadist groups and their supporters—although not so inhospitable to lead them to abandoned Telegram in favor of another platform. Dissemination channels that were once public—searchable and open to anyone who had an account—started to become private, and their accessibility has decreased almost exponentially since.

While this made things more difficult—increasing barriers to researcher (and jihadist) entry and making everything more time-consuming—it did not stymie research efforts entirely. Tracking jihadists online became more challenging but not technically impossible. Researchers just had to spend more time trying to stay inside jihadist networks by looking out for new invitation links to secret channels and joining replacement and reserve channels whenever they became available. However, it was not entirely without obstacles, and governments around the world began to institute new legislation that makes the handling of jihadist content illegal or at least legally questionable.[27] This meant that researchers have had to bear

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25 Anna Johansson, "ISIS-chan – The Meanings of the Manga Girl in Image Warfare Against the Islamic State," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 1 (2018): 1-25.

26 Jacob Bogage, "This Hacker is Fighting ISIS by Spamming Its Twitter Accounts with Porn," *Washington Post,* June 14, 2016, https://www. washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2016/06/14/this-hacker-is-fighting-isis-by-spamming-its-twitter-accounts-with-porn/?utm_term=.7242fde81c21.

27 For example: Lizzie Dearden, "Clicking on Terrorist Propaganda Even Once Could Mean 15 Years in Prison under New Law," *The Independent,* February 12, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/terrorist-propaganda-website-online-prison-sen-

greater risks while conducting their work. Most legislation makes provisions for academic inquiry, asking that researchers are clear about what they are researching and how.

For those not familiar with Telegram, though, the structural challenges continue to be greater. By 2019, it was much harder to gain access to jihadists using the network—the entry of new researchers into jihadist networks had to be facilitated by others. This is not entirely problematic. If researchers find it more difficult to access jihadist networks, it follows that extremists and would-be extremists also find it more difficult to access jihadist networks.[28] Still, the challenge for researchers remains, independent of any positive security externality.

It is critical that more experienced jihadist propaganda researchers help early-career or cross-disciplinary researchers participate in this space alongside them. Individual researchers can co-author and collaborate on larger scale research projects. This solution, however, is not necessarily scalable as it requires connections and access to senior terrorism scholars, which many early career researchers may not have. The only real solution to this data barrier is the continued existence of content aggregators such as Jihadology, which scrapes the jihadist internet, rendering its materials available to everyone at no cost.[29]

Interpreting data

There are two sides to the issue of interpretation in studying jihadist propaganda. The first is access-based. Due to the nature of the online jihadist landscape today, a relatively small number of people can dictate what they think the reality of jihadist propaganda is, even though others, if they were able to access the same materials at source, might interpret it in a different way. The second side of the interpretation issue is analysis-based. By its very

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tence-uk-isis-a8776226.html.

28   Alexander, "Digital Decay."

29   It is worth noting that Jihadology came under fire in late 2018 for providing too-easy access to propaganda. Discussions between its founder Aaron Zelin and various private and public stakeholders resulted in it establishing an access wall, meaning that users had to register with it prior to being able to watch or download any materials. See David Bond, "How Extremist Videos are Hitting UK Relations with US Tech Group," *Financial Times,* December 3, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/53ce7e78-f480-11e8-ae55-df4bf40f9d0d; Graeme Wood, "Don't Shut Down the Internet's Biggest Violent jihadist Archive," *The Atlantic,* December 10, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/dont-shut-down-internets-biggest-violent jihadi-archive/577630/; David Bond, "Library of Violent Jihadi Material to Restrict Access to Most Sensitive Material," *Financial Times,* April 10, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/55338012-5ae0-11e9-9dde-7aedca0a081a.

nature, qualitative research—and quantitative too—requires that researchers make conscious decisions about what things mean. People are naturally subjective, and media are inherently polysemous—i.e., imbued with many possible meanings depending on who is consuming it—which can give rise to content misinterpretation or divergent interpretations at the very least. While these challenges have not been the subject of much examination, they are important to note and to keep in mind while conducting or consuming this type of research.

Access-based issues

As mentioned in Section I of this chapter, the barriers to entry facing new or multidisciplinary researchers of jihadist propaganda are higher now than they have been for at least a decade. Researchers who are already well-embedded on jihadist propaganda networks have an outsized interpretative role for the rest of the research community and, consequently, for media and policy communities. While one would hope that none of these researchers have malign intent, there is no question that they bring a range of political beliefs to the table. This is not in itself a problem, but it does result in different opinions regarding what is and what is not important in the propaganda sphere.

Thus, the field risks being steered by the "gatekeeper effect", in which a small number of people filter out information they do not deem to be important, while over-focusing on the information they do.[30] This could manifest accidentally, as a result of seemingly inconsequential decisions on the part of researchers. The fact that relatively few people have hegemony over the interpretation of an issue as globally significant as jihadist propaganda is not ideal and should give pause for thought. This is exactly the type of issue that the academic review process is set up to resolve. A continuous critical peer review process can mitigate the interpretative concerns that may arise from this "gatekeeper effect".

In my experience, this ongoing review process has been exceptionally useful. Being able to compare and corroborate my own findings with those of others—of Zelin, Milton, or Nanninga—has directly improved the quality and standard of my research.[31] Even Fisher's

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30   For more on this, see: Pamela J. Shoemaker and Timothy Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

31   Zelin, "Picture or It Didn't Happen"; Milton, "Communication Breakdown"; Pieter Nanninga, "Branding a Caliphate in Decline: The Islamic State's Official Video Output (2015-2018)," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorrism-The Hague* (2019).

account, which goes against my own observations, was useful because it prompted me to think about how to better elucidate my archiving and codification methodologies. It is critical that researchers keep an open mind when reading others' views on the same data, even when their findings conflict, just as it is crucial that those consuming the research understand that findings may vary based on the individual researcher's access to and use of data. Findings from other studies that conflict with a researcher's own present an opportunity to learn and refine their understanding of the object of their research, rather than an upset or something that completely invalidates their own research findings.

Analysis-based issues

The second issue related to interpretation is how researchers analyze data. Different media products mean different things to different people. When the meaning of something seems obvious, it is only obvious in the cultural context of the individual observing it.[32] In the context of jihadist propaganda, this issue of polysemy can be especially problematic because researchers are required to think outside of their own cultural habitus when conducting their analysis. As with all good research practice, there is no place for personal opinions, socio-cultural views, and religious beliefs in a researcher's interpretation of data. However, jihadist materials are often explicitly geared towards degrading viewer neutrality by provoking viewers using graphic images of acts of extreme violence. Such provocation means that it can be more difficult to keep values and worldviews out of the research process.

This issue has been particularly prominent in the context of the Islamic State. Consider its 2014 video, "A message to America," in which a British foreign fighter beheaded the American photojournalist James Foley.[33] For those who were not supporters of the Islamic State, it was almost unanimously regarded as an abhorrent event, something that demonstrated the group's depraved savagery. However, it meant something very different for its supporters. As a triumphalist expression of retributive justice, the video was something to be celebrated, not shunned.[34] For the most part, terrorism researchers attempt to decipher the

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32   For more on polysemy, see: John Fiske, "Televison: Polysemy and Popularity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3, no. 4 (1986): 391-408.

33   Chelsea J. Carter, "Video Shows ISIS Beheading U.S. Journalist James Foley," *CNN,* August 20, 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/19/world/meast/isis-james-foley/index.html.

34   Ian R. Pelletier, Leif Lundmark, Rachel Gardner, Gina Scott Ligon, and Ramazan Kilinc, "Why ISIS's Message Resonates: Leveraging Islam, Sociopolitical Catalysts, and Adaptive Messaging," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 10 (2016): 871-99.

thought processes of this latter demographic. In order to do that, they have to be able to place themselves outside their cultural habitus. To this end, researchers must continuously strive to be reflexive in their work and train to identify and correct the injection of their own biases while interpreting data.

There are two ways to get around these issues of interpretation. The first is to take advantage of the fact that, for the most part, the English-speaking terrorism research community is collaborative and encourages constant exchange of opinion through anything from academic journal articles and books to opinion articles and social media. However, a lot more could and should be done to understand and, if necessary, improve access to collaborative opportunities between English and non-English-speaking researchers. The second, which is especially relevant to issues associated with polysemy and interpretation bias, is to prioritize the use of grounded theory-based research methodologies that allow the data in question to speak for itself.[35] While still imperfect, these methodologies analyze data inductively, allowing researchers to look at materials with fresh eyes and attempt to keep latent, deductive biases in check. Again, an open, non-combative attitude and a willingness to share data amongst researchers can help mitigate bias in data selection and bias within the jihadist propaganda research community.

Recognizing and addressing trauma

As noted earlier in this chapter, the impact of trauma among researchers is less immediately tangible than the two issues of access and interpretation, but just as, if not more, important in conducting research on terrorism and violent extremism. There is evidence to suggest that prolonged exposure to harmful content may cause post-traumatic stress disorder-like symptoms, but, as of yet, this evidence is purely anecdotal.[36]

Jihadist propaganda can be extremely distressing. Videos of mass executions, captive torture, and pre-teen suicides are routine in this sphere, as are close-up photographs of rot-

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35   For a good, critical analysis of the advantages (and disadvantages) of grounded theory, see: George Allan, "A Critique of Using Grounded Theory as a Research Method," *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods* 2, no. 1 (2003): 1-10.

36   Arsht and Etcovitch, "The Human Cost of Online Content Moderation"; Beckett, "We Need to Talk About the Mental Health of Content Moderators."

ting and defiled corpses.[37] Unpleasant though it may be, even the most violent content is deserving of study.

Employee welfare is usually factored into the clerical duties of technology companies and law enforcement. However, the same cannot be said of academic institutions, where it is often up to individual researchers to mitigate the potential for psychological harm without support. Institutional review boards—the university bodies in charge of ensuring that research programs are conducted in an ethical manner—usually require researchers to demonstrate that they are not causing physical harm or potential harm to themselves or their colleagues, but they do not generally require them to demonstrate they are not causing psychological harm. Symptoms of psychological trauma rarely seem to be directly related to the workplace—they can manifest in anything from a generalized loss of appetite to problems with sleeping. As such, it is easy for researchers to dismiss as normal those behavioral changes that may indicate deeper psychological trauma.[38]

We do not know much about the psychological consequences of this work. To date, there is no publicly available academic or clinical literature on the short-, medium- or long-term impact of researching or working with jihadist content.[39] Given that social media and propaganda analysis became one of the most fertile areas of terrorism research in recent years, this is untenable. It is wrong to dismiss the potential for lasting psychological trauma as some sort of possible work-related inconvenience. Instead, this is an issue that should be foregrounded, studied, and factored into the research design itself.

There are a few things individual researchers can do to improve their psychological resilience. This advice, which I received from an independently-sought counsellor, is not exhaustive, nor is it necessarily generalizable. Even though it appears to be working for me,

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37   Vivek Venkatesh, Jeffrey S. Podoshen, Jason Wallin, Jihan Rabah, and Daniel Glass, "Promoting Extreme Violence: Visual and Narrative Analysis of Select Ultraviolent Terror Propaganda Videos Produced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2015 and 2016," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2018.1516209?af=R&journalCode=ftpv20.

38   "Symptoms of PTSD. Anxiety and Depression Association of America," Anxiety and Depression Association of America, https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms; "PTSD," *Mind,* https://www.mind.org.uk/media/23538921/ptsd-2018.pdf.

39   The closest extant study is perhaps: Betty Pfefferbaum, Elana Newman, Summer D. Nelson, Pascal Nitiema, Rose L. Pfefferbaum, and Ambreen Rahman, "Disaster Media Coverage and Psychological Outcomes: Descriptive Findings in the Extant Research," *Current Psychiatry Reports* 16, no. 9 (2015), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4144190/.

researchers should seek additional advice from a suitably qualified expert. First, researchers should make a concerted effort to fully process distressing information.[40] It is not enough to just watch a video of an execution, switch it off, and move on to something else. Rather, researchers should think through what they witnessed, and discuss it with someone, or write about it. In my experience, it is better to actively consider such materials than to leave them sitting, abstracted, in the mind's eye. Taking the time to mindfully process the content viewed allows for something akin to rationalization—provoking thoughts probing why the content came into being, rather than contemplating the nature of the content itself. Second, researchers should try to keep grounded when handling these materials, even if this means actively trying to remain detached from them.[41] While a researcher's empathy is important, so too is their ability to separate themselves from the subject of study; it means they remain analysts and avoid becoming participants. Simple mindfulness techniques— breathing exercises—can assist here, as well as such tricks as watching content in minimized windows or with the volume muted.[42]

Those leading research projects and those funding them have a responsibility to consider both the physical and psychological welfare of their research team. This should be a standard, not an exception to the rule. It is upon institutional review boards to always ensure that the necessary systems are in place, especially if students are enlisted in project delivery.

Moving forward, more clinical research into this issue is critical. As things stand, the research on trauma is not even in its nascency. Given that more people are working with jihadist and violent extremist propaganda than ever before—not just in technology companies, law enforcement, and professional research, but students too—there has never been a great need for it. It is critical that actual studies are conducted in this issue, because it is likely to become only more problematic in years to come.

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40   See, for example: "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: How Can I Help Myself," *Mind,* https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/self-care-for-ptsd/#.XKnQlZhKg2w.

41   Ibid.

42   Ibid.

Conclusion

This chapter explored three key challenges that arise in the context of jihadist propaganda research that, while specific to research on jihadist propaganda specifically, contain lessons translatable to similar research on violent and violent extremist content. The first section addressed difficulties associated with accessing most primary sources in this area, which is a significant barrier to entry for most researchers. The second section dealt with issues associated with interpretation, considering the "gatekeeper effect" and polysemy. The last section focused on the issue of trauma.

This chapter hopes to provide researchers with a set of baseline considerations to take into account early in the research process. It also hopes to provide the policymakers and practitioners who commission said research with some ideas as to what they should push for as methodological and ethical standards. Access, interpretation, and trauma issues are by no means unique to studies of violent extremism and terrorism. However, given the violent nature of the content and the legal issues surrounding it, these research problems are especially pronounced. It is critical that researchers account for and keep in mind these issues when designing projects and engaging in analysis. Doing so will foster a collaborative atmosphere and improve the aggregate research product—researchers will have better access to sources and other innovative methodologies.

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Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism

Lessons Learned from the STRIVE Global Program[1]

Farangiz Atamuradova[2] & Carlotta Nanni

As research on violent extremism (VE) and terrorism continues to grow, the safety and protection of those individuals involved in this research needs to grow simultaneously. At the same time, the various stakeholders commissioning the research also face significant methodological, ethical, legal and financial challenges in ensuring CVE research is conducted to the highest standards. An analysis of CVE research from the perspective of the donors has gone highly unnoticed. The aim of this chapter is to bring attention to select challenges and lessons research commissioners have come across during the first four years of implementation of Hedayah's STRIVE Global[3] Program using the Western Balkans as a case study. Learning from the challenges identified through submitted research proposals and final papers,

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1   The opinions expressed in this chapter are those of the authors and are not representative of Hedayah or the STRIVE Global Program.

2   *Farangiz Atamuradova is a researcher working on various CVE related issues as well as political analysis. She is a Program Officer in the Research and Analysis Department at Hedayah, where she leads and supports a number of department's projects and programs.*

3   The STRIVE Global Program is a five year and half program (May 2015 – December 2020), funded by the European Union through the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (ICSP). Its overall objective is to build the capacity of state and non-state actors to effectively challenge radicalization leading to violent extremism.

the chapter concludes with a checklist of good practices for use by researchers and research commissioners of violent extremism and terrorism studies moving forward.

Introduction

In response to an existing threat of violent extremism (VE) and terrorism, an increasing amount of research has tried to better understand, prevent, and counter the phenomenon. Conducting research on violent extremism is challenging due to the absence of a universally accepted definition and the high sensitivity of the topic. This sensitivity has ethical implications, including both the safety of the researcher and the research subjects, underlining the pressing need to abide by legal and moral frameworks. Other challenges of researching violent extremism are linked to the project design and methodological frameworks. This includes ensuring a representative sample, an appropriate methodology for data collection, and the proper analysis and validation of the findings.

Importantly, the research process does not only involve the researchers, but also the stakeholders or donors commissioning the research. Organizations commissioning research on violent extremism face several difficulties, such as ensuring the quality and accuracy of the final research output, verifying compliance with ethical principles of research, and acknowledging inherent biases. Furthermore, it is difficult to closely monitor research processes from a distance. Finally, while the contextual knowledge of the research organization may be strong, there remains much room for improvement on more specific research skills that may affect final findings.

Through the STRIVE Global Program, Hedayah commissioned research to explore the drivers of radicalization in the Western Balkans and other regions. The program's target audience are credible, local organizations, institutions, or universities that do not normally receive international donor funding. Based on our experience publishing calls for propos-

als[4] and commissioning research throughout four years of implementing the STRIVE Global Program, Hedayah developed a checklist of good practices for researchers submitting proposals and for organizations commissioning research on similar topics. This chapter delineates those good practices and why they are important, both for researchers and research commissioners.

The checklist explained in this chapter was developed through a cross-analysis of common practices within proposals and research papers submitted to Hedayah's STRIVE's program targeting the Western Balkans. To verify the accuracy of this cross-analysis, the authors also surveyed the 34 organizations who had submitted proposals or papers for research in the region.[5] While the checklist was developed based on reflections and experiences commissioning research in the Western Balkans, it contains valuable recommendations and insights that can be applied to other contexts.

While there are many difficulties researchers and commissioners of research face, this chapter discusses only three main challenges which are, in our opinion, the most relevant in the context of the Western Balkans. This, however, is not to say that the challenges outlined in this chapter are necessarily exhaustive in the Western Balkans or in other contexts, nor are the recommendations outlined in this chapter the only remedies available to address them.

The three main challenges can be summarized as follows. First among the challenges discussed in this chapter is the choice of research topics. Despite the deep contextual understanding and expertise of local researchers, popular research trends and the interests of donors can influence the research topics they select. This, in effect, can affect opportunities for researchers to study topics that might be of greater relevance within their own country. A second challenge discussed in this chapter revolves around the ethical considerations required for research focusing on violent extremism, including the Do No Harm approach. Researchers operating in familiar contexts face specific ethical challenges and may run into

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4   The call for proposals mechanism has been adopted to select the local organizations in STRIVE target areas (Central Asia, Western Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa region, South Caucasus, and Turkey) to which to provide financial and technical support. Four calls for proposals divided by geographical and/or thematic lots for third party research organizations have been published since the start of the program in May 2015.

5   Only seven of the thirty-four grant receiving organizations responded to the survey. Data from their survey responses contributed to the development of the checklist.

obstacles or blind spots that researchers external to the context may otherwise avoid with significant implications for the research. The third and final challenge discussed in this essay is the development and implementation of coherent and relevant research designs and the clarification of existing assumptions, biases, and terminologies ensuring ease of reference for readers. A carefully outlined research paper with all underlying assumptions and definitions ensures the readers fully understand the perspective taken by the researchers.

1 Challenge 1:
Navigating popular research trends and donor-driven research topics

Demand for research on religious-based violent extremism has increased worldwide since the launch of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). More recent attacks carried out by or in the name of extremist groups proclaiming a religious cause—most notably by the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—accelerated interest in religiously motivated violent extremism worldwide.[6] However, while ISIS and other groups that proclaim themselves as "Islamic" have dominated the headlines over the years, other violent extremist groups, including far-right political groups, are on the rise.[7]

As an organization evaluating research proposals, it is difficult to discern whether submitted proposals either reflect the local dynamics, what researchers perceive as a topic likely to be funded based on the popularity of the research topics at the time or, instead, one likely to be of interest to the funding entity. Research proposals we received from the Western Balkans tended to focus on violent extremism carried out in the name of religion. Only limited, if any, attention was given to far-right violent extremism, violent hooliganism, or neo-Nazi movements, all of which are gaining prominence in nearly all the Western Balkan countries and beyond.[8] Many of the proposals omitted a general assessment of the context and often seemed to suggest that ISIS-inspired violent extremism represents the only type

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6   The term "religious-based violent extremists" is used to refer primarily to groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

7   Global Terrorism Index, *Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018), 3, http://visionofhumanity.org/reports.

8   Valery Perry, *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2019).

of violent extremism in the region. While this may be true for some countries, evidence suggests that it is not an accurate depiction of the region as a whole.[9]

At the same time, however, researchers and commissioners face a dilemma: researching far-right violent extremism may be increasingly complicated and a lack of this research may create a misconception of the actual nature of violent extremism and violent extremist threats in a given context. The increasing popularity of far-right political discourses in Europe, for example, makes it harder to conduct research that is not construed as political in nature. Studies on the far right often point out the blurring lines between mainstream political and extremist rhetoric.[10] An attempt to mitigate the possibility that research findings will be misinterpreted could discourage researchers as well as research commissioners from broaching these politically sensitive topics. Unfortunately, this dynamic can result in a body of literature that may not necessarily reflect the entire spectrum of violent extremist trends and threats.

Based on our experience, to address these issues, researchers and commissioners should be cognizant of and work to address the following:

- **Commissioners of research should be mindful of how they word their calls for papers and their criteria within them, both of which may influence or overly circumscribe the proposals they receive.[11]** Researchers will likely try to write research proposals that would increase their chances of receiving funds by "ticking the boxes" commissioners set or are perceived to have set. As a result, the more dictated and narrow in focus the call is, the less room there is for truly locally identified research topics. In the Western Balkans and beyond, donor-driven priorities, rather than locally identified trends and issues, have resulted in a redundant body of research on violent extremism, which misses the opportunity to address local issues and trends.[12] Organizations commissioning research must reflect and take

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9   Zdravko Saveski and Artan Sadiku, *The Radical Right in Macedonia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, December 2012), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09568.pdf.

10   Luke Kelly, *Overview of Research on Far Right Extremism in the Western Balkans,* K4D Helpdesk Report (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, June 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d309f7aed915d2fe9ea6aec/620_Western_Balkans_far_Right.pdf

11   For more on this, see: Perry, "Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia."

12   Saveski and Sadiku, *The Radical Right in Macedonia.*

into account how their own biases and personal views may affect their funding decisions and, therefore, existing research on violent extremism. Commissioning organizations might also consider avoiding specifications on research topics that may imply a strong preference for a specific type or definition of violent extremism.

- **From a commissioner's experience, it can be helpful to involve local experts in the development of calls for proposals and to include them in the proposal review board to ensure contextual reflection.** This approach ensures a flexible yet contextually specific selection process. Short-listed proposals present an innovative approach to researching identified gaps in the given context.

- **Donors should encourage researchers to be assertive when identifying and presenting research topics and questions, especially when the proposed research may not entirely fit within a donor's preferred research topics.** A strong, well-validated literature review and situational analysis of the research topic and its importance can justify topic selection in the proposal. While this may not guarantee funding, it will at the very least provide the commissioning entity a more accurate picture of local concerns about and variation in violent extremist actors, dynamics, and trends.

2 Challenge 2: Adhering to Ethical Principles in Research

Tore Bjørgo, head of Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo, states, "extremism is a research ethics minefield where there is a risk of serious missteps."[13] While this quote refers to ethical challenges in the context of interviewing Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right extremist, it is apt in describing researching violent extremism more broadly. The issue of ethics is important in any kind of research and even more critical with highly sensitive research topics such as violent extremism.

The aim of ethics and protocols is to protect human subjects, "safeguarding them from any potential harm that participating in the study could bring, warning them of these dan-

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13   Elin Fugelsnes, "Extremism is a Research Ethics Minefield," *ScienceNordic,* June 25, 2016, http://sciencenordic.com/extremism-research-ethics-minefield.

gers, and ensuring that they give a fully informed consent to participate."[14] A number of publications highlight the importance of ethics in researching violent extremism specifically and scholars, practitioners, and researchers continue to widely discuss the topic.[15] The U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research's *Belmont Report* outlines general, basic principles of ethics relevant to social research, including:

1 **Respect for persons:** "subjects enter into the research voluntarily and with adequate information," essentially respecting their autonomy or protecting those with "diminished autonomy"

2 **Beneficence:** "persons are treated in an ethical manner not only by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm, but also by making efforts to secure their well-being"

3 **Justice:** where all subjects are treated equally and equals should not be discriminated depending on their existing conditions

Source: Adapted from *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subject Research.*[16]

Research topics proposed by Western Balkans STRIVE applicants varied. Some focused on understanding the relationship between violent extremism and vulnerable populations, while others focused on returning terrorist fighters. Some sought to study disengagement, deradicalization, and rehabilitation programs, while others sought to understand the role of the educational sector, mass or social media, and local religious narratives and discourses; youth and women; or factors increasing the susceptibility to radicalization. Despite their topical diversity, all the proposed research topics proved highly sensitive, with specific ethical implications. One component of the STRIVE research review was a careful assessment of research methodology design and the incorporation of ethical principles. As part

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14   Anne Speckhard, "Research Challenges Involved in Field Research and Interviews Regarding the Militant Jihad, Extremism, and Suicide Terrorism," *Democracy and Security* 5, no.3 (2009): 199-222, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419160903183409.

15   To name a few: Marie Breen Smyth, "Subjectivities, 'Suspect Communities', Governments and Ethics of Research on 'Terrorism'," in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda,* eds. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 194-215; Ted Reynolds, "Ethical and Legal Issues Surrounding Academic Research into Online Radicalization: A UK Experience," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no.3 (2012): 499-513, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2012.723447.

16   The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subject Research, Report of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979), https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sites/default/files/the-belmont-report-508c_FINAL.pdf.

of the research methodology, we assessed the data gathering techniques employed in the research for any potential ethical issues.

Research can be qualitative, quantitative, or a mix of both. The data gathering technique is determined depending on the research question and context and each method requires ethical considerations. Rarely, however, did the concept notes we received cover the ethical aspects of the research project and how applicants planned to address these issues. There are a number of publications and ethics committees that provide guidance on how to best address the ethical aspects of research.[17] Basic ethical considerations include informing the participants of the purpose of the study, their ability to withdraw from the study at any point, where and how their data will be stored and for how long, and who will have access to it. Another common issue is that potential research participants may be hesitant to partake in the project due to sensitivities or dangers to their personal security, whether from violent extremist groups or security forces.

The do no harm approach and researching vulnerable groups

A critical ethical consideration when conducting research is the Do No Harm approach, especially when researching vulnerable populations. One of the main concerns is that participating in the research may stigmatize an identified group of individuals, which can be mitigated adopting Do No Harm principles and practices.

Among the proposals for research on violent extremism that Hedayah received for the STRIVE Global Program, many involved research with or on potentially vulnerable populations, including proposals that aimed to assess their "susceptibility" to radicalization. From the reviewers' perspective, research on vulnerable populations raises several concerns. First, considering that individuals engaged in extremist activities can vary significantly in age, socioeconomic status, literacy level, occupation, ethnicity, ideology, and past criminal records, it is difficult and problematic to suggest one broad grouping of individuals as more "susceptible" to radicalization than any other.

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17   Speckhard, "Research Challenges Involved in Field Research and Interviews Regarding the Militant Jihad, Extremism, and Suicide Terrorism"; Reynolds, "Ethical and Legal Issues Surrounding Academic Research into Online Radicalization." For additional resources, see: British Educational Research Association, available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/; University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC), available at: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/.

Second, a research proposal referring to a population believed to be more vulnerable to radicalization based solely on any one characteristic—among proposed research topics in the Western Balkans, their ethnic background most notably—can lead to the stigmatization of and unjustified attention toward the targeted group in policy and practice and in the broader population. At best, such research demonstrates implicit reductionism and confirmation bias. At worst, research carried out without consideration of its ethical implications on one specific group in a larger population can further divisions based on pre-existing social structures. Research stigmatizing a community, even inadvertently, can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and marginalization, which could, in turn, play into the grievance narratives violent extremists use to recruit new members.

There is no proven causality between a social vulnerability factor and radicalization. This lack of evidence of causation, despite observed correlation during the research conducted by STRIVE Global grantees, poses challenges to countering violent extremism (CVE) program development and implementation. CVE needs to balance practicality, ethics, and effectiveness to avoid reinforcing false assumptions, stereotypes, and misjudgements. It is imperative that researchers and research commissioners alike adopt the principle of Do No Harm to account for any negative implications of research.

Based on our experience, to address these issues, researchers and commissioners should be cognizant of and work to address the following:

- **Donors should require that proposals adopt formal or informal ethical reviews to their research before submission.** In the STRIVE Global Program, the proposals with more developed ethical procedures typically originated from universities. Universities usually have an ethics committee or review board in place ensuring that any research the university conceptualizes, commissions, and/or conducts abides by established ethical principles and guidelines. This is not to say that university-conducted research alone is always ethical. However, based on the experience of the STRIVE Global Program, universities tended to demonstrate proper processes for addressing ethical concerns. Research institutes or local organizations should establish similar mechanisms, even informal ones, to ensure that ethical principles are considered.

- **To promote forward planning for ethical challenges in the research process, research commissioners could encourage researchers to develop their own ethical checklist or provide guidelines to the researchers.** Research commissioners are also encouraged to create their own ethical checklist for applicants and include it in the proposal requirements. The checklist should address ethical questions related to how the researchers gather data, inform research participants about the purpose and parameters of the study, and how they will store and protect the data they gathered, including information about who will have access to their data and how long it will be kept. The list can be altered and extended depending on the context, where certain questions will be more vital than others.

- **Proposals must account for political sensitivities around the collected data, how their findings could be misconstrued if not presented in a generally acceptable way, and the ethical and security implications of the overarching political dynamics.** To do so, it is important that the organizations commissioning research know the context of the target countries well or involve local experts in the evaluation and revision process (both procedures that were followed in STRIVE Global Program). We encouraged applicants to inform governments or even involve official entities in the research process to mitigate political sensitivities. Additionally, STRIVE advises successful applicants to submit the research findings for peer review for any sensitivities.

- **Research commissioners must maintain awareness of the sensitivities and potential biases within the context they are commissioning research and within research proposals.** Research commissioners and researchers should be aware of how the given research could strengthen the external negative perceptions towards already stigmatized or marginalized groups in a given context, resulting in a perpetuation of underdevelopment and discrimination. As mentioned in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) *Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe*, "it is important to challenge assumptions about any risk assessment tool and process so as to avoid profiling or stigmatizing individuals or even pushing them towards violence."[18] To mitigate some of these concerns, researchers should take great care

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18 OSCE, Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe (Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 2019): 18, https://www.

to present the requisite evidence underlying their research decisions, clearly outline any of their own conflicts of interest, be transparent regarding their own assumptions and biases in research proposals and processes, and strategize ways in which to avoid causing harm within the populations they are studying.

- **Researchers need to clearly acknowledge existing assumptions and mitigate inherent biases, both of which contribute to the proposal's strength.** Ensuring a diverse and inclusive team of researchers in terms of ethnicity, religion, and gender can be a good balancing strategy. Biases should be clearly and honestly stated in the limitations of the study.

- **Researchers should abide by the Do No Harm principle in their research design to ensure that neither the research process nor its outcomes inadvertently contribute to the further marginalization of specific ethnic or religious groups or put participants at risk.** This is particularly true in research exploring the "vulnerability" of specific groups to radicalization. Researchers must be cognizant of the fact that research findings can be interpreted beyond their original intent or meaning, feeding into local narratives that promote stigmatization or political goals.

- **The Do No Harm principle should guide the evaluation of the research methodology and its potential long-term impact within the society to avoid creating community alienation.** This is problematic in research that involves interviews with former foreign fighters, for instance. A number of research proposals did not explain the possible implications their interviews may have on the lives of these individuals and their families or the strategy to mitigate the risks for the researchers themselves. For instance, interviewing a returning terrorist fighter may result in an unwanted attention drawn towards the individual and the family. Whether during the concept note stage or throughout project implementation, STRIVE ensures the partner organization abides by the Do No Harm principle and seeks to clarify any questions that may raise concerns in the future.

- **Researchers need to consider the above points on the Do No Harm principle before submitting their work.** Reviewers will likely judge by the coverage of sensi-

osce.org/secretariat/418274.

tive aspects and compliance with the Do No Harm approach. The approach is meant to help "practitioners think through the short- and long-term effects of certain initiatives or programs on a community," to avoid negative, unintended consequences.[19]

- **Finally, researchers should explicitly state all their assumptions, biases, and caveats upfront in research proposals and final research products.** Outlining assumptions helps the reader understand the limitations and the realities of the analysis and the findings and safeguards against risks associated with the overgeneralization and overstatement of research findings. Upholding ethical principles during the research is one of the main elements to fall under scrutiny from other researchers and donor organizations. Failing to abide by ethical principles may lead to reputational damage for all parties.

3 Challenge 3: Developing and implementing a realistic, logical, and coherent research design

In our experience reviewing research proposals and final papers, we noticed that some crucial elements of the research design were routinely missing. At other times, proposals fail to define key terms, explain research questions and data analysis methods, or delineate budget plans and timelines.

Sufficient details in the research design can help to orient the research commissioner to better understand the critical research questions and methodologies involved in the research, which reduces the need for over-involvement in the research process once funded. Clear communication throughout the proposal review process and project implementation period is, therefore, essential.[20] Hence, as an organization commissioning research, we strive to ensure that all the questions reviewers of a proposal or final paper may ask are answered.

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19 Georgia Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013), 5, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf.

20 For further discussion, see: David Malet and Mark Korbitz, *Resilience is for Research Designs Too: Funders, Researchers, & Navigating Study Constraints* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://resolvenet.org/research/resilience-research-designs-too-funders-researchers-navigating-study-constraints.

Good practices for researchers and commissioners to ensure a coherent research design and proposal based on our experience:

- **Always conduct and include a proper literature review. We often carry out a thorough literature and context review to assess existing gaps and needs and to avoid duplication of efforts.** This is a common practice that should be carried out by the researchers as well as the commissioning organization.

- **Define all the terms used in the research project.** While we still lack an official definition of certain terms related to violent extremism,[21] it is important that researchers define the terms they employ and explain how they relate to the proposed research questions. In some cases, organizations use the terms "extremism", "radicalism", "violent extremism", and "radicalization" interchangeably. The confusion among the terms can be partly due to the translation of the words between local languages and English. In order to mitigate definitional confusion, we suggest STRIVE Global grantees write the final paper in the local language and then translate it into English in close collaboration with a professional translating company to avoid any loss of information. As a commissioner, we strongly encourage grantees to allocate appropriate funds for translation in the initial budgeting phase. Based on our experience, translating final documents has been less costly than continuous translation.

- **Make sure information about research design and planned analysis of results is complete.** Commissioned research projects have financial and time constraints. When receiving proposals, reviewers not only assess the quality but also how well the research project is planned in terms of objectives, realistic research questions, methods, timeframes, and budget lines. At times, proposals submitted to STRIVE were ambitious and not feasible with the given grant financial amount and time. If a certain project is selected, reviewers assist grantees to keep their project within the given time and financial framework to attain the best results. Sometimes less is more when developing research proposals: more efficient projects are focused on one or

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21   For a detailed discussion, see, for example: J.M. Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://resolvenet.org/research/researching-violent-extremism-state-play.

two specific research questions and articulate how answers to those questions contribute to the body of knowledge or influence policy change.[22]

- **At the completion stage of the project, the organization shares their research report with commissioners for a final peer review before publication.** Based on the experience of reviewing these reports, those that went through a smoother peer review process demonstrated the following:

    - The research design was time-sensitive, attainable, realistic, and valid;
    - Validity checks on the research process, methods, and data were in place and successfully implemented to ensure data triangulation;
    - The findings were situated within the existing research in the local context, providing a comprehensive analysis of the findings;
    - The researchers aptly paired quantitative and qualitative data in a logical and accurate manner, drawing analysis from the two.

In conclusion, both researchers and research commissioning organizations should review existing research in a specific context to avoid duplication of efforts, over-funding similar projects, and missing existing gaps in research. Furthermore, researchers should carefully outline all existing hypotheses, assumptions, limitations, and key terminologies to guide reviewers and readers on the thought processes and situational circumstances of the research conducted. Finally, while providing an analysis solely on the gathered data may be insightful, it is important to interrelate, compare, and contrast various sources of data to present coherent conclusions from the research conducted.

Conclusion

A recommended checklist for researchers and research commissioners

This chapter provided an overview of selected issues research commissioners have come across during the implementation of Hedayah's STRIVE Global Program focused on the

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22   For a detailed discussion of narrowing research foci, see: *Kris Inman Going Back to Basics: Going Back to Basics: Research on Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2019-10/RSVE_RVESeries_BacktoBasics_ResearchonVE_KInman_Oct2019.pdf.

Western Balkans. Based on the submitted research proposals and final papers, the authors have developed a list of recommendations for researchers and research commissioners moving forward:

- **Consider all existing forms of violent extremism present in the target areas before developing a research proposal.** At the same time, research commissioners need to be mindful of how they word their call for papers and how their criteria may influence received proposals and research in general.

- **Avoid dictating the topic of research based on donor requirements and interests.** Instead, base research topics on observations and needs identified at the local level.

- **Observe the Do No Harm approach and develop strategies to avoid stigmatizing or targeting specific populations as broadly linked or susceptible to violent extremism, unless specifically and unequivocally borne out by the evidence.**

- **Establish a comprehensive ethical checklist for research.** Commissioners and researchers should create their own ethical codes and guidelines when soliciting or developing research projects to ensure adherence to the Do No Harm principles.

- **Sustain and encourage diversity within the research team to establish checks on individual biases and organize regular check-ins to monitor and address personal biases.** Any biases should be mentioned in the initial proposal and final publications as potential limitations to the study.

- **Disclose all assumptions up front in the research proposal and the final report. Paradigms and biases are unavoidable.** Still, it is advisable to declare any potential biases or paradigm preferences at the onset to have a clear and common starting point for the researcher, the commissioning entity, and the audience.

- **Carry out background research on the context where the research will be commissioned or conducted to identify existing research agendas and remaining knowledge gaps and needs.** This is particularly important to avoid duplication of efforts by researchers and commissioning entities and orient topics within the call for proposals' guidelines.

- **Write the final paper in the local language and then translate it into English in close collaboration with professional translating services to avoid any loss of information.**

- **State clearly the project's research questions, hypotheses, and objectives in the proposal and in the final report.** Outlining these elements and mentioning them consistently helps to develop appropriate activities and allows the reader to follow the logical framework of the research process.

- **Align research design, including the proposed methodology and list of activities, with the project duration, ensuring that the design is time-sensitive, attainable, realistic, and valid.**

- **While providing a separate analysis of gathered data may be insightful, it is important to interrelate various sources of data in a coherent structure.** Quantitative and qualitative analysis must be integrated and complement one another.

- **Commissioners should be flexible when reviewing proposals; while the main principles should guide the proposal, researchers need to be able to propose and lead on the research topic.**

- **The same principle of flexibility should be applied when developing a call for proposals: commissioners should provide guidance for research topics but encourage and be open to well-presented alternative suggestions on research proposals.**

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Resilience is for Research Designs Too

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Significant challenges to conducting research on violent extremism (VE) occur when funders and researchers have different expectations, particularly when this leads to requests to modify projects after they already commenced. This can happen when the funder restricts available methods and project resources or requests to omit undesirable findings if they are politically sensitive. Although conditions may make it impossible to produce the deliverables originally agreed upon, researchers should be prepared to adapt their studies to collect different data and to promote policy-relevant findings outside of the original scope of the project. In this chapter we detail our experiences with improvising methods as needed while remaining within an approved research design. Despite our challenges, we ultimately published peer-reviewed articles and generated potentially lifesaving findings to share with participant agencies.

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Introduction

Conducting research in general, but on VE specifically, incurs significant challenges related to funders. Research funders may place limitations or constraints on research processes, ask the researcher to significantly alter their methods and resources, or request that undesirable findings be omitted if they consider them politically sensitive either after the study has already commenced or, in the case of the latter, concluded. Drawing primarily from the authors' own experience conducting VE studies, this chapter reflects on researcher agility in the face of bureaucratic challenges.[2] Specifically, the chapter details some common challenges funder requests may pose to the research, including: (1) requests to alter methods and data collection after a proposal has already been accepted, (2) restrictions on compensation for study participants, (3) inflexible timelines, and (4) requests to alter findings coupled with threats to withhold payment or publication for non-compliance.

In some cases, funder priorities and constraints may make it impossible to produce intended deliverables and fully investigate the dynamics originally proposed in the research plan. However, researchers prepared to adapt their studies through collecting different data and adopting new methods may find that there are still opportunities to uncover and promote policy-relevant findings outside of the original scope of the project. The chapter concludes with additional recommendations, based on the authors' experience, that may help to mitigate the challenges associated with late stage research alteration requests, both for the researcher and research funder.

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2   Our study of risk communication was intended to test whether the public would place more trust in information they received via then-new social media platforms, whether participants would respond differently to different types of public safety risks and what levels of risk would be acceptable to them, and whether government and public safety officials reacted differently than the public. This chapter focuses on reflections on the general research process. The specific designs, methods, and results of our prior VE research are not described in this chapter. For our research designs and findings, please see: David Malet and Mark Korbitz, "Accountability Between Experts and the Public in Times of Risk: Results from a Public Communications Experiment," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 73, no. 4 (2014): 491–500; and David Malet and Mark Korbitz, "Bioterrorism and Local Agency Preparedness: Results from an Experimental Study in Risk Communication," *The Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 12, no. 4 (2015): 861–73.

Background: Researcher-funder relationships

This chapter is informed by the authors' experiences navigating funder requests for alterations to the research process outside of the parameters originally agreed upon and to the ultimate findings of the research once completed. The authors experiences are instructive for researchers and research funders alike seeking to navigate and prevent similar challenges in their own projects.[3]

Even when projects are developed to meet the specific criteria of a request for proposals (RFP), and are selected by funders because they match the funding organization's objectives, there are many reasons why funders might later insist on changes to agreed research designs, protocols, or outputs. Our experience has been that research on VE preparation and response, in particular, can be politically sensitive. In addition to other bureaucratic constraints, funders may be unwilling to publish any findings that are perceived to cast a negative light on their organization—even when the research team believes the findings would support efforts to garner additional resources for that organization.

Since the traumatic events of September 2001, government agencies and policymakers around the world have a greater responsibility to understand VE dynamics, construct policy based on empirical evidence, and learn how to most effectively communicate information relevant to public safety in the face of real or potential VE threats. Research is crucial to ensuring that governments are able to construct effective programs for preventing or addressing VE and in identifying and adapting those that are not. To fulfil this responsibility, the funders of VE research must allow researchers to adopt the best methods of obtaining accurate information for government policy and funders remain open to research findings that suggest improvements to current government policies.

There are many methods researchers can adopt in carrying out VE research to inform government policy and VE responses. For example, for our own research on government public safety communications in the event of a real or potential terrorist attack, we could use one of two or three methods: a retrospective analysis of historical events, social sci-

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3   See Malet and Korbitz, "Bioterrorism and Local Agency Preparedness," and "Accountability Between Experts and the Public in Times of Risk."

entific research designed to experimentally model a scenario and elicit from individuals or groups responses (ours), or meta-analyses. Fundamentally, gaining access to complete and accurate information is hard enough on its own. However, when more intricate methods, e.g. experimentation, are used to derive insights on complex social phenomena, or when funders or government agencies have taken a particular interest in the findings of a study, researchers can potentially be subjected to additional requests or demands from funders. In those situations, funders, government agents, or policymakers may take on a more active role in the research process, attempt to exercise control of research methods or conclusions, or interfere in other ways. While active interest and sponsorship of scientific research is undoubtedly in the public's interest, attempts to constrain or tightly control the results of that research beyond what is responsible and intrinsic to the scientific endeavor itself is not.

Facts and results must stand as the basis for debate and discussion. We therefore suggest developing a broad but specific set of guidelines to help researchers, funding agencies, and reviewers move together toward best scientific practices. When a research funding relationship shifts away from straightforward and traditional scientific quests for truth and the discovery of facts as revealed by the data, and when that shift is the result of a concern for control over research processes and a preoccupation with, or questions of, perception or political ramifications, the process is corrupted.

The impact of external influences on research

Concerns about bias in research often revolve around the ideologies, theoretical preferences, or professional ambitions of the researchers. However, while rarely documented, there is ample evidence that funders can bias research and its findings. Historically, and in our own experience, research funders have sought to influence the findings of research to advance their own commercial, institutional, or ideological interests. Perhaps the most prominent example was the Soviet Union's suppression of research into mainstream Mendelian genetics by natural selection as bourgeois pseudoscience in favor of ideologically-inspired theories of natural cooperation that could justify Soviet agricultural policy.[4] Sim-

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4   Peter Singer, "A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation," in *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Michael Ruse (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 343–49.

ilarly, investigations in the 1990s revealed that the tobacco industry had spent decades promoting falsified data indicating that smoking was not harmful and attacking studies that showed otherwise.[5] In both of these instances, the researchers involved had to weigh considerations of funding, contracts, publications, government and industry access, and even their own personal well-being against funder pressures for specific research findings.

In most circumstances, however, funders have legitimate concerns in protecting the interests of their organizations. Individual projects rarely produce the definitive findings that should be used as the basis for policy.[6] Particular studies may produce results that are questionable or that provide data outside of a wider context. And industry, governmental, and nonprofit funders can be vulnerable to backlash from within their own organizations or their sources of political or financial support. Funders can also face legitimate unforeseen constraints, such as government shutdowns or spending freezes, that require them to request changes from researchers.

Beyond the researchers and their funders, policymakers, both governmental and nongovernmental, and other consumers of the research can also be adversely impacted by these challenges. In some cases, the policymakers may even have funded the research directly, but receive the final data without any understanding or awareness of the bureaucratic or political constraints that were placed on the research throughout the study and their impact on the veracity of its findings. Effective public policy and organizational decision-making require accurate and essentially impartial scientific methods of data collection and analysis. Without awareness, policymakers may be using biased or false data to construct flawed VE solutions.

Challenges

Researchers and their funders bear the responsibility of working collaboratively to ensure that project deliverables are met, and the sanctity of the research process maintained. How-

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5   Allan M. Brandt, "Inventing Conflicts of Interest: A History of Tobacco Industry Tactics," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no.1 (2012): 63–71.
6   Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17, 26.

ever, the often-one-sided power dynamic between researchers and their funders means that, regardless of the validity of a researcher's opinion, funders usually have the ultimate say over project decisions. Funders control project resources even after contracts are signed and may choose to exert their leverage over researchers in several ways. This is not to say, however, that funder decisions are nefarious or made with the intention of biasing results. There are many reasons why funders may request modifications to projects in-progress, or even to studies that have already been completed. These reasons may include constraints that the funders themselves are facing rather than disagreements related to researcher conduct or attempts to stifle unwelcome findings. Still, researchers, funders, and research consumers should be aware that project funders can impact both the production and dissemination of data in ways never fully delineated in the original RFP.

Alterations to data methods and collection

We have had multiple experiences in which funders approved our proposals for research and publications, contracted us for payment, and only afterwards provided us any notice that their own regulations made the project impossible to complete in its originally approved proposal form. There are no statistics available to determine how often this occurs in VE research, how many studies must be substantially redesigned, how many are concluded without producing the envisioned deliverables, and how many are simply cancelled. However, given the politicized and complicated nature of VE research—including, but not limited to considerations of national security and restricted information, political factors, the legal rights of vulnerable populations and accused perpetrators, etc.—funder-researcher challenges are potentially more common in VE studies than in other forms of social science research.

In one instance, we received funding to conduct a multi-year experiment measuring reactions to terrorism. After the contracts were signed and the funding period had commenced, we were informed that we would not be permitted to offer participants any form of compensation, could not ask them any pre-scripted questions, and could not debrief them in focus groups, all of which had been central elements of our approved proposal. In another VE study in which the primary data was to be interviews with prisoners, the agency that had

offered its support for the proposal reversed its position several months into the funding period.

In the first instance, as described later in this chapter, the authors were able to develop alternative methods to collect comparable data. The funders approved this backup plan, which eventually led us to uncovering unanticipated but very useful findings. However, the study did not have the representative population that we had originally proposed, which may have impacted the validity of our results and, thus, their predictive value, which is important in recommending the right courses of action for relevant policymakers. In the second instance, the research team was not able to implement a new research design and, as a result, while we continued to receive funding and produce other project deliverables, we were not able to fulfil the primary study objective.

It is important to note that, in both of these cases, the challenges we encountered were the result of bureaucratic and political factors that occurred beyond our funding agency, not a result of decisions made by our funders to not honor our initial contracts. These challenges point to how important it is that: (1) funders fully understanding potential constraints on research when drafting RFPs, and (2) researchers develop research contingency plans, both of which are discussed later in this chapter.

Inflexible timelines

Contracts usually require that research be conducted or deliverables be produced within a specified period of time, although in some circumstances, funders will amend contracts to allow necessary alterations in research design. In the case involving prisoner research referenced above, after one agency declined to permit scheduled interviews to take place, the agency sponsoring the study agreed to give us a yearlong extension in the middle of the funding period to allow the research team to develop alternative research plans.

On other occasions, however, funders may not be so flexible with research timelines. For example, funders may not have the ability to delay expenditures, particularly when their own funding is contingent on the publication of deliverables or when there might be other reasons to believe that funding will be interrupted. Alternatively, funders may not have per-

formed sufficient due diligence before approving contracts and, therefore, may be unaware that their own rules and regulations may restrict them from sponsoring particular methods of data collection or working with particular populations or sensitive data, for example. In still other cases, funders may face procedural or bureaucratic requirements that could delay research beyond the originally agreed upon or even realistic research timelines.

In one study, our funder required that we alter the approved study design because of unforeseen timeline constraints. We were informed that the sponsoring office had discovered, after signing our contract, that the regulatory authority that enabled the study required that any interview questions be published and available for public comment for 11 months prior to implementation. To be clear, this restriction is not necessarily a normal constraint on the research process, but dependent on the rules of the sponsoring agency and the funding sources—other VE studies, including those involving interviews with victims of actual major terrorist attacks, had been conducted in the same country within weeks of those incidents. To be fair, the funder had not sponsored social science research before and was, therefore, presumably unfamiliar with this constraint.

Nevertheless, the funding agency refused to delay the study to permit either the 11 month public comment period—which would require publication of the study questions in the *Federal Register*, the journal the US government uses to solicit feedback on proposals, or allow us to redesign the project. The sponsors additionally informed us that they might lose all funding for the project if the research funds were not spent during that fiscal year. They further argued that the possibility of an impending government shutdown accelerated the threat of losing funding should the study not commence immediately. As awardees, it was impossible to know whether these concerns were actually justified or simply justification for our funder's desire to avoid project delays. Regardless, because these developments were so unexpected, we advise researchers to always ask funders if they foresee any obstacles to implementing proposed research before signing contracts.

Compensation for study participants

Another constraint that can emerge after study approval is that funders may be reluctant to approve compensation for study participants or discover that they are prohibited by regu-

lation from doing so. While not always necessary, compensation for research participation is sometimes needed in order to reach the right research populations who may otherwise be unable or unwilling to participate. Prohibitions on compensation can extend beyond just the distribution of cash payments to study participants. For example, in some cases, the use of research funding to purchase refreshments for volunteers in events connected to the study is also prohibited. Some volunteers are willing to go unpaid in exchange for a modest meal if they participate in events during hours outside of work, but even this may become impossible to provide due to funder restrictions. Some researchers are able to recruit a significant portion of the general public to participate in online surveys that generate quantitative data, but this can sometimes be prohibited within funders' organizational guidelines and regulations as well.

Compensation, however, is not necessary—or even permissible in some instances—with regard to certain research populations, e.g. government personnel. It is incumbent upon both researchers and funders to determine whether proposals to compensate study participants are legal and ethical. Additionally, as some proposals will involve partnerships with external organizations, all parties involved must be aware of any restrictions on payments to third parties to avoid contract disputes.

Research funders should communicate prohibitions related to the compensation of study participants in the RFP; they should certainly make researchers aware of them before commencing any funded research involving paid participants. Restrictions on the compensation of study participants can lead to samples that are too small or too unrepresentative of the broader population to be valid. For example, when we discovered that we would be unable to pay participants in our study, we ended up with a pool of participants that was less than one-third the size we originally proposed and that did not meet any of our parameters for community demographic representation. It was also not representative because we relied on volunteers who were interested enough to participate and had an atypical degree of education and interest in VE and homeland security. Constraints on available volunteers are one reason why many academic studies involve university students, captive audiences that do not represent general populations in age, education, or income level. In lieu of a representative population sample, many researchers turn to their own professional and

personal networks for assistance, but these are also unlikely to produce representative samples.

When restricted from using paid participants, our research team attempted to compensate by setting up recruiting tables at public events and locations, including the community library, but this strategy also produced virtually no committed volunteers. Additionally, we found out after the project was awarded that we were unable to compensate the partner organizations working with vulnerable communities that provided letters of support for our initial proposal that featured communications with these demographic groups. Those organizations soon withdrew from participation in the study. There may be legitimate reasons to avoid compensation for external partners, but funders should indicate these prior to acceptance of awards.

Requested alterations to research findings

More problematic than requests to alter data collection or research methods are funder requests to alter the findings of completed studies, including through the omission of particular findings. When funders do not accept research findings or otherwise view them unfavorably—because they are unwelcome for political reasons or because of other organizational interests—funder-researcher disputes can be more difficult to resolve than those over methodology or inference. Funders may "bury" studies by simply never publishing them, asserting their ownership rights over research outputs as the intellectual property (IP) of the funder.

Occasionally funders will take these claims a step farther. In one instance, a VE study funders informed us that our findings were "politically embarrassing" and requested different results that contradicted our own findings. The funder in question even requested removing sections of our literature reviews that referenced studies detailing difficulties in decision-making or policy implementation. When we declined to comply, the funder threatened to terminate our contract and to give our data to other researchers who would presumably be more amenable to producing the funder's desired product. In this instance we were compelled to seek legal advice and to inform our sponsor that we might be compelled to act as whistleblowers to the broader government and research community before the

funder agreed to allow us to complete our contract. This is an extreme example and we recommend researchers attempt to avoid litigation and political fights, especially when their own safety might be compromised. Still, it is important for researchers to understand their rights to IP and payment in every contract.

Ultimately, in our experience, when most difficulties arise, it is still possible, albeit with some compromises, to complete studies and generate new, potentially lifesaving findings to share with participant agencies and to produce peer-reviewed publications. In the next section, we detail our experiences with improvising methods as needed while remaining within the approved research design. Overall, we recommend that researchers undertaking work on VE consider the political and organizational interests of study sponsors and prepare contingency plans for mandated alterations to their research designs or findings.

Adaptation and alternative designs

Researchers must be prepared to adapt their studies in light of unforeseen developments related to funder decisions as well as to complications that arise over the course of study implementation. In some cases, the inability to implement a research design might be because of the mistaken assumptions of the researchers. In other cases, it may be researchers who identify flawed policy assumptions or practices. Our study had the goal of determining how social media would impact trust in emergency communications. After approaching potential participants, we discovered that the emergency alerts one local government agency disseminated over social media would not be visible to employees in other local government agencies whose office computers had firewalls.[7] This potentially lifesaving finding was not data that we had sought or anticipated. Researchers studying VE and policy responses should take note of study implementation difficulties, identify public safety issues, and attempt to improvise on their research designs.

Adopting alternative methods and open surveys

In some cases, researchers may be required (expectedly or unexpectedly) to alter the methods used to obtain data. For example, we were notified after our proposal had been accepted

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7   Malet and Korbitz, "Bioterrorism and Local Agency Preparedness," 10.

that we would not be able to ask any questions of the participants to analyze their reactions to risk communications, as we originally proposed. To address this unexpected, but fundamental change to our research plan, we adopted a new design utilizing an open-ended survey that instructed participants to read material supplied to them and then to "record how would you react if presented with this information if it actually happened."[8] While we used this approach out of necessity, the method proved useful in essentially recording the responses we originally wanted.

While open-ended responses will produce a significant number of irrelevant responses (in our experience, these can include some participants devoting more attention to critiquing the writing style or verisimilitude of an experiment than recording their own reactions), they provide the most adaptable tool available for replacing research instruments when necessary. They can also produce unexpected insights that would not likely be obtained if the scope of questions was limited to issues that researchers consider relevant prior to conducting the study. Unexpected-but-important findings from open-ended questions may also include gaps in knowledge or biases among subject participants. When confronted with unexpected method restrictions, we recommend researchers think through and adopt alternative methods capable of producing comparable results, akin to our own.

However, adopting a new research method and design can prove costly. To get the results from open-ended surveys, researchers would need to perform a content analysis using qualitative data software to identify which types of responses are produced under certain conditions. This requires obtaining software and training, developing a response codebook, and having project team members spend significant hours coding the responses, which can quickly become the biggest expenditure of a project. Adopting such a major change is only possible if the funder consents to a new expenditure budget. Our funders agreed to permit us to do this, but we were obliged to cancel the planned professional production and dissemination of our findings to emergency responders to have the funds available.

In addressing the possibility of required late-stage method adaptations, funders should take the initiative to offer alternative means of data collection; researchers should not hesitate to request they do so, although some funders might be leery to offer recommendations

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8   Arlene Fink, *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step by Step Guide*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 78.

about methods with which they are less familiar. The funder of our aforementioned study, who informed us after our proposal was approved that we could not use our previously-approved "focus groups" because that implied the use of otherwise prohibited scripted questions, also informed us that we would be permitted to use "table top exercises" instead. Although we viewed this as a purely semantic distinction, the funder considered the latter an "improvised discussion", and therefore permissible, as opposed to scripted questioning.

We were able to collect useful data from these sessions, although the results were also unstructured. We were also obliged to code this qualitative content, an added task and expense. Still, we would not have been aware of this option, which proved a viable alternative, had it not been suggested by the funder. Researchers should be receptive to funder-proposed alternative methods but must always be cognizant of the data they are seeking to obtain and how an alternative method may affect the data gathered.

Budget fexibility

Funding for research is often strictly regulated and subject to a limited range of uses, which do not always align exactly with all the project requirements. What is more, the guidelines around the use of funds for specific activities and purposes related to the research, but not directly involving research, can be vague and difficult to interpret. For example, when the funder that restricted us from compensating study participants encouraged us to invite them to evening table top exercises, the funder informed our organization, the funding recipient, that, while research funds could not be used directly to pay for food, the organization could still purchase meals using its own budget. This presents an interesting ethical and contractual dilemma. Practically speaking, there was no way to prevent the organization from using transferred research funds for otherwise restricted products and services.

To avoid issues like these involving expenditure ambiguity, researchers should always attempt to secure supplemental funding for projects in line with their funding requirements and institutional policies. In fact, doing so can be an attractive signal to funders that researchers enjoy institutional or community support and will be able to build on their projects. Decisions to use available resources outside of the study contract, however, must

be pursued with great caution and transparency to avoid the appearance of or potential for impropriety.

Furthermore, researchers can request that their affiliated institutions assist with costs and logistics not covered by research funding. Funders should always be made aware when this occurs to ensure that funds are not misused. For example, we have observed awardee organizations use research funding to purchase office supplies and for other expenditures not covered by contracts. To address this, we recommend that funders require strict accounting procedures to safeguard against misappropriation. In ideal cases, funders will inform researchers that they can use general contractual payments to cover expenses that the funder is not permitted to pay directly, which can be a useful workaround. Researchers should always be aware of restrictions around their use of funding and opportunities to mitigate them.

Identifying findings outside the original scope of study

Unexpected constraints on studies that have been approved or have already commenced provide researchers with an opportunity as well as a challenge. In some cases, researchers may discover new and interesting results that were not anticipated and, if their use of the study data is not restricted by its funder, these findings can be used in subsequent research. For example, when we sought to test responses to social media communications about risks related to terror attacks, we quickly learned that the dozens of government employees who volunteered would only use email in the event of an actual emergency. The finding did not align with our original study objectives, and, indeed, prevented us from meeting some of our objectives, but it was valuable and potentially useful for other projects, nonetheless.

As a result of an additional study constraint, we also discovered that other volunteers who participated in the study by email remained more active volunteers, potentially opening new avenues for research into social media use. Researchers who manage to navigate unexpected constraints, whether due to funder restrictions or facts uncovered during the study, should maintain flexible thinking and look for unexpected seeds of future research. While potentially demoralizing and frustrating, funder-imposed research constraints can still produce interesting and relevant findings, both within and outside of the project scope.

Recommendations for Researchers – and for Funders

This chapter identified several potential challenges that can emerge in funder-researcher relationships and as a result of study constraints caused by funder interventions and other factors that can arise while implementing a VE study. However, most of these issues can be mitigated through appropriate planning and a willingness to adapt and compromise. Regardless of the nature of the disruption, researchers should plan carefully so that their research designs are resilient enough to withstand unexpected shocks, particularly those undertaking VE studies.

Institutional review boards and human subject research

Most universities internationally require human subject research to be reviewed for ethical and legal standards by an institutional review board (IRB) or a similar body. IRBs will differ between institutions, so it is vital to check what your IRB requires before proposing a research design based on human subject participation. Researchers not affiliated with a university will still find it desirable to work with an IRB to ensure legal protections, and many publishers will require evidence of institutional review before publication of findings.

It is worth noting that regulations vary greatly between institutions, and some are far more flexible than others. In some cases, IRB approval requirements will make it easier to adapt a method or research project because they do not require specific information, e.g. planned participant questionnaires for approval. In other cases, however, strict IRB guidelines will make adaptations more difficult. Researchers should be aware of and communicate any potential IRB issues associated with adapting project plans with their funders. In addition, researchers should be cognizant of the degree to which their research plans require a stricter IRB approval process. For example, some universities have human subject protocols that were created with the strictest standards for medical research that may be unnecessary for the planned research method, i.e. tabletop exercises.

That being said, in our study, some of our participants reported that the materials we had them read left them feeling "anxious" or "depressed" even though they were aware

that what they were reading was a depiction of a fictional scenario. Whether these participants were any more emotionally distressed than they would have been reading about real world news is beside the point. Participation agreements provide research subjects with fair warning that they may encounter upsetting material and detail their rights and means of recourse as participants. These agreements not only protect the subjects, but also the researchers, their organizations, and their funders from legal action, bad publicity, or impropriety. We do not advocate avoiding or disregarding IRB approval. In cases where multiple institutions are involved in a research project, the research team should consider which of their institution's IRB approval they should seek in line with the research methods and topics and consider the flexibility allowed by each of the IRB options should the study need modifications. Researchers should communicate IRB requirements, safeguards, and implications for adapting the study (some of which may be financial) should the need arise to their funders.

Clarifying funder expectations

Whether funders are receptive to flexible proposals or to the collection of data that is different from what they normally collect will depend on the funding organization. For example, we encountered different perspectives from our funder on everything from our literature reviews to valid data inferences while conducting our VE risk communications experiment. Ultimately, our contacts at the funding organization acknowledged that they did not have the background in the social sciences necessary and were funding this type of research for the first time. Although we were clear in our proposed research design in response to the RFP, and the funder told us that we were selected based on the strength of our research design, there were evidently very different expectations and understandings. We recommend discussing expectations with sponsors, during the RFP period if possible, and identifying any potential problems or misunderstanding well before a research project commences.

Specifically, we recommend asking whether there are particular outcomes that the funders hope to see or if they simply want the most accurate data. If funders express a preference for particular findings, researchers must confront their own ethical principles and answer difficult questions regarding their willingness to continue the project. For example, if a funder pressures the researcher to modify their research results, does that justify poten-

tially altering the validity of study findings through changing research conclusions or the presentation of data? The most fundamental basis of scientific integrity should invariably lead to the rejection of those types of terms or conditions from funders.

Building resilience into study proposals

Leaving aside the unique challenges that we have encountered, researchers should prepare for the unexpected and have contingencies in mind if the original study design cannot be completed. If key elements of the study cannot be completed for one or more reasons, how will enough data be collected?

While it is important to be nimble and respond to unforeseen problems, we recommend advance preparation and thoughtful consideration of contingencies. Consider what other resources are available, or which would be sufficient to implement at least some version of the original research design. For example, if funds are not available to pay study participants, perhaps it is still possible to entice some volunteers to participate with off-budget incentives. These might include ordering food for participants through the organization's regular accounts. These contingencies do not need to be presented in proposals, but they should be available if requested, and they will be useful to researchers in thinking about just what information is required for the study and the most efficient ways to obtain it. Contingencies may even become preferred options.

We also recommend asking sponsors for suggestions of acceptable alternative methods if they express concerns about aspects of a research plan. If a funder informs researchers that they are not be permitted to convene "focus groups" when those are included in a proposal, the team should ask funders whether alternative forms of data collection could be substituted. For example, "tabletop exercises" that do not have explicitly scripted questions can yield very similar results with moderators who are familiar with the study and who can guide discussion.

Understanding researcher rights

Dynamics between researchers and funders may become contentious, particularly if personnel changes on either side mean that one or both sides of the relationship were not

party to the original agreement. In other cases, new supervisors can introduce unanticipated constraints on both funders and researchers. Individual funders may face performance review pressures to ensure that contracted research is delivered and meets organizational standards.

However, the relationship between researchers and funders is not an equal one. Funders may threaten to withhold payments or prevent publication of research, and this creates a high degree of leverage over individual researchers. This is particularly true for junior scholars at universities who must establish research and funding records to secure tenure and maintain their careers in academia. Researchers and their institutions also face the indirect costs of time spent developing new methods outside of contracted hours. When funders introduce alterations to projects, it places the burden on researchers to complete contracts even when they have commitments to other work or are now without the resources required to produce agreed-upon deliverables.

It is important that researchers understand their rights to the IP produced under contracted research. Depending on the agreements, funders may have sole discretion over publishing the results. In other instances, it may be sufficient to send articles to peer-reviewed journals with information about the funding source and a notation that publication does not constitute approval of the results by the funder. In our experience, funders may never publish any findings from studies that they have funded, but they can still permit publication of critical findings, including in the instances referenced in this chapter. We recommend that researchers identify potential alternative venues for publications in case sponsors decline to publish them. This could include academic journals and also reports published by privately-funded policy institutes or think tanks that would be amenable to disseminating research when government agencies are not.

In some instances, it is not funders, but other members of academic teams, who claim IP rights to the work of their colleagues because the work was produced while team members were performing contracted work. This may be the case even then the researcher's work is not related to the contracted project simply because their work hours have been earmarked for the contract—we have seen this relationship exploited by senior VE researchers supervising graduate students and junior researchers. From our own consultations with IP

lawyers, ownership of ideas can be difficult to establish. However, as with funders, money talks in these situations—the party holding the funding usually has the distinct advantage. We strongly advise all researchers to be fully aware of the terms of any funding contracts before committing to work. Likewise, researchers should be able to identify avenues for seeking redress from funders, whether through internal mechanisms of the study sponsor, conditions expressed directly in contracts, or with external watchdogs.

Recommendations for funders

Due diligence about potential constraints is necessary both when drafting RFPs and when reviewing finalists for awards. The same offices that would be contacted during implementation should be contacted prior to approval of a proposal to determine whether it is feasible for the funder to sponsor the study and whether it would require any modifications. "Any" modifications is a better standard to use than "significant" modifications, because even compliance officers in funder organizations are not likely experts in proposed research methods and would be unable to determine whether seemingly minor required modifications would have major impacts on study designs or even invalidate them. To avoid difficulties once contracts have been signed, it is better to let researchers determine whether and how they can make requested changes **before accepting awards**.

In general, funders should create and maintain open lines of communication with researchers to prevent unforeseen problems from arising or intensifying. To avoid them from the outset, it is preferable to identify any potential organizational interests or biases in preferred outcomes, and to make intentions explicit in the RFP. It is also important to establish clearly defined and communicated standards of data use and ownership.

VE researchers may believe that they are helping sponsors by reporting findings that their agencies are under-resourced, but the funders might view this as exposing them to liability for shortcomings. Researchers will not be aware of the political and bureaucratic considerations shaping decisions within funder organizations and between these organizations and their own sources of funding. Altering findings may be politically useful but counterproductive for policymaking if the desired conclusions do not match the reality of challenges and threats.

Violent extremism and unpredictability

Studies of violent extremism and responses to it necessarily involve analysis of dynamic and complex human behaviors. Researchers develop theories and models that help to identify general patterns but do not tell us how specific individuals or groups will behave.[9] It is important that VE research designs are flexible enough to accommodate deviations in subject behavior. But they should also be resilient enough to accommodate modifications resulting from changes in sponsor expectations or access to resources. Funders should also be aware of the burden that unexpected modifications to already approved research proposals have on researchers and their affiliated organizations and work to clarify any restrictions, to the extent possible, in the RFP or prior to awarding a contract. While unavoidable obstacles may sometimes arise, open lines of communication between researchers and research funders are key to ensuring a smooth, accurate, and productive research process in the spirit of the scientific research method. They are essential to producing the information necessary to craft effective VE policy and practice.

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9   John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618 (2008): 80.

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Getting Local Engagement Right
Key Considerations for Local-level P/CVE Research

Drew Mikhael & Julie Norman

This chapter provides a guide for conceptualizing and conducting community-focused, locally engaged research on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Researching P/CVE is especially challenging in conflict zones and divided societies. Local engagement, however, can help researchers gain the trust and access necessary to carry out meaningful qualitative fieldwork. Collaborating with local actors through engagements such as knowledge exchanges and capacity building ensures that research is not purely extractive or transactional. Local engagement builds the foundation for trust between researchers and research participants, which is particularly important when working on P/CVE projects. Furthermore, promoting the exchange of community-based knowledge between researchers and local stakeholders facilitates good ethical practice and enhances conflict sensitivity. Finally, working with local partners increases opportunities for meaningful policy impact, providing insights from real world practices, examples, and case studies that can guide policy development and implementation.

Introduction

This chapter presents the case for local engagement in research on violent extremism and delineates best practices from the authors' experiences working with community partners to implement qualitative P/CVE research in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom (UK). While our experiences are mainly qualitative, local engagement can also improve the cultural and contextual sensitivity of quantitative research efforts, particularly in the development of survey questionnaires. Contextual engagement and sensitivity help navigate sensitive local-level P/CVE research, provide more accurate data, and maintain respectful working relationships between research participants, partners, and the researchers.

Through our own fieldwork, we found that working with local partners was essential in gaining credibility, understanding hyper-local contexts and sensitivities, and accessing under-represented groups, including women, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees. We also found it important to engage with diverse actors within local communities, including former combatants, who are able to offer local experience of historical drivers of violence in their locale. In addition to improving research rigor, local engagement elevates good ethical practice, enhancing conflict sensitivity and researcher responsibility. Finally, we found that engagement with local partners increased opportunities for meaningful policy impact, providing context-relevant examples of best practices for policy and practice.

Local engagement in P/CVE research, however, is not without challenges. Local communities are often reluctant to participate in P/CVE research for fear that research findings will further marginalize local communities and those considered "vulnerable" to recruitment into violent extremist groups. Our experiences underscore the importance of balancing P/CVE research aims on the one hand with the local community's concerns on the other.

Drawing from our own experience, this chapter encourages researchers to think critically about their research objectives, designs, and implications for both local communities and local, state, and global P/CVE policies, to facilitate ethically sound research processes and broader impact.

P/CVE research: The importance of local engagement

Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has been a key priority for international organizations and research institutes in recent years.[1] Following the rise of Daesh[2] in 2014, governments and international institutions have made greater efforts to develop policy responses utilizing evidence-based research to understand, prevent, and combat recruitment by extremist groups worldwide.[3] Nevertheless, the research underpinning P/CVE policy responses to date have often been based on speculative assertions on the drivers of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism and the best means to address them.

It is now clear that the search for a singular root cause of violent extremism globally, and even locally, largely misinterprets the problem, leading to oversimplified characterizations and countervailing policy responses that inaccurately and unfairly label certain groups, regions, and classes as more likely to lead to violent extremism. Simplistic responses have furthered alienation and distrust in local communities that should otherwise serve as a vanguard against violent extremism. In addition, donor-led funding streams promoting essentialist understandings of the phenomena decoupled from contextual factors discourage better understanding of violent extremism and the role of local communities.

P/CVE research has assumed that there is something new about recent waves of extremism.[4] This exoticization of violent extremism, however, limits the focus of research and policy to assumption-based options that do not always reflect the dynamics in local contexts.[5] To address this, it may be helpful to think of P/CVE research as a subset of broader conflict research, blurring the lines between political violence, terrorism, and violent extremism.

1   United Nations General Assembly, "Plan of Action to Prevent Extremism," *Report of the Secretary General*, December 24, 2015, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.

2   Da'esh is an Arabic translation of the acronym for the Islamic State in the Levant, also known as ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) or ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

3   Patrick Greenfield, "Home Office Unveils AI Program to Tackle ISIS Online Propaganda," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/13/home-office-unveils-ai-program-to-tackle-isis-online-propaganda.

4   Arthur Boutellis and Naureen C. Fink, *Waging Peace: UN Peace Operations Confronting Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2016) https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/1610_Waging-Peace.pdf.

5   Radicalisation Awareness Network, "Common P/CVE Challenges in the Western Balkans and European Union," April 4, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_policy_practice_common_pcve_challenges_sofia_04042018_en.pdf.

Research into the causes of violence (including ethnic, regional, national, identity-based, etc.) has produced a significant body of work on the factors leading to violence as a reaction to circumstances.[6] However, factors that influence individual participation in violent political action, including but not limited to violent extremism, require an understanding of hyper-local contexts that manifest in individual perceptions of circumstances. By focusing on local dynamics and perceptions, local engagement and partnerships can help facilitate that understanding and sensitivity for more ethical and accurate research, policy, and practice that contributes to, rather than extracts from, the communities participating in the research process.

Our experience with local engagement

Our discussion in this chapter is based on our experiences in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, Nigeria, and the UK that underscore the importance as well as the challenges of local engagement in P/CVE research. Our main projects included analyzing responses to radical messaging, examining everyday prevention of radicalization, fostering inter-sectarian cohesion, and assessing the role of exited former fighters in P/CVE interventions.

Responses to radical and counter-radical messaging

We engaged in a study with Club de Madrid that sought to understand the different reactions to radical and counter-radical messages.[7] Research for this project took place in 2017 in urban and rural locations in predominantly Sunni communities in Lebanon, Nigeria, and Tunisia. The 522 focus group participants included young people (18-30 years old) and older (30 and above) males and females. Two other focus groups were conducted with a special category of individuals seen as particularly marginalized in the country context, including Palestinian refugees from Ain el Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon, formerly imprisoned Libyan refugees in Tunisia, and students from a religious school in the North East in Nige-

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6   P/CVE researchers have, after several years of funded research, acknowledged the need for understanding the wider socio-economic and political context and how they contribute to radicalization. See: Lilah El Sayed and Jamal Barnes, *Contemporary P/CVE Research and Practice*, (Hedayah & Edith Cowan University, 2017): 8, https://s3-eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/hedayah-wp-offload/hedayah/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/17114200/File-222018131552.pdf.

7   Club de Madrid, "Preventing Violent Extremism: Leaders Telling a Different Story," 2018, http://www.clubmadrid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PVE-Outcome-Document-2017-12-1.pdf.

ria. Local organizations in each of the three countries worked directly and in collaboration with us to develop and translate the focus group discussion guide, give details on the particular contexts in each country, and recruit participants. The focus groups focused on the consumption and frequency of contact with radical and counter-radical messages and the interpretation and possible behavioral changes the messages would have on participants. The final report was delivered to senior policymakers in each of the case study countries and members of the Club de Madrid network.

Everyday prevention of radicalization by local actors

We conducted research with the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS) to identify and examine the role of local civil society actors engaged in the prevention of radicalization through everyday engagements.[8] We conducted semi-structured interviews with local civil society actors just outside of the northern city of Tripoli in Lebanon in the neighborhoods of Bab al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, which saw significant violence between the Sunni and Alawite communities that lived in the interface areas. For the prominently Sunni area of Bab al Tabbaneh, having seen a significant number of residents leave the area to fight in Syria, the focus of the research was to obtain the views of civil society actors who have worked with those who have been radicalized or those close to them. Since 2015, the conflict has largely dissipated, and the hard security presence in the area has lessened as international, national, and local actors engaged to halt the conflict. The interviews sought to understand what variables made for successful intervention and prevention of young people joining local and regional militias and extremist groups.

Inter-sectarian and social cohesion among young people in Iraq

We acted as Participatory Action Research (PAR)[9] consultants on a large European Union and British Council project[10] designed to increase inter-sectarian social cohesion among

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8   Drew Mikhael, and Julie Norman, "Local Leaders Key to Preventing Violent Extremism among Youth," *Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies*, March 2019, https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=221.

9   Participatory research seeks to enact changes in the community in which it collects data. It typically employs a mixed methods approach and within political science is used to challenge the current social order. For more, see: Orlando Fals Borda, "Participatory (Action) Research in Social Theory: Origins and Challenges," in *Handbook of action research,* eds. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, (SAGE, 2006), 27-37.

10   To read more on the British Council Hiwar project see here: https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/international-development/news-and-events/march-2018/Iraq-the-interplay-between-religion-and-development.

youth, especially among those who had suffered communal violence.[11] We designed a focus group-based study with the recommendations of local experts and partner organizations and delivered qualitative research trainings to the local partner organization responsible for conducting focus groups via a cohort of youth researchers in three provinces in Iraq. In total, 30 focus groups were conducted with 361 total participants across three in areas that had seen significant inter-ethnic violence. We analyzed the data and drew key lessons focusing on interrelated themes of reconciliation in communities.

Evaluation of formers effectiveness in prevention and exit work

We work in a research and professional support capacity for organizations tackling radicalization, including the Lebanon-based NGO Fighters for Peace[12] and the EU's Radicalization Awareness Network. Our engagements include research, writing evaluation reports on programs, delivering capacity-building trainings, and conducting knowledge exchanges between organizations of former combatants and ex-extremists now working to counter and prevent extremism. Through these engagements, we have observed a number of best practices from various organizations that use approaches to P/CVE in different contexts. We have also conducted semi-structured interviews with key members of different P/CVE organizations to contribute to peer-reviewed articles and public engagement pieces that detail the key lessons to draw to counter radicalization.

Local engagement in P/CVE research: Key considerations

In our work, we have engaged with a variety of actors and partners, including individuals who were involved in violent groups, worked to prevent violence, and were targeted for recruitment by violent actors. While our methods and contexts vary with each project, one consistent element in our approach is engagement at the community or local level. Local engagement, as we define it, means working in neighborhoods and villages and actively engaging participants with direct experience with the radicalization process or practitioners approaching P/CVE from the grassroots level in the research process. Participants, there-

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11   The research was recently completed, and the final draft of the report submitted and scheduled to be published.

12   Information on Fighters For Peace can be found here: http://fightersforpeace.org.

fore, are not just the subjects of research, they are active contributors to its development and vetting.

Particular challenges arise when conducting local-level P/CVE research, such as gaining access to communities, navigating sensitivities, minimizing risk for vulnerable participants, and extrapolating from local cases to global trends. In our experience, however, meaningful engagement with various local actors can help alleviate some of these challenges, enabling 1) understanding of hyperlocal violent extremism dynamics; 2) access and trust with participant communities; 3) inclusion in the research process and findings; 4) adherence to ethical approaches and standards when conducting research on sensitive and securitized issues; and 5) production of actionable, context-specific, and relevant recommendations for policy/ and practice that are suited to the needs of the community.

Local engagement is not easy. As a research approach, it requires a great deal of commitment and care from researchers to ensure that the research truly engages local communities instead of instrumentalizing them. Based on our own experiences interacting and engaging with local communities to conduct research on sensitive topics, we offer the following recommendations for researchers seeking to conduct local P/CVE studies.

Remember the bigger picture

Local context matters for P/CVE: radicalization most often happens at the individual or small group level. Learning about the perceived deficits in the local context will highlight key methods in recruitment narratives of extremist organizations. Better understanding the grievances behind the narratives will enhance policy and programmatic responses that target the underlying drivers of radicalization. However, this local focus should be contextualized within broader, macro level dynamics and policies.

Recognize the micro-macro nexus

Recent literature indicates that wide generalizations of assumed drivers towards violence or extremism are misplaced, and no single method of prevention works universally.[13] The

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13   William Stephens, Stijn Sieckelinck, and Hans Boutellier, "Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1543144; JM Berger, "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach based on

weakness of a local engagement approach, especially in P/CVE research aimed at enhancing policy and practice, is that drawing generalizable recommendations becomes difficult. This weakness, turned around, can be a strength, however. While our local engagement approach does not place primacy on national-level P/CVE polices, it recognizes their importance in the local contexts. Much policy understandably focuses on the national level. Our approach seeks to place national-level P/CVE policies in a context of local realities, opening up multiple levels for policy impact and assessing the effect of national-level approaches and dynamics on local experiences.

Inquiring about local-level experiences and relating them to possible P/CVE policies at the national level allows for an intimate and nuanced understanding of the drivers of radicalization in local contexts and the influence (or lack thereof) of broader policies. For example, researching the sectarian interface area of Bab al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli, Lebanon, we found that the motivations for participation in armed groups and the hooks used by recruiters were rooted more in local grievances than in broader religious or political narratives prevalent in other contexts—an important finding when making recommendations for a broader national P/CVE strategy.

While understanding hyperlocal dynamics is essential, researchers must adopt an approach that does not lose the forest for the trees but understands the importance of multiple levels of policy and its influence in local context. One method we found useful to making these connections is *grounded theory*, which creates theories from emerging patterns in data. Grounded theory allows the salient facts to emerge from the context, providing a better platform for identifying local dynamics that traditional hypothesis-driven research may miss.

Facilitate cross-comparison and generalization

This is not to say, however, that local-engagement approaches cannot build in mechanisms for greater generalizability and cross-comparability. Comparative lessons and synergies between local contexts are important to map out and understand. While localizing research tends to limit the generalizability of findings, this weakness can be mitigated through study designs that allow for comparison through the framing and organization of topics in inter-

views and focus groups. To collect comparative data across hyper-local contexts, we recommend formulating and grouping interview and focus group questions thematically, rather than by a context-specific logic.

An example of this approach is our study that compared the perceptions of radical and counter-radical messaging across Nigeria, Tunisia, and Lebanon. To account for the differences in contexts, ensuring hyper-local distinctions while safeguarding the ability to compare the data during the analysis phase, we used the following two questions to guide the focus groups:

- Do these messages impact behavior and how?
- Why do they impact your behavior, why do they not?

Focusing on behavioral changes through interpretative intra-personal understanding of the messages provided a basis for prompts (identified and outlined in the discussion guide testing) to explore the contours of the local context without undermining comparability at a later stage. Further, we employed audio-visual aids, images, speeches, and advertisements, that contained a range of messaging techniques and content. These were specific to each country through particular socio-political messages, content and language but were selected based on over-arching thematic parameters to ensure comparability.

(Actually) invest in local relationships

Local-level P/CVE research requires building trust between researchers and communities. Local communities and local partners are not only key gatekeepers of access and information, they are experts on local dynamics and efforts. Developing relationships at the local level over time can improve research findings, make the research experience more comfortable for participants, and build lasting, collaborative research practices instead of purely extractive ones. This is particularly true of research in areas affected by conflict and violent extremism, which can be difficult or even detrimental if community members are reluctant to discuss violence or are still suffering from recent trauma.

Partner with local gatekeepers

In our research, we work closely with local partners trusted in their communities. For example, we arranged a focus group with Palestinian refugees from the Ain el Hilweh camp in Lebanon who suffered from a range of formal and informal exclusionary policies of the Lebanese state, making them a vulnerable group wary of conducting interviews with unfamiliar researchers. The border of the refugee camp is securitized by the Lebanese Army, causing the residents of the Ain el Hilweh to be less likely to engage in research focusing on local pathways of radicalization for fear that it might lead to further security protocols. As the local partner had an established relationship with Palestinians in the camp, they could act as an interlocutor, facilitating access to key research participants.

Invest in meaningful relationships and exchanges

The development of good working relationships with grassroots organizations requires a significant investment of time, which the research trip planning stage often omits. Multiple site visits, including initial visits without formal data collection, allow researchers to focus on observations and meetings with key individuals and organizations. These visits offer an opportunity for the researcher to obtain access to hard-to-reach participants and to learn about local sensitivities. Offering to contribute pro-bono work in the form of editing funding proposals or final reports can also help cement trusted working relationships with local partners and gatekeepers.

However, while preferable, long-term relationships might not be possible. In these instances, a site visit with key personnel and meetings to outline the parameters of the study to clear any misconceptions are viable alternatives. Allowing the interlocutor organization access to interview questions or initial findings can deepen the research, incorporating suggestions specific to the hyper-local context.

In some cases, we developed long-term partnerships with local organizations that share thematic approaches to tackling violent extremism in different contexts such as Fighters for Peace (FFP), an NGO of ex-combatants in Lebanon, and Small Steps, an organization of former right-wing extremists in the UK. By developing long-term partnerships with both organizations, we have been able to compare and contrast their programmatic approaches

to violent extremism longitudinally, which deepened the analysis and accounted for the independent variables between the contexts. Furthermore, as researchers, we were well-placed to communicate best practices to benefit both organizations, especially when funding does not allow for peer knowledge exchanges. This relationship can build trust with individuals inside the organizations, resulting in more access to individuals who are more willing to participate in research, and, ultimately, improving the breadth and inclusivity of the information.

We also have an ongoing relationship with the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) comprised of formers, researchers, and practitioners. Working with this consortium over the long term has enabled us to learn from local partners and act as interlocutors to share best practices between different groups and contexts. Participation in RAN also ensures that as researchers we keep up to date with the current theoretical and empirical developments in the research and practice.

Maintain objectivity

Local engagement for P/CVE research is not without its challenges. For example, as researchers spend more time in communities and develop trust relationships with participants, it may be difficult to maintain objectivity. We address this by striving to include mixed methods in our research designs that allow for triangulation of data that can highlight potential biases. We are also intentional about incorporating reflexive practice into our methodology, debriefing with each other and with external colleagues about the impact of our presence and our trust relationships on the findings.

Be inclusive

Inclusion is not just about seeking participation from the most vulnerable populations (or conceptions of it) but about recognizing the lived experiences and diversity *within* different populations. For example, while young men have been the primary concern in P/CVE research, focusing research on this group alone will not provide the necessary data to understand societal deficits that contribute to marginalization and radicalization. The inclusion of women, girls, and other demographics are crucial to nuance the interrelated

phenomena of radicalization, while avoiding broad-stroke assumptions, such as "females are always likely to be a vanguard against extremism."

We strive for inclusion and gender sensitivity in all our conflict-related research, facilitating the inclusion of different socio-political groups into research that stretches beyond, but often informs, the radicalization prism. For example, understanding the issues that coalesce around forced migration and the integration of refugees in new communities highlights a potential pathway of alienation. This marginalization can contribute to group vulnerabilities, which can be instrumentalized to motivate people from those populations to violence. Local engagement helps researchers reach marginalized groups whose voices are often left out of elite-focused or national-level studies and provide underrepresented perspectives that add nuance to P/CVE discussions. Developing trust and building partnerships through local engagement is crucial for accessing marginalized or hard-to-reach groups, including women, youth, refugees or IDPs, and ex-combatants.

ENGAGE YOUTH

P/CVE research tends to focus on the drivers of radicalization for youth[14] as the most significant demographic of extremist groups[15]. P/CVE often perceives young people as a problem, labeling young people as vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment.[16] Youth, however, is not a monolithic grouping. Treating it as such ignores broader, cross-cutting marginalization factors—political, economic, and social—that intersect with other identity factors such as nationality, religion, sect, class, urban or rural livelihood, region, sexual orientation, and race. In environments where young people feel acutely vulnerable, where social pressures limit their engagement in civil life and their autonomy in family settings, research and policies problematizing youth will only serve to alienate them.[17]

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14   Elizabeth Pearson, "Why Men Fight and Women Don't: Masculinity and Extremist Violence," *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, September 13, 2018, https://institute.global/policy/why-men-fight-and-women-dont-masculinity-and-extremist-violence.

15   Michael Kimmel, "Almost All Violent Extremists Share One Thing: Their Gender," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/08/violent-extremists-share-one-thing-gender-michael-kimmel .

16   Merle Verdegaal and Wessel Haanstra, "The Role of Youth Work in the Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism," *Radicalisation Awareness Network*, December 7, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-yf-and-c/docs/ran_yf_c_role_youth_work_prevention_radicalisation_violent_extremism_06-07_12_2017_en.pdf.

17   For research work that has critically evaluated the negative effect of problematizing young people in different environments, see: Emma C. Murphy, "Problematizing Arab Youth: Generational Narratives of Systemic Failure," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 1 (2012): 5-22; Peter Kelly, "Youth as an Artefact of Expertise: Problematizing the Practice of Youth Studies in an Age of Uncertainty," *Journal of Youth Studies* 3, no. 3 (2000): 301-15.

For us, ensuring the meaningful representation of young people requires conducting inter-views and focus groups with separate age categories. Splitting the so-called youth demo-graphic, ranging from 15 to 35 years, into sub-groups, such as teenagers and young adults 22-35, can elucidate youth perspectives, without seniority causing a reluctance to engage with the questions. As a best practice, we recommend including a cross-section of young people to avoid essentializing certain demographics.

Engaging with young people from different classes, religions, and ethnicities through net-works—faith groups, schools, sports and youth clubs—ensures a cross-sectional approach. This avoids treating youth as one broad category and helps to identify issues that affect young people of different backgrounds. For example, in our study in Iraq, refugee youth from minority backgrounds displaced by ISIS had different priorities than university stu-dents, and urban youth in Baghdad had different cultural concerns than those in Erbil.

Be gender sensitive

Conflict research in general and P/CVE research in particular often portrays women and girls in a binary, either as victims or saviors.[18] Many women are indeed victims of extrem-ist violence; Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls in 2014,[19] and ISIS raped and sexually enslaved thousands of Yazidi women between 2014-2018.[20] In our research, however, we aim to add nuance to the gender narrative by including women who identify as survivors, activists, community leaders, and ex-fighters. It is good research practice to be sensitive to narratives of masculinity and take a nuanced perspective to men and boys' experiences in conflict as well.

To include gender sensitivity in our research, first, before beginning fieldwork, we include gender sensitivity in the conflict analysis and actor mapping. This inputs a critical gender component into an area of study that has been often male-focused. The use of a gendered

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18   Amanda Braga and Christina Kwuak, ''How Girls' Education Intersects with Violent Extremism," *Brookings Education Plus Supplement*, April 13, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/04/13/how-girls-education-intersects-with-vio-lent-extremism/; For a more nuanced discussion see for example: Yulia Nesterova, "Women and Violent Extremism," *Impakter,* May 28, 2018, https://impakter.com/women-violent-extremism/; Katherine E. Brown, "Gender and Anti-Radicalisation: Women and Emerging Counter-terrorism Measures," in *Gender, National Security, and Counter-terrorism: Human Rights Perspectives,* eds. Margaret L. Satter-thwaite and Jayne Huckerby (London: Routledge, 2013): 36-59, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203081396.

19   BBC News, "Nigeria Chibok Abductions: What We Know," May 8, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-32299943.

20   Cathy Otten, "A Broken Homecoming," *Foreign Policy*, May 2, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/02/a-broken-homecoming-isis-rape-yazidi/.

view can illustrate if potential failures of masculinity are contributory factors to radicalization and if or how radicalization processes differ between men and women in different contexts. Comparing the process of radicalization across genders and mapping the potential differences in radicalization pathways increases the understanding of the phenomena. Focusing on the hyper-local level helps underscore the gender dynamics within communities that may be particular to the area and guide data collection and data analysis.

Researchers should strive for gender parity through inclusion in the research design to deepen the understanding of an important social dynamic that drives key behavioral patterns. For example, when arranging focus groups, we work with local interlocutors to aim for gender parity. In communities with noted gender sensitivities, we run some focus groups separately with women, ideally with a female facilitator. These separate focus groups are often crucial for making women's voices heard and creating a safe space to talk about gender-based violence among other issues.

Engage ex-combatants

Though not considered a typical marginalized group, the voices of ex-combatants are often missing from conflict and P/CVE research.[21] In our work at the local level, especially in Lebanon (with ex-combatants from the civil war) and the UK (with ex-combatants from the Northern Ireland Troubles and former right-wing extremists), we found that the inclusion of formers enhances our research. First, insights from formers are crucial to highlighting the pathways of recruitment and exiting.

Second, in our research we have seen that formers often carry a degree of social capital in their community that can facilitate trust relationships. They are often seen as defenders of communities, having built their reputations through violent political action. They can use their reputations to interact with persons in the process of radicalization who are hard to reach. Formers often have compelling stories and, depending on the individual, the capacity to retell their experience to others and warn against violence as a means to achieve personal goals from a point of authority. In Lebanon, for example, ex-fighters from the civil

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21   Recent work has pointed to the importance of having former extremists work on prevention and counter radicalization. For more, see: Simon Copland, "How Do You Prevent Extremism," *BBC*, May 1, 2019, http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20190501-how-do-you-prevent-extremism?ocid=fbfut&fbclid=IwAR06gNgznyWscerrIXV7OWSHNI3MeSOILhYifUSWjrn240BXXAya47hJNdU.

war worked with youth in the Bab al Tabbeneh and Jabal Mohsen neighborhood to prevent them from being drawn by recruiters to fight in Syria.

Working with formers is not without complications. Finding individuals who have the needed inter-personal capacity but have also sufficiently recovered from their experiences is not always easy. Fully exiting an armed group or ideology can be a years-long process and is not possible for all. With many formers suffering from trauma-related mental health issues, a significant risk of re-traumatization exists if they engage in P/CVE projects before they are ready. There are few formers who are able to engage in activities, and many more are needed to make a meaningful impact. Additionally, in still divided societies, formers who engage publicly in P/CVE or reconciliation work face rejection from their kin-groups. Ongoing deep ethnic enmity and can endanger the former engaging in the P/CVE work and often limits their contributions, in particular public engagements.

Access to former fighters can be difficult, especially in contexts where the conflict is recent or ongoing.[22] In these cases, we rely on relationships with local NGOs, cultivated through the local engagement approach, to try to gain access to former fighters. Once a trust relationship develops, most former fighters who have exited armed groups welcome the opportunity to engage with researchers to share their experiences and help others disengage or prevent them from joining armed groups.

Be sensitive

Local engagement in P/CVE can pose ethical challenges, including 1) undermining the relationship between participants and interlocutors, often through insensitive questioning; 2) jeopardizing the security of participants; 3) and traumatizing participants, particularly those who are more vulnerable (such as young people) or those with direct experience with violence. Establishing cooperative relationships with local organizations enhances good ethical practice and directly feeds into the design of the project, helping phrase questions appropriately and avoid insensitive or traumatizing topics.

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22   Liz Sly, "The Jihadists No One Wants," *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/syria/isis-prisoners/?utm_term=.16fad0e6ae15.

Understand and prevent trauma

In our research, we are mindful that participants can be under significant stress, and insensitive questions or style in qualitative methods can upset or re-traumatize participants. Re-traumatization of participants is a particular risk in conflict areas or with vulnerable groups such as refugees and survivors of sexual violence. The research approach must give participants the space to not answer questions. P/CVE researchers should diversify data collection methods for conflict sensitivity. Directly quizzing participants during interviews can result in evasion or re-traumatization and can undermine relationships with local partners and participants. Our questions on paper do not ask or inquire about violence-related trauma, although these issues often come up during the focus groups or interviews. It often falls on the researcher to decide to probe further or not; local knowledge and experience in the community can help researchers make that call.

We have conducted interviews with persons whose stories are a matter of public record, and they usually display more comfort with probing questions. However, we have had interviews with former combatants who had sensitive reactions to a memory they recounted—at that point we stepped back from the questions. We have also found value in adopting processes that create co-ownership of interview processes, such as oral-history techniques, which allow the participant to shape the direction of the interview, giving them more agency in determining when and how to discuss difficult topics. These techniques avoid direct challenges on sensitive topics that can lead to participant evasion, disengagement, or traumatization. Other methods we adopted in focus groups were group work exercises—including role plays and privately written stream-of-consciousness activities—in Jordan and Iraq that helped participants open up on the topic and think about the questions in non-linear ways.

Ensure participant safety and comfort

The security of participants is always a priority but is a lead concern in contexts with active state security force operations. Participants fearful of researchers' agendas often did not attend focus groups. We worked with local organizations to develop a one-page description of the research, funding sources, implementers, and the purpose (all repeated before focus groups verbally) to ensure transparent recruitment of participants.

Locations of focus groups and research can be problematic. Significant travel for participants tends to lessen their feeling of security and willingness to participate. We have designed data collection to occur in the neighborhoods where participants live, normally on grounds of the local organization or a suitable and neutral safe space. An example that highlights the variance intra country was Iraq; in Baghdad participants were unwilling to meet in hotels due to the history of bombings, while hotels in Erbil were considered safe. We discovered this in conflict analysis discussions before the data collection began.

Displaced people and migrants are some of the most vulnerable groups in society due to the precarity of their legal position and the often-negative response of the host community to their presence.[23] Refugees have at times been the victim of P/CVE narratives that securitized their presence in host states, identifying them as vulnerable to recruitment, especially those congregated together in camps bordering the states they fled.[24] As a result, security forces are usually more present in organized camps and on the perimeter governing the spaces where refugees live, which requires researchers to inform local authorities of their project intentions or logistics. To ensure participants' personal security, focus groups can take place away from camps. However, they should convene nearby, as refugees generally restrict their movement to avoid being stopped without documentation.

To increase participant comfort, we have used age brackets and separated genders to ensure that focus group participants felt as comfortable as possible. We obtained the written permission of a parent and legal guardian before engaging participants under the age of 18. In addition, the local partner would provide staff that sat in on the focus groups, ensuring the presence of two adults at all times. We also aim to conduct the interviews or focus groups with facilitators of corresponding genders.

If we are working with local facilitators rather than conducting focus groups ourselves, we work with local partners to select the facilitators and conduct a training, including a mock

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23 A range of scholarship has concluded that the international structures designed to protect refugees are insufficient. For more, see: Zachary A. Lomo, "The Struggle for Protection of the Rights of Refugees and IDPs in Africa: Making the Existing International Legal Regime Work," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 18, no. 2 (2000): 268; Jeff Crisp, "A New Asylum Paradigm? Globalisation, Migration and the Uncertain Future of the International Refugee Regime," *St Antony's International Review* 1, no. 1 (2005): 39-53.

24 Classic definition of the "warrior refugee" was originally formulated in: Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1992).

focus group. We recommend this approach to give facilitators practice in ensuring that participants feel comfortable throughout, especially when answering questions on personal experiences. Most facilitators agreed that the mock focus group helped make them more confident and effective when conducting the actual focus groups.

Protect anonymity

P/CVE research should prioritize participants' well-being and anonymity. Researchers must keep all data files and transcripts in a protected repository and guard personally identifiable information of participants to guarantee their safety. When writing up the findings, researchers should only include basic descriptions of gender, age category, or location of province or city to avoid biographical details that could identify participants even without names. The need for these measures increases in states where security apparatuses have a poor human rights record. P/CVE research is likely to draw the attention of security institutions, thus, researchers must take extra care to protect the identity of participants. Local engagement can help here by making researchers aware of the social context and networks to avoid identifying information and ensuring good ethical and safety practice based on trust relationships.

Manage expectations

Many participants in conflict areas face daily uncertainty of services, such as Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. Insecurity and the lack improvement in service provision can result in heightened tensions around research. Participants in heavily researched groupings such as Syrian refugees in Lebanon, expressed research fatigue, asking why they should take part in another discussion when they have been involved in many previously. Syrian refugees in the Levant face a near constant turnover of researchers examining socio-political, health, and housing issues they face to—from the perspective of the participants—no discernable benefits in their life. The lack of palpable results in some cases led to anger directed at UN officials during our focus group, often coinciding with cuts in services and support.

One way to ensure a sensitive, ethical approach, is to manage the expectations of research participants upfront, especially when dealing with marginalized local communities. During our research in Lebanon with Syrian and Palestinian refugees, to seek to avoid frustration

directed at us or the organizing partner, we sought to manage expectations of participants before the focus group. We gave the partner a clear written script that outlined all the relevant information pertaining to the research to give to the potential participants. We also sought to reduce the inconvenience in the lives of participants by organizing focus groups at locations accessible and times appropriate for them. In south Lebanon, Palestinian residents of the Ain el Hilweh camp had to endure a rigorous security system entering and leaving the camp, and we were denied a permit to enter. To mitigate, we organized a focus group on a day in which the refugees were already visiting the partner adjacent to the camp, reducing additional travel time and stress.

Be relevant

There are multiple audiences for P/CVE research findings. It is crucial to be cognizant of the interests of stakeholders on the one hand and the needs of the community on the other. P/CVE has created a research and policy paradigm that has, so far, not managed to properly respond to the multitude of pathways that lead to radicalization. Understanding political violence as an expression of agency related to other potential socio-political marginalization or personal actions (such as drug addiction or suicide) can help to understand individual motivations, communal weaknesses, and policy responses.

Therefore, P/CVE work should create holistic and contextualized research agendas to ensure that the policy recommendations that flow from findings do not paint violent extremism as uniquely abnormal but as a choice in response to the surrounding environment. Policy recommendations should not focus on violent extremism solely but seek to tackle group and individual marginalization. This wider policy focus is essential, as focusing on limiting violent extremism only has already proven to lead to undesirable prescriptions that can target certain groups while constraining healthy public sentiments of dissent that help alleviate feelings of societal alienation.

Co-create policy recommendations

Policy recommendations should be inclusive of the grassroots level so that the local dynamics that lead to violence are addressed. Sense-checking findings with partners and participants to ensure that the final report accurately reflects the views and experiences of

research subjects helps keep the findings grounded and those who contributed to the research positively engaged. Best practices to sense-check include agreeing with the partner organizations at the start of the project on an appropriate format for reviewing findings, such as sending outlines or drafts for comments, arranging follow-on calls, or returning to the field site to discuss findings and plans for dissemination. During the collaboration over the findings, we develop initial recommendations focused on grassroots interventions with key takeaways that local organizations can implement to increase the efficiency of their P/CVE programming.

Plan for multi-stakeholder dissemination

Final reports and recommendations should ensure that the findings speak to important wider trends. Dissemination of the work maximizes policy uptake and should engage participants and local partners in the process when possible. Different stakeholders in regional and international arenas have various levels of influence, so a mapping of key actors can help ensure that the findings reach appropriate audiences and inform relevant program agendas, increasing the likelihood of uptake when presenting the report. For example, the network of Club de Madrid helped gain access to international policymakers and donors interested in P/CVE. During local dissemination, materials should be translated into the local language and disseminated in accessible formats to ensure accessibility and pre-empt bias towards international organizations and donor countries. Building local relationships allows local actors to be involved in the dissemination of findings and implementation of recommendations.

Conclusions

From our research, we have found that local engagement tells a more complete story about radicalization processes, taking into account the contexts locals face, including those trying to prevent extremist recruitment and those who have been its targets. We have worked collaboratively with local actors at each stage of the research process to ensure more ethical, inclusive, and contextually appropriate data collection and policy recommendations. This approach is a helpful contrast to top-down P/CVE research that often securitizes common

development policy areas, sometimes alienating potential local partners working to confront extremism.

Local engagement for P/CVE research is not without challenges. Overall, however, we find that locally rooted participatory research positively impacts findings. The deep data we uncover via interviews, focus groups, and community case studies conducted with local partners provide a rich picture of how P/CVE operates at the individual and community levels—a necessary complement to top-down large-N studies.

The challenges of this research are that the qualitative and critical approach is time consuming and that recommendations focusing on an integrated approach tackling marginalization are often deemed inappropriate for policymakers who seek an immediate response to violent extremism. However, the methodological approach we have outlined here can help avoid frequent pitfalls of P/CVE research and practice.

A collaborative approach to data collection can create meaningful relationships with practitioners at the grassroots level who are first responders to tackling marginalization. Oftentimes, research does not make use of these key groups and, in worst case, damages relationships with them with research agendas essentializing those who engage in violent extremism. By utilizing established theoretical concepts around violence, violent extremism can be demystified to offer policy prescriptions that do not alienate special categories of people and ensure that the wake of data collection does not undermine relationships with those best placed to tackle violent extremism.

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Research as an Outsider

Positionality, Ethics, and Risk

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Almost a decade ago I was in Afghanistan to observe the first round of a presidential election. Election observation involves careful recording of information about the different polling centers and stations visited. In preparation for the task, I had bought a sleeveless "journalist's jacket" with plenty of pockets for storing notes, a mobile phone, and other observation process paraphernalia. I was in the company of three other observers, one of whom was an Afghan friend of more than thirty years' standing. When he saw me in the jacket, he came up and, with no sense of irony, said, "Bill, you should take off that jacket—people will think you're a foreigner." I chuckled at the time, but since then, I have reflected often on the implications of my friend's observation.

Outsiders—or "foreigners"—who study violent extremism in affected countries can have multiple identities as students of violent extremism, as students of the countries in question, and

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1   *William Maley is Emeritus Professor of Diplomacy, The Australian National University, author of Rescuing Afghanistan (2006), Transition in Afghanistan: Hope, Despair and the Limits of Statebuilding (2018), and The Afghanistan Wars, 3rd edition (2021); and co-author (with Niamatullah Ibrahimi) of Afghanistan: Politics and Economics in a Globalising State (2020).*

as "foreigners" to the contexts they study. They often have long-standing personal relation-ships with local community members and in some cases they have spent more time living in the countries they study than in their countries of nationality. Yet they inhabit an ambiguous space, being "insiders" in the eyes of some, and "outsiders" in the eyes of others. This ambiguity gives rise to both practical and ethical challenges in undertaking fieldwork. The following reflections draw on my own experiences to illustrate some of the complexities associated with positionality, ethics, and risk as well as important considerations that all researchers should take into account when undertaking fieldwork in a country other than their own.

The nature of fieldwork: Some personal reflections

The idea of "fieldwork" can entail many different sorts of activity. An environment that is challenging for one type of research may not be challenging for all. This creates a certain space for researchers, particularly those "foreign" to the contexts they study, to structure their activities to minimize risk, political as well as physical, both for themselves and for those with whom they interact or work. This chapter gives a brief introduction to different approaches and methodologies of field research before offering some considerations related to researcher positionality, fieldwork ethics, and personal risk. The author's personal experiences in undertaking research in Afghanistan provide some illustrative anecdotes. The aim of this chapter is to provide researchers with useful considerations for conducting fieldwork in foreign countries beyond the baseline standards.

Document analysis

Often the most straightforward research approach is the analysis of documents, as is the case with a number of important recent studies of groups such as the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, and ISIS.[2] Increasingly, documents of value are available online. However, it

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2   See Thomas H. Johnson, *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict* (London: Hurst & Co., 2017); Samina Yasmeen, *Jihad and Dawah: Evolving Narratives of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jamat ud Dawah* (London: Hurst & Co., 2017); C. Christine Fair, *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (London: Hurst & Co., 2018); Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (London: Hurst & Co., 2020).

may still be necessary to go into the field in order to access some of the more interesting texts. In countries with strong oral traditions, it is easy to overlook the extent to which documentary material of quality may be available. Just how much material is available and of value will depend on the research topic, the language ability of the researcher, or the scientific discipline of the project. It will also depend on previous efforts to gather and catalogue material that researchers might use.

For instance, in Afghanistan, at least until the Taliban occupation of Kabul in August 2021, valuable archives were accessible at the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU). The core of this collection consisted of a remarkably diverse collection of books and papers of the late Professor Louis Dupree, who died in March 1989. His widow, Nancy Hatch Dupree, had initially made some of these papers available to researchers in the ACBAR Resource and Information Centre in Peshawar. After 2001, she pursued the task of having a dedicated building established in Kabul to which the collection was eventually moved, with space for its further expansion. Over time, it grew to include over 100,000 items. In addition, researchers in Kabul could also access a substantial library at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the core of which was the library of the old British Institute of Afghan Studies.

Interviews

Much fieldwork, of course, involves interviewing. This method can be implemented differently and for various purposes. I spent a great deal of time talking to people in Afghanistan about a wide range of issues, but very rarely with a view to quoting them directly in a book or research article where I would need to be able to establish that I had interviewed them pursuant to formal procedures set out in ethics protocols. Such "background" discussion can be of enormous value in contextualizing information found in documents or in "triangulating," that is, cross-checking what other informants observed about particular episodes or activities. A more common form of interviewing, however, involves the collection of testimony that can be cited as evidence about particular matters. Without getting involved in the complex issues related to the nature of testimony,[3] recent discussions of interviewing have highlighted that it has its own complexities. The late Lee Ann Fujii drew attention to

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3   See C.A.J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

the relational dimensions of interviewing: it is not simply a process by which information is extracted from a subject—interviewing involves the development of complicated relationships, with ethical as well as empirical dimensions.[4]

Surveys and statistics

Another form of fieldwork is driven by the desire to gather data that can then be analyzed using various statistical techniques. This approach is widely used in the social sciences, ranging from opinion studies, to the analysis of public policy interventions, to epidemiology. Field research of this kind can be illuminating; it can also go horribly wrong for reasons ranging from design problems to the frailty of the researchers.[5] It is not a form of field research that can be rushed, and those who embark upon it require both an understanding of sampling techniques and statistical analysis and a grasp of the complexities of the specific environment in which they are operating. A weakness in either of these spheres can blind researchers to the implications of their "findings." In a war-torn country, parts of the population may be inaccessible to researchers, complicating survey research. Furthermore, potential biases in responses always need to be borne in mind.

Afghanistan has never been a particularly friendly environment for lone researchers to conduct credible studies of opinion, but quite a lot of surveys have been conducted on which one might be tempted to draw. I would advise extreme caution in doing so unless those conducting the surveys are highly transparent and supply considerable detail about the methods that they employed. I have found the most useful source to be the annual survey of opinion conducted in Afghanistan until 2019 by the Asia Foundation. The staff overseeing the surveys were highly professional; the reports summarizing the data gave detail about the research methodology; the complete data sets are available in accessible form; and the researchers took into account critical comments by users. In analyzing mass opinion in Afghanistan, I would rather rely on Asia Foundation data than on the kind of "qualitative" research that begins with something like "my cook was talking to his cousin's uncle in Helmand, who said that his grandson's friend thought that no one there really trusts the government …"

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4   Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

5   Dean Karlan and Jacob Appel, *Failing in the Field: What We Can Learn When Field Research Goes Wrong* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Official data sources

Hovering somewhere between desk research and fieldwork is the gathering of official statistics. The same warnings should apply here as to survey research: transparency about the data collection method is crucial to assess whether to make use of official statistics or not. Some official statistics may be derived from activities where the government itself has a strong interest in obtaining accurate information, for example statistics on the movement of vehicles carrying goods subject to customs duty. In other areas, however, for example the size and distribution of the population, the relevant data may be difficult to gather, even if the government for the purposes of baseline analysis has a strong interest in gathering accurate information. In societies emerging from severe conflict, sample surveys may remain better sources of information than aggregate data.

Observational studies

My former PhD supervisor, the eminent Sovietologist T.H. Rigby, once advised me never to underestimate the value of simply wandering around and picking up what he called the "smell and feel" of a situation. Conceptually, this is what Michael Polanyi called "tacit knowledge,"[6] and it can be of inestimable value. In a more formal sense, a quest for contextual understanding also underpins many qualitative studies based on in-depth observation of power, community life, and culture.[7]

One interesting form of "fieldwork," usually overlooked, is election observation. This is a subject with a rich literature[8] and it is an activity that can be either extremely instructive or a complete waste of time. It is not a particularly effective device for confidence-building or prevention of fraud, but carried out by well-prepared observers it can identify weaknesses in electoral processes or defects in the performance of tasks even in well-designed pro-

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6   Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

7   Afghanistan has been richly supplied with high-quality studies of this kind in recent years. See, for example, Noah Coburn, *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Dipali Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, *Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Andrea Chiovenda, *Crafting Masculine Selves: Culture, War, and Psychodynamics in Afghanistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

8   See Eric C. Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Susan D. Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Judith G. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works, and Why It Often Fails* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

cesses. What the fieldworker can learn from election observation is essentially incidental to the electoral process itself. But it is a great opportunity for researchers to witness processes of significance in a society they are studying and to develop an understanding of a society that can complement more formalized forms of fieldwork. It is also a good tool for meeting with a wide range of people and gauging their mood.

Considerations for researchers in the field

Fieldwork in war-torn societies involves the navigation of many obstacles. These obstacles are likely to confront the researcher well before they reach the field, as well as during the research process itself. Three in particular deserve some further attention: positionality, ethics, and personal risk. Researchers need to be alert to how their very existence or presence can affect the worlds they are studying. They need to reflect carefully on the moral responsibilities that can flow from their presence. And they need to understand the implications of their presence in the field for their own safety and the safety of others. The following paragraphs set out some personal reflections on how these influences play out for researchers conducting studies of violent extremism and conflict in spaces foreign to their own.

Understanding positionality

Those who study the politics and society of a country foreign to their own operate simultaneously in different social worlds. They can be academic analysts and at the same time key actors in a country's politics—sometimes unavoidably so. For example, their published analyses may affect the reputations of players in the country they study, or the willingness of foreign donors to contribute funding for important activities such as reconstruction or development. Metaphorically, they may provide ammunition for weapons over which they have no control. Over time, they may also develop complex and diverse relationships with people in different strata of the societies they study. These relationships shape the ways in which they conduct analysis, and it is important to be cognizant of them when doing so. Just as Afghan languages have different terms for various categories of friendship,[9] so can

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9   Zach Warren and Basir Bita, "Friends and Enemies in Afghanistan," in *The Psychology of Friendship and Enmity: Relationships in Love, Work, Politics, and War Vol. II*, eds. Rom Harré and Fathali M. Moghaddam (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013): 113.

researchers develop different types of friendship as well, varying in intimacy and scale of reciprocal commitment. On occasion, one can come to know individuals as "friends" well before one engages with them as social or political actors. While this may be a source of valuable insight, it can also blur one's understanding of how far they may be prepared to go to achieve their objectives.

Researchers should never forget that they can be targets for manipulation by actors with agendas of their own. In Afghanistan, Afghans on occasion have proven adept at such manipulation;[10] but so have foreign actors with a line that they are trying to "spin," seeing academics as credible figures to channel that "spin." Spin is a ubiquitous problem: a Western ambassador in Kabul once described to me how the defense minister of his own country had raised his eyebrows in disbelief at the content of a briefing from his own defense force deployed in Afghanistan. Academics and researchers need to be wary about putting themselves in "embedded" positions with interested parties, dependent on their hosts for protection, accommodation, transport and sustenance; the likely result is that they will see only what their hosts want them to see.

The prospect of becoming a "player" can be alluring but carries real dangers, mostly an abandonment of critical judgment and perspective: one risks losing a sense of moral compass. An interesting example of this came in February 2020, with the controversial publication in the New York Times of an op-ed article allegedly written by a leading Taliban figure and listed terrorist, Sirajuddin Haqqani.[11] The word "allegedly" is important here, because no one even remotely familiar with the rhetoric and vocabulary characteristically used by the likes of Haqqani would believe that he was the author of the piece: it read much more like a case for the Taliban drafted by a Western think-tanker. Exactly who the real author was we may never know, but whoever it was showed a lamentable lack of judgment in amplifying the voice of a notorious and duplicitous killer who was on the FBI "Most Wanted" list as a "specially-designated global terrorist."

Researchers need to be wary of getting too close to power. Prominent researchers from the United States are in perpetual danger of being perceived to be weighty figures inside the

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10   See Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, 1978–2012* (London: Hurst & Co., 2014): 234.

11   Sirajuddin Haqqani, "What We, the Taliban, Want," *New York Times,* February 20, 2020.

Beltway, and actors with interests to advance can prove adept in crafting messages which they hope will be swallowed whole. One of the advantages of being an Australian is that Australia is not a particularly powerful country, and there is little risk of being seduced by an offer of proximity to the world of major decision-making. Lord Acton's famous warning that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely[12] is normally read as a caution to office-holders, but it applies equally to people on the fringes of power. And here lies further danger. Proximity to power runs the risk of inducing a form of self-censorship in which people tailor their views to suit the expectations of those with whom they wish to interact. The long-run consequences of such tendencies may end up advantaging no one.

Understanding fieldwork ethics

The politics of ethics

It is now standard for scholars studying human subjects to be required to secure an "ethics clearance" before embarking upon research. In the university context, this is supplied by an ethics committee that in turn may be seeking to give effect to a code of research conduct developed to cover a particular discipline area, or promulgated by a government funding agency. In principle, it is important that scholarly research be conducted with the highest degree of integrity and ethical sensitivity. This should not, however, be confused with the much more contentious idea of political sensitivity, which can be a euphemism for encouraging researchers to avoid questions that political figures would prefer not to have them raise or to tone down their findings if they seem likely to prove controversial.

The philosopher Philip Pettit has warned of the tendency of ethics committees to be "not only self-assertive, but also self-righteous."[13] An additional danger when ethics committees turn their attention to proposed research on war-torn or conflict-ridden societies is that their focus may prove to be more on political or reputational risk-management than on the ethics of research. Violent extremism is highly political, and some institutions may be frightened of becoming too much involved in studying it dispassionately out of a fear of offending powerful forces with their own barrows to push. For example, an Afghan researcher in

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12   John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, *Historical Essays and Studies* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1907), 504.

13   Philip Pettit, *Rules, Reasons, and Norms: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 392.

Australia whose work I was supervising had proposed to study, among other groups, the political party in Afghanistan known as Hizb Al-Tahrir. He was asked by an ethics committee to respond to criticism of the group by a right-wing Australian politician reported in a tabloid newspaper. This prompted me to write to the chair of the committee that "serious political analysis requires a willingness to study groups that some observers may find unappetizing. If analysts in Western universities were limited to studying forces in developing countries that were fully committed to Western-style democracy, a dangerously skewed image of the politics of such countries would most likely result." In light of my comments, and a detailed and careful response by the researcher, the research project was approved; but the questioning on such flimsy grounds was unsettling and seemed to have more to do with protecting an institution from political criticism than with meaningful research ethics.

The ethics of relationship building

For foreign scholars undertaking fieldwork, there is great insight to be found in a study by Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay of what they call the "tribal politics" of fieldwork. Their focus is research in conflict environments, and they argue that

> "long-held methodological principles about positionality do not hold in today's conflicts. Research of this kind can still be pursued, but only if the scholar's place in the political economy of today's wars is reconceived as one of limited power and unavoidable partiality … We argue that those still able to do fieldwork amidst increasing violence do so by virtue of building their own "tribes," forming and joining different social micro-systems to collect data and, in some cases, survive. We conclude that field research must be recognised as a form of intervention, with analogues to other types of intervention—from humanitarian aid delivery to counterinsurgency— and a corresponding set of challenges and opportunities."[14]

Researchers always need to be alert to power relations and power imbalances when they are in the field, since in multifarious ways, asymmetries of power can affect the nature of the material that researchers gather and indirectly the interpretations of situations and cir-

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14   Romain Malejacq and Dipali Mukhopadhyay, "The 'Tribal Politics' of Field Research: A Reflection on Power and Partiality in 21st-Century Warzones," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 4 (2015): 1012.

cumstances that researchers then offer. One particular point worth bearing in mind is that one's local counterparts will likely themselves be building their own "tribes." This should not be seen as a cynical exercise; on the contrary, my experience has often been that in a country such as Afghanistan, certain locals will feel a genuine sense of relief at being able to unburden themselves to researchers about issues that they could not possibly canvass in the company of most other Afghans because they would be seen as transgressing established social norms or expectations. For this reason, the relationships that develop between researchers and some of their local interlocutors or counterparts can over time become much deeper and warmer than one might have anticipated. This need not be a problem, but as a researcher one needs to be alert to the risk of becoming subtly biased in favor of the perspectives advanced by those who one likes and respects.

This ties in with a further point concerning the "real" ethics of fieldwork. In Afghanistan, there is a strong tradition of hospitality, which, allied with the genuine affection that Afghan researchers can develop for their Western partners, can lead Afghans to put their own lives and well-being at risk in order to ensure the safety of foreign visitors. One of my Australian friends, although an aid worker rather than a researcher, experienced this when he was targeted by a suicide bomber. When the blast occurred, most people in the vicinity scattered. The main exception was my friend's Afghan interpreter, who ran to his aid even though there was a very real risk that a second bomber might have been on the scene waiting for this to happen. In this situation, the presence of the Afghan interpreter was an often-unavoidable feature of an environment in which Australians had to work to deliver aid projects that could benefit the Afghan community more broadly. But in the case of researchers, the link between their research and concrete benefits for the local community may be less obvious. It pays to think carefully about whether the desire to complete one's research project maybe putting others at risk. To me, this is the central ethical issue of fieldwork.[15]

The ethics of engagement: Recognizing risks to "local" partners

When one speaks of fieldwork in Afghanistan, it is tempting to assume that it involves "foreigners" making their way to Afghanistan to study the politics and society of the country.

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15   For instructive recent discussions, see Geoffrey Swenson and Kate Roll, "Theorizing Risk and Research: Methodological Constraints and Their Consequences," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 53, no. 2 (2020): 286–291; Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "Hypotheses on Agony: Field Research in a Genocidal Context," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 54, no. 2 (2021): 276–280.

This is of course part of the story, but only a part. Just as significant, particularly in more recent times, has been the phenomenon of Afghans studying Afghanistan and undertaking fieldwork to do so. The Taliban takeover is likely to put an end to this for the moment, but in all probability not forever. Some of these Afghan researchers have been based more-or-less permanently in Afghanistan, others have been Afghans studying abroad with scholarships offered to do doctoral research at foreign universities, and yet others have been researchers of Afghan background who have grown up or have lived in foreign countries for varying periods of time. Depending upon exactly into which category they fall, such researchers may face a diverse range of challenges. Those based in Afghanistan more-or-less permanently may be vulnerable to threats from power holders who for whatever reason feel threatened by the substance of the investigator's research. The family and friends of the investigator may also be at some risk. Afghan doctoral researchers in foreign countries may be required by their universities to take security measures that are wholly inappropriate for natives of the country and simply serve to attract unwanted attention. On the other hand, Afghans who have long been abroad may be framed by their local interlocutors as gharbzadeh ("westernized"), and may speak local languages in a somewhat archaic fashion, employing vocabulary that was common when they were young in Afghanistan, but which is now no longer widely used, whilst at the same time they lack a command of more recent idiom.

Afghan researchers can also be involved in fieldwork as co-authors with non-Afghan counterparts. Depending on how well the co-authors know each other, this can be a fruitful relationship, at best bringing together diverse strands of tacit and explicit knowledge to produce an illuminating product. Western researchers who embark on such activities nonetheless need to understand that their Afghan co-authors may face vulnerabilities that they do not share, and that Afghan researchers are also obliged to live simultaneously in a range of social worlds. It is therefore important, at the outset, to be very clear that if Afghan co-authors have reason to feel uncomfortable about the trajectory of a project, they will be free to exit with no hard feelings. Gifted Afghan co-authors can add so much value to a project that it is crucial to ensure that their goodwill is not exploited. The contributions made by Afghan co-authors should be fully and explicitly recognized in all publications that flow from a particular project of research. Afghanistan-based co-authors will often have fewer opportunities to explore the various reaches of the academic world than their non-Afghan counterparts, not least because Western countries have often proved to be mean-spirited

in issuing visas to Afghan researchers or in issuing them promptly. One way to try to circumvent this is to ensure that Afghanistan-based researchers receive proper recognition for their contributions to a greater understanding of their country.

The ethics of verification: Reporting on rumors

There are a range of miscellaneous issues, a grab-bag of sorts, that can arise when one works on Afghanistan and that relate to the ubiquity in Afghanistan of conspiracy theories and rumors. While documentary material and high-quality scholarship is increasingly available, communication by word-of-mouth is still a pervasive way of sharing information about political and social matters. Perhaps unsurprisingly, conspiracy theories of diverse variety[16] are frequently encountered in Afghanistan, very often involving the United States, which, as one of the largest international players in Afghanistan in recent decades, is easily depicted as having had a finger in every pie. In some cases, the provenance of such theories is difficult to trace; in other cases, they have clearly been generated by political figures seeking to advance their own interests.

Sorting fact from fiction can be quite a challenge but is worth the effort if there are grounds for suspicion that key actors may be acting in a conspiratorial fashion. In Afghanistan rumor is ubiquitous in the form of unverified and sometimes unverifiable factual claims that may be entirely false.[17] These can be exceedingly dangerous, as the brutal murder of Farkhunda Malikzada by a violent mob on March 19, 2015, in the center of Kabul made clear; the killers were motivated by a rumor that she had burnt a copy of the Quran, a rumor subsequently proven to have been completely baseless.[18] However, not all rumors are baseless and sometimes they can supply useful leads for researchers to follow. It is important to cross-check such claims as rigorously as possible, but in many cases one will be able to go only so far before the trail goes cold. In my experience, the best thing to do when this happens is to make no use of the claim in writings but instead to file it away at the back of one's

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16   See Matthew Gray, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Nancy L. Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead, *A Lot of People are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

17   Cass R. Sunstein, *On Rumors: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, and What Can Be Done* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

18   See Niamatullah Ibrahimi, "Rumor and Collective Action Frames: An Assessment of How Competing Conceptions of Gender, Culture and Rule of Law Shaped Responses to Rumor and Violence in Afghanistan," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 2019.

mind in case some further information surfaces in the future that may make it worthwhile to revisit the old claim and explore it further.

Understanding personal risk

No academic article is worth the loss of a life or serious injury to life and limb. Researchers must be very cautious and careful when working in a war-torn society. Yet ultimately, researchers should develop the habit of making their own informed assessments of security rather than simply relying on the assessments of other people or agencies. Those assessments may prove to be ill-grounded. I was in Mazar-e Sharif in May 1997 when Abdul Malik Pahlavan attempted a "coup" against the local strongman, Abdul Rashid Dostam. The broad consensus as stories spread on May 19 about what was happening was that this simply reflected a certain jockeying for power. I did not share this belief and arranged to fly from Mazar-e Sharif to Islamabad on May 22. On May 24, heavy fighting flared in the district of Mazar where I had been staying. Ever since, I have been extremely glad that I trusted my own judgment instead of relying on the judgment of others.

Government travel warnings: Important implications

An additional complication for researchers flows from the growing disposition of states to try to discourage their nationals from traveling to war-torn countries by issuing online travel warnings. This is a relatively recent development, but one that has the potential to affect researchers in complex and unforeseen ways.[19] For example, for some years with respect to Afghanistan, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has offered the advice "do not travel." This is sensible advice where tourists are concerned, but until recently was less obviously relevant to researchers with extensive field experience of their own, and some of whom were citizens of Afghanistan as well as Australia. Do-not-travel advice typically has the effect of invalidating insurance cover that researchers might otherwise have enjoyed under blanket policies negotiated by their institutions and thus can increase the cost of doing fieldwork. Travel warnings also tend to be somewhat homogenized and less attuned than one might wish to the regional variations that can be found in a

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19   William Maley, "Risk, Populism, and the Evolution of Consular Responsibilities," in *Consular Affairs and Diplomacy*, eds. Jan Melissen and Ana Mar Fernández (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011).

complex environment. That said, researchers do need to understand the severe limitations on the capacity of embassies in Afghanistan to offer "consular assistance."

Working with security firms: Pressures and considerations

Some government agencies, including Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, advise that travelers should consider "hiring dedicated armed personal security protection, though even these precautions cannot guarantee personal safety." In war-torn countries, there has been a proliferation in recent years of private security companies.[20] It is important, however, to recognize that security firms have services to sell and are working actively to promote them. A researcher needs to balance the value of the protection private security firms provide against the danger that they would simply mark the person being "protected" as a target worth hitting. This is dangerous when such firms have developed routines. When one is in a country for any length of time, it is easy to fall into routine patterns of behavior, but it is these very routines that expose one to danger, since they can make one a more predictable target. Unless one can afford very high levels of security protection, it may well be that avoiding routine and maintaining a low profile is the best that one can do. At a certain point, avoidance of routine can almost become a matter of second nature. No matter how splendid the food in a particular restaurant, it pays not to become a regular patron; and restaurants with a predominantly local clientele may be safer than those known to be frequently patronized by foreigners.

It is also worth noting that security personnel can vary in their knowledge and experience in a given country. A decade ago, in Afghanistan, I was traveling in a convoy with security personnel who had only just arrived in the country after working for years in Iraq. The convoy was stopped by the Afghan National Security Forces at a checkpoint, and weapons were found in the security personnel's vehicle, weapons for which they had no registration papers. This gave rise to a tense and awkward stand-off, with some potential to escalate. I felt in greater danger at that moment than at virtually any other time I had been Afghanistan. More recently, a similar convoy drove me into a dead-end street from which it

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20 See P.W Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Deborah D. Avant, *The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Simon Chesterman and Chia Lehnardt, eds., *From Mercenaries to Market: The Rise and Regulation of Private Military Companies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

extracted itself with considerable difficulty; a somewhat similar traffic foul-up to that which left Archduke Franz Ferdinand vulnerable to an assassin's bullet in Sarajevo in June 1914.

Conclusion

These reflections do not take us in the direction of any single model for fieldwork but point to a range of considerations useful to bear in mind. One such consideration relates to the complexity of the environment that a conflict-affected country such as Afghanistan offers.[21] A preoccupation with the purely logistical difficulties of working in a war-torn place can distract attention from the equally significant challenges that arise from the complexity of local politics and social structure. Persons contemplating fieldwork need to keep their eyes wide open and avoid the temptation to over-generalize or rely on a small number of informants.[22] Another relates to the need routinely to interrogate the research. Self-awareness is almost always a virtue but it is a particularly important virtue in the field where the excitement of day-to-day life, the "thrill of the chase" as it were, can dull awareness of the problematic position of a researcher, neither "inside" nor "outside" the realms of study. But perhaps most important of all is the need to be perpetually sensitive to the vulnerabilities of those locals with whom one is working, whether they be fellow researchers or citizens of the country. They may face dangers that a visiting researcher does not; their kindness, goodwill, and generosity should never be taken for granted.

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21 William Maley, "Studying Host-Nationals in Operational Areas: The Challenge of Afghanistan," in *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies,* eds. Joseph Soeters, Patricia M. Shields and Sebastiaan Rietjens (London: Routledge, 2014).

22 See Kevin Sieff, "Nebraska Kebab-Maker Has Advised Seven U.S. Commanders in Afghanistan," Washington Post, March 29, 2013.

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Interacting with Trauma
Reflections from Research in Kosovo

Teuta Avdimetaj[1]

This chapter explores the role of trauma in violent extremism research, offering insights on its effects on the research process, providing insights on the radicalization process of individual cases, and informing reintegration prospects of returning foreign fighters and their family members. The chapter focuses on war-related trauma as a widespread experience in post-conflict societies, which may persist years after the war ends, scarring societies in numerous ways for generations and potentially creating an ongoing cycle of violence. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the available literature on the link between trauma and radicalization while bringing attention to existing gaps within this field. It then continues with insights from field research in Kosovo on how trauma was expressed among the family

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members of foreign fighters, including women returnees from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, and provides insight into how the author approached the subject in her own research.

Introduction

The field of violent extremism studies has developed exponentially in the recent years, as scholars, practitioners, and policymakers sought to investigate the factors that lead individuals to adopt extremist beliefs and engage in violent behavior. Increasing interest in the field of violent extremism has produced numerous studies that capture the complexity of the phenomenon, acknowledging the interplay between multiple factors that influence the radicalization process such as social, political, and economic grievances combined with a personal quest for belonging to a cause, ideology, or social network.[2] These insights continue to inform preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts that aim to target extremist radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization to violence[3] and address the root causes of violent extremism in order to prevent it.[4] However, there is a dearth of knowledge on how factors such as trauma can influence violent extremism in both the (1) radicalization process and (2) reintegration and reconciliation process. The issue of violent extremism is often framed as an ideological problem, and many current approaches to investigating violent extremism tend to underplay the impact psychological factors may have in radicalization and reintegration processes.[5]

Various studies emphasize that there is no causal relationship between mental health and terrorism.[6] While not fully explored, it may be important to further understand how trauma may uniquely marginalize individuals and make them vulnerable to radicalization. Our lack of understanding of trauma—or mental health more broadly—in relation to engagement in

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2   Magnus Ranstorp, "The Root Causes of Violent Extremism," *RAN Centre of Excellence*, January 4, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf.

3   Department of Homeland Security, "A Comprehensive U.S. Government Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," accessed August 17, 2021, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/US%20Government%20Approach%20to%20CVE-Fact%20Sheet_0.pdf.

4   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PVE/CVE)," accessed January 5, 2020, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism.html.

5   John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (July 1, 2008): 80-94, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0002716208317539.

6   Ardavan Khoshnood, "The Correlation Between Mental Disorders and Terrorism is Weak", accessed April 4, 2020, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5288096/.

violent extremism is compounded by a number of factors. First, there is a lack of compre-hensive demographic data on violent extremist populations across case studies that include individual records on mental health. As a result, existing studies that explore the role of trauma among violent extremists rely heavily on anecdotal evidence or limited databases of security services to draw conclusions.[7] This lack of understanding is particularly salient in post-conflict settings where populations are likely to have experienced trauma-inducing situations on a broad scale and find themselves in a vicious cycle of violence.[8] Moreover, trauma can be an all-pervasive and, at the same time, an elusive condition to character-ize, which makes it more difficult to recognize and adequately address. A more complete understanding of the role of trauma in determining the vulnerability or risk towards violent extremism is necessary given its important implications for further research and policy-making (see Table 1).

Table 1.

- **Trauma and Radicalization:** Does experiencing trauma affect the radicalization pro-cess? Why do some trauma-impacted individuals radicalize while others do not? How do we account for, or consider, war-related trauma in relation to other traumatic events?

- **Trauma and Research on Violent Extremism:** What are the challenges in inter-viewing individuals affected by trauma and violent extremism? How can we adopt a trau-ma-sensitive approach to research on violent extremism?

- **Trauma and P/CVE:** What are the implications of links between trauma and radicaliza-tion for researchers as well as for policymakers? What are the implications of links between trauma, disengagement, and reintegration for researchers as well as for policymakers?

This chapter considers these questions and draws from the author's experiences inter-viewing family members of foreign fighters in Kosovo, including women returnees from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, in discussing how the author navigated a research process

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7   Christophe Paulussen, Janne Nijman, and Karlien Lismont, *Mental Health and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon: A Case Study from the Netherlands* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, March 2017), https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ICCT-Paulussen-Nijman-Lismont-Mental-Health-and-the-Foreign-Fighter-Phenomenon-March-2017.pdf.

8   Edward Balke, "Trauma and Conflict," *Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, Working Paper Series No. 02-37* (Octo-ber 2002), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/138359/WP37.pdf.

that, while not focused on understanding the links between trauma and violent extremism, inevitably involved circumstances and themes related to trauma. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the current state of knowledge on the link between trauma and violent extremism and the importance of understanding these potential links when conducting research and programming addressing issues of violent extremism. It then proceeds with reflections from the author's field research in Kosovo on how issues related to trauma manifested among the family members of foreign fighters throughout the research and interview process and, based on the author's experiences, considerations for other researchers who may embark on studies of trauma and violent extremism.

It must be noted that the author is not a mental health care professional, rather the insights in this chapter are reflections from the author's personal experiences and field research. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to obtain ethics approval and consult licensed mental health and trauma care providers for further information and best practices in dealing with trauma during research.

Trauma and violent extremism: A brief overview

Trauma is generally understood as an emotionally scarring experience leaving someone with a deep sense of helplessness. It is a psychological "wound" that suddenly overwhelms a person, threatens their life or personal integrity, leaves a perceived feeling of no escape, and triggers accompanying fear that overwhelms the individual's ability to cope.[9] The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines trauma as:

> *Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence in one or more of four ways: (a) directly experiencing the event; (b) witnessing, in person, the event occurring to others; (c) learning that such an event happened to a close family member or friend; and (d) experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of such events, such as with first responders.[10]*

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9   Balke, "Trauma and Conflict."

10   American Psychiatric Association (APA), "Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm.

Thus, trauma is not only a phenomenon that a person experiences directly, but also events that occur in the environment that surrounds them. A wide range of events can cause trauma including, but not limited to, death of a loved one, war or continued duress, incarceration, economic grievances, rape, or social isolation.[11] Its impact can be subtle, insidious, or outright destructive depending on factors including personal characteristics, the type of the event(s), or sociocultural aspects.[12]

Trauma reactions vary as individuals try to manage its distressing effects, including through high-risk behaviors, aggressiveness, or by subconsciously reenacting aspects of the trauma.[13] Though trauma can be manifested in various forms, it is common for individuals to display signs or symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[14] Van der Velden and Krasenber note that traumatization is a complex process and the terms "trauma" and "PTSD" are only two of many related phenomena.[15] Though certainly not always, experiencing trauma can increase the risk of a person (re-) engaging in violent behavior.[16]

Further, it is important to remember that traumatization entails a dynamic process and does not present just a one time-event, but rather a series of experiences that can accumulate over time and produce various reactions. Trauma is not just something that happened in the past; it also relates to the future. The individual suffering from trauma can feel as if the original event is happening repeatedly, leading to chronic fear and a sense of helplessness.[17]

The link between trauma and tendency towards violence has perplexed researchers for decades. However, the relationship between trauma and violent extremism has only begun to be considered in more recent years. How does trauma make an individual more vulnerable towards violence? How does trauma impact individuals who have disengaged from

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11   Alana Siegel, et al., "Preventing Future Terrorism: Intervening on Youth Radicalization," in *An International Perspective on Disasters and Children's Mental Health,* eds. Christina W. Hoven, Lawrence Amsel, and Sam Tyano (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 396.

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid.

14   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US), 2014), 89, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207201/.

15   Maurice van der Velden and Jordy Krasenberg, "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence," *RAN Centre of Excellence, Ex Post Paper RAN H&SC meeting "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence," April 10-11, 2018, Lisbon (Portugal),* https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_h-sc_ptsd_trauma_stress_risk_re-turning_violence_lisbon_10-11_04_2018_en.pdf.

16   Ibid.

17   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services,* 89.

violent extremism? And finally, how does trauma impact the families and communities of those who have participated in violent extremism?

Why is understanding trauma relevant in research and practice addressing violent extremism?

The potential impact of trauma on radicalization processes

Research from several studies[18] shows that trauma may be one of the risk factors for violent extremism due to both its causes and the resulting psychosocial impairments.[19] Many of these studies focus on exposure to violence at an early age. Some studies have shown that exposure to trauma increases the risk of delinquency,[20] while childhood mistreatment also increases the likelihood of becoming violent as an adult.[21] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that children and youth who have been exposed to violence are at a higher risk of depression and deficiencies in empathy.[22] Considering other known risk factors, this might increase vulnerability for perpetrating violence and recruitment into extremist groups. It is important to note that this is not a one-to-one relationship: not all those who experience trauma are more vulnerable to radicalization and not all that are radicalized have been exposed to trauma. Rather, trauma is an additional layer to consider when looking at cases of radicalization. Additional insight into why this may be the case is detailed below.

Research suggests that in some cases trauma can destroy a person's assumptions about themselves and the world around them, which in turn can lead to greater hostility and

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18   See, for instance: O. Lynch and S. Lambert, *Child Returnees from Conflict Zones* (RAN Centre of Excellence, November 2016), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_child_returnees_from_conflict_zones_112016_en.pdf; Kiran M. Sarma, *Multi-Agency Working and Preventing Violent Extremism: Paper 2* (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_hsc_policy_mawr_report_sarma_26032019_en.pdf.

19   Valerie De Marinis and Eolene Boyd-MacMillan, *A Mental Health Approach to Understanding Violent Extremism* (Paris: Radicalisation Awareness Network, Ex Post Paper RAN Policy & Practice, 2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2019-07/ran_hsc_prac_mental_health_03062019_en.pdf.

20   Robert Vermeiren, "Psychopathology and Delinquency in Adolescents: A Descriptive and Developmental Perspective," *Clinical Psychology Review* 23, no. 2 (March 2003): 277-318, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0272-7358(02)00227-1.

21   Van der Velden and Krasenberg, "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence."

22   Jim Mercy, "CDC Measures Violence against Children, Sparks Action," *CDC Foundation,* November 25, 2013, https://www.cdcfoundation.org/blog-entry/cdc-measures-violence-against-children-sparks-action; Leila Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization," *Futures Without Violence, Blueprint,* May 2017, https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/FWV_blueprint_7-Youth.pdf.

mistrust that create openness to violent extremism.[23] According to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the accumulation of negative experiences over time makes individuals more susceptible to the pull of violent groups, as traumatic experiences during childhood heighten the need for identity, which can be fulfilled by extremist causes.[24]

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) authors argue that a higher exposure to trauma leads to a greater likelihood of PTSD, which correlates with increased anger and hostility and greater urge for revenge than reconciliation, thus increasing the prospect of supporting violent extremism.[25] Evidence suggests that "chronic and severe stress resulting from multi-trauma experiences contributes to mental health imbalances later in life, increasing general vulnerability including towards violent extremism."[26]

Using life histories of violent white supremacists, Simi et al. found that non-ideological risk factors including trauma accumulate over time, beginning during childhood, and act as precursors to participation in violent extremist groups.[27] They argue that social–psychological processes that implicate cognition influence the effects of risk factors on future engagement in antisocial behavior and criminally-oriented groups, including violent extremist groups. Of the subjects interviewed by Simi et al., 64 percent reported witnessing serious violence.[28] Exposure to torture or the brutal killing of a relative or friend, severe humiliation, or being denied rights over extended periods may all increase an individual's susceptibility.[29]

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23   Dylan O'Driscoll, "Links Between Childhood Experience of Violence and Violent Extremism," *K4D,* December 15, 2017, https://assets. publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c1903f740f0b60c2c1c798a/248_Childhood_Experience_of_Violence_and_Violent_Extremism.pdf.

24   Ibid. See also: Jytte Klausen, et al., "Radicalization Trajectories: An Evidence-Based Computational Approach to Dynamic Risk Assessment of 'Homegrown' Jihadists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (July 2, 2020): 588-615, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576 10x.2018.1492819, which used a probabilistic simulation model to identify common high-risk sequential behavioral segment pairs in the U.S. terrorism offenders' pathways to terrorist criminality. The study found that push factors include traumatic events (occurring mostly at an early stage) or other adverse circumstances that may cause an individual to seek a solution in extremism.

25   O'Driscoll, "Links Between Childhood Experience of Violence and Violent Extremism."

26   van der Velden and Krasenberg, "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence." See also: Leila Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization," where she argues that exposure to traumatic stress and violence as a child has deep, long-term consequences which increase risk to various negative outcomes, including recruitment to violent groups.

27   Pete Simi, Bryan F. Bubolz, Hillary McNeel, Karyn Sporer, and Steven Windisch, "Trauma as a Precursor to Violent Extremism: How Non-ideological Factors can Influence Joining an Extremist Group," *START,* April 2015, https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_CSTAB_ TraumaAsPrecursortoViolentExtremism_April2015.pdf.

28   Ibid.

29   Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization."

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a leading specialist on trauma, offers a more clinical explanation. He posits that trauma is not the story of something terrible that happened in the past, but the residue of imprints left behind in people's sensory and hormonal systems. "The body keeps the score," leaving traumatized people terrified of the sensations in their own bodies.[30] Thus, looking for an outlet for fear or anger, violent crimes are often committed by people who lack the ability to regulate and modulate their bodily response to perceived danger, which in some instances relates to trauma.[31]

A study of ISIS recruits on six continents underscored the personal nature of their engagement in violent extremism, finding that exposure to ideological propaganda as well as direct or indirect group influence may play a role in radicalization processes.[32] Extremist ideology may provide a sense of purpose and offer a protective shield in the short term against other mental health problems.[33] With the right narrative and exposure, individuals alienated by their communities or families may perceive extremist groups as caring entities, view their group leaders as surrogate father figures, and perceive the group's social norms as accepting of who they are.[34]

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAUMA IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE ADDRESSING RADICALIZATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESSES

Post-conflict countries are among some of the contexts in which trauma may be widespread across different population groups and in which issues associated with violent extremism may be present. Thus, it is important to explore and address the role of trauma in these settings to prevent potential long-term repercussions, both in informing assessments of its potential impact on radicalization, and in informing efforts to reintegrate former violent extremists and their families back into these contexts.

Trauma in conflict affected contexts – Implications for understanding radicalization

A study on associations between exposure to violence, trauma-related symptoms, and aggression among Congolese refugees in Uganda showed that war-related trauma expo-

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30   Peter Weinberger, "Implications of Research on Traumatic Stress for Countering Violent Extremism," *START*, August 3, 2016, https://www.start.umd.edu/news/implications-research-traumatic-stress-countering-violent-extremism.

31   Ibid.

32   De Marinis and Boyd-MacMillan, *A Mental Health Approach to Understanding Violent Extremism.*

33   Ibid.

34   Ibid.

sure has been linked to aggression and enhanced levels of community and family violence, suggesting a cycle of violence.[35] In another study, Keresteš interviewed around 700 children in Croatia three years after the end of the war and found that those who had been exposed to a higher level of war trauma in early school years considered themselves as more aggressive than their peers who had experienced a smaller number of war stressors.[36] In youth exposed to war, prior exposure to childhood trauma is also associated with greater post-traumatic symptoms and increased involvement in violence.[37] A study by Pat-Horenczyk et al. on Israeli youth exposed to terrorism showed that adolescents suffering from PTSD reported more risk-taking behaviors than non-symptomatic adolescents.[38] PTSD symptoms include a bleak vision of the future, which can make the idea of dying for a cause more appealing.[39] Understanding how that may affect radicalization to violent extremism, thus, may be important.

Current research provides no clear-cut answers to questions such as: Does the trauma experienced in post-conflict countries influence radicalization within them, and if so, how? Research does, however, reveal a number of ways in which individuals who have experienced trauma during conflict may interact with extremist narratives. For example, traumatizing events can leave an individual with a yearning for identity that is fulfilled by extremist causes.[40] Through effective messages, recruiters may reinforce cause-and-effect narratives that assign blame for in-group suffering to an "other" group whose practices are perceived as the source of the trauma.[41] Conditions or experiences that tend to increase individuals'

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35   Tobias Hecker, Simon Fetz, Herbert Ainamani, and Thomas Elbert, "The Cycle of Violence: Associations Between Exposure to Violence, Trauma-Related Symptoms and Aggression—Findings from Congolese Refugees in Uganda," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 28, no. 5 (October 2015): 448-55, https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22046.

36   Gordana Keresteš, "Children's Aggressive and Prosocial Behavior in Relation to War Exposure: Testing the Role of Perceived Parenting and Child's Gender," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 30, no. 3 (May 2006): 227-39, https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025406066756.

37   Christina W. Hoven, Lawrence Amsel, and Sam Tyano, eds., *An International Perspective on Disasters and Children's Mental Health* (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 396.

38   Hoven, et al., *An International Perspective on Disasters and Children's Mental Health.*

39   Ibid.

40   National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Countering Violent Extremism Through Public Health Practice: Proceedings of a Workshop* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.17226/24638.

41   Patrick J. Christian, "A Psycho-Emotional Human Security Analytical Framework: Origin and Epidemiology of Violent Extremism and Radicalization of Refugees," *Small Wars Journal,* April 18, 2017, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/a-psycho-emotional-human-security-analytical-framework-origin-and-epidemiology-of-violent-e.

susceptibility to trauma can, therefore, also increase their identification with these types of narratives.[42]

The percentage of violent extremists in comparison to the general population is relatively low. As noted above, not all traumatized individuals engage in violent acts, and not all violent extremists are traumatized.[43] This raises the question: What makes those experiencing trauma who do radicalize different? According to some studies, resilience and a strong social support system are key to avert radicalization. As Hecker et al. argue, resilience and other protective factors (personal or community-based) can make up for risk factors such as trauma, facilitating a positive final outcome with very few traumatized young people turning towards violent extremism.[44]

The expression of trauma and PTSD can vary across socio-cultural contexts.[45] Thus, cross-comparison studies are necessary to fully understand its correlation with violent behavior and its centrality to P/CVE program effectiveness. Ultimately, current studies seem to suggest that trauma merits further consideration in exploring pathways to violent extremism. Research on traumatic stress and ways to address it[46] can inform models for P/CVE, especially in building individual and community resilience.

Trauma beyond radicalization: Implications for disengagement and reintegration

While a growing body of literature examines trauma's relation to the radicalization process, equally important is the role of trauma in the reintegration process and among the families and communities who have experienced violent extremism, or from which violent extremists originate. This is of particular importance to researchers interacting with communities and families who have experienced or are experiencing trauma due to legacies of conflict or resulting from their engagement in violent extremism.

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42   Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization."

43   Paulussen et al., *Mental Health and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon: A Case Study from the Netherlands*.

44   Ibid.

45   Naim Fanaj and Erika Melonashi, "Understanding and Describing PTSD in Kosovo: A Systematic Evidence-Based Review," *SAGE Open* 7, no. 4 (October 2017), https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017734588.

46   For understanding and treating traumatic stress, see: Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Penguin Publishing, 2015).

Trauma and deradicalization and reintegration

The role of trauma is especially relevant to understanding repatriation, reintegration, and reconciliation processes for former extremists directly involved in active conflict or those socializing in violent extremist environments. Reports citing references to a "hellish world" experienced prior to joining violent extremist groups raise the broader question about how traumatic stress contributes to radicalization, especially for children and youth.[47] However, delineating the role of trauma does not include only accounting for its impact on radicalization, but also how it should be considered in designing disengagement and reintegration programs. In these efforts, there are multiple lessons that can also be drawn from reconciliation and restorative justice principles, which, in addition to offering a sense of justice, can reduce stigma against those disengaging, enable routine prosocial engagement, and provide a tangible alternative identity.[48]

Individuals undergoing rehabilitation and reintegration programs are more likely to be suffering from PTSD or other forms of trauma than those participating in prevention-focused programs.[49] Thus, offenders' individual circumstances, including the experience of trauma, may require unique psychology-based interventions.[50] As Bosley states, "healing trauma and addressing other mental and behavioral health challenges in people who are disengaging can encourage help-seeking behavior and a willingness to engage with others."[51] Treating trauma could often be one of the first steps to influence changes in the outward demeanor (e.g. apathy, unresponsiveness, anger, etc.) of individuals formerly associated with extremist groups, and address some of the factors that could prevent them from returning to or being welcomed in their communities.[52]

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47   Milani, Leila. "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization."

48   Chris Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation: A Peacebuilding Approach* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2020), https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/07/violent-extremist-disengagement-and-reconciliation-peacebuilding-approach.

49   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Non-custodial Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for Policymakers and Practitioners in South-Eastern Europe* (Vienna: OSCE, 2020), 34, https://www.osce.org/secretariat/444838.

50   Ryan J. Williams, "Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation," *RAN Centre of Excellence* (2016), 2, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-p-and-p/docs/ran_pp_approaches_to_violent_extremist_en.pdf.

51   Bosley, Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation, 2.

52   Leanne Erdberg Steadman, *Disengagement and Reconciliation in Conflict-Affected Settings* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2020), 5, https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/disengagement-and-reconciliation-conflict-affected-settings.

Importantly, as Bosley also notes, trauma-informed care "is not a technique or method, but instead an awareness and sensitivity" that those implementing reintegration and rehabilitation programs must maintain to avoid subjecting a person to additional trauma.[53] Thus, adopting a public health approach that addresses trauma and provides behavioral and psychosocial support may provide a pathway for former violent extremists to find their humanity and dignity outside the influence of violent extremism.[54]

Pro-social engagement with other members of the community is tied with better prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration. In the efforts to pull individuals away from violence, communities must be consulted and included to provide those disengaging with a sustainable alternative to redefine their future.[55] Exposure to trauma and the resulting need for psychosocial services does not absolve individuals of the responsibility for having engaged with violent groups or in criminal behavior—yet, it should be recognized that trauma can affect victims and perpetrators.[56] Programs should also consider the trauma experienced by communities affected by violent extremism, not only the trauma experienced by the violent extremists themselves, to promote collective healing.

Since trauma's role in understanding radicalization continues to be a securitized topic, it is important for researchers and practitioners to be aware of how it may affect vulnerable groups. For instance, individuals or communities affected by violent extremism which have experienced traumatic events may reveal different levels of vulnerability depending on personal characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic standing, etc. As a UNDP report notes, for deradicalization programs this necessitates a case-by-case assessment including not only sensitivity to the gendered dimensions of each case but also male and female programmatic personnel trained "to undertake such assessments for rehabilitation and reintegration programs, including for minors, and deal with both the impact of trauma that individuals may face as well as the threat they may pose."[57] Dean and Kessles note that a sensitive and empathic response to trauma and victimization may also

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53   Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation.*

54   Ibid.

55   Erdberg Steadman, *Disengagement and Reconciliation in Conflict-Affected Settings,* 5.

56   Ibid.

57   Sanam Naraghi Anderlini and Melinda Holmes, *Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism* (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), 2019), 40, https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ICAN-UNDP-Rehabilitation-Reintegration-Invisible-Women-Report-2019.pdf.

challenge perceptions and feelings toward other groups, such as dehumanization of and hatred toward representatives of state authorities, which could make disengagement and cooperation with intervention and reintegration efforts much easier.[58]

Importantly, some have noted that to reduce stigma and promote interactions between program beneficiaries and the community, programs geared towards facilitating personal and social development should engage directly with communities.[59] Ultimately, since those affected by violent extremism include victims and perpetrators, as well as other members of the community who may have been exposed to trauma, it is important to understand the vulnerability of these groups while interacting with them. Thus, those conducting research in this space must be aware of the challenges that arise while interacting with groups affected by trauma, which can be a difficult undertaking not only in regard to obtaining research insights but also in terms of integration of trauma-informed care in the design and implementation of reintegration and rehabilitation programs. In the next section, the author draws from personal experience conducting research with affected populations to illustrate some of the challenges, while also hinting at areas in need of greater focus.

Trauma and research on violent extremism

Understanding the issue of trauma as it relates to communities affected by violent extremism and violent extremists themselves is imperative, especially when doing research in a post-conflict context. Research shows that the impact of trauma is long-term and that these "invisible wounds" can leave a society vulnerable to a recurrence of violence.[60] In such settings, a number of factors should be considered such as the high risk of re-traumatization (even if involuntarily), dealing with unaddressed trauma, and accounting for the role of shame and stigma especially among family members in otherwise still divided societies.[61] Individuals who live in post-conflict societies are more likely to have been exposed to trauma, and their experience with violent extremism could present only one episode in a

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58 Christopher Dean and Eelco Kessels, *Compendium of Good Practices in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders* (Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2018), 21, https://www.veocompendium.org/.

59 Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation*.

60 The World Bank, "Social Development Notes: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction," *Social Development Notes: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction* 13 (2003), 1, https://web.worldbank.org/archive/website00522/WEB/PDF/CPR13LEG.PDF.

61 "Clinical Issues Across Services," in *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services, Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US): 2014), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207185/.

series of occurrences that have left painful marks on them. In many instances, post-conflict settings are also characterized by limited resources dedicated to mental health support, which is why respondents may be dealing with unaddressed trauma. For instance, studies show that in post-war societies, such as those in the Balkans, unprocessed cumulative trauma has become deeply embedded in the collective memory and the effects of collective traumatization have been multidimensional.[62] Thus, interacting in these contexts necessitates trauma-informed approaches that not only focus on identifying individuals who have histories of trauma and traumatic stress symptoms but also on adopting prevention strategies to avoid re-traumatization and promote resilience.[63] This is the case even for research that is not specifically focused on understanding the role of trauma in radicalization and reintegration processes given the possibility that issues associated with trauma may inevitably come up in research on violent extremism conducted in post-conflict societies, as was the case in my own research on violent extremism in Kosovo. Researchers should acquire ethics approval, locate resources to prepare them to recognize how this may manifest, and identify strategies to address trauma before undertaking research.

Re-traumatization of respondents can occur throughout the different stages of the research process: e.g., while they are retelling their stories, are faced with representatives of certain state institutions or stakeholders, are shown triggering imagery or video content, or are interviewed in perceived unfriendly settings or spaces, etc.[64] Moreover, individuals who have encountered trauma as a result of experiences with violence can also face greater levels of stigma, whether from their immediate family members or the broader community. The level of stigma can be particularly present when dealing with certain types of violence, such as sexual violence, where the shame that often accompanies such crimes is mistakenly placed upon the victim rather than the perpetrator. Navigating these sensitivities when dealing with vulnerable groups in post-conflict contexts is often difficult, especially when dealing with securitized topics such as violent extremism. Drawing on personal experience, the next section reflects on my own observations and challenges encountered related to

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62   Delic et. al, "Academic Model of Trauma Healing in Post-war Societies," *Acta Medica Academica* 43, no. 1 (2014): 76-80, https://www.research-gate.net/publication/262845678_Academic_model_of_trauma_healing_in_post-war_societies/link/53d155ad0cf220632f39305c/download.

63   Ibid.

64   Amanda Weiss, "Retraumatization and Social Sciences Research: Theoretical and Empirical Perspective," (2021): 2, https://osf.io/rvksp.

potential manifestations of trauma that came up while conducting my research on violent extremism in Kosovo.

Insights from field research in Kosovo

An estimated 403 Kosovars joined or traveled to foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2018, of which 255 men are considered foreign fighters, while the rest are broadly categorized as non-combatants.[65] Studies exploring drivers of violent extremism in Kosovo, as manifested through the foreign fighter phenomenon, point to the potential influence of a combination of tangible internal conditions such as a weak economy, political instability, a poor education system, and the rise of various Islamic nongovernmental organizations competing in Kosovo's newly democratized public sphere.[66] Issues of identity, belonging, purpose, and social isolation or outright exclusion also figure prominently. Yet, there has been no in-depth study that looks into the role of trauma in the radicalization process, even though some publications mention trauma briefly.[67] While there is an obvious need to better understand the role of trauma in violent extremism, there is also a compelling need to better prepare researchers who may find themselves in situations in which trauma is brought up. Even though trauma was not the focus of my study, in my personal experience interviewing family members of foreign fighters, as well as women returnees in Kosovo, the potential impact of trauma became evident early on. Based on my experience, I provide insights below on the role it may play and the difficulties it may pose to researchers either studying trauma and violent extremism specifically, or studying other topics related to violent extremism.

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65   Skënder Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi, *Unpacking Kosovo's Response to Returnees from the War Zones in Syria and Iraq* (Pristina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 2020), http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/violent-extremism-eng_978757.pdf.

66   Garentina Kraja, *The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo Deconstructed One Story at a Time* (Pristina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 2017), http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/ISNinKosovo-eng_794656.pdf.

67   See, for example: Anne Speckhard and Adrian Shajkovci, "The Balkan Jihad: Recruitment to Violent Extremism and Issues Facing Returning Foreign Fighters in Kosovo and Southern Serbia," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 101, no. 2 (2018): 79-109, https://doi.org/10.5325/soundings.101.2.0079.

Context and engagement with research participants

War is a major disruptive event—societies that experience conflict are likely to suffer from prolonged traumatic stress years after the conflict ends.[68] Kosovo experienced the destruction of war over 20 years ago, which left around 13,000 people killed, an estimated 20,000 women and men raped, half the country's population (about a million people) fleeing as refugees, and over 1,600 people still missing today.[69] Beyond mere statistics, these data suggest that a large portion of the country's population is likely to have been directly or indirectly affected by trauma.

A research study on PTSD in the sociocultural context of Kosovo demonstrated that even ten years post-war, prevalence rates for PTSD are still high among refugees, veterans, and civilians exposed to trauma.[70] Studies in Kosovo suggest that anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, anger, and revenge thoughts often correlate with PTSD.[71] These data should serve as a starting point in thinking through the role of trauma within social phenomena in Kosovo. In my own discussions with family members of foreign fighters—those accompanying foreign fighters in foreign conflict zones as well as those who never left the country—it became apparent that memories of the Kosovo War are still present, and the trauma may still remain. Indeed, common extremist narratives targeting Kosovo have made constant references to war-related grievances and comparisons between the Kosovo War and the conflict in Syria, including talking about how "brothers have been tortured and sisters are being raped."[72] Insights from my experience interviewing family members of foreign fighters validate the need for further research. Although the focus of the interviews was on immediate needs to better understand the receiving environment in which the foreign fighters would eventually return, trauma became a recurring theme. Vivid recollections of war memories were common.

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68   Zachary Steel, et al., "Association of Torture and Other Potentially Traumatic Events with Mental Health Outcomes Among Populations Exposed to Mass Conflict and Displacement," *JAMA* 302, no. 5 (August 5, 2009): 537-49, https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.1132.

69   See: Milka Domanovic, "List of Kosovo War Victims Published," *Balkan Transitional Justice*, December 10, 2014, https://balkaninsight.com/2014/12/10/kosovo-war-victims-list-published/; Valerie Plesch, "A Dark Legacy: The Scars of Sexual Violence from the Kosovo War," *Politico,* March 25, 2019, https://www.politico.eu/interactive/a-dark-legacy-the-scars-of-sexual-violence-from-the-kosovo-war/.

70   Fanaj and Melonashi, "Understanding and Describing PTSD in Kosovo."

71   Ibid.

72   For a deconstruction of extremist narratives, see, for instance: Kraja, *The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo Deconstructed One Story at a Time.*

The family members of foreign fighters brought up topics that suggested traumatic experiences may have impacted radicalization processes in numerous ways. For instance, in one case, a respondent shared that their family member, a prominent foreign fighter, was exposed to extreme violence during the Kosovo War while he was just a child. During the war, he witnessed his sibling and his mother being tortured by Serbian security forces. However, in accounts available at the time describing his radicalization process, there was no discussion of trauma as a relevant factor. In another case, a respondent noted how their current living situation, faced with the prosecution of their son on terrorism-related charges, financial strains, and the respondent's own suffering from a severe illness, was taking a toll on the respondent and other family members, in addition to recalling war-related trauma. Moreover, respondents' experiences with police raids as part of institutional efforts to persecute foreign fighters was said to have brought flashbacks of persecutions during the war—an experience that may have been troubling for them.

However, as radicalization was not within the scope of my interviews, I was not able to probe further. When respondents reveal sensitive or traumatic experiences, researchers may find themselves in a difficult spot – what is the best way to respond? It is important to be prepared and to be able to identify potential sensitive topics related to trauma when conducting research, especially because it provides important insight for policy and practice and because, if unidentified and probed further, discussing traumatizing or sensitive topics may inadvertently retraumatize participants. More on this is discussed below.

Another factor to discuss and consider is how verbal and physical signs of trauma or discomfort may manifest during discussions with research participants. In one case, a woman returnee whose husband was still in a foreign conflict zone exhibited a series of confusing reactions during the interview as she recalled the loss of two close family members. As she explained her bereavement she was smiling, which, to me, seemed to suggest a visible disconnect between her narrative and emotions.[73] This brought up a further dilemma: how, as a researcher, do you react to interviewees' emotions or to their story? What is the risk of researcher feedback inadvertently triggering a negative response by the respondent? For

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73   For an explanation about why this phenomenon occurs among traumatized individuals, see: Lisa Ferentz, "Why Clients Smile When Talking About Trauma," *Psychology Today,* September 4, 2015, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/healing-trauma-s-wounds/201509/why-clients-smile-when-talking-about-trauma-part-1.

me, previous sensitization and trauma-awareness training was helpful in navigating this experience, but for researchers without prior training or understanding, situations like this may be more difficult to identify and address.

During my interviews, family members of foreign fighters also pointed out that trauma might affect children in their families, and in many cases they lack the knowledge or know-how to approach them. In contexts like Kosovo, where seeking mental health support is still largely considered taboo, many in need of mental health services may be left untreated, including those affected by trauma and violent extremism. In some cases during my interviews with family members and women returnees, respondents were inclined to talk for more extended periods than anticipated, which seemed to be a sign that talking may have been a cathartic experience for them. In these cases, I faced the challenge of whether to interrupt respondents or allow them to continue expressing their emotions. While they may see talking to a researcher as a substitute for seeking mental health support, however, talking and other forms of therapies to address trauma or stress should be overseen by a trained psychologist or psychiatrist. Since in such instances respondents often share common worries, fears, concerns, or problems they face, they tend to also turn to the researcher for guidance.[74] Giving advice to respondents, however, is not the role of researchers. It can also interfere with efforts to objectively portray or analyze their case.[75]

Considerations for the field

Advancing sensitivity to and preparation for researchers interacting with trauma

Researching violent extremism may necessarily involve interacting with trauma, especially due to the often traumatic nature of the topic. While more research is needed to better understand how trauma impacts individuals and communities affected by violent extremism, additional efforts to better prepare researchers interacting with potentially traumatizing subjects are necessary. Some considerations for the field moving forward are presented

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74   Julia Chaitin, "'I Wish He Hadn't Told Me That': Methodological and Ethical Issues in Social Trauma and Conflict Research," *Qualitative Health Research* 13, no. 8 (2003): 1145-54, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14556424/.

75   See Allmark et. al, "Ethical Issues in the Use of In-depth Interviews: Literature Review and Discussion," *Research Ethics Review* 5, no. 2 (2009): 48–54, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/174701610900500203.

below. Ultimately, however, individuals should consult with a licensed mental health care provider, trauma specialist, and/or their institutions for advice and resources to prepare for and address issues associated with mental health and trauma.

1. **Understand and prepare for trauma.** Prior to conducting research with human subjects in the field of violent extremism, researchers should consider obtaining as much information about the research context as possible, especially in post-conflict environments. What communities, groups, or individuals are more likely to have experienced trauma? Are any of those individuals or communities going to be part of your research? In countries, such as Kosovo, that have experienced conflict, war-related trauma may be prevalent, notwithstanding other layers of trauma that an individual may acquire over time. Moreover, among the growing rates of conflict-zone returnees from Syria and Iraq, experience with trauma is well-established and researchers should be aware that it might come up during interactions with research participants. Even in cases when trauma is not outright visible or probable, researchers should still consider consulting with mental health care and trauma specialists for guidance on how to prepare for these situations and identify potential signs of it so as to avoid potentially harming their research participants.[76] Institutions sponsoring research should also consider investing in mental health care and trauma resources and trainings to help prepare researchers studying sensitive subjects such as violent extremism.

2. **The importance of ethical guidelines, honesty, and transparency. In interacting with individuals that have experienced trauma, one of the principal considerations should be to do no harm and avoid re-traumatization.** This includes following research protocol in obtaining informed consent for the interview process, protecting confidentiality, providing contact details of mental health services, if needed and advised, and emphasizing that respondents can withdraw from the interview at any moment. Given that individuals affected by trauma and violent extremism are often susceptible to the effects of resurfacing negative emotions, it is imperative to be completely honest about the goals of the research project and the role of the researcher. Honesty is

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76   For a mental health and counter-extremism framework see: Zainab al-Attar, Extremism, *Radicalisation & Mental Health: Handbook for Practitioners* (RAN Centre of Excellence, 2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_h-sc_handbook-for-practitioners_extremism-radicalisation-mental-health_112019_en.pdf.

crucial in building rapport with respondents in order for them to feel comfortable in sharing information and in ensuring a do-no-harm approach and ethical research processes. Respondents should never be pressured into sharing what they feel reluctant to share. However, as they build trust, respondents may also mistake researchers for a source of help with their personal concerns (e.g., dire economic conditions) beyond the scope of the project. In order to avoid any misunderstandings or raising false expectations, researchers need to balance building rapport with a constant reminder that a researcher's key contribution is to present their case as objectively as possible.

3. **The importance of self-care.** Efforts to raise awareness about the presence of trauma among researchers of violent extremism are increasing, as researchers continue to be regularly exposed to extremist content or stories of trauma, though their psychological impact on researchers is not completely understood.[77] Researchers may benefit from established methods to manage psychological distress as a result of an emotionally taxing work environment,[78] but, ultimately, researchers should consult mental health care and trauma specialists when needed. Institutions sponsoring research on topics like violent extremism, which can be traumatizing to the researcher, should consider investing in mental health care support and resources for researchers in need.

Conclusion

This chapter offered an overview of the available research on the relationship between trauma and violent extremism, while drawing attention to the lingering gaps in the current body of knowledge. The chapter hopes to also bring attention to the need to rethink the positioning of mental health support in P/CVE, particularly in initiatives for the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists, as well as the need for further research examining how trauma may impact violent extremism or fuel cycles of violence. For instance, the inability to address past wounds in post-conflict countries may act as an impediment to reconciliation and sustainable peace. Though we might not expect a causal relationship

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77 See: Charlie Winter, *Researching Jihadist Propaganda: Access, Interpretation, and Trauma* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.1.

78 See, for instance: American Psychiatric Association, "Coping with Stress at Work," October 14, 2018, https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/work-stress.

between trauma and radicalization, that does not necessarily mean it plays no role at all. A nuanced understanding of the role of trauma and its relationship with violent extremism is necessary not only to identify vulnerabilities but also to determine viable options to strengthen individual or collective resilience.

This is similarly important for those undertaking research, be it on the role of trauma in issues related to violent extremism, or on other violent extremism topics. While my research, discussed in this report, involved interviews with family members of foreign fighters and women returnees from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, the intention of the research was not to explore the impact of trauma. Still, issues associated with or potentially pointing to traumatization came up during my research and interviews. Researchers should be prepared for the fact that traumatizing or sensitive subjects may come up during research and interviews about violent extremism. For those researching violent extremism, and institutions sponsoring researchers, it may be prudent to consult with mental health care providers and trauma specialists prior to conducting research to further prepare for these types of situations.

The evolution of the violent extremism threat landscape over time requires researchers and practitioners to adapt their focus accordingly. In considering means by which to address or better understand violent extremism, however, it is necessary for stakeholders, especially researchers and practitioners to also account for factors such as experienced trauma, that may be critical in understanding the issue, especially in post-conflict contexts.

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Community-centered P/CVE Research in Southeast Asia

Opportunities and Challenges

Matteo Vergani

The definition and understanding of community-centered preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) research lacks analytical clarity. This chapter examines this concept with a focus on the Southeast Asian context, reflecting on opportunities, challenges, and pitfalls, to lay the foundation for future theorization and comparative P/CVE research in local contexts. Collaboration with independent and genuine community actors is advantageous for all stakeholders, since deficient trust, tamed and crystallized relationships, and a lack of resources and capacities can result in biased research findings. The chapter advocates for the establishment of research and evaluation frameworks in National Action Plans, with the aim to set out common definitions, measurement tools, and methodologies in consultation with all stakeholders, including community actors. This is a necessary step in producing systematic, cumulative, and comparative research and evaluation findings that hold true across local contexts. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical implications of conducting commu-

nity-centered P/CVE research with minority communities—such as the creation of suspicious, ostracized, and alienated communities—as well as with majority communities. It also speaks to the potential for research findings and topics of focus interfering in or being instrumental- ized to impact a country's democratic process. Although the Southeast Asian context is used to discuss the opportunities and challenges of the different approaches to community-cen- tered P/CVE research, key findings are likely relevant to other contexts.

Introduction

Holistic and whole-of-society approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have been gaining traction globally, including in Southeast Asia. Numerous initia- tives have been introduced, with various degrees of success, to bring stakeholders from governmental and non-governmental backgrounds together to learn from each other, cross-pollinate best practices, and improve the quality and effectiveness of P/CVE work in the region. Some of these initiatives have stemmed from high-level efforts, such as the resolutions of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which have highlighted in multiple documents over the years the need to build trust and strengthen cooperation between government agencies and civil society organizations in P/CVE work.[1] The Austra- lian government has also contributed to creating momentum for a holistic, regional P/CVE approach in Southeast Asia by sponsoring initiatives working together on P/CVE, such as the Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organizations (SEAN-CSO) and the working group on CVE of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF), co-convened by Australia and Indonesia.

Research has been a key focus of all these efforts for many purposes: to inform and evalu- ate P/CVE policy and programming, to identify the root causes and risk factors of radicaliza- tion in different contexts, to understand terrorist and extremist threats and trends, and to understand resilience factors, among others. Community actors are key to P/CVE research

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1   Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), "Asean Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent
     Extremism (2018 – 2025)," 2018, https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Adopted-ASEAN-PoA-to-Prevent-and-Counter-PCVE.pdf.

because they can access social groups that are hard to reach for various reasons (for example, because they lack trust in research and government institutions and perceive to be over-researched and treated as suspicious communities). Moreover, community actors are key to translate research into actionable knowledge that is useful to P/CVE practitioners who work with individuals at risk of radicalization.

Broadly, communities can be part of the research–practice cycle in two ways: they can be both the subject and the object of research. As the **subject** of research—that is, those undertaking research—communities are understood as a diverse galaxy of formal and informal entities, such as local and international NGOs, community organizations, individual activists, social enterprises, think tanks, and research centers. They undertake research independently or in partnership with other organizations, such as governments or universities, in various capacities and in different phases of the research. As the **object** of research, communities are often an ephemeral notion that sometimes incorporates very narrow groups, on a geographical or ethnic basis for example, and can embrace large populations, such as national or even multinational identities (e.g., the Malay identity, which is found across multiple Southeast Asian states).

The definition and understanding of communities as both the subject and object of P/CVE research lacks analytical clarity. This chapter aims to dissect and disentangle the meaning of community-centered research with a focus on the Southeast Asian context, reflecting on opportunities, but also the challenges and pitfalls of this approach to P/CVE. It draws on research and engagement experience in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, discussing relevant scholarly and gray-area literature about community-centered CVE efforts in these four national contexts.

Defining community-centered P/CVE research

One of the main challenges in conceptualizing the notion of community-centered P/CVE research is the diversity of meanings that are attributed to each of the terms: community, P/CVE, and research.

Mixed definitions: Community

Community is a loose concept that denotes a group of people with some characteristic, whether real or perceived, in common. As per the classic study of nationalism by Anderson,[2] communities are socially constructed by perception and are strongly influenced by media (including social media) and a number of other structural, group-based, and individual factors such as common grievances, education, and socio-economic conditions. It is useful to talk about communities as a fractal. Like snowflakes or broccoli, the closer we look at a community, the more sub-communities we can identify. Seen from a distance, these differences tend to disappear, and the boundaries of larger communities can be drawn, especially in comparison with other groups.

Let us take for example students of Islam in Indonesia. If we look closely enough, all *pesantren* (communal boarding schools housing *madrasah*, or Islamic schools) are different from one another, because of the personal styles of the *kyai* (the head of the *pesantren*), the charisma of the teachers, and the socio-demographic composition of student body. Zooming out, we notice that some groups of *pesantren* are different from others, because they are affiliated with different organizations. Some are associated with the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), others with Muhammadiyah, and others still are independent. Some *pesantren* only teach religious content (known as *Pesantren Salafiyah*—'original' *pesantren*), and others also teach national curriculum subjects, such as the sciences, arts, and humanities.[3] However, if we zoom out further, we can see that *pesantren* are different from schools, especially in urban areas. Thus, can *santri*––that is, the students of a *pesantren*—be considered a community? In this case, it depends on how and why we use the concept of community in relation to P/CVE research and practice.

Identities are political by nature, and in Southeast Asia many religious and political organizations tend to define the boundaries of their communities of reference around the identities that are most convenient to their agenda. This tendency is not uncommon in P/CVE, and it requires profound local knowledge to understand how and why biases play out in defining community boundaries. For example, research conducted among *pesantren* asso-

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2   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso Books, 2006).*

3   Greg Barton, Gus Dur: *The Authorized Biography of Abdurrahman Wahid* (UK: Equinox Publishing, 2002).

ciated only with NU or only with Muhammadiyah would provide a biased vision of the community of *santri*. These considerations are crucial when designing research in this field.

Furthermore, it is useful to split the notion of community into two conceptually different (but in practice often overlapping) camps. On the one hand, there are community members, a collection of individuals who belong (or are perceived to belong) to a certain group. On the other hand, there is a galaxy of community actors composed of activists, leaders (real or self-proclaimed), organizations, and NGOs, who each claim to somehow represent the interests of community members. The two camps overlap because the former often belongs to the latter—community actors are community members themselves. However, the degree to which they really represent the broader interests of community members and their actual connectedness with the community is mixed. It is important to always consider competition for resources and the political agendas of subgroups within each community. Going back to the metaphor of fractals, the more we zoom in, the easier is to find legitimate community actors, smaller groups are more homogenous and can more easily find local actors to represent their interests. On the other hand, the larger the community, the more difficult is to find legitimate community actors that are accepted by large and diverse communities.

Mixed definitions: P/CVE

P/CVE is a broad field that incorporates all non-coercive, preventative forms of counter-terrorism. Scholars and practitioners often use the label P/CVE to refer to a diversity of activities, which can be grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, as in the public health model. Primary interventions are implemented before the occurrence of terrorism and violent extremism, aiming to address the root causes and risk factors of radicalization. For example, primary interventions include education and strategic communication programs that target groups within the general population (for example school students) and aim to prevent them from adopting violent extremist ideologies. Secondary interventions are implemented after an individual or a group has started the radicalization process but before they engage in serious ideologically motivated crime. They include one-to-one mentoring programs targeting individuals who show indications or warning signs of radicalization to violent extremism and aim to prevent them from engaging in acts of violence.

Tertiary interventions are implemented after the crime is committed, usually after terrorists are imprisoned or released from prison after serving their sentence. For example, they include programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate former terrorists back into the community. Research that aims to underpin and support activities in the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels needs to work with different methodologies because of the different size and characteristics of the target population. For instance, research related to primary P/CVE activities can usually use large samples and quantitative techniques, while research related to secondary and tertiary P/CVE interventions can usually rely on small samples and qualitative design. Each requires different approaches to research, monitoring, and evaluation.

Primary P/CVE interventions are the most common globally, and South East Asia is no exception. In 2017, a study surveyed 60 civil society organizations and researchers working on P/CVE from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand,[4] finding that 54 of them worked exclusively on primary interventions, compared to only one on secondary and three on tertiary.

Mixed definitions: Research

Finally, it is important to underline that the notion of research is also used inconsistently to refer to a range of different activities. Scholars know well that different ontologies and epistemologies can lead to different research activities. There is a continuum of positions between those who believe that reality can be studied using scientific methods and those, at the other end of the spectrum, who believe that meanings and realities only exist as mental constructions within subjects.[5] These differences shape not only academic research but also the research approaches of community actors, including activists, NGOs, civil soci-

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4 Greg Barton, Matteo Vergani, Dan Goodhardt, Husnul Atiyah, "Gap Analysis and Capacity Assessment of Society Organisations Working against Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia," Deakin University, 2018, unpublished report.

5 Scholars usually refer to paradigms as the philosophical assumptions that guide our way of conducting research. The four main paradigms are usually referred to as: postpositivist, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic. Post positivism is based on the rationalistic and empiricist idea that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, and that causality and other mechanisms can be observed with measurement and experimentation. Constructivism proposes that reality is socially constructed, and research is a product of the values of researchers. The transformative paradigm positions researchers side by side with less powerful and marginalized groups in a joint effort to bring about social transformation. The pragmatic paradigm eludes for the most part metaphysical discussions about truth and reality and looks at the intersubjective relations that compose the social world with a mixed methods approach that includes aspects of postpositivist, constructivist, and transformative approaches. For more discussion about the paradigms of research, see: Donna M. Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (SAGE Publications, 2014).

ety organizations, and others. In Southeast Asia, the majority of P/CVE community actors that I have encountered in my activities as part of SEAN-CSO position themselves on the latter end of the spectrum and adopt a relativist and subjectivist approach and tend to reject the use of the scientific method. This has important implications for the type and range of research conducted in P/CVE by communities, because it narrows the toolkit of methods used by community researchers in this region. This is not unique to Southeast Asia, as it reflects the methods used in the field of radicalization research generally.[6]

The different combinations of the possible meanings of these three terms—communities, P/CVE, and research—often end up including vastly different activities and approaches under the same umbrella of community-centered P/CVE research. More narrow definitions of communities are usually associated with research relevant to localized approaches. In the primary P/CVE space, such research might inform or evaluate programs in narrowly defined geographical communities (for example development programs), or in the tertiary P/CVE space, programs for convicted terrorists. Broader definitions of communities are associated with research relevant to mainstream approaches. In the secondary P/CVE space, this research might underpin risk assessment indicators aiming at detecting early signs of radicalization in schools. In the primary P/CVE space, it might include research informing or evaluating strategic communication campaigns.

Conducting P/CVE research in and with localized communities

From many points of view, community actors are in a position of advantage to research violent extremism at the local level. As previous literature reviews have found,[7] most radicalization and terrorism research use either secondary sources (like propaganda materials) or non-extremist samples (like university students). Accessing individuals and groups that are more at risk of radicalization is crucial but difficult, as communities at risk are usually not open to being researched by people they do not know or trust. Community actors are often able to provide this access because— and as long as—as members of the community themselves, community members trust them.

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6   Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar, and Greg Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal. A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization into Violent Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 10 (2020): 854–54.

7   Ibid.

Understanding trust

Trust is the universal currency in all exchanges between stakeholders in the P/CVE space, but it is also volatile. In contexts where civil society loses space or is less free to democratically oppose the government, the credibility of community actors can be corrupted by working in the P/CVE field in collaboration with governments, especially in the eyes of those who have little trust in such institutions. This is a common situation in Southeast Asian countries experiencing an ongoing separatist struggle and where the central government does not trust minority communities who share an ethno-religious identity and grievances with the rebels.

For example, in Thailand and the Philippines, both experiencing long-standing separatist struggles in which the separatist minorities are identified along ethno-religious lines, there is a trust deficit between Muslim communities and the central government. In these contexts, P/CVE research and practice is often carried out by community actors (such civil society organizations, leaders, and activists), who are in the difficult position of having to build trust with both the central government and the community members. Trust from the government is necessary to access funding and relationships with government agencies, including law enforcement, correction systems, and local government authorities, and to make sure that the research is put to concrete use by government. Likewise, trust from the communities is necessary to access individuals and groups who would not otherwise participate in any government-funded P/CVE research or intervention program. In another chapter of this volume, Mikhael and Norman provide a nuanced discussion of how to successfully build trust relationships with local partners for conducting P/CVE research in conflict zones and divided societies.[8]

Understanding risk

Community actors incur significant risks in collaborating with governments and security agencies on P/CVE research. As Howell suggests, community actors who want to maintain trust from their communities need to remain independent from the aims of the secu-

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8   Drew Mikhael and Julie Norman, *Getting Local Engagement Right: Key Considerations for Local-level P/CVE Research* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.5.

rity apparatus and continue addressing issues of social justice, redistribution, and ethnic oppression without being oppressed by the government.[9] It is important to remember that community actors can be targeted by extremists and hate campaigns, both physically and in social media. Being seen to be working in P/CVE is often dangerous in local contexts where extremist ideologies are normalized and where governments are corrupted or governance is weak. Engagement of community actors in P/CVE puts them at risk of being perceived as aligning with the state's security agenda. In these contexts, trust needs to be balanced with independence.

This risk poses inescapable ethical challenges to P/CVE research, including the risk posed to the security of the researcher and community members in contexts of active conflict. It also creates the potential for bias that can distort research results. If the relationship between community actors and the government is too close, community actors engaged in research will be perceived as tamed, instruments to the government's political agenda, losing the trust of the community members. Similarly, if a community actor is too involved in political competition with other community actors, they will likely lose the trust of part of the community.

Lack of trust from parts of the community translates into research biases such as sample bias, which can affect the quality and reliability of research findings. For example, a community actor that is not trusted by individuals and groups within the community will not be able to access the whole community and will likely overlook important information relevant to P/CVE research questions. This is an important reason why it is in the best interest of governments and other funders of P/CVE research to choose as partners community actors that are truly independent and pursue the empowerment of their communities without political motives.

Understanding researcher independence

One of the best ways for community actors to achieve independence is through the diversification of funding sources. In their chapter, Malet and Korbitz examine the relationships

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9   Jude Howell, "The Global War on Terror, Development and Civil Society," *Journal of International Development: The Journal of the Development Studies Association* 18, no. 1 (2006): 121-135.

between P/CVE funders and researchers and the potential challenges arising from different expectations and needs.[10] P/CVE research in Southeast Asia is funded not only by national governments but often by foreign governments, universities, and international NGOs.

A study conducted in 2019 explored the funding sources of 74 community actors (including civil society organizations, universities, think-tanks, and activists) working on P/CVE in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.[11] The study found that all community actors received some funding for P/CVE research and practice from local and foreign governments, and their funding models were heavily reliant on grants. More recently, civil society organizations are starting to work on different funding models, such as social enterprises, to self-fund at least part of their activities. For example, the creation of social enterprises is one of the key focuses of the SEAN-CSO network, which has provided seed funding to local community actors to create small businesses to finance their local P/CVE work.

In Southeast Asia, government trust in community actors tends to crystallize over time into a handful of established and proven partnerships working on P/CVE, mainly consolidated through informal relationships. In Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, these relationships are maintained especially with community actors that are seen as not critical toward the government, which poses a real threat to the independence of research and practice in the P/CVE space.

In a study conducted in 2019, Kruber et al. interviewed 20 members of civil society organizations working on P/CVE in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand to investigate their relationships with local governments.[12] Most community actors expressed concern about the ephemeral nature of their relationships with their governments, perceived as being dependent on personal relationships, which can be impacted by changes of personnel within government departments and agencies, including through electoral cycles. As indicated by many interviewees, a potential solution to this problem would be the devel-

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10   David Malet and Mark Korbitz, *Resilience is for Research Designs Too: Funders, Researchers, & Navigating Study Constraints* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.7.

11   Vergani, Anggraeni, Goodhardt, and Barton, "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2018-2019."

12   Samantha Kruber, Matteo Vergani, Greg Barton, Dan Goodhardt, and Titien Yuliatiningtyas, "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2019-2020. Assessment of Government-Civil Society Relationships in CVE: The Perspective of Civil Society Organisations in South East Asia," *Deakin University,* 2020, unpublished report.

opment of formal mechanisms to involve local research actors in P/CVE research, such as within National Action Plans.[13] These mechanisms should also clearly regulate processes of data sharing between community actors and government agencies within national settings. In this volume, Atamuradova and Nanni provide a list of recommendations for use by researchers and research commissioners in the P/CVE field, which can assist community actors in securing funding for their activities.[14]

Researcher resources and capacity

While researchers associated with universities and other institutions often have both the resources and the skills to undertake high quality research, community actors often have unique access to communities at risk but sometimes lack the capacities and resources to conduct rigorous, reliable, and well-designed research. The majority of civil society organizations working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia are under-resourced and under-staffed, largely relying on volunteers. In some cases, they are disconnected from the national and international research community and are not well versed in the broad toolkit of methods available to P/CVE researchers. For example, Barton et al. found that evaluation methods among civil society organizations working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia are often unsystematic, with very limited use of control groups or pre- and post-intervention measurements.[15] Observations, interviews, unstructured conversations, and post-intervention self-reported Likert scales are the norm for evaluating P/CVE programs.

In addition, there is an over-reliance on qualitative methods, textual analyses, and ethnography to investigate radicalization factors by community actors in the South East Asian context, and studies using other methodologies (for example experimental designs) are virtually absent. This lack of methodological breadth is detrimental to the quality and reliability of P/CVE research in the region. Providing basic research training to community members and enhancing collaboration with researchers from local and international institutions could

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13   Kruber et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2019-2020."

14   Farangiz Atamuradova and Carlotta Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from the STRIVE Global Program* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020). https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.6.

15   Barton, Vergani, Goodhardt, and Atiyah, "Gap Analysis and Capacity Assessment of Society Organisations Working against Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia."

address some of these problems, although the issue of resources and funding remains a key problem in advancing the quality of P/CVE research and evaluations in Southeast Asia.

P/CVE research in and with broadly defined communities: Challenges and opportunities

P/CVE research in—and with—communities, when intended in a broader sense—for example, tapping into a broad religious identity like the Muslim community—poses a different set of challenges and opportunities.

Variation in causes and risks of radicalization

Systematic, cumulative, and comparative research is needed to inform P/CVE practice across different contexts within a particular region (like Southeast Asia) or even within a large and diverse country (like Indonesia, for example). In different local contexts, different sets of risk factors and root causes of radicalization might be relevant. For example, research has shown that in post-conflict zones like Iraq, improving service provision reduces insurgent violence, particularly when the provision is made through smaller, community-based projects.[16] In more stable contexts, the association between development indicators and violence has found to be absent in meta-analytic reviews.[17]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this diversity of contexts and root causes of radicalization exists also within Southeast Asia. Vergani et al. found that, according to 74 community actors working on P/CVE research and practice in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, political grievances, Islamophobia, and exclusion of Muslim minorities from the political process are seen as one of the main risk factors of radicalization in the Philippines and Thailand, but not in Malaysia or Indonesia.[18] Rather, returnees from Syria and Iraq linked to the Islamic State are seen as a major issue in these countries. Moreover, Indonesians and Malaysians identify political and religious polarization and hate from Muslim

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16   Eli Berman, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Joseph H. Felter, "Can Hearts and Minds be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Journal of Political Economy* 119, no. 4 (2011): 766–819.

17   Aurélie Campana and Luc Lapointe, "The Structural 'Root' Causes of Non-suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Scoping Review," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 1 (2012): 79–104.

18   Vergani et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2018-2019."

groups toward non-Muslim minorities and LGBTIQ+ groups as another major issue. Other important concerns identified by respondents include the involvement of women and children in terrorist groups and the regional consequences of instability and armed groups' safe havens in the Philippines.

The root causes and risk factors of radicalization across different geographical areas in Southeast Asia are vastly different. However, no systematic comparative research has investigated the different relevance of these factors across the various Southeast Asian local contexts to inform P/CVE practice. Similarly, in the evaluation space, there is no comparative and cumulative knowledge base to understand what P/CVE interventions work or don't work, where, and why. In Southeast Asia, evaluations are conducted mostly by community actors, using different and inconsistent measurement tools and research designs.

Standardization of terms and methods

An initial barrier to conducting this type of research is the lack of common definitions of violent extremism among Southeast Asian P/CVE stakeholders, including governments and community actors. Research shows that among Southeast Asian community actors terms such as CVE, PVE, and social cohesion are delegitimized by some because they are intrinsically ambiguous and do not allow stakeholders to distinguish clearly between legitimate forms of non-violent radical or fundamentalist religious thought, which are part of the democratic political discourse in Muslim-majority countries, and violent extremism.[19] For this reason, in Malaysia and Indonesia, the distinction between radicalism and violent extremism is a particularly important aspect of the P/CVE scholarly debate.[20] In Thailand and the Philippines, where there are separatist insurgencies and Muslims are a religious minority, the distinction between terrorism and freedom fighters, rebels, and insurgents is a key part of the debate.[21] This lack of shared definitions translates into a lack of comparable research

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19   Ibid.

20   Alexander R. Arifianto, "Islamic Campus Preaching Organizations in Indonesia: Promoters of Moderation or Radicalism?" *Asian Security* 15, no. 3 (2019): 323–42; Choirul Mahfud, Niken Prasetyawati, Wahyuddin Wahyuddin, Zainul Muhibbin, Dyah Satya Yoga Agustin, and Heni Sukmawati, "Religious Radicalism, Global Terrorism and Islamic Challenges in Contemporary Indonesia," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora (JSH)* 11, no. 1 (2018): 8–18.

21   Rohan Gunaratna and Muh Taufiqurrohman, "Insurgency and Terrorism in East Asia: Threat and Response," in *Non-Traditional Security in East Asia: A Regime Approach,* eds. Ramon Pacheco Pardo and Jeffrey Reeves (2016): 23–48, https://doi.org/10.1142/p1008.

findings across different contexts, which limits the production of cumulative P/CVE knowledge in the region.

A second barrier to producing cumulative and comparative knowledge in P/CVE research is the lack of consistent methodologies used throughout different research and evaluation studies across local contexts. The diversity of research skills and resources among different community actors produces fragmented knowledge that is difficult for policy makers to interpret, use, or verify. Without consistent methods and cumulative knowledge, it is impossible to have a solid foundation from which to prioritize certain P/CVE areas and interventions across large and diverse communities.

A potential solution to these problems would be the creation of a unified research and evaluation framework, developed in consultation with community actors, within a country or potentially across multiple countries that share similar broad communities, sets of stakeholders, grievances, and risk factors. National Action Plans could set some basic foundations for common definitions, measurements, research, and evaluation frameworks. Specific and detailed frameworks should be a priority for networks of government agencies, researchers, practitioners, and community actors to develop. These networks should prioritize sharing research methods and toolkits to spark collaborative and comparative P/CVE research and evaluation across local community contexts.

In support of this recommendation, Vergani et al. found that the need to develop strategic P/CVE frameworks (such as National Action Plans) and the need for more rigorous evaluation of P/CVE programs are at the top of the list of priorities identified by community actors working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia.[22] Still, some government agencies might be opposed to collaborating with community actors on P/CVE.[23]

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22   Vergani et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2018-2019."

23   I. Gusti Bagus Dharma Agastia, Anak Agung Banyu Perwita, and D. B. Subedi, "Countering Violent Extremism Through State-society Partnerships: A Case Study of De-radicalisation Programmes in Indonesia," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (2020): 23-43, https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2020.1722317; Cameron Sumpter, "Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Priorities, Practice and the Role of Civil Society," *Journal for Deradicalization* 11 (2017): 112–47.

Networking and coordination

To this end, it is important to highlight the presence of numerous networking initiatives and platforms for P/CVE community actors across Southeast Asia. A stable regional initiative funded by the Australian Government is the Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organizations (SEAN-CSO) working on addressing violent extremism, which has existed since 2016 and organizes online and face-to-face events and trainings for community and government stakeholders in the region.

Networking between community and government actors often takes place through multilateral initiatives, such as the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) sub-committee on CVE led by Australia and Indonesia. Many international donors and P/CVE actors have launched networking initiatives of civil society actors in Southeast Asia. To name just a few, the Global Center on Cooperative Security (funded by the government of the Netherlands) has launched an initiative to strengthen the networks of women-led P/CVE organizations in Southeast Asia. The Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy and the ASEAN Society of the Philippines convened a large network of community actors working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia in 2017, funded by numerous governmental and intergovernmental actors.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns, countless online events are organized every month in Southeast Asia, with the aim of bringing together and training community actors working on P/CVE. While the increase in online networking and training efforts to increase skills, collaboration, and coordination among the variety of actors engaged in the P/CVE space is a positive development, personal communications with local P/CVE actors suggest that this over-proliferation of online events can cause fatigue, duplication, and exhaustion among local community stakeholders, who struggle to locate the events and trainings that are important to them. Online training and networking proliferation is exacerbated by the competing political agendas of funding bodies—e.g., multilateral bodies and foreign governments—and by competition between P/CVE agencies. A curated repository of on- and offline networking and training events in the P/CVE space would be beneficial for scholars and practitioners working in the South East Asian region.

Understanding ethics: Considerations around majority and minority populations

Finally, and importantly, significant ethical implications relate to P/CVE research and practice among both majority and minority communities, broadly defined, in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, the implications for minority communities have been discussed and studied extensively in the literature of critical terrorism studies, particularly in relation to "community-driven" P/CVE approaches in Western countries.[24] In Southeast Asia, this applies to contexts such as Thailand and the Philippines, where P/CVE research and practice targets the broad Muslim community, incurring the risk of profiling individuals, creating suspect citizens, and silencing dissent and free speech.

On the other hand, the ethical and political implications of P/CVE research and practice among majority communities is rarely discussed. The Southeast Asian context is an optimal case to examine this issue, which applies in similar terms to all countries where P/CVE addresses forms of extremism that are present within majority communities, such as far-right and racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) in Western countries. For example, Berger[25] discussed the ethical implications of discussing in the public domain research findings showing how some white nationalist extremists have explicitly supported U.S. President Donald Trump, as well as the practical and ethical challenges of conducting P/CVE work in a political context where some policy makers turn a blind eye to extremism among their political supporters.

For the Southeast Asian context, tackling jihadist extremism in Muslim-majority democracies such as Indonesia and Malaysia poses key ethical challenges. The first challenge is related to the use of taxpayers' money to counter ideas that play a major role in a country's democratic process. As in Western countries, in Southeast Asian politics some political leaders incite hatred against non-Muslims and use populist rhetoric and toxic ultra-nationalist narratives based on ethno-religious identities to gather consensus. Sometimes this

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24   Nicole Nguyen, *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Aislinn O'Donnell, "Securitisation, Counterterrorism and the Silencing of Dissent: The Educational Implications of Prevent," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 64, no. 1 (2016): 53-76.

25   J.M. Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.3.

toxic populism surfaces into mainstream politics. In Malaysia, the government approach has been to dominate the discourse on Islam and attain Malay Muslim support with the creation of a Muslim bureaucracy and the implementation of aspects of religiously based laws.[26]

In these contexts, researching and countering extremist ideologies is politically sensitive, because it has the potential to be instrumentalized by political elites and thus affect political and democratic processes. Tackling the spread of out-group hatred is an important component of primary P/CVE work. However, when hateful and extremist ideas are directly associated with mainstream political movements, despite the presence of ideological contiguity with extremist movements, public and foreign funding invested into researching and countering these ideas can be seen as undue interference.[27]

Over-researching a particular topic could also create imbalances in the public opinion, drawing attention to certain topics over others.[28] P/CVE research can set the agenda of the public, the media, and politicians disproportionately on a certain security issue (for example, hatred spread by a certain political movement). This, by consequence, can demonize a certain political ideology and diminish attention on other areas of public interest (such as education, healthcare, etc.). For example, in the South East Asian context, the politicization of the Patani conflict in Thailand has been associated with a securitized political agendas and the erosion of civil liberties.[29] For this reason, P/CVE research in the Thai context is very sensitive, with the national Thai government framing P/CVE research on Patani violence as religiously inspired terrorism, and local communities largely contesting this definition and framing the conflict in terms of ethno-nationalist struggle.[30]

Agenda-setting can be exploited by political leaders whose objectives align with P/CVE research and practice for electoral purposes. As Atamuradova and Nanni discuss, donor-

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26   Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Political Islam in Malaysia: Problematising Discourse and Practice in the UMNO–PAS 'Islamisation Race,'" *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2004): 184–205.

27   For more, see: Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism.*

28   See Atamuradova and Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism.*

29   Aurel Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 1 (2007): 1–18.

30   Bayu Mitra A. Kusuma, "Patani United Liberation Organization: From Jihad to Local Politics Movement," *The Indonesian Journal of Public Administration* 2, no. 1 (2016).

driven priorities can significantly distort P/CVE research agendas by focusing research efforts on only one type of violent extremism.[31] Communities can set P/CVE research agendas to advance their political and economic interests. Funders, communities, and political stakeholders can influence and distort how research findings are analyzed and interpreted, sometimes to biased end. Backlash from other political actors can result, further polarizing political attitudes in the country. As a risk mitigation strategy, academics and practitioners in the P/CVE field suggest involving a diversity of stakeholders—including communities, researchers, and law enforcement and government representatives with different viewpoints and agendas—in review boards, advisory boards, and research teams, to make sure all points of views are represented in the research assumptions, questions and methods.[32]

Conclusion

This chapter discussed key aspects to consider when undertaking community-centered P/CVE research in South East Asia. Although the Southeast Asian context is used to discuss the opportunities and challenges of different approaches to community-centered research, the key findings are likely relevant to other contexts too. First, when research is done in—and with—local communities, community actors are in a position of advantage to access samples that would otherwise be overlooked by researchers who are not from the community. However, ethical challenges and potential distortions (such as sample biases) need to be taken carefully into consideration, particularly in contexts like Thailand and the Philippines, where the priorities of P/CVE government donors might reflect a political agenda that is perceived as biased by local communities.

Other factors, such as crystallized and tamed relationships between governments and certain community actors, political competition within and between communities, and the lack of research resources and capacities, need to be assessed when conducting P/CVE research with community actors in local contexts. Previous research in the South East Asian context found that the vast majority of funding for P/CVE research in the region tends to involve a small group of community organizations that act as de-facto gatekeepers of research in

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31 Atamuradova and Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism.*

32 John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 267–91; Atamuradova and Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism.*

this field.[33] This concentration of funding and resources increases the risks of biased P/CVE research in the region.

Second, when research is done in—and with—broader communities, the main challenge is to produce systematic, cumulative, and comparative research findings that hold true across local contexts. To achieve this aim, it can be helpful to establish common definitions, measurement tools, and methodologies in consultation with all stakeholders, including community actors. Practical solutions can include the establishment of research and evaluation frameworks in National Action Plans. However, it is also important to consider that community actors are often invited to networking tables that are set primarily to address the needs of donors, therefore fatiguing community stakeholders by duplicating their efforts and weakening broader P/CVE objectives. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is leading the way in creating a National Action Plan that includes a strong focus on lifting the quality of P/CVE research in the country, by providing skills and training to community and research actors to produce reliable, valid, and cumulative P/CVE knowledge.[34]

Finally, it is important to consider specific ethical challenges related to working with minority communities—such as the creation of suspicious, ostracized, and alienated communities—but also with majority communities—and the potential for research findings and topics of focus interfering in or being instrumentalized to impact a country's political and democratic process, which is a key issue for international P/CVE donors working in South East Asia.

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33   Kruber et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2019-2020."

34   United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Indonesia, "UNDP Indonesia Join Forces with BNPT to Establish Action Plan on Violent Extremism Prevention," January 23, 2020, https://www.id.undp.org/content/indonesia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/UNDP-Indonesia-Join-Forces-with-BNPT.html.

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Annexes.

Select Chapters by Region

Annexes | GUIDE FOR READERS

What's in this section for you?

Context matters in research on VE. The regional annexes provided in this edited volume, while not exhaustive, highlight chapters within other sections of this volume specific to research on violent extremism in two regions: Southeast Asia and the Western Balkans. These two regions are highlighted based on RESOLVE research training and capacity building efforts conducted in both for participants from research and non-research backgrounds.[1]

For researchers:

This section will help you learn more about conducting research on VE in Southeast Asia and the Western Balkans. The chapters provide insights based on specific regional experiences and highlight the importance of considering context, tailored research, and opportunitites and challenges that may impact research based on location.

For non-researchers, policymakers, & practitioners:

This section will help you explore distinctions between experiences based on the region in which research on VE is conducted and understand specific contextual considerations that may impact research processes and, ultimately, research findings.

Annex 1.

Chapters on the Western Balkans

Annex 1: Western Balkans

SELECT CHAPTERS

This annex includes chapters featured elsewhere in this edited volume that specifically focus on research on violent extremism in the Western Balkans. The following two chapters are highlighted in this annex:

1. *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from the STRIVE Global Program, by Farangiz Atamuradova & Carlotta Nanni*

   Originally published June 30, 2020 | https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.6

2. *Interacting with Trauma: Reflections from Research in Kosovo, by Teuta Avdimetaj*

   Originally published October 27, 2022 | https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2022.2

Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism

Lessons Learned from the STRIVE Global Program[1]

Farangiz Atamuradova[2] & Carlotta Nanni

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As research on violent extremism (VE) and terrorism continues to grow, the safety and protection of those individuals involved in this research needs to grow simultaneously. At the same time, the various stakeholders commissioning the research also face significant methodological, ethical, legal and financial challenges in ensuring CVE research is conducted to the highest standards. An analysis of CVE research from the perspective of the donors has gone highly unnoticed. The aim of this chapter is to bring attention to select challenges and lessons research commissioners have come across during the first four years of implementation of Hedayah's STRIVE Global[3] Program using the Western Balkans as a case study. Learning from the challenges identified through submitted research proposals and final papers,

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1   The opinions expressed in this chapter are those of the authors and are not representative of Hedayah or the STRIVE Global Program.

2   *Farangiz Atamuradova is a researcher working on various CVE related issues as well as political analysis. She is a Program Officer in the Research and Analysis Department at Hedayah, where she leads and supports a number of department's projects and programs.*

3   The STRIVE Global Program is a five year and half program (May 2015 – December 2020), funded by the European Union through the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (ICSP). Its overall objective is to build the capacity of state and non-state actors to effectively challenge radicalization leading to violent extremism.

the chapter concludes with a checklist of good practices for use by researchers and research commissioners of violent extremism and terrorism studies moving forward.

Introduction

In response to an existing threat of violent extremism (VE) and terrorism, an increasing amount of research has tried to better understand, prevent, and counter the phenomenon. Conducting research on violent extremism is challenging due to the absence of a universally accepted definition and the high sensitivity of the topic. This sensitivity has ethical implications, including both the safety of the researcher and the research subjects, underlining the pressing need to abide by legal and moral frameworks. Other challenges of researching violent extremism are linked to the project design and methodological frameworks. This includes ensuring a representative sample, an appropriate methodology for data collection, and the proper analysis and validation of the findings.

Importantly, the research process does not only involve the researchers, but also the stakeholders or donors commissioning the research. Organizations commissioning research on violent extremism face several difficulties, such as ensuring the quality and accuracy of the final research output, verifying compliance with ethical principles of research, and acknowledging inherent biases. Furthermore, it is difficult to closely monitor research processes from a distance. Finally, while the contextual knowledge of the research organization may be strong, there remains much room for improvement on more specific research skills that may affect final findings.

Through the STRIVE Global Program, Hedayah commissioned research to explore the drivers of radicalization in the Western Balkans and other regions. The program's target audience are credible, local organizations, institutions, or universities that do not normally receive international donor funding. Based on our experience publishing calls for propos-

als[4] and commissioning research throughout four years of implementing the STRIVE Global Program, Hedayah developed a checklist of good practices for researchers submitting proposals and for organizations commissioning research on similar topics. This chapter delineates those good practices and why they are important, both for researchers and research commissioners.

The checklist explained in this chapter was developed through a cross-analysis of common practices within proposals and research papers submitted to Hedayah's STRIVE's program targeting the Western Balkans. To verify the accuracy of this cross-analysis, the authors also surveyed the 34 organizations who had submitted proposals or papers for research in the region.[5] While the checklist was developed based on reflections and experiences commissioning research in the Western Balkans, it contains valuable recommendations and insights that can be applied to other contexts.

While there are many difficulties researchers and commissioners of research face, this chapter discusses only three main challenges which are, in our opinion, the most relevant in the context of the Western Balkans. This, however, is not to say that the challenges outlined in this chapter are necessarily exhaustive in the Western Balkans or in other contexts, nor are the recommendations outlined in this chapter the only remedies available to address them.

The three main challenges can be summarized as follows. First among the challenges discussed in this chapter is the choice of research topics. Despite the deep contextual understanding and expertise of local researchers, popular research trends and the interests of donors can influence the research topics they select. This, in effect, can affect opportunities for researchers to study topics that might be of greater relevance within their own country. A second challenge discussed in this chapter revolves around the ethical considerations required for research focusing on violent extremism, including the Do No Harm approach. Researchers operating in familiar contexts face specific ethical challenges and may run into

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4 The call for proposals mechanism has been adopted to select the local organizations in STRIVE target areas (Central Asia, Western Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa region, South Caucasus, and Turkey) to which to provide financial and technical support. Four calls for proposals divided by geographical and/or thematic lots for third party research organizations have been published since the start of the program in May 2015.

5 Only seven of the thirty-four grant receiving organizations responded to the survey. Data from their survey responses contributed to the development of the checklist.

obstacles or blind spots that researchers external to the context may otherwise avoid with significant implications for the research. The third and final challenge discussed in this essay is the development and implementation of coherent and relevant research designs and the clarification of existing assumptions, biases, and terminologies ensuring ease of reference for readers. A carefully outlined research paper with all underlying assumptions and definitions ensures the readers fully understand the perspective taken by the researchers.

1 Challenge 1: Navigating popular research trends and donor-driven research topics

Demand for research on religious-based violent extremism has increased worldwide since the launch of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). More recent attacks carried out by or in the name of extremist groups proclaiming a religious cause—most notably by the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—accelerated interest in religiously motivated violent extremism worldwide.[6] However, while ISIS and other groups that proclaim themselves as "Islamic" have dominated the headlines over the years, other violent extremist groups, including far-right political groups, are on the rise.[7]

As an organization evaluating research proposals, it is difficult to discern whether submitted proposals either reflect the local dynamics, what researchers perceive as a topic likely to be funded based on the popularity of the research topics at the time or, instead, one likely to be of interest to the funding entity. Research proposals we received from the Western Balkans tended to focus on violent extremism carried out in the name of religion. Only limited, if any, attention was given to far-right violent extremism, violent hooliganism, or neo-Nazi movements, all of which are gaining prominence in nearly all the Western Balkan countries and beyond.[8] Many of the proposals omitted a general assessment of the context and often seemed to suggest that ISIS-inspired violent extremism represents the only type

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6   The term "religious-based violent extremists" is used to refer primarily to groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

7   Global Terrorism Index, *Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018), 3, http://visionofhumanity.org/reports.

8   Valery Perry, *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2019).

of violent extremism in the region. While this may be true for some countries, evidence suggests that it is not an accurate depiction of the region as a whole.[9]

At the same time, however, researchers and commissioners face a dilemma: researching far-right violent extremism may be increasingly complicated and a lack of this research may create a misconception of the actual nature of violent extremism and violent extremist threats in a given context. The increasing popularity of far-right political discourses in Europe, for example, makes it harder to conduct research that is not construed as political in nature. Studies on the far right often point out the blurring lines between mainstream political and extremist rhetoric.[10] An attempt to mitigate the possibility that research findings will be misinterpreted could discourage researchers as well as research commissioners from broaching these politically sensitive topics. Unfortunately, this dynamic can result in a body of literature that may not necessarily reflect the entire spectrum of violent extremist trends and threats.

Based on our experience, to address these issues, researchers and commissioners should be cognizant of and work to address the following:

- **Commissioners of research should be mindful of how they word their calls for papers and their criteria within them, both of which may influence or overly circumscribe the proposals they receive.[11]** Researchers will likely try to write research proposals that would increase their chances of receiving funds by "ticking the boxes" commissioners set or are perceived to have set. As a result, the more dictated and narrow in focus the call is, the less room there is for truly locally identified research topics. In the Western Balkans and beyond, donor-driven priorities, rather than locally identified trends and issues, have resulted in a redundant body of research on violent extremism, which misses the opportunity to address local issues and trends.[12] Organizations commissioning research must reflect and take

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9   Zdravko Saveski and Artan Sadiku, *The Radical Right in Macedonia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, December 2012), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09568.pdf.

10   Luke Kelly, *Overview of Research on Far Right Extremism in the Western Balkans,* K4D Helpdesk Report (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, June 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d309f7aed915d2fe9ea6aec/620_Western_Balkans_far_Right.pdf

11   For more on this, see: Perry, "Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia."

12   Saveski and Sadiku, *The Radical Right in Macedonia.*

into account how their own biases and personal views may affect their funding decisions and, therefore, existing research on violent extremism. Commissioning organizations might also consider avoiding specifications on research topics that may imply a strong preference for a specific type or definition of violent extremism.

- **From a commissioner's experience, it can be helpful to involve local experts in the development of calls for proposals and to include them in the proposal review board to ensure contextual reflection.** This approach ensures a flexible yet contextually specific selection process. Short-listed proposals present an innovative approach to researching identified gaps in the given context.

- **Donors should encourage researchers to be assertive when identifying and presenting research topics and questions, especially when the proposed research may not entirely fit within a donor's preferred research topics.** A strong, well-validated literature review and situational analysis of the research topic and its importance can justify topic selection in the proposal. While this may not guarantee funding, it will at the very least provide the commissioning entity a more accurate picture of local concerns about and variation in violent extremist actors, dynamics, and trends.

2 Challenge 2:
Adhering to Ethical Principles in Research

Tore Bjørgo, head of Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo, states, "extremism is a research ethics minefield where there is a risk of serious missteps."[13] While this quote refers to ethical challenges in the context of interviewing Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right extremist, it is apt in describing researching violent extremism more broadly. The issue of ethics is important in any kind of research and even more critical with highly sensitive research topics such as violent extremism.

The aim of ethics and protocols is to protect human subjects, "safeguarding them from any potential harm that participating in the study could bring, warning them of these dan-

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13   Elin Fugelsnes, "Extremism is a Research Ethics Minefield," *ScienceNordic,* June 25, 2016, http://sciencenordic.com/extremism-research-ethics-minefield.

gers, and ensuring that they give a fully informed consent to participate."[14] A number of publications highlight the importance of ethics in researching violent extremism specifically and scholars, practitioners, and researchers continue to widely discuss the topic.[15] The U.S. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research's *Belmont Report* outlines general, basic principles of ethics relevant to social research, including:

1 **Respect for persons:** "subjects enter into the research voluntarily and with adequate information," essentially respecting their autonomy or protecting those with "diminished autonomy"

2 **Beneficence:** "persons are treated in an ethical manner not only by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm, but also by making efforts to secure their well-being"

3 **Justice:** where all subjects are treated equally and equals should not be discriminated depending on their existing conditions

Source: Adapted from *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subject Research.*[16]

Research topics proposed by Western Balkans STRIVE applicants varied. Some focused on understanding the relationship between violent extremism and vulnerable populations, while others focused on returning terrorist fighters. Some sought to study disengagement, deradicalization, and rehabilitation programs, while others sought to understand the role of the educational sector, mass or social media, and local religious narratives and discourses; youth and women; or factors increasing the susceptibility to radicalization. Despite their topical diversity, all the proposed research topics proved highly sensitive, with specific ethical implications. One component of the STRIVE research review was a careful assessment of research methodology design and the incorporation of ethical principles. As part

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14   Anne Speckhard, "Research Challenges Involved in Field Research and Interviews Regarding the Militant Jihad, Extremism, and Suicide Terrorism," *Democracy and Security* 5, no.3 (2009): 199-222, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419160903183409.

15   To name a few: Marie Breen Smyth, "Subjectivities, 'Suspect Communities', Governments and Ethics of Research on 'Terrorism'," in *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda,* eds. Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 194-215; Ted Reynolds, "Ethical and Legal Issues Surrounding Academic Research into Online Radicalization: A UK Experience," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no.3 (2012): 499-513, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2012.723447.

16   The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subject Research, Report of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979), https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sites/default/files/the-belmont-report-508c_FINAL.pdf.

of the research methodology, we assessed the data gathering techniques employed in the research for any potential ethical issues.

Research can be qualitative, quantitative, or a mix of both. The data gathering technique is determined depending on the research question and context and each method requires ethical considerations. Rarely, however, did the concept notes we received cover the ethical aspects of the research project and how applicants planned to address these issues. There are a number of publications and ethics committees that provide guidance on how to best address the ethical aspects of research.[17] Basic ethical considerations include informing the participants of the purpose of the study, their ability to withdraw from the study at any point, where and how their data will be stored and for how long, and who will have access to it. Another common issue is that potential research participants may be hesitant to partake in the project due to sensitivities or dangers to their personal security, whether from violent extremist groups or security forces.

The do no harm approach and researching vulnerable groups

A critical ethical consideration when conducting research is the Do No Harm approach, especially when researching vulnerable populations. One of the main concerns is that participating in the research may stigmatize an identified group of individuals, which can be mitigated adopting Do No Harm principles and practices.

Among the proposals for research on violent extremism that Hedayah received for the STRIVE Global Program, many involved research with or on potentially vulnerable populations, including proposals that aimed to assess their "susceptibility" to radicalization. From the reviewers' perspective, research on vulnerable populations raises several concerns. First, considering that individuals engaged in extremist activities can vary significantly in age, socioeconomic status, literacy level, occupation, ethnicity, ideology, and past criminal records, it is difficult and problematic to suggest one broad grouping of individuals as more "susceptible" to radicalization than any other.

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17   Speckhard, "Research Challenges Involved in Field Research and Interviews Regarding the Militant Jihad, Extremism, and Suicide Terrorism"; Reynolds, "Ethical and Legal Issues Surrounding Academic Research into Online Radicalization." For additional resources, see: British Educational Research Association, available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/; University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC), available at: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/.

Second, a research proposal referring to a population believed to be more vulnerable to radicalization based solely on any one characteristic—among proposed research topics in the Western Balkans, their ethnic background most notably—can lead to the stigmatization of and unjustified attention toward the targeted group in policy and practice and in the broader population. At best, such research demonstrates implicit reductionism and confirmation bias. At worst, research carried out without consideration of its ethical implications on one specific group in a larger population can further divisions based on pre-existing social structures. Research stigmatizing a community, even inadvertently, can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and marginalization, which could, in turn, play into the grievance narratives violent extremists use to recruit new members.

There is no proven causality between a social vulnerability factor and radicalization. This lack of evidence of causation, despite observed correlation during the research conducted by STRIVE Global grantees, poses challenges to countering violent extremism (CVE) program development and implementation. CVE needs to balance practicality, ethics, and effectiveness to avoid reinforcing false assumptions, stereotypes, and misjudgements. It is imperative that researchers and research commissioners alike adopt the principle of Do No Harm to account for any negative implications of research.

Based on our experience, to address these issues, researchers and commissioners should be cognizant of and work to address the following:

- **Donors should require that proposals adopt formal or informal ethical reviews to their research before submission.** In the STRIVE Global Program, the proposals with more developed ethical procedures typically originated from universities. Universities usually have an ethics committee or review board in place ensuring that any research the university conceptualizes, commissions, and/or conducts abides by established ethical principles and guidelines. This is not to say that university-conducted research alone is always ethical. However, based on the experience of the STRIVE Global Program, universities tended to demonstrate proper processes for addressing ethical concerns. Research institutes or local organizations should establish similar mechanisms, even informal ones, to ensure that ethical principles are considered.

- **To promote forward planning for ethical challenges in the research process, research commissioners could encourage researchers to develop their own ethical checklist or provide guidelines to the researchers.** Research commissioners are also encouraged to create their own ethical checklist for applicants and include it in the proposal requirements. The checklist should address ethical questions related to how the researchers gather data, inform research participants about the purpose and parameters of the study, and how they will store and protect the data they gathered, including information about who will have access to their data and how long it will be kept. The list can be altered and extended depending on the context, where certain questions will be more vital than others.

- **Proposals must account for political sensitivities around the collected data, how their findings could be misconstrued if not presented in a generally acceptable way, and the ethical and security implications of the overarching political dynamics.** To do so, it is important that the organizations commissioning research know the context of the target countries well or involve local experts in the evaluation and revision process (both procedures that were followed in STRIVE Global Program). We encouraged applicants to inform governments or even involve official entities in the research process to mitigate political sensitivities. Additionally, STRIVE advises successful applicants to submit the research findings for peer review for any sensitivities.

- **Research commissioners must maintain awareness of the sensitivities and potential biases within the context they are commissioning research and within research proposals.** Research commissioners and researchers should be aware of how the given research could strengthen the external negative perceptions towards already stigmatized or marginalized groups in a given context, resulting in a perpetuation of underdevelopment and discrimination. As mentioned in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) *Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe*, "it is important to challenge assumptions about any risk assessment tool and process so as to avoid profiling or stigmatizing individuals or even pushing them towards violence."[18] To mitigate some of these concerns, researchers should take great care

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18   OSCE, Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe (Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 2019): 18, https://www.

to present the requisite evidence underlying their research decisions, clearly outline any of their own conflicts of interest, be transparent regarding their own assumptions and biases in research proposals and processes, and strategize ways in which to avoid causing harm within the populations they are studying.

- **Researchers need to clearly acknowledge existing assumptions and mitigate inherent biases, both of which contribute to the proposal's strength.** Ensuring a diverse and inclusive team of researchers in terms of ethnicity, religion, and gender can be a good balancing strategy. Biases should be clearly and honestly stated in the limitations of the study.

- **Researchers should abide by the Do No Harm principle in their research design to ensure that neither the research process nor its outcomes inadvertently contribute to the further marginalization of specific ethnic or religious groups or put participants at risk.** This is particularly true in research exploring the "vulnerability" of specific groups to radicalization. Researchers must be cognizant of the fact that research findings can be interpreted beyond their original intent or meaning, feeding into local narratives that promote stigmatization or political goals.

- **The Do No Harm principle should guide the evaluation of the research methodology and its potential long-term impact within the society to avoid creating community alienation.** This is problematic in research that involves interviews with former foreign fighters, for instance. A number of research proposals did not explain the possible implications their interviews may have on the lives of these individuals and their families or the strategy to mitigate the risks for the researchers themselves. For instance, interviewing a returning terrorist fighter may result in an unwanted attention drawn towards the individual and the family. Whether during the concept note stage or throughout project implementation, STRIVE ensures the partner organization abides by the Do No Harm principle and seeks to clarify any questions that may raise concerns in the future.

- **Researchers need to consider the above points on the Do No Harm principle before submitting their work.** Reviewers will likely judge by the coverage of sensi-

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osce.org/secretariat/418274.

tive aspects and compliance with the Do No Harm approach. The approach is meant to help "practitioners think through the short- and long-term effects of certain initiatives or programs on a community," to avoid negative, unintended consequences.[19]

- **Finally, researchers should explicitly state all their assumptions, biases, and caveats upfront in research proposals and final research products.** Outlining assumptions helps the reader understand the limitations and the realities of the analysis and the findings and safeguards against risks associated with the overgeneralization and overstatement of research findings. Upholding ethical principles during the research is one of the main elements to fall under scrutiny from other researchers and donor organizations. Failing to abide by ethical principles may lead to reputational damage for all parties.

3 Challenge 3: Developing and implementing a realistic, logical, and coherent research design

In our experience reviewing research proposals and final papers, we noticed that some crucial elements of the research design were routinely missing. At other times, proposals fail to define key terms, explain research questions and data analysis methods, or delineate budget plans and timelines.

Sufficient details in the research design can help to orient the research commissioner to better understand the critical research questions and methodologies involved in the research, which reduces the need for over-involvement in the research process once funded. Clear communication throughout the proposal review process and project implementation period is, therefore, essential.[20] Hence, as an organization commissioning research, we strive to ensure that all the questions reviewers of a proposal or final paper may ask are answered.

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19   Georgia Holmer, *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013), 5, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf.

20   For further discussion, see: David Malet and Mark Korbitz, *Resilience is for Research Designs Too: Funders, Researchers, & Navigating Study Constraints* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://resolvenet.org/research/resilience-research-designs-too-funders-researchers-navigating-study-constraints.

Good practices for researchers and commissioners to ensure a coherent research design and proposal based on our experience:

- **Always conduct and include a proper literature review. We often carry out a thorough literature and context review to assess existing gaps and needs and to avoid duplication of efforts.** This is a common practice that should be carried out by the researchers as well as the commissioning organization.

- **Define all the terms used in the research project.** While we still lack an official definition of certain terms related to violent extremism,[21] it is important that researchers define the terms they employ and explain how they relate to the proposed research questions. In some cases, organizations use the terms "extremism", "radicalism", "violent extremism", and "radicalization" interchangeably. The confusion among the terms can be partly due to the translation of the words between local languages and English. In order to mitigate definitional confusion, we suggest STRIVE Global grantees write the final paper in the local language and then translate it into English in close collaboration with a professional translating company to avoid any loss of information. As a commissioner, we strongly encourage grantees to allocate appropriate funds for translation in the initial budgeting phase. Based on our experience, translating final documents has been less costly than continuous translation.

- **Make sure information about research design and planned analysis of results is complete.** Commissioned research projects have financial and time constraints. When receiving proposals, reviewers not only assess the quality but also how well the research project is planned in terms of objectives, realistic research questions, methods, timeframes, and budget lines. At times, proposals submitted to STRIVE were ambitious and not feasible with the given grant financial amount and time. If a certain project is selected, reviewers assist grantees to keep their project within the given time and financial framework to attain the best results. Sometimes less is more when developing research proposals: more efficient projects are focused on one or

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21   For a detailed discussion, see, for example: J.M. Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://resolvenet.org/research/researching-violent-extremism-state-play.

two specific research questions and articulate how answers to those questions contribute to the body of knowledge or influence policy change.[22]

- **At the completion stage of the project, the organization shares their research report with commissioners for a final peer review before publication.** Based on the experience of reviewing these reports, those that went through a smoother peer review process demonstrated the following:

    – The research design was time-sensitive, attainable, realistic, and valid;
    – Validity checks on the research process, methods, and data were in place and successfully implemented to ensure data triangulation;
    – The findings were situated within the existing research in the local context, providing a comprehensive analysis of the findings;
    – The researchers aptly paired quantitative and qualitative data in a logical and accurate manner, drawing analysis from the two.

In conclusion, both researchers and research commissioning organizations should review existing research in a specific context to avoid duplication of efforts, over-funding similar projects, and missing existing gaps in research. Furthermore, researchers should carefully outline all existing hypotheses, assumptions, limitations, and key terminologies to guide reviewers and readers on the thought processes and situational circumstances of the research conducted. Finally, while providing an analysis solely on the gathered data may be insightful, it is important to interrelate, compare, and contrast various sources of data to present coherent conclusions from the research conducted.

Conclusion

A recommended checklist for researchers and research commissioners

This chapter provided an overview of selected issues research commissioners have come across during the implementation of Hedayah's STRIVE Global Program focused on the

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22   For a detailed discussion of narrowing research foci, see: *Kris Inman Going Back to Basics: Going Back to Basics: Research on Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2019-10/RSVE_RVESeries_BacktoBasics_ResearchonVE_KInman_Oct2019.pdf.

Western Balkans. Based on the submitted research proposals and final papers, the authors have developed a list of recommendations for researchers and research commissioners moving forward:

- **Consider all existing forms of violent extremism present in the target areas before developing a research proposal.** At the same time, research commissioners need to be mindful of how they word their call for papers and how their criteria may influence received proposals and research in general.

- **Avoid dictating the topic of research based on donor requirements and interests.** Instead, base research topics on observations and needs identified at the local level.

- **Observe the Do No Harm approach and develop strategies to avoid stigmatizing or targeting specific populations as broadly linked or susceptible to violent extremism, unless specifically and unequivocally borne out by the evidence.**

- **Establish a comprehensive ethical checklist for research.** Commissioners and researchers should create their own ethical codes and guidelines when soliciting or developing research projects to ensure adherence to the Do No Harm principles.

- **Sustain and encourage diversity within the research team to establish checks on individual biases and organize regular check-ins to monitor and address personal biases.** Any biases should be mentioned in the initial proposal and final publications as potential limitations to the study.

- **Disclose all assumptions up front in the research proposal and the final report. Paradigms and biases are unavoidable.** Still, it is advisable to declare any potential biases or paradigm preferences at the onset to have a clear and common starting point for the researcher, the commissioning entity, and the audience.

- **Carry out background research on the context where the research will be commissioned or conducted to identify existing research agendas and remaining knowledge gaps and needs.** This is particularly important to avoid duplication of efforts by researchers and commissioning entities and orient topics within the call for proposals' guidelines.

- **Write the final paper in the local language and then translate it into English in close collaboration with professional translating services to avoid any loss of information.**

- **State clearly the project's research questions, hypotheses, and objectives in the proposal and in the final report.** Outlining these elements and mentioning them consistently helps to develop appropriate activities and allows the reader to follow the logical framework of the research process.

- **Align research design, including the proposed methodology and list of activities, with the project duration, ensuring that the design is time-sensitive, attainable, realistic, and valid.**

- **While providing a separate analysis of gathered data may be insightful, it is important to interrelate various sources of data in a coherent structure.** Quantitative and qualitative analysis must be integrated and complement one another.

- **Commissioners should be flexible when reviewing proposals; while the main principles should guide the proposal, researchers need to be able to propose and lead on the research topic.**

- **The same principle of flexibility should be applied when developing a call for proposals: commissioners should provide guidance for research topics but encourage and be open to well-presented alternative suggestions on research proposals.**

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Interacting with Trauma
Reflections from Research in Kosovo

Teuta Avdimetaj[1]

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This chapter explores the role of trauma in violent extremism research, offering insights on its effects on the research process, providing insights on the radicalization process of individual cases, and informing reintegration prospects of returning foreign fighters and their family members. The chapter focuses on war-related trauma as a widespread experience in post-conflict societies, which may persist years after the war ends, scarring societies in numerous ways for generations and potentially creating an ongoing cycle of violence. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the available literature on the link between trauma and radicalization while bringing attention to existing gaps within this field. It then continues with insights from field research in Kosovo on how trauma was expressed among the family

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members of foreign fighters, including women returnees from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, and provides insight into how the author approached the subject in her own research.[2]

Introduction

The field of violent extremism studies has developed exponentially in the recent years, as scholars, practitioners, and policymakers sought to investigate the factors that lead individuals to adopt extremist beliefs and engage in violent behavior. Increasing interest in the field of violent extremism has produced numerous studies that capture the complexity of the phenomenon, acknowledging the interplay between multiple factors that influence the radicalization process such as social, political, and economic grievances combined with a personal quest for belonging to a cause, ideology, or social network.[3] These insights continue to inform preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts that aim to target extremist radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization to violence[4] and address the root causes of violent extremism in order to prevent it.[5] However, there is a dearth of knowledge on how factors such as trauma can influence violent extremism in both the (1) radicalization process and (2) reintegration and reconciliation process. The issue of violent extremism is often framed as an ideological problem, and many current approaches to investigating violent extremism tend to underplay the impact psychological factors may have in radicalization and reintegration processes.[6]

Various studies emphasize that there is no causal relationship between mental health and terrorism.[7] While not fully explored, it may be important to further understand how trauma may uniquely marginalize individuals and make them vulnerable to radicalization. Our lack

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2   These insights are reflections from field research rather than direct findings.

3   Magnus Ranstorp, "The Root Causes of Violent Extremism," *RAN Centre of Excellence*, January 4, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf.

4   Department of Homeland Security, "A Comprehensive U.S. Government Approach to Countering Violent Extremism," accessed August 17, 2021, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/US%20Government%20Approach%20to%20CVE-Fact%20Sheet_0.pdf.

5   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PVE/CVE)," accessed January 5, 2020, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism.html.

6   John Horgan, "From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (July 1, 2008): 80-94, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0002716208317539.

7   Ardavan Khoshnood, "The Correlation Between Mental Disorders and Terrorism is Weak", accessed April 4, 2020, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5288096/.

of understanding of trauma—or mental health more broadly—in relation to engagement in violent extremism is compounded by a number of factors. First, there is a lack of comprehensive demographic data on violent extremist populations across case studies that include individual records on mental health. As a result, existing studies that explore the role of trauma among violent extremists rely heavily on anecdotal evidence or limited databases of security services to draw conclusions.[8] This lack of understanding is particularly salient in post-conflict settings where populations are likely to have experienced trauma-inducing situations on a broad scale and find themselves in a vicious cycle of violence.[9] Moreover, trauma can be an all-pervasive and, at the same time, an elusive condition to characterize, which makes it more difficult to recognize and adequately address. A more complete understanding of the role of trauma in determining the vulnerability or risk towards violent extremism is necessary given its important implications for further research and policymaking (see Table 1).

Table 1.

- **Trauma and Radicalization:** Does experiencing trauma affect the radicalization process? Why do some trauma-impacted individuals radicalize while others do not? How do we account for, or consider, war-related trauma in relation to other traumatic events?

- **Trauma and Research on Violent Extremism:** What are the challenges in interviewing individuals affected by trauma and violent extremism? How can we adopt a trauma-sensitive approach to research on violent extremism?

- **Trauma and P/CVE:** What are the implications of links between trauma and radicalization for researchers as well as for policymakers? What are the implications of links between trauma, disengagement, and reintegration for researchers as well as for policymakers?

This chapter considers these questions and draws from the author's experiences interviewing family members of foreign fighters in Kosovo, including women returnees from the

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8   Christophe Paulussen, Janne Nijman, and Karlien Lismont, *Mental Health and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon: A Case Study from the Netherlands* (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, March 2017), https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ICCT-Paulussen-Nijman-Lismont-Mental-Health-and-the-Foreign-Fighter-Phenomenon-March-2017.pdf.

9   Edward Balke, "Trauma and Conflict," *Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, Working Paper Series No. 02-37* (October 2002), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/138359/WP37.pdf.

conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, in discussing how the author navigated a research process that, while not focused on understanding the links between trauma and violent extremism, inevitably involved circumstances and themes related to trauma. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the current state of knowledge on the link between trauma and violent extremism and the importance of understanding these potential links when conducting research and programming addressing issues of violent extremism. It then proceeds with reflections from the author's field research in Kosovo on how issues related to trauma manifested among the family members of foreign fighters throughout the research and interview process and, based on the author's experiences, considerations for other researchers who may embark on studies of trauma and violent extremism.

It must be noted that the author is not a mental health care professional, rather the insights in this chapter are reflections from the author's personal experiences and field research. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to obtain ethics approval and consult licensed mental health and trauma care providers for further information and best practices in dealing with trauma during research.

Trauma and violent extremism: A brief overview

Trauma is generally understood as an emotionally scarring experience leaving someone with a deep sense of helplessness. It is a psychological "wound" that suddenly overwhelms a person, threatens their life or personal integrity, leaves a perceived feeling of no escape, and triggers accompanying fear that overwhelms the individual's ability to cope.[10] The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines trauma as:

> *Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence in one or more of four ways: (a) directly experiencing the event; (b) witnessing, in person, the event occurring to others; (c) learning that such an event happened to a close family member or friend; and (d) experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of such events, such as with first responders.[11]*

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10   Balke, "Trauma and Conflict."

11   American Psychiatric Association (APA), "Diagnostic Criteria for PTSD," in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm.

Thus, trauma is not only a phenomenon that a person experiences directly, but also events that occur in the environment that surrounds them. A wide range of events can cause trauma including, but not limited to, death of a loved one, war or continued duress, incarceration, economic grievances, rape, or social isolation.[12] Its impact can be subtle, insidious, or outright destructive depending on factors including personal characteristics, the type of the event(s), or sociocultural aspects.[13]

Trauma reactions vary as individuals try to manage its distressing effects, including through high-risk behaviors, aggressiveness, or by subconsciously reenacting aspects of the trauma.[14] Though trauma can be manifested in various forms, it is common for individuals to display signs or symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[15] Van der Velden and Krasenber note that traumatization is a complex process and the terms "trauma" and "PTSD" are only two of many related phenomena.[16] Though certainly not always, experiencing trauma can increase the risk of a person (re-) engaging in violent behavior.[17]

Further, it is important to remember that traumatization entails a dynamic process and does not present just a one time-event, but rather a series of experiences that can accumulate over time and produce various reactions. Trauma is not just something that happened in the past; it also relates to the future. The individual suffering from trauma can feel as if the original event is happening repeatedly, leading to chronic fear and a sense of helplessness.[18]

The link between trauma and tendency towards violence has perplexed researchers for decades. However, the relationship between trauma and violent extremism has only begun to be considered in more recent years. How does trauma make an individual more vulnerable towards violence? How does trauma impact individuals who have disengaged from

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12   Alana Siegel, et al., "Preventing Future Terrorism: Intervening on Youth Radicalization," in *An International Perspective on Disasters and Children's Mental Health,* eds. Christina W. Hoven, Lawrence Amsel, and Sam Tyano (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 396.

13   Ibid.

14   Ibid.

15   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US), 2014), 89, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207201/.

16   Maurice van der Velden and Jordy Krasenberg, "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence," *RAN Centre of Excellence, Ex Post Paper RAN H&SC meeting "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence,"* April 10-11, 2018, Lisbon (Portugal), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_h-sc_ptsd_trauma_stress_risk_re-turning_violence_lisbon_10-11_04_2018_en.pdf.

17   Ibid.

18   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services,* 89.

violent extremism? And finally, how does trauma impact the families and communities of those who have participated in violent extremism?

Why is understanding trauma relevant in research and practice addressing violent extremism?

The potential impact of trauma on radicalization processes

Research from several studies[19] shows that trauma may be one of the risk factors for violent extremism due to both its causes and the resulting psychosocial impairments.[20] Many of these studies focus on exposure to violence at an early age. Some studies have shown that exposure to trauma increases the risk of delinquency,[21] while childhood mistreatment also increases the likelihood of becoming violent as an adult.[22] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that children and youth who have been exposed to violence are at a higher risk of depression and deficiencies in empathy.[23] Considering other known risk factors, this might increase vulnerability for perpetrating violence and recruitment into extremist groups. It is important to note that this is not a one-to-one relationship: not all those who experience trauma are more vulnerable to radicalization and not all that are radicalized have been exposed to trauma. Rather, trauma is an additional layer to consider when looking at cases of radicalization. Additional insight into why this may be the case is detailed below.

Research suggests that in some cases trauma can destroy a person's assumptions about themselves and the world around them, which in turn can lead to greater hostility and

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19   See, for instance: O. Lynch and S. Lambert, *Child Returnees from Conflict Zones* (RAN Centre of Excellence, November 2016), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_child_returnees_from_conflict_zones_112016_en.pdf; Kiran M. Sarma, *Multi-Agency Working and Preventing Violent Extremism: Paper 2* (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_hsc_policy_mawr_report_sarma_26032019_en.pdf.

20   Valerie De Marinis and Eolene Boyd-MacMillan, *A Mental Health Approach to Understanding Violent Extremism* (Paris: Radicalisation Awareness Network, Ex Post Paper RAN Policy & Practice, 2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2019-07/ran_hsc_prac_mental_health_03062019_en.pdf.

21   Robert Vermeiren, "Psychopathology and Delinquency in Adolescents: A Descriptive and Developmental Perspective," *Clinical Psychology Review* 23, no. 2 (March 2003): 277-318, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0272-7358(02)00227-1.

22   Van der Velden and Krasenberg, "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence."

23   Jim Mercy, "CDC Measures Violence against Children, Sparks Action," *CDC Foundation,* November 25, 2013, https://www.cdcfoundation.org/blog-entry/cdc-measures-violence-against-children-sparks-action; Leila Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization," *Futures Without Violence, Blueprint,* May 2017, https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/FWV_blueprint_7-Youth.pdf.

mistrust that create openness to violent extremism.[24] According to the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the accumulation of negative experiences over time makes individuals more susceptible to the pull of violent groups, as traumatic experiences during childhood heighten the need for identity, which can be fulfilled by extremist causes.[25]

Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) authors argue that a higher exposure to trauma leads to a greater likelihood of PTSD, which correlates with increased anger and hostility and greater urge for revenge than reconciliation, thus increasing the prospect of supporting violent extremism.[26] Evidence suggests that "chronic and severe stress resulting from multi-trauma experiences contributes to mental health imbalances later in life, increasing general vulnerability including towards violent extremism."[27]

Using life histories of violent white supremacists, Simi et al. found that non-ideological risk factors including trauma accumulate over time, beginning during childhood, and act as precursors to participation in violent extremist groups.[28] They argue that social–psychological processes that implicate cognition influence the effects of risk factors on future engagement in antisocial behavior and criminally-oriented groups, including violent extremist groups. Of the subjects interviewed by Simi et al., 64 percent reported witnessing serious violence.[29] Exposure to torture or the brutal killing of a relative or friend, severe humiliation, or being denied rights over extended periods may all increase an individual's susceptibility.[30]

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24   Dylan O'Driscoll, "Links Between Childhood Experience of Violence and Violent Extremism," *K4D,* December 15, 2017, https://assets. publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c1903f740f0b60c2c1c798a/248_Childhood_Experience_of_Violence_and_Violent_Extremism.pdf.

25   Ibid. See also: Jytte Klausen, et al., "Radicalization Trajectories: An Evidence-Based Computational Approach to Dynamic Risk Assessment of 'Homegrown' Jihadists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 7 (July 2, 2020): 588-615, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576 10x.2018.1492819, which used a probabilistic simulation model to identify common high-risk sequential behavioral segment pairs in the U.S. terrorism offenders' pathways to terrorist criminality. The study found that push factors include traumatic events (occurring mostly at an early stage) or other adverse circumstances that may cause an individual to seek a solution in extremism.

26   O'Driscoll, "Links Between Childhood Experience of Violence and Violent Extremism."

27   van der Velden and Krasenberg, "PTSD, Trauma, Stress and the Risk of (Re)turning to Violence." See also: Leila Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization," where she argues that exposure to traumatic stress and violence as a child has deep, long-term consequences which increase risk to various negative outcomes, including recruitment to violent groups.

28   Pete Simi, Bryan F. Bubolz, Hillary McNeel, Karyn Sporer, and Steven Windisch, "Trauma as a Precursor to Violent Extremism: How Non-ideological Factors can Influence Joining an Extremist Group," *START,* April 2015, https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_CSTAB_ TraumaAsPrecursortoViolentExtremism_April2015.pdf.

29   Ibid.

30   Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization."

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a leading specialist on trauma, offers a more clinical explanation. He posits that trauma is not the story of something terrible that happened in the past, but the residue of imprints left behind in people's sensory and hormonal systems. "The body keeps the score," leaving traumatized people terrified of the sensations in their own bodies.[31] Thus, looking for an outlet for fear or anger, violent crimes are often committed by people who lack the ability to regulate and modulate their bodily response to perceived danger, which in some instances relates to trauma.[32]

A study of ISIS recruits on six continents underscored the personal nature of their engagement in violent extremism, finding that exposure to ideological propaganda as well as direct or indirect group influence may play a role in radicalization processes.[33] Extremist ideology may provide a sense of purpose and offer a protective shield in the short term against other mental health problems.[34] With the right narrative and exposure, individuals alienated by their communities or families may perceive extremist groups as caring entities, view their group leaders as surrogate father figures, and perceive the group's social norms as accepting of who they are.[35]

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAUMA IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE ADDRESSING RADICALIZATION AND REINTEGRATION PROCESSES

Post-conflict countries are among some of the contexts in which trauma may be widespread across different population groups and in which issues associated with violent extremism may be present. Thus, it is important to explore and address the role of trauma in these settings to prevent potential long-term repercussions, both in informing assessments of its potential impact on radicalization, and in informing efforts to reintegrate former violent extremists and their families back into these contexts.

Trauma in conflict affected contexts – Implications for understanding radicalization

A study on associations between exposure to violence, trauma-related symptoms, and aggression among Congolese refugees in Uganda showed that war-related trauma expo-

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31   Peter Weinberger, "Implications of Research on Traumatic Stress for Countering Violent Extremism," *START,* August 3, 2016, https://www.start.umd.edu/news/implications-research-traumatic-stress-countering-violent-extremism.

32   Ibid.

33   De Marinis and Boyd-MacMillan, *A Mental Health Approach to Understanding Violent Extremism.*

34   Ibid.

35   Ibid.

sure has been linked to aggression and enhanced levels of community and family violence, suggesting a cycle of violence.[36] In another study, Keresteš interviewed around 700 children in Croatia three years after the end of the war and found that those who had been exposed to a higher level of war trauma in early school years considered themselves as more aggressive than their peers who had experienced a smaller number of war stressors.[37] In youth exposed to war, prior exposure to childhood trauma is also associated with greater post-traumatic symptoms and increased involvement in violence.[38] A study by Pat-Horenczyk et al. on Israeli youth exposed to terrorism showed that adolescents suffering from PTSD reported more risk-taking behaviors than non-symptomatic adolescents.[39] PTSD symptoms include a bleak vision of the future, which can make the idea of dying for a cause more appealing.[40] Understanding how that may affect radicalization to violent extremism, thus, may be important.

Current research provides no clear-cut answers to questions such as: Does the trauma experienced in post-conflict countries influence radicalization within them, and if so, how? Research does, however, reveal a number of ways in which individuals who have experienced trauma during conflict may interact with extremist narratives. For example, traumatizing events can leave an individual with a yearning for identity that is fulfilled by extremist causes.[41] Through effective messages, recruiters may reinforce cause-and-effect narratives that assign blame for in-group suffering to an "other" group whose practices are perceived as the source of the trauma.[42] Conditions or experiences that tend to increase individuals'

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36 Tobias Hecker, Simon Fetz, Herbert Ainamani, and Thomas Elbert, "The Cycle of Violence: Associations Between Exposure to Violence, Trauma-Related Symptoms and Aggression—Findings from Congolese Refugees in Uganda," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 28, no. 5 (October 2015): 448-55, https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22046.

37 Gordana Keresteš, "Children's Aggressive and Prosocial Behavior in Relation to War Exposure: Testing the Role of Perceived Parenting and Child's Gender," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 30, no. 3 (May 2006): 227-39, https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025406066756.

38 Christina W. Hoven, Lawrence Amsel, and Sam Tyano, eds., *An International Perspective on Disasters and Children's Mental Health* (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 396.

39 Hoven, et al., *An International Perspective on Disasters and Children's Mental Health.*

40 Ibid.

41 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Countering Violent Extremism Through Public Health Practice: Proceedings of a Workshop* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.17226/24638.

42 Patrick J. Christian, "A Psycho-Emotional Human Security Analytical Framework: Origin and Epidemiology of Violent Extremism and Radicalization of Refugees," *Small Wars Journal,* April 18, 2017, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/a-psycho-emotional-human-security-analytical-framework-origin-and-epidemiology-of-violent-e.

susceptibility to trauma can, therefore, also increase their identification with these types of narratives.[43]

The percentage of violent extremists in comparison to the general population is relatively low. As noted above, not all traumatized individuals engage in violent acts, and not all violent extremists are traumatized.[44] This raises the question: What makes those experiencing trauma who do radicalize different? According to some studies, resilience and a strong social support system are key to avert radicalization. As Hecker et al. argue, resilience and other protective factors (personal or community-based) can make up for risk factors such as trauma, facilitating a positive final outcome with very few traumatized young people turning towards violent extremism.[45]

The expression of trauma and PTSD can vary across socio-cultural contexts.[46] Thus, cross-comparison studies are necessary to fully understand its correlation with violent behavior and its centrality to P/CVE program effectiveness. Ultimately, current studies seem to suggest that trauma merits further consideration in exploring pathways to violent extremism. Research on traumatic stress and ways to address it[47] can inform models for P/CVE, especially in building individual and community resilience.

Trauma beyond radicalization: Implications for disengagement and reintegration

While a growing body of literature examines trauma's relation to the radicalization process, equally important is the role of trauma in the reintegration process and among the families and communities who have experienced violent extremism, or from which violent extremists originate. This is of particular importance to researchers interacting with communities and families who have experienced or are experiencing trauma due to legacies of conflict or resulting from their engagement in violent extremism.

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43 Milani, "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization."

44 Paulussen et al., *Mental Health and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon: A Case Study from the Netherlands*.

45 Ibid.

46 Naim Fanaj and Erika Melonashi, "Understanding and Describing PTSD in Kosovo: A Systematic Evidence-Based Review," *SAGE Open* 7, no. 4 (October 2017), https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017734588.

47 For understanding and treating traumatic stress, see: Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (Penguin Publishing, 2015).

Trauma and deradicalization and reintegration

The role of trauma is especially relevant to understanding repatriation, reintegration, and reconciliation processes for former extremists directly involved in active conflict or those socializing in violent extremist environments. Reports citing references to a "hellish world" experienced prior to joining violent extremist groups raise the broader question about how traumatic stress contributes to radicalization, especially for children and youth.[48] However, delineating the role of trauma does not include only accounting for its impact on radicalization, but also how it should be considered in designing disengagement and reintegration programs. In these efforts, there are multiple lessons that can also be drawn from reconciliation and restorative justice principles, which, in addition to offering a sense of justice, can reduce stigma against those disengaging, enable routine prosocial engagement, and provide a tangible alternative identity.[49]

Individuals undergoing rehabilitation and reintegration programs are more likely to be suffering from PTSD or other forms of trauma than those participating in prevention-focused programs.[50] Thus, offenders' individual circumstances, including the experience of trauma, may require unique psychology-based interventions.[51] As Bosley states, "healing trauma and addressing other mental and behavioral health challenges in people who are disengaging can encourage help-seeking behavior and a willingness to engage with others."[52] Treating trauma could often be one of the first steps to influence changes in the outward demeanor (e.g. apathy, unresponsiveness, anger, etc.) of individuals formerly associated with extremist groups, and address some of the factors that could prevent them from returning to or being welcomed in their communities.[53]

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48   Milani, Leila. "Youth, Trauma and Radicalization."

49   Chris Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation: A Peacebuilding Approach* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2020), https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/07/violent-extremist-disengagement-and-reconciliation-peacebuilding-approach.

50   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Non-custodial Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for Policymakers and Practitioners in South-Eastern Europe* (Vienna: OSCE, 2020), 34, https://www.osce.org/secretariat/444838.

51   Ryan J. Williams, "Approaches to Violent Extremist Offenders and Countering Radicalisation in Prisons and Probation," *RAN Centre of Excellence* (2016), 2, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-p-and-p/docs/ran_pp_approaches_to_violent_extremist_en.pdf.

52   Bosley, Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation, 2.

53   Leanne Erdberg Steadman, *Disengagement and Reconciliation in Conflict-Affected Settings* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2020), 5, https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/disengagement-and-reconciliation-conflict-affected-settings.

Importantly, as Bosley also notes, trauma-informed care "is not a technique or method, but instead an awareness and sensitivity" that those implementing reintegration and rehabilitation programs must maintain to avoid subjecting a person to additional trauma.[54] Thus, adopting a public health approach that addresses trauma and provides behavioral and psychosocial support may provide a pathway for former violent extremists to find their humanity and dignity outside the influence of violent extremism.[55]

Pro-social engagement with other members of the community is tied with better prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration. In the efforts to pull individuals away from violence, communities must be consulted and included to provide those disengaging with a sustainable alternative to redefine their future.[56] Exposure to trauma and the resulting need for psychosocial services does not absolve individuals of the responsibility for having engaged with violent groups or in criminal behavior—yet, it should be recognized that trauma can affect victims and perpetrators.[57] Programs should also consider the trauma experienced by communities affected by violent extremism, not only the trauma experienced by the violent extremists themselves, to promote collective healing.

Since trauma's role in understanding radicalization continues to be a securitized topic, it is important for researchers and practitioners to be aware of how it may affect vulnerable groups. For instance, individuals or communities affected by violent extremism which have experienced traumatic events may reveal different levels of vulnerability depending on personal characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic standing, etc. As a UNDP report notes, for deradicalization programs this necessitates a case-by-case assessment including not only sensitivity to the gendered dimensions of each case but also male and female programmatic personnel trained "to undertake such assessments for rehabilitation and reintegration programs, including for minors, and deal with both the impact of trauma that individuals may face as well as the threat they may pose."[58] Dean and Kessles note that a sensitive and empathic response to trauma and victimization may also

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54   Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation.*

55   Ibid.

56   Erdberg Steadman, *Disengagement and Reconciliation in Conflict-Affected Settings,* 5.

57   Ibid.

58   Sanam Naraghi Anderlini and Melinda Holmes, *Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism* (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), 2019), 40, https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ICAN-UNDP-Rehabilitation-Reintegration-Invisible-Women-Report-2019.pdf.

challenge perceptions and feelings toward other groups, such as dehumanization of and hatred toward representatives of state authorities, which could make disengagement and cooperation with intervention and reintegration efforts much easier.[59]

Importantly, some have noted that to reduce stigma and promote interactions between program beneficiaries and the community, programs geared towards facilitating personal and social development should engage directly with communities.[60] Ultimately, since those affected by violent extremism include victims and perpetrators, as well as other members of the community who may have been exposed to trauma, it is important to understand the vulnerability of these groups while interacting with them. Thus, those conducting research in this space must be aware of the challenges that arise while interacting with groups affected by trauma, which can be a difficult undertaking not only in regard to obtaining research insights but also in terms of integration of trauma-informed care in the design and implementation of reintegration and rehabilitation programs. In the next section, the author draws from personal experience conducting research with affected populations to illustrate some of the challenges, while also hinting at areas in need of greater focus.

Trauma and research on violent extremism

Understanding the issue of trauma as it relates to communities affected by violent extremism and violent extremists themselves is imperative, especially when doing research in a post-conflict context. Research shows that the impact of trauma is long-term and that these "invisible wounds" can leave a society vulnerable to a recurrence of violence.[61] In such settings, a number of factors should be considered such as the high risk of re-traumatization (even if involuntarily), dealing with unaddressed trauma, and accounting for the role of shame and stigma especially among family members in otherwise still divided societies.[62] Individuals who live in post-conflict societies are more likely to have been exposed to trauma, and their experience with violent extremism could present only one episode in a

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59 Christopher Dean and Eelco Kessels, *Compendium of Good Practices in the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders* (Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2018), 21, https://www.veocompendium.org/.

60 Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation*.

61 The World Bank, "Social Development Notes: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction," *Social Development Notes: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction* 13 (2003), 1, https://web.worldbank.org/archive/website00522/WEB/PDF/CPR13LEG.PDF.

62 "Clinical Issues Across Services," in *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services, Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 57* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US): 2014), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207185/.

series of occurrences that have left painful marks on them. In many instances, post-conflict settings are also characterized by limited resources dedicated to mental health support, which is why respondents may be dealing with unaddressed trauma. For instance, studies show that in post-war societies, such as those in the Balkans, unprocessed cumulative trauma has become deeply embedded in the collective memory and the effects of collective traumatization have been multidimensional.[63] Thus, interacting in these contexts necessitates trauma-informed approaches that not only focus on identifying individuals who have histories of trauma and traumatic stress symptoms but also on adopting prevention strategies to avoid re-traumatization and promote resilience.[64] This is the case even for research that is not specifically focused on understanding the role of trauma in radicalization and reintegration processes given the possibility that issues associated with trauma may inevitably come up in research on violent extremism conducted in post-conflict societies, as was the case in my own research on violent extremism in Kosovo. Researchers should acquire ethics approval, locate resources to prepare them to recognize how this may manifest, and identify strategies to address trauma before undertaking research.

Re-traumatization of respondents can occur throughout the different stages of the research process: e.g., while they are retelling their stories, are faced with representatives of certain state institutions or stakeholders, are shown triggering imagery or video content, or are interviewed in perceived unfriendly settings or spaces, etc.[65] Moreover, individuals who have encountered trauma as a result of experiences with violence can also face greater levels of stigma, whether from their immediate family members or the broader community. The level of stigma can be particularly present when dealing with certain types of violence, such as sexual violence, where the shame that often accompanies such crimes is mistakenly placed upon the victim rather than the perpetrator. Navigating these sensitivities when dealing with vulnerable groups in post-conflict contexts is often difficult, especially when dealing with securitized topics such as violent extremism. Drawing on personal experience, the next section reflects on my own observations and challenges encountered related to

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63   Delic et. al, "Academic Model of Trauma Healing in Post-war Societies," *Acta Medica Academica* 43, no. 1 (2014): 76-80, https://www.research-gate.net/publication/262845678_Academic_model_of_trauma_healing_in_post-war_societies/link/53d155ad0cf220632f39305c/download.

64   Ibid.

65   Amanda Weiss, "Retraumatization and Social Sciences Research: Theoretical and Empirical Perspective," (2021): 2, https://osf.io/rvksp.

potential manifestations of trauma that came up while conducting my research on violent extremism in Kosovo.

Insights from field research in Kosovo

An estimated 403 Kosovars joined or traveled to foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2018, of which 255 men are considered foreign fighters, while the rest are broadly categorized as non-combatants.[66] Studies exploring drivers of violent extremism in Kosovo, as manifested through the foreign fighter phenomenon, point to the potential influence of a combination of tangible internal conditions such as a weak economy, political instability, a poor education system, and the rise of various Islamic nongovernmental organizations competing in Kosovo's newly democratized public sphere.[67] Issues of identity, belonging, purpose, and social isolation or outright exclusion also figure prominently. Yet, there has been no in-depth study that looks into the role of trauma in the radicalization process, even though some publications mention trauma briefly.[68] While there is an obvious need to better understand the role of trauma in violent extremism, there is also a compelling need to better prepare researchers who may find themselves in situations in which trauma is brought up. Even though trauma was not the focus of my study, in my personal experience interviewing family members of foreign fighters, as well as women returnees in Kosovo, the potential impact of trauma became evident early on. Based on my experience, I provide insights below on the role it may play and the difficulties it may pose to researchers either studying trauma and violent extremism specifically, or studying other topics related to violent extremism.

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66 Skënder Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi, *Unpacking Kosovo's Response to Returnees from the War Zones in Syria and Iraq* (Pristina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 2020), http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/violent-extremism-eng_978757.pdf.

67 Garentina Kraja, *The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo Deconstructed One Story at a Time* (Pristina: Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, 2017), http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/ISNinKosovo-eng_794656.pdf.

68 See, for example: Anne Speckhard and Adrian Shajkovci, "The Balkan Jihad: Recruitment to Violent Extremism and Issues Facing Returning Foreign Fighters in Kosovo and Southern Serbia," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 101, no. 2 (2018): 79-109, https://doi.org/10.5325/soundings.101.2.0079.

Context and engagement with research participants

War is a major disruptive event—societies that experience conflict are likely to suffer from prolonged traumatic stress years after the conflict ends.[69] Kosovo experienced the destruction of war over 20 years ago, which left around 13,000 people killed, an estimated 20,000 women and men raped, half the country's population (about a million people) fleeing as refugees, and over 1,600 people still missing today.[70] Beyond mere statistics, these data suggest that a large portion of the country's population is likely to have been directly or indirectly affected by trauma.

A research study on PTSD in the sociocultural context of Kosovo demonstrated that even ten years post-war, prevalence rates for PTSD are still high among refugees, veterans, and civilians exposed to trauma.[71] Studies in Kosovo suggest that anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, anger, and revenge thoughts often correlate with PTSD.[72] These data should serve as a starting point in thinking through the role of trauma within social phenomena in Kosovo. In my own discussions with family members of foreign fighters—those accompanying foreign fighters in foreign conflict zones as well as those who never left the country—it became apparent that memories of the Kosovo War are still present, and the trauma may still remain. Indeed, common extremist narratives targeting Kosovo have made constant references to war-related grievances and comparisons between the Kosovo War and the conflict in Syria, including talking about how "brothers have been tortured and sisters are being raped."[73] Insights from my experience interviewing family members of foreign fighters validate the need for further research. Although the focus of the interviews was on immediate needs to better understand the receiving environment in which the foreign fighters would eventually return, trauma became a recurring theme. Vivid recollections of war memories were common.

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69   Zachary Steel, et al., "Association of Torture and Other Potentially Traumatic Events with Mental Health Outcomes Among Populations Exposed to Mass Conflict and Displacement," *JAMA* 302, no. 5 (August 5, 2009): 537-49, https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.1132.

70   See: Milka Domanovic, "List of Kosovo War Victims Published," *Balkan Transitional Justice*, December 10, 2014, https://balkaninsight.com/2014/12/10/kosovo-war-victims-list-published/; Valerie Plesch, "A Dark Legacy: The Scars of Sexual Violence from the Kosovo War," *Politico,* March 25, 2019, https://www.politico.eu/interactive/a-dark-legacy-the-scars-of-sexual-violence-from-the-kosovo-war/.

71   Fanaj and Melonashi, "Understanding and Describing PTSD in Kosovo."

72   Ibid.

73   For a deconstruction of extremist narratives, see, for instance: Kraja, *The Islamic State Narrative in Kosovo Deconstructed One Story at a Time.*

The family members of foreign fighters brought up topics that suggested traumatic experiences may have impacted radicalization processes in numerous ways. For instance, in one case, a respondent shared that their family member, a prominent foreign fighter, was exposed to extreme violence during the Kosovo War while he was just a child. During the war, he witnessed his sibling and his mother being tortured by Serbian security forces. However, in accounts available at the time describing his radicalization process, there was no discussion of trauma as a relevant factor. In another case, a respondent noted how their current living situation, faced with the prosecution of their son on terrorism-related charges, financial strains, and the respondent's own suffering from a severe illness, was taking a toll on the respondent and other family members, in addition to recalling war-related trauma. Moreover, respondents' experiences with police raids as part of institutional efforts to persecute foreign fighters was said to have brought flashbacks of persecutions during the war—an experience that may have been troubling for them.

However, as radicalization was not within the scope of my interviews, I was not able to probe further. When respondents reveal sensitive or traumatic experiences, researchers may find themselves in a difficult spot – what is the best way to respond? It is important to be prepared and to be able to identify potential sensitive topics related to trauma when conducting research, especially because it provides important insight for policy and practice and because, if unidentified and probed further, discussing traumatizing or sensitive topics may inadvertently retraumatize participants. More on this is discussed below.

Another factor to discuss and consider is how verbal and physical signs of trauma or discomfort may manifest during discussions with research participants. In one case, a woman returnee whose husband was still in a foreign conflict zone exhibited a series of confusing reactions during the interview as she recalled the loss of two close family members. As she explained her bereavement she was smiling, which, to me, seemed to suggest a visible disconnect between her narrative and emotions.[74] This brought up a further dilemma: how, as a researcher, do you react to interviewees' emotions or to their story? What is the risk of researcher feedback inadvertently triggering a negative response by the respondent? For

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74   For an explanation about why this phenomenon occurs among traumatized individuals, see: Lisa Ferentz, "Why Clients Smile When Talking About Trauma," *Psychology Today,* September 4, 2015, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/healing-trauma-s-wounds/201509/why-clients-smile-when-talking-about-trauma-part-1.

me, previous sensitization and trauma-awareness training was helpful in navigating this experience, but for researchers without prior training or understanding, situations like this may be more difficult to identify and address.

During my interviews, family members of foreign fighters also pointed out that trauma might affect children in their families, and in many cases they lack the knowledge or know-how to approach them. In contexts like Kosovo, where seeking mental health support is still largely considered taboo, many in need of mental health services may be left untreated, including those affected by trauma and violent extremism. In some cases during my interviews with family members and women returnees, respondents were inclined to talk for more extended periods than anticipated, which seemed to be a sign that talking may have been a cathartic experience for them. In these cases, I faced the challenge of whether to interrupt respondents or allow them to continue expressing their emotions. While they may see talking to a researcher as a substitute for seeking mental health support, however, talking and other forms of therapies to address trauma or stress should be overseen by a trained psychologist or psychiatrist. Since in such instances respondents often share common worries, fears, concerns, or problems they face, they tend to also turn to the researcher for guidance.[75] Giving advice to respondents, however, is not the role of researchers. It can also interfere with efforts to objectively portray or analyze their case.[76]

Considerations for the field

Advancing sensitivity to and preparation for researchers interacting with trauma

Researching violent extremism may necessarily involve interacting with trauma, especially due to the often traumatic nature of the topic. While more research is needed to better understand how trauma impacts individuals and communities affected by violent extremism, additional efforts to better prepare researchers interacting with potentially traumatizing subjects are necessary. Some considerations for the field moving forward are presented

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75   Julia Chaitin, "'I Wish He Hadn't Told Me That': Methodological and Ethical Issues in Social Trauma and Conflict Research," *Qualitative Health Research* 13, no. 8 (2003): 1145-54, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14556424/.

76   See Allmark et. al, "Ethical Issues in the Use of In-depth Interviews: Literature Review and Discussion," *Research Ethics Review* 5, no. 2 (2009): 48–54, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/174701610900500203.

below. Ultimately, however, individuals should consult with a licensed mental health care provider, trauma specialist, and/or their institutions for advice and resources to prepare for and address issues associated with mental health and trauma.

1. **Understand and prepare for trauma.** Prior to conducting research with human subjects in the field of violent extremism, researchers should consider obtaining as much information about the research context as possible, especially in post-conflict environments. What communities, groups, or individuals are more likely to have experienced trauma? Are any of those individuals or communities going to be part of your research? In countries, such as Kosovo, that have experienced conflict, war-related trauma may be prevalent, notwithstanding other layers of trauma that an individual may acquire over time. Moreover, among the growing rates of conflict-zone returnees from Syria and Iraq, experience with trauma is well-established and researchers should be aware that it might come up during interactions with research participants. Even in cases when trauma is not outright visible or probable, researchers should still consider consulting with mental health care and trauma specialists for guidance on how to prepare for these situations and identify potential signs of it so as to avoid potentially harming their research participants.[77] Institutions sponsoring research should also consider investing in mental health care and trauma resources and trainings to help prepare researchers studying sensitive subjects such as violent extremism.

2. **The importance of ethical guidelines, honesty, and transparency. In interacting with individuals that have experienced trauma, one of the principal considerations should be to do no harm and avoid re-traumatization.** This includes following research protocol in obtaining informed consent for the interview process, protecting confidentiality, providing contact details of mental health services, if needed and advised, and emphasizing that respondents can withdraw from the interview at any moment. Given that individuals affected by trauma and violent extremism are often susceptible to the effects of resurfacing negative emotions, it is imperative to be completely honest about the goals of the research project and the role of the researcher. Honesty is

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77   For a mental health and counter-extremism framework see: Zainab al-Attar, Extremism, *Radicalisation & Mental Health: Handbook for Practitioners* (RAN Centre of Excellence, 2019), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_h-sc_handbook-for-practitioners_extremism-radicalisation-mental-health_112019_en.pdf.

crucial in building rapport with respondents in order for them to feel comfortable in sharing information and in ensuring a do-no-harm approach and ethical research processes. Respondents should never be pressured into sharing what they feel reluctant to share. However, as they build trust, respondents may also mistake researchers for a source of help with their personal concerns (e.g., dire economic conditions) beyond the scope of the project. In order to avoid any misunderstandings or raising false expectations, researchers need to balance building rapport with a constant reminder that a researcher's key contribution is to present their case as objectively as possible.

3. **The importance of self-care.** Efforts to raise awareness about the presence of trauma among researchers of violent extremism are increasing, as researchers continue to be regularly exposed to extremist content or stories of trauma, though their psychological impact on researchers is not completely understood.[78] Researchers may benefit from established methods to manage psychological distress as a result of an emotionally taxing work environment,[79] but, ultimately, researchers should consult mental health care and trauma specialists when needed. Institutions sponsoring research on topics like violent extremism, which can be traumatizing to the researcher, should consider investing in mental health care support and resources for researchers in need.

Conclusion

This chapter offered an overview of the available research on the relationship between trauma and violent extremism, while drawing attention to the lingering gaps in the current body of knowledge. The chapter hopes to also bring attention to the need to rethink the positioning of mental health support in P/CVE, particularly in initiatives for the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists, as well as the need for further research examining how trauma may impact violent extremism or fuel cycles of violence. For instance, the inability to address past wounds in post-conflict countries may act as an impediment to reconciliation and sustainable peace. Though we might not expect a causal relationship

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78   See: Charlie Winter, *Researching Jihadist Propaganda: Access, Interpretation, and Trauma* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.1.

79   See, for instance: American Psychiatric Association, "Coping with Stress at Work," October 14, 2018, https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/work-stress.

between trauma and radicalization, that does not necessarily mean it plays no role at all. A nuanced understanding of the role of trauma and its relationship with violent extremism is necessary not only to identify vulnerabilities but also to determine viable options to strengthen individual or collective resilience.

This is similarly important for those undertaking research, be it on the role of trauma in issues related to violent extremism, or on other violent extremism topics. While my research, discussed in this report, involved interviews with family members of foreign fighters and women returnees from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, the intention of the research was not to explore the impact of trauma. Still, issues associated with or potentially pointing to traumatization came up during my research and interviews. Researchers should be prepared for the fact that traumatizing or sensitive subjects may come up during research and interviews about violent extremism. For those researching violent extremism, and institutions sponsoring researchers, it may be prudent to consult with mental health care providers and trauma specialists prior to conducting research to further prepare for these types of situations.

The evolution of the violent extremism threat landscape over time requires researchers and practitioners to adapt their focus accordingly. In considering means by which to address or better understand violent extremism, however, it is necessary for stakeholders, especially researchers and practitioners to also account for factors such as experienced trauma, that may be critical in understanding the issue, especially in post-conflict contexts.

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Annex 2.

Chapters on Southeast Asia

Annex 2: Southeast Asia

SELECT CHAPTERS

This annex includes chapters featured elsewhere in this edited volume that specifically focus on research on violent extremism in Southeast Asia. The following two chapters are highlighted in this annex:

1. *Community-centered P/CVE Research in Southeast Asia: Opportunities and Challenges, by Matteo Vergani*

   Originally published January 12, 2021 | https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2021.1

2. *Lab-in-Field Experiments for the Reintegration of Violent Extremists: The Promise of Prosocial Evaluation, by Cameron Sumpter*

   Originally published January 28, 2021 | https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2021.3

Community-centered P/CVE Research in Southeast Asia

Opportunities and Challenges

Matteo Vergani

The definition and understanding of community-centered preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) research lacks analytical clarity. This chapter examines this concept with a focus on the Southeast Asian context, reflecting on opportunities, challenges, and pitfalls, to lay the foundation for future theorization and comparative P/CVE research in local contexts. Collaboration with independent and genuine community actors is advantageous for all stakeholders, since deficient trust, tamed and crystallized relationships, and a lack of resources and capacities can result in biased research findings. The chapter advocates for the establishment of research and evaluation frameworks in National Action Plans, with the aim to set out common definitions, measurement tools, and methodologies in consultation with all stakeholders, including community actors. This is a necessary step in producing systematic, cumulative, and comparative research and evaluation findings that hold true across local contexts. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical implications of conducting commu-

nity-centered P/CVE research with minority communities—such as the creation of suspicious, ostracized, and alienated communities—as well as with majority communities. It also speaks to the potential for research findings and topics of focus interfering in or being instrumentalized to impact a country's democratic process. Although the Southeast Asian context is used to discuss the opportunities and challenges of the different approaches to community-centered P/CVE research, key findings are likely relevant to other contexts.

Introduction

Holistic and whole-of-society approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have been gaining traction globally, including in Southeast Asia. Numerous initiatives have been introduced, with various degrees of success, to bring stakeholders from governmental and non-governmental backgrounds together to learn from each other, cross-pollinate best practices, and improve the quality and effectiveness of P/CVE work in the region. Some of these initiatives have stemmed from high-level efforts, such as the resolutions of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which have highlighted in multiple documents over the years the need to build trust and strengthen cooperation between government agencies and civil society organizations in P/CVE work.[1] The Australian government has also contributed to creating momentum for a holistic, regional P/CVE approach in Southeast Asia by sponsoring initiatives working together on P/CVE, such as the Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organizations (SEAN-CSO) and the working group on CVE of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF), co-convened by Australia and Indonesia.

Research has been a key focus of all these efforts for many purposes: to inform and evaluate P/CVE policy and programming, to identify the root causes and risk factors of radicalization in different contexts, to understand terrorist and extremist threats and trends, and to understand resilience factors, among others. Community actors are key to P/CVE research

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1   Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), "Asean Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2018 – 2025)," 2018, https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Adopted-ASEAN-PoA-to-Prevent-and-Counter-PCVE.pdf.

because they can access social groups that are hard to reach for various reasons (for example, because they lack trust in research and government institutions and perceive to be over-researched and treated as suspicious communities). Moreover, community actors are key to translate research into actionable knowledge that is useful to P/CVE practitioners who work with individuals at risk of radicalization.

Broadly, communities can be part of the research–practice cycle in two ways: they can be both the subject and the object of research. As the **subject** of research—that is, those undertaking research—communities are understood as a diverse galaxy of formal and informal entities, such as local and international NGOs, community organizations, individual activists, social enterprises, think tanks, and research centers. They undertake research independently or in partnership with other organizations, such as governments or universities, in various capacities and in different phases of the research. As the **object** of research, communities are often an ephemeral notion that sometimes incorporates very narrow groups, on a geographical or ethnic basis for example, and can embrace large populations, such as national or even multinational identities (e.g., the Malay identity, which is found across multiple Southeast Asian states).

The definition and understanding of communities as both the subject and object of P/CVE research lacks analytical clarity. This chapter aims to dissect and disentangle the meaning of community-centered research with a focus on the Southeast Asian context, reflecting on opportunities, but also the challenges and pitfalls of this approach to P/CVE. It draws on research and engagement experience in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, discussing relevant scholarly and gray-area literature about community-centered CVE efforts in these four national contexts.

Defining community-centered P/CVE research

One of the main challenges in conceptualizing the notion of community-centered P/CVE research is the diversity of meanings that are attributed to each of the terms: community, P/CVE, and research.

Mixed definitions: Community

Community is a loose concept that denotes a group of people with some characteristic, whether real or perceived, in common. As per the classic study of nationalism by Anderson,[2] communities are socially constructed by perception and are strongly influenced by media (including social media) and a number of other structural, group-based, and individual factors such as common grievances, education, and socio-economic conditions. It is useful to talk about communities as a fractal. Like snowflakes or broccoli, the closer we look at a community, the more sub-communities we can identify. Seen from a distance, these differences tend to disappear, and the boundaries of larger communities can be drawn, especially in comparison with other groups.

Let us take for example students of Islam in Indonesia. If we look closely enough, all *pesantren* (communal boarding schools housing *madrasah*, or Islamic schools) are different from one another, because of the personal styles of the *kyai* (the head of the *pesantren*), the charisma of the teachers, and the socio-demographic composition of student body. Zooming out, we notice that some groups of *pesantren* are different from others, because they are affiliated with different organizations. Some are associated with the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), others with Muhammadiyah, and others still are independent. Some *pesantren* only teach religious content (known as *Pesantren Salafiyah*—'original' *pesantren*), and others also teach national curriculum subjects, such as the sciences, arts, and humanities.[3] However, if we zoom out further, we can see that *pesantren* are different from schools, especially in urban areas. Thus, can *santri*––that is, the students of a *pesantren*—be considered a community? In this case, it depends on how and why we use the concept of community in relation to P/CVE research and practice.

Identities are political by nature, and in Southeast Asia many religious and political organizations tend to define the boundaries of their communities of reference around the identities that are most convenient to their agenda. This tendency is not uncommon in P/CVE, and it requires profound local knowledge to understand how and why biases play out in defining community boundaries. For example, research conducted among *pesantren* asso-

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2   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso Books, 2006).*
3   Greg Barton, Gus Dur: *The Authorized Biography of Abdurrahman Wahid* (UK: Equinox Publishing, 2002).

ciated only with NU or only with Muhammadiyah would provide a biased vision of the community of *santri*. These considerations are crucial when designing research in this field.

Furthermore, it is useful to split the notion of community into two conceptually different (but in practice often overlapping) camps. On the one hand, there are community members, a collection of individuals who belong (or are perceived to belong) to a certain group. On the other hand, there is a galaxy of community actors composed of activists, leaders (real or self-proclaimed), organizations, and NGOs, who each claim to somehow represent the interests of community members. The two camps overlap because the former often belongs to the latter—community actors are community members themselves. However, the degree to which they really represent the broader interests of community members and their actual connectedness with the community is mixed. It is important to always consider competition for resources and the political agendas of subgroups within each community. Going back to the metaphor of fractals, the more we zoom in, the easier is to find legitimate community actors, smaller groups are more homogenous and can more easily find local actors to represent their interests. On the other hand, the larger the community, the more difficult is to find legitimate community actors that are accepted by large and diverse communities.

Mixed definitions: P/CVE

P/CVE is a broad field that incorporates all non-coercive, preventative forms of counterterrorism. Scholars and practitioners often use the label P/CVE to refer to a diversity of activities, which can be grouped into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, as in the public health model. Primary interventions are implemented before the occurrence of terrorism and violent extremism, aiming to address the root causes and risk factors of radicalization. For example, primary interventions include education and strategic communication programs that target groups within the general population (for example school students) and aim to prevent them from adopting violent extremist ideologies. Secondary interventions are implemented after an individual or a group has started the radicalization process but before they engage in serious ideologically motivated crime. They include one-to-one mentoring programs targeting individuals who show indications or warning signs of radicalization to violent extremism and aim to prevent them from engaging in acts of violence.

Tertiary interventions are implemented after the crime is committed, usually after terrorists are imprisoned or released from prison after serving their sentence. For example, they include programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate former terrorists back into the community. Research that aims to underpin and support activities in the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels needs to work with different methodologies because of the different size and characteristics of the target population. For instance, research related to primary P/CVE activities can usually use large samples and quantitative techniques, while research related to secondary and tertiary P/CVE interventions can usually rely on small samples and qualitative design. Each requires different approaches to research, monitoring, and evaluation.

Primary P/CVE interventions are the most common globally, and South East Asia is no exception. In 2017, a study surveyed 60 civil society organizations and researchers working on P/CVE from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand,[4] finding that 54 of them worked exclusively on primary interventions, compared to only one on secondary and three on tertiary.

Mixed definitions: Research

Finally, it is important to underline that the notion of research is also used inconsistently to refer to a range of different activities. Scholars know well that different ontologies and epistemologies can lead to different research activities. There is a continuum of positions between those who believe that reality can be studied using scientific methods and those, at the other end of the spectrum, who believe that meanings and realities only exist as mental constructions within subjects.[5] These differences shape not only academic research but also the research approaches of community actors, including activists, NGOs, civil soci-

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4   Greg Barton, Matteo Vergani, Dan Goodhardt, Husnul Atiyah, "Gap Analysis and Capacity Assessment of Society Organisations Working against Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia," Deakin University, 2018, unpublished report.

5   Scholars usually refer to paradigms as the philosophical assumptions that guide our way of conducting research. The four main paradigms are usually referred to as: postpositivist, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic. Post positivism is based on the rationalistic and empiricist idea that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, and that causality and other mechanisms can be observed with measurement and experimentation. Constructivism proposes that reality is socially constructed, and research is a product of the values of researchers. The transformative paradigm positions researchers side by side with less powerful and marginalized groups in a joint effort to bring about social transformation. The pragmatic paradigm eludes for the most part metaphysical discussions about truth and reality and looks at the intersubjective relations that compose the social world with a mixed methods approach that includes aspects of postpositivist, constructivist, and transformative approaches. For more discussion about the paradigms of research, see: Donna M. Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (SAGE Publications, 2014).

ety organizations, and others. In Southeast Asia, the majority of P/CVE community actors that I have encountered in my activities as part of SEAN-CSO position themselves on the latter end of the spectrum and adopt a relativist and subjectivist approach and tend to reject the use of the scientific method. This has important implications for the type and range of research conducted in P/CVE by communities, because it narrows the toolkit of methods used by community researchers in this region. This is not unique to Southeast Asia, as it reflects the methods used in the field of radicalization research generally.[6]

The different combinations of the possible meanings of these three terms—communities, P/CVE, and research—often end up including vastly different activities and approaches under the same umbrella of community-centered P/CVE research. More narrow definitions of communities are usually associated with research relevant to localized approaches. In the primary P/CVE space, such research might inform or evaluate programs in narrowly defined geographical communities (for example development programs), or in the tertiary P/CVE space, programs for convicted terrorists. Broader definitions of communities are associated with research relevant to mainstream approaches. In the secondary P/CVE space, this research might underpin risk assessment indicators aiming at detecting early signs of radicalization in schools. In the primary P/CVE space, it might include research informing or evaluating strategic communication campaigns.

Conducting P/CVE research in and with localized communities

From many points of view, community actors are in a position of advantage to research violent extremism at the local level. As previous literature reviews have found,[7] most radicalization and terrorism research use either secondary sources (like propaganda materials) or non-extremist samples (like university students). Accessing individuals and groups that are more at risk of radicalization is crucial but difficult, as communities at risk are usually not open to being researched by people they do not know or trust. Community actors are often able to provide this access because— and as long as—as members of the community themselves, community members trust them.

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6   Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar, and Greg Barton, "The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal. A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization into Violent Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 10 (2020): 854–54.

7   Ibid.

Understanding trust

Trust is the universal currency in all exchanges between stakeholders in the P/CVE space, but it is also volatile. In contexts where civil society loses space or is less free to democratically oppose the government, the credibility of community actors can be corrupted by working in the P/CVE field in collaboration with governments, especially in the eyes of those who have little trust in such institutions. This is a common situation in Southeast Asian countries experiencing an ongoing separatist struggle and where the central government does not trust minority communities who share an ethno-religious identity and grievances with the rebels.

For example, in Thailand and the Philippines, both experiencing long-standing separatist struggles in which the separatist minorities are identified along ethno-religious lines, there is a trust deficit between Muslim communities and the central government. In these contexts, P/CVE research and practice is often carried out by community actors (such civil society organizations, leaders, and activists), who are in the difficult position of having to build trust with both the central government and the community members. Trust from the government is necessary to access funding and relationships with government agencies, including law enforcement, correction systems, and local government authorities, and to make sure that the research is put to concrete use by government. Likewise, trust from the communities is necessary to access individuals and groups who would not otherwise participate in any government-funded P/CVE research or intervention program. In another chapter of this volume, Mikhael and Norman provide a nuanced discussion of how to successfully build trust relationships with local partners for conducting P/CVE research in conflict zones and divided societies.[8]

Understanding risk

Community actors incur significant risks in collaborating with governments and security agencies on P/CVE research. As Howell suggests, community actors who want to maintain trust from their communities need to remain independent from the aims of the secu-

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8   Drew Mikhael and Julie Norman, *Getting Local Engagement Right: Key Considerations for Local-level P/CVE Research* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.5.

rity apparatus and continue addressing issues of social justice, redistribution, and ethnic oppression without being oppressed by the government.[9] It is important to remember that community actors can be targeted by extremists and hate campaigns, both physically and in social media. Being seen to be working in P/CVE is often dangerous in local contexts where extremist ideologies are normalized and where governments are corrupted or governance is weak. Engagement of community actors in P/CVE puts them at risk of being perceived as aligning with the state's security agenda. In these contexts, trust needs to be balanced with independence.

This risk poses inescapable ethical challenges to P/CVE research, including the risk posed to the security of the researcher and community members in contexts of active conflict. It also creates the potential for bias that can distort research results. If the relationship between community actors and the government is too close, community actors engaged in research will be perceived as tamed, instruments to the government's political agenda, losing the trust of the community members. Similarly, if a community actor is too involved in political competition with other community actors, they will likely lose the trust of part of the community.

Lack of trust from parts of the community translates into research biases such as sample bias, which can affect the quality and reliability of research findings. For example, a community actor that is not trusted by individuals and groups within the community will not be able to access the whole community and will likely overlook important information relevant to P/CVE research questions. This is an important reason why it is in the best interest of governments and other funders of P/CVE research to choose as partners community actors that are truly independent and pursue the empowerment of their communities without political motives.

Understanding researcher independence

One of the best ways for community actors to achieve independence is through the diversification of funding sources. In their chapter, Malet and Korbitz examine the relationships

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9   Jude Howell, "The Global War on Terror, Development and Civil Society," *Journal of International Development: The Journal of the Development Studies Association* 18, no. 1 (2006): 121-135.

between P/CVE funders and researchers and the potential challenges arising from different expectations and needs.[10] P/CVE research in Southeast Asia is funded not only by national governments but often by foreign governments, universities, and international NGOs.

A study conducted in 2019 explored the funding sources of 74 community actors (including civil society organizations, universities, think-tanks, and activists) working on P/CVE in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.[11] The study found that all community actors received some funding for P/CVE research and practice from local and foreign governments, and their funding models were heavily reliant on grants. More recently, civil society organizations are starting to work on different funding models, such as social enterprises, to self-fund at least part of their activities. For example, the creation of social enterprises is one of the key focuses of the SEAN-CSO network, which has provided seed funding to local community actors to create small businesses to finance their local P/CVE work.

In Southeast Asia, government trust in community actors tends to crystallize over time into a handful of established and proven partnerships working on P/CVE, mainly consolidated through informal relationships. In Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, these relationships are maintained especially with community actors that are seen as not critical toward the government, which poses a real threat to the independence of research and practice in the P/CVE space.

In a study conducted in 2019, Kruber et al. interviewed 20 members of civil society organizations working on P/CVE in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand to investigate their relationships with local governments.[12] Most community actors expressed concern about the ephemeral nature of their relationships with their governments, perceived as being dependent on personal relationships, which can be impacted by changes of personnel within government departments and agencies, including through electoral cycles. As indicated by many interviewees, a potential solution to this problem would be the devel-

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10 David Malet and Mark Korbitz, *Resilience is for Research Designs Too: Funders, Researchers, & Navigating Study Constraints* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.7.

11 Vergani, Anggraeni, Goodhardt, and Barton, "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2018-2019."

12 Samantha Kruber, Matteo Vergani, Greg Barton, Dan Goodhardt, and Titien Yuliatiningtyas, "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2019-2020. Assessment of Government-Civil Society Relationships in CVE: The Perspective of Civil Society Organisations in South East Asia," *Deakin University,* 2020, unpublished report.

opment of formal mechanisms to involve local research actors in P/CVE research, such as within National Action Plans.[1313] These mechanisms should also clearly regulate processes of data sharing between community actors and government agencies within national settings. In this volume, Atamuradova and Nanni provide a list of recommendations for use by researchers and research commissioners in the P/CVE field, which can assist community actors in securing funding for their activities.[14]

Researcher resources and capacity

While researchers associated with universities and other institutions often have both the resources and the skills to undertake high quality research, community actors often have unique access to communities at risk but sometimes lack the capacities and resources to conduct rigorous, reliable, and well-designed research. The majority of civil society organizations working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia are under-resourced and under-staffed, largely relying on volunteers. In some cases, they are disconnected from the national and international research community and are not well versed in the broad toolkit of methods available to P/CVE researchers. For example, Barton et al. found that evaluation methods among civil society organizations working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia are often unsystematic, with very limited use of control groups or pre- and post-intervention measurements.[15] Observations, interviews, unstructured conversations, and post-intervention self-reported Likert scales are the norm for evaluating P/CVE programs.

In addition, there is an over-reliance on qualitative methods, textual analyses, and ethnography to investigate radicalization factors by community actors in the South East Asian context, and studies using other methodologies (for example experimental designs) are virtually absent. This lack of methodological breadth is detrimental to the quality and reliability of P/CVE research in the region. Providing basic research training to community members and enhancing collaboration with researchers from local and international institutions could

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13   Kruber et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2019-2020."

14   Farangiz Atamuradova and Carlotta Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from the STRIVE Global Program* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020). https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.6.

15   Barton, Vergani, Goodhardt, and Atiyah, "Gap Analysis and Capacity Assessment of Society Organisations Working against Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia."

address some of these problems, although the issue of resources and funding remains a key problem in advancing the quality of P/CVE research and evaluations in Southeast Asia.

P/CVE research in and with broadly defined communities: Challenges and opportunities

P/CVE research in—and with—communities, when intended in a broader sense—for example, tapping into a broad religious identity like the Muslim community—poses a different set of challenges and opportunities.

Variation in causes and risks of radicalization

Systematic, cumulative, and comparative research is needed to inform P/CVE practice across different contexts within a particular region (like Southeast Asia) or even within a large and diverse country (like Indonesia, for example). In different local contexts, different sets of risk factors and root causes of radicalization might be relevant. For example, research has shown that in post-conflict zones like Iraq, improving service provision reduces insurgent violence, particularly when the provision is made through smaller, community-based projects.[16] In more stable contexts, the association between development indicators and violence has found to be absent in meta-analytic reviews.[17]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this diversity of contexts and root causes of radicalization exists also within Southeast Asia. Vergani et al. found that, according to 74 community actors working on P/CVE research and practice in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, political grievances, Islamophobia, and exclusion of Muslim minorities from the political process are seen as one of the main risk factors of radicalization in the Philippines and Thailand, but not in Malaysia or Indonesia.[18] Rather, returnees from Syria and Iraq linked to the Islamic State are seen as a major issue in these countries. Moreover, Indonesians and Malaysians identify political and religious polarization and hate from Muslim

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16 Eli Berman, Jacob N. Shapiro, and Joseph H. Felter, "Can Hearts and Minds be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Journal of Political Economy* 119, no. 4 (2011): 766–819.

17 Aurélie Campana and Luc Lapointe, "The Structural 'Root' Causes of Non-suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Scoping Review," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 1 (2012): 79–104.

18 Vergani et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2018-2019."

groups toward non-Muslim minorities and LGBTIQ+ groups as another major issue. Other important concerns identified by respondents include the involvement of women and children in terrorist groups and the regional consequences of instability and armed groups' safe havens in the Philippines.

The root causes and risk factors of radicalization across different geographical areas in Southeast Asia are vastly different. However, no systematic comparative research has investigated the different relevance of these factors across the various Southeast Asian local contexts to inform P/CVE practice. Similarly, in the evaluation space, there is no comparative and cumulative knowledge base to understand what P/CVE interventions work or don't work, where, and why. In Southeast Asia, evaluations are conducted mostly by community actors, using different and inconsistent measurement tools and research designs.

Standardization of terms and methods

An initial barrier to conducting this type of research is the lack of common definitions of violent extremism among Southeast Asian P/CVE stakeholders, including governments and community actors. Research shows that among Southeast Asian community actors terms such as CVE, PVE, and social cohesion are delegitimized by some because they are intrinsically ambiguous and do not allow stakeholders to distinguish clearly between legitimate forms of non-violent radical or fundamentalist religious thought, which are part of the democratic political discourse in Muslim-majority countries, and violent extremism.[19] For this reason, in Malaysia and Indonesia, the distinction between radicalism and violent extremism is a particularly important aspect of the P/CVE scholarly debate.[20] In Thailand and the Philippines, where there are separatist insurgencies and Muslims are a religious minority, the distinction between terrorism and freedom fighters, rebels, and insurgents is a key part of the debate.[21] This lack of shared definitions translates into a lack of comparable research

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19   Ibid.

20   Alexander R. Arifianto, "Islamic Campus Preaching Organizations in Indonesia: Promoters of Moderation or Radicalism?" *Asian Security* 15, no. 3 (2019): 323–42; Choirul Mahfud, Niken Prasetyawati, Wahyuddin Wahyuddin, Zainul Muhibbin, Dyah Satya Yoga Agustin, and Heni Sukmawati, "Religious Radicalism, Global Terrorism and Islamic Challenges in Contemporary Indonesia," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora (JSH)* 11, no. 1 (2018): 8–18.

21   Rohan Gunaratna and Muh Taufiqurrohman, "Insurgency and Terrorism in East Asia: Threat and Response," in *Non-Traditional Security in East Asia: A Regime Approach,* eds. Ramon Pacheco Pardo and Jeffrey Reeves (2016): 23–48, https://doi.org/10.1142/p1008.

findings across different contexts, which limits the production of cumulative P/CVE knowledge in the region.

A second barrier to producing cumulative and comparative knowledge in P/CVE research is the lack of consistent methodologies used throughout different research and evaluation studies across local contexts. The diversity of research skills and resources among different community actors produces fragmented knowledge that is difficult for policy makers to interpret, use, or verify. Without consistent methods and cumulative knowledge, it is impossible to have a solid foundation from which to prioritize certain P/CVE areas and interventions across large and diverse communities.

A potential solution to these problems would be the creation of a unified research and evaluation framework, developed in consultation with community actors, within a country or potentially across multiple countries that share similar broad communities, sets of stakeholders, grievances, and risk factors. National Action Plans could set some basic foundations for common definitions, measurements, research, and evaluation frameworks. Specific and detailed frameworks should be a priority for networks of government agencies, researchers, practitioners, and community actors to develop. These networks should prioritize sharing research methods and toolkits to spark collaborative and comparative P/CVE research and evaluation across local community contexts.

In support of this recommendation, Vergani et al. found that the need to develop strategic P/CVE frameworks (such as National Action Plans) and the need for more rigorous evaluation of P/CVE programs are at the top of the list of priorities identified by community actors working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia.[22] Still, some government agencies might be opposed to collaborating with community actors on P/CVE.[23]

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22   Vergani et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2018-2019."

23   I. Gusti Bagus Dharma Agastia, Anak Agung Banyu Perwita, and D. B. Subedi, "Countering Violent Extremism Through State-society Partnerships: A Case Study of De-radicalisation Programmes in Indonesia," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (2020): 23-43, https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2020.1722317; Cameron Sumpter, "Countering Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Priorities, Practice and the Role of Civil Society," *Journal for Deradicalization* 11 (2017): 112–47.

Networking and coordination

To this end, it is important to highlight the presence of numerous networking initiatives and platforms for P/CVE community actors across Southeast Asia. A stable regional initiative funded by the Australian Government is the Southeast Asian Network of Civil Society Organizations (SEAN-CSO) working on addressing violent extremism, which has existed since 2016 and organizes online and face-to-face events and trainings for community and government stakeholders in the region.

Networking between community and government actors often takes place through multilateral initiatives, such as the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) sub-committee on CVE led by Australia and Indonesia. Many international donors and P/CVE actors have launched networking initiatives of civil society actors in Southeast Asia. To name just a few, the Global Center on Cooperative Security (funded by the government of the Netherlands) has launched an initiative to strengthen the networks of women-led P/CVE organizations in Southeast Asia. The Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy and the ASEAN Society of the Philippines convened a large network of community actors working on P/CVE in Southeast Asia in 2017, funded by numerous governmental and intergovernmental actors.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns, countless online events are organized every month in Southeast Asia, with the aim of bringing together and training community actors working on P/CVE. While the increase in online networking and training efforts to increase skills, collaboration, and coordination among the variety of actors engaged in the P/CVE space is a positive development, personal communications with local P/CVE actors suggest that this over-proliferation of online events can cause fatigue, duplication, and exhaustion among local community stakeholders, who struggle to locate the events and trainings that are important to them. Online training and networking proliferation is exacerbated by the competing political agendas of funding bodies—e.g., multilateral bodies and foreign governments—and by competition between P/CVE agencies. A curated repository of on- and offline networking and training events in the P/CVE space would be beneficial for scholars and practitioners working in the South East Asian region.

Understanding ethics: Considerations around majority and minority populations

Finally, and importantly, significant ethical implications relate to P/CVE research and practice among both majority and minority communities, broadly defined, in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, the implications for minority communities have been discussed and studied extensively in the literature of critical terrorism studies, particularly in relation to "community-driven" P/CVE approaches in Western countries.[24] In Southeast Asia, this applies to contexts such as Thailand and the Philippines, where P/CVE research and practice targets the broad Muslim community, incurring the risk of profiling individuals, creating suspect citizens, and silencing dissent and free speech.

On the other hand, the ethical and political implications of P/CVE research and practice among majority communities is rarely discussed. The Southeast Asian context is an optimal case to examine this issue, which applies in similar terms to all countries where P/CVE addresses forms of extremism that are present within majority communities, such as far-right and racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) in Western countries. For example, Berger[25] discussed the ethical implications of discussing in the public domain research findings showing how some white nationalist extremists have explicitly supported U.S. President Donald Trump, as well as the practical and ethical challenges of conducting P/CVE work in a political context where some policy makers turn a blind eye to extremism among their political supporters.

For the Southeast Asian context, tackling jihadist extremism in Muslim-majority democracies such as Indonesia and Malaysia poses key ethical challenges. The first challenge is related to the use of taxpayers' money to counter ideas that play a major role in a country's democratic process. As in Western countries, in Southeast Asian politics some political leaders incite hatred against non-Muslims and use populist rhetoric and toxic ultra-nationalist narratives based on ethno-religious identities to gather consensus. Sometimes this

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24   Nicole Nguyen, *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Aislinn O'Donnell, "Securitisation, Counterterrorism and the Silencing of Dissent: The Educational Implications of Prevent," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 64, no. 1 (2016): 53-76.

25   J.M. Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism: The State of Play* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2019.3.

toxic populism surfaces into mainstream politics. In Malaysia, the government approach has been to dominate the discourse on Islam and attain Malay Muslim support with the creation of a Muslim bureaucracy and the implementation of aspects of religiously based laws.[26]

In these contexts, researching and countering extremist ideologies is politically sensitive, because it has the potential to be instrumentalized by political elites and thus affect political and democratic processes. Tackling the spread of out-group hatred is an important component of primary P/CVE work. However, when hateful and extremist ideas are directly associated with mainstream political movements, despite the presence of ideological contiguity with extremist movements, public and foreign funding invested into researching and countering these ideas can be seen as undue interference.[27]

Over-researching a particular topic could also create imbalances in the public opinion, drawing attention to certain topics over others.[28] P/CVE research can set the agenda of the public, the media, and politicians disproportionately on a certain security issue (for example, hatred spread by a certain political movement). This, by consequence, can demonize a certain political ideology and diminish attention on other areas of public interest (such as education, healthcare, etc.). For example, in the South East Asian context, the politicization of the Patani conflict in Thailand has been associated with a securitized political agendas and the erosion of civil liberties.[29] For this reason, P/CVE research in the Thai context is very sensitive, with the national Thai government framing P/CVE research on Patani violence as religiously inspired terrorism, and local communities largely contesting this definition and framing the conflict in terms of ethno-nationalist struggle.[30]

Agenda-setting can be exploited by political leaders whose objectives align with P/CVE research and practice for electoral purposes. As Atamuradova and Nanni discuss, donor-

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26   Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Political Islam in Malaysia: Problematising Discourse and Practice in the UMNO–PAS 'Islamisation Race,'" *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2004): 184–205.

27   For more, see: Berger, *Researching Violent Extremism.*

28   See Atamuradova and Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism.*

29   Aurel Croissant, "Muslim Insurgency, Political Violence, and Democracy in Thailand." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 1 (2007): 1–18.

30   Bayu Mitra A. Kusuma, "Patani United Liberation Organization: From Jihad to Local Politics Movement," *The Indonesian Journal of Public Administration* 2, no. 1 (2016).

driven priorities can significantly distort P/CVE research agendas by focusing research efforts on only one type of violent extremism.[31] Communities can set P/CVE research agendas to advance their political and economic interests. Funders, communities, and political stakeholders can influence and distort how research findings are analyzed and interpreted, sometimes to biased end. Backlash from other political actors can result, further polarizing political attitudes in the country. As a risk mitigation strategy, academics and practitioners in the P/CVE field suggest involving a diversity of stakeholders—including communities, researchers, and law enforcement and government representatives with different viewpoints and agendas—in review boards, advisory boards, and research teams, to make sure all points of views are represented in the research assumptions, questions and methods.[32]

Conclusion

This chapter discussed key aspects to consider when undertaking community-centered P/CVE research in South East Asia. Although the Southeast Asian context is used to discuss the opportunities and challenges of different approaches to community-centered research, the key findings are likely relevant to other contexts too. First, when research is done in—and with—local communities, community actors are in a position of advantage to access samples that would otherwise be overlooked by researchers who are not from the community. However, ethical challenges and potential distortions (such as sample biases) need to be taken carefully into consideration, particularly in contexts like Thailand and the Philippines, where the priorities of P/CVE government donors might reflect a political agenda that is perceived as biased by local communities.

Other factors, such as crystallized and tamed relationships between governments and certain community actors, political competition within and between communities, and the lack of research resources and capacities, need to be assessed when conducting P/CVE research with community actors in local contexts. Previous research in the South East Asian context found that the vast majority of funding for P/CVE research in the region tends to involve a small group of community organizations that act as de-facto gatekeepers of research in

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31 Atamuradova and Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism.*

32 John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 267–91; Atamuradova and Nanni, *Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism.*

this field.[33] This concentration of funding and resources increases the risks of biased P/CVE research in the region.

Second, when research is done in—and with—broader communities, the main challenge is to produce systematic, cumulative, and comparative research findings that hold true across local contexts. To achieve this aim, it can be helpful to establish common definitions, measurement tools, and methodologies in consultation with all stakeholders, including community actors. Practical solutions can include the establishment of research and evaluation frameworks in National Action Plans. However, it is also important to consider that community actors are often invited to networking tables that are set primarily to address the needs of donors, therefore fatiguing community stakeholders by duplicating their efforts and weakening broader P/CVE objectives. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is leading the way in creating a National Action Plan that includes a strong focus on lifting the quality of P/CVE research in the country, by providing skills and training to community and research actors to produce reliable, valid, and cumulative P/CVE knowledge.[34]

Finally, it is important to consider specific ethical challenges related to working with minority communities—such as the creation of suspicious, ostracized, and alienated communities—but also with majority communities—and the potential for research findings and topics of focus interfering in or being instrumentalized to impact a country's political and democratic process, which is a key issue for international P/CVE donors working in South East Asia.

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33   Kruber et al., "Capacity-Gap Analysis 2019-2020."

34   United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Indonesia, "UNDP Indonesia Join Forces with BNPT to Establish Action Plan on Violent Extremism Prevention," January 23, 2020, https://www.id.undp.org/content/indonesia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/ UNDP-Indonesia-Join-Forces-with-BNPT.html.

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Lab-in-Field Experiments for the Reintegration of Violent Extremists

The Promise of Prosocial Evaluation

Cameron Sumpter

When an inmate leaves prison following a sentence for terrorism offences, their reintegration will depend on whether they can function as a relatively social member of their community. Obstacles such as stigmatization exist for all former convicts, but among steadfast extremists these barriers will be mutual, if they continue to perceive the ingroup-outgroup dichotomy that fed their extremism in the first place. A simple but effective means for determining the likelihood that returning prisoners will act prosocially towards the 'other' could be the use of so-called lab-in-field games, which provide small incentives to learn how individuals behave in a given situation, rather than just eliciting their sentiment. This chapter outlines the potential for such an approach. It draws on field research conducted in Indonesia in 2018, which involved interviews with 28 former convicted terrorists, regarding their practical experiences with reintegration and interactions in the community.

Introduction

The societal reintegration of (violent) extremists is becoming a critical section of the counterterrorism policy spectrum in a range of nations. Average terrorism-related prison sentences are getting shorter in the United States, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[1] Sentences vary across Europe but the typical length in several states is fewer than ten years, particularly when probation periods are factored.[2] Australia is facing an increase in scheduled terrorism-offender prison releases over the next five years.[3] And thousands of ISIS supporters from dozens of nations are now subsisting in vast camps in northern Syria, many vying for repatriation.[4]

Research has shown that reoffending rates among violent extremists may be lower than those for other crimes.[5] But the loaded impact of terrorism adds weight to any related case of recidivism, while heaping pressure on programs aimed at rehabilitation and facilitating post-release transitions. Risk assessment instruments designed for terrorism offenders have become sophisticated in the past ten years or so, but their complexity can also prove a hindrance. Practitioners require advanced training, the associated interviews are time consuming, and persistent uncertainty surrounding terrorism risk factors creates an element of doubt that could arguably outweigh the requisite effort in some contexts.[6]

A practical supplement to specialized risk assessment tools could be the use of so-called lab-in-field experiments, which have been adopted by researchers and development practitioners since the 1970s to establish levels of prosocial behavior among different sample

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1   Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Justice, "Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Monitoring of Inmate Communications to Prevent Radicalization," *Audit Division 20-042*, March 2020, https://oig.justice.gov/news/doj-oig-releases-report-bops-monitoring-inmate-communications-prevent-radicalization.

2   Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neuman, "Prisons and Terrorism: Extremist Offender Management in 10 European Countries," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation*, July 22, 2020, https://icsr.info/2020/07/22/prisons-and-terrorism-extremist-offender-management-in-10-european-countries/.

3   Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), "Counterterrorism Yearbook 2020," March 30, 2020, https://www.aspi.org.au/report/counterterrorism-yearbook-2020.

4   Simon Hooper, "Families demand repatriation of all foreign nationals from Syrian Camps," *Middle East Eye*, October 26, 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-kurds-camps-western-families-repatriation.

5   Andrew Silke and John Morrison, "Re-Offending by Released Terrorists: Separating Hype from Reality," *ICCT Policy Brief*, September 2020, https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/09/Re-Offending-by-Released-Terrorist-Prisoners.pdf.

6   See for example: Randy Borum, "Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2, no. 2 (2015): 63-87; Sarah L. Desmarais, Joseph Simons-Rudolph, Christine Shahan Brugh, Eileen Schilling, and Chad Hoggan, "The State of Scientific Knowledge Regarding Factors Associated With Terrorism," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 4, no. 4 (2017): 180-209.

populations.[7] Recently, these behavioral science exercises have been highlighted for their potential to evaluate preventing violent extremism initiatives.[8] While inadequate for measuring specific risk, lab-in-field experiments could be effective in gauging the likelihood that an individual will assimilate with a community following release from prison or repatriation, the development of those already trying, and the impact of associated programs. They may even provide evidence of disengagement from violent extremist networks.

This chapter will explore the utility of lab-in-field experiments for assessing the reintegration of violent extremists. First, it will outline relevant theories of radicalization which emphasize the social nature of the process and the formation of ingroup-outgroup perspectives and preferences. It will then describe the design and function of lab-in-field games and provide examples of applicable research projects, before illustrating how and why this approach could be employed for possibly reforming violent extremists. This final section will draw on the author's field research into the societal reintegration of former prisoners convicted of terrorism offences in Indonesia, where several hundred individuals have been released or repatriated in recent years.

Us versus them

The study of terrorism and its drivers is a contentious field, with definitional uncertainty and schools of thought influenced by broader political discourse. One of the few points of consensus in the analysis of 'radicalization,' for example, is that no single profile or straightforward pathway can explain the process towards violence. Instead, an array of psychological, relational, and structural conditions are potential ingredients, depending on the temporal context and environmental circumstances.[9] But a prominent theme among some of the discipline's most influential scholars is the fundamentally social nature of becoming and remaining a member of a violent extremist network.[10]

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7   Hans Binswanger, "Attitudes Toward Risk: Experimental Measurement in Rural India," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 62, no. 3, 1980.

8   Georgia Holmer, Peter Bauman, with Kateira Aryaeinejad, "Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programs," *United States Institute of Peace*, September 6, 2018, https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/09/measuring-monitoring-and-evaluating-pcve-programs.

9   See: Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICCT Research Paper*, March 2013, https://icct.nl/publication/radicalisation-de-radicalisation-counter-radicalisation-a-conceptual-discussion-and-literature-review/.

10   See: Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011).

For Marc Sageman, terrorist organizations comprise groups of individuals who most often know each other through long-standing friendships or family connections, and further develop resolute bonds based on trust and mutual affection.[11] The draw of membership to a clandestine association can also be driven by a desire for the development of belonging, solidarity and acceptance—particularly among young people seeking direction.[12] Relationships may grow stronger through reciprocated activism, and eventually a collective social identity supersedes that of the individual, establishing a dedicated loyalty strengthened through cycles of group activity, peer pressure, and communal protection.[13]

This subordination of individual identity to that of the collective "provides the most powerful lens to understand terrorism psychology and behavior," according to Jerrold Post.[14] Social and organizational dynamics not only shape the process of incremental individual involvement; John Horgan has argued that perceptions of group factors play perhaps the most critical role in decisions to engage in terrorist activity and maintain involvement.[15] While a strong social identity formed within a group establishes devotion to collective goals, radicalization is often a sustained reaction to perceived threats to the ingroup from real or imagined outgroup adversaries.[16]

Ingroup-outgroup divisions exist among an array of everyday identity markers, from fans of sporting teams to musical taste; but as J.M. Berger explains, extremists remove all associated subjectivity, defining outgroup beliefs and practices in sharp contrast to those of the ingroup.[17] Any common grey space is subsumed by either black or white. Perceiving themselves to be morally superior, the ingroup loses their ability to see the world from the perspective of the 'other,' and outsiders are demonized through narratives of threat and/or

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11   Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 24.
12   Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of terrorism: Instrumental and organizational approaches," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 20.
13   Remy Cross and David A. Snow, "Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types," Journal of Strategic Security 4, no. 4 (2011): 120; Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology* 2, no. 2 (2000): 414; Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," Terrorism & Political Violence 24, no. 1 (2012): 16; See also, The Lord Alderdice, "The individual, the group and the psychology of terrorism," *International Review of Psychiatry* 19, no. 3 (2007).
14   Jerrold Post, "'When hatred is bred to the bone:' the social psychology of terrorism," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 26, no. 4 (2010): 15. https://doig.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2010.05694.x.
15   John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 5.
16   Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008).
17   J.M. Berger, *Extremism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), Chapter 3.

persecution.[18] Any sympathy for outgroup members, or even attempts to understand their position, will be deemed a betrayal of loyalty to the extremist ingroup, leading to accusations of "whose side are you on?"[19]

It may be natural to uphold such an exclusivist mindset when a person spends significant time with other ingroup members (offline, online, or both), but perhaps less so when frequent social interactions are more varied. Researchers suggest that it is "considerably harder to demonize the 'other' when one has the opportunity to meet, play, and work together for a substantial length of time."[20] Managed carefully, societal reintegration initiatives following a prison sentence for terrorism offences or repatriation from a camp in Syria could provide these types of regular engagements. Actual and potential constructive interaction between (former) extremists and people outside their perceived ingroup can be measured by determining testable preferences for prosocial behavior.

Do unto others

Prosocial behavior describes acts such as helping, sharing, donating, cooperating, and volunteering.[21] While behavioral reciprocity has been branded a universal norm since at least the 1960s, prosocial behavior may be also performed "without conscious, explicitly felt anticipations of reciprocated rewards," provided the associated costs are not overly taxing.[22] Whether learned as good practice in childhood or through some innate social function of being human, people often simply help other people. Selfless acts to benefit others may be common to virtually every culture on earth, but not unconditionally. Researchers have found that actors behave more prosocially to members of their ingroup than perceived outsiders, across a variety of contexts.[23] One study concluded the strength of an individual's

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18   Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011).

19   Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 156.

20   Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel, and Alan S. Waterman, "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 552.

21   Arthur P. Brief and Stephan J. Motowildo, "Prosocial Organisational Behaviors," *Academy of Management Review* 11, no. 4 (1986): 710.

22   Alvin Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 2 (1960); Leonard Berkowitz and Louise R. Daniel, "Responsibility and Dependency," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66, no. 5 (1963).

23   Jim A. C. Everett, Nadira S. Faber, and Molly Crockett, "Preferences and beliefs in ingroup favouritism," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 9, no. 15 (2015).

identification to a particular group impacts the way they balance individual and collective interests.[24]

Such findings are the result of experiments involving behavioral science games, which are becoming popular policy tools for development practitioners seeking increased program efficiency and more effective targeting.[25] Among the first so-called lab-in-field experiments in this discipline were conducted in the late 1970s to measure the effects of risk-taking on behavioral outcomes among farmers in India.[26] In recent years, these experimental exercises have been played with a range of target populations in different contexts, from young football players with experience of conflict in Sierra Leonne, to juvenile delinquents in Chicago, to snack food consumers in rural Thailand.[27] While the design and variation of the actual games played are only constrained by the creativity of the researchers, many are based on a few classic examples.

The Dictator Game is generally a two-player exercise in which one person must decide how to divide a prescribed amount of money between themselves and the other player, which tests altruism and fairness preferences. A majority of players have been found to transfer roughly 20 per cent of the allotment.[28] Slightly more complex is the Ultimatum Game, where the first player decides what portion to offer the second player, before the potential recipient chooses to either accept the division so that each player receives something, or refuse (and punish), resulting in neither player receiving anything.[29] A third common exercise is the Trust Game, in which player one again decides how much of an allotted sum to

24   Delia Baldassarri, and Guy Grossman, "The Effect of Group Attachment and Social Position on Prosocial Behavior. Evidence from Lab-in-the-Field Experiments," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 3 (2013).

25   Pamela Jakiela, "What Are We Learning from Lab-in-the-Field Experiments in Developing Countries?," *Center for Global Development*, June 6, 2019, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/what-are-we-learning-lab-field-experiments-developing-countries.

26   Hans Binswanger, "Attitudes Toward Risk: Experimental Measurement in Rural India," American Journal of Agricultural Economics 62, no. 3, 1980.

27   Francesco Cecchi, Koen Leuveld, and Maarten Voors, "Conflict Exposure and Competitiveness: Experimental Evidence from the Football Field in Sierra Leone," *The University of Chicago* (February 2016); Sara B. Heller, Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold A. Pollack, "Thinking, Fast and Slow? Some Field Experiments to Reduce Crime and Dropout in Chicago," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 132, no. 1 (2017); Antonia Grohmann, and Sahra Sakha, "The effect of peer observation on consumption choices: evidence from a lab-in-field experiment," *Applied Economics* 51, no. 55 (2019).

28   See: Daniel Kahneman, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard Thaler, "Fairness as a Constraint on Profit Seeking: Entitlements in the Market," *The American Economic Review* 76, no. 4 (1986): 728-741.

29   Steven D. Levitt and John A. List, "What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preference Reveal About the Real World?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 2 (2007): 155.

give to player two, which is then multiplied by a predetermined number, before player two decides how much of her acquisition to give back to player one.[30]

These descriptions are bare-boned representations of what are often more creative designs deemed appropriate for the specific experiment at hand. Beyond altruism and fairness, the games test for motivations such as conditional reciprocity, inequity aversion, and risk-taking in a social setting.[31] Lab-in-field exercises are generally simple to run, relatively inexpensive, and genuine (while small) financial payoffs tend to ensure that participants consider their decisions carefully and seriously.[32] Of course, there are a number of caveats and complications that need to be considered with any experimental design. Particular moral and/or cultural considerations may influence results, as well as the type and degree of scrutiny a player receives as they make their decisions (even simply from the person conducting the experiment).[33] Appropriate control groups also play an important role in determining specific preferences and presenting convincing comparisons.[34]

Examples from the (lab-in) field

While projects using behavioral science laboratory experiments in communities focus on a diverse range of issues, studies looking at post-conflict dynamics or prison populations may offer examples relevant to the reintegration of violent extremists. Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii researched the impact of Nepal's ten-year civil war on social cohesion in areas affected by wartime violence.[35] After mapping applicable communities and randomly selecting an even number of conflict-affected and not-conflict-affected townships among 48 identified districts, the team played four lab-in-field games to discern differences in sentiment. For instance, a dictator game asked subjects to donate a portion of money to an unnamed local

30 Matteo M. Galizzi, "On the external validity of social preference games: a systematic lab-if-field study," *Management Science* 65, no. 3 (2018).

31 Levitt and List, "What Do Laboratory Experiments Measuring Social Preference Reveal," 154-155

32 Armin Falk and James J. Heckman, "Lab Experiments Are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences," *IZA Discussion Paper* No. 4520 (2009): 3-4.

33 John A. List, "Why Economists Should Conduct Field Experiments and 14 Tips for Pulling One Off," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (2011).

34 Kurt Braddock, *Experimentation & Quasi-Experimentation in Countering Violent Extremism: Directions of Future Inquiry* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), https://doi.org/10.37805/rve2020.1.

35 Michael J. Gilligan, Benjamin J. Pasquale, and Cyrus Samii, "Civil War and Social Cohesion: Lab-in-the-Field Evidence from Nepal," *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 3 (2014): 604-619.

family in need, while another tested the willingness to gamble on reciprocated cooperation. The project ultimately concluded that "community-level exposure to fatal civil-war violence increases community-level social cohesion."[36]

An earlier study in post-war Bosnia used similar methods to measure cooperation across ethnic divisions; or more specifically, whether "ethnic groups from Bosnia exhibit norms of fairness that are different for their ingroup then for an outgroup."[37] A form of the dictator game was again used to have participants decide how much of an allocated sum of money (often a day's average wage) to share with an anonymous counterpart from a different ethnic group, and how much to keep for themselves. The authors highlighted research suggesting that members of different ethnic groups often discriminate against others based on perceived trust. But through their experiments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they found evidence of "considerable fairness both within and between ethnic groups."[38] This was deemed comparatively convincing, as the findings from the game-based study relied on actual behavior rather than previous research that focused on eliciting attitudes towards outgroups in Bosnia.[39]

In Italy, a team of researchers conducted prisoner dilemma games with actual prisoners (and control groups of students) to test varied levels of behavioral cooperation among regular prisoners and convicted members of the organized criminal group, the Camorra. Nese et al. employed both a 'one-shot' prisoners' dilemma game and a second involving three participants with the possibility of third-party punishment.[40] The games used tokens worth €0.30, which were later paid out to students or credited to the inmates' prison accounts.[41] A three-way comparison showed the *Camorristi* displayed higher degrees of cooperativeness than both students and regular criminals respectively and a stronger tendency to punish defectors than the unaffiliated inmates, who demonstrated an opportunism in sharp contrast to the honor codes of the Camorra.[42]

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36   Ibid, 616.
37   Sam Whitt and Rick K. Wilson, "The Dictator Game, Fairness and Ethnicity in Postwar Bosnia," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 3 (2007): 655-668.
38   Ibid, 662.
39   Ibid, 666.
40   Annamaria Nese, Niall O'Higgins, Patrizia Sbriglia, and Maurizio Scudiero, "Cooperation, punishment and organized crime: a lab-in-the-field experiment in southern Italy," *European Economic Review* 107 (2018): 86-98.
41   Ibid, 91.
42   Ibid, 97.

Another applicable example is a longitudinal lab-in-field experiment to determine changes in prosocial behavior among prison inmates who had successfully completed a rehabilitation program in California.[43] Trust and dictator games were played with 80 inmates—38 control subjects and 42 who took part in a specific program called Guiding Rage Into Power (DRIP), which explores the origins of violent behavior and develops positive coping mechanisms.[44] The games were administered before and after the one-year course. The research team concluded that "trust [had] significantly increased in GRIP participants compared to the control group."[45] The authors argued their findings suggested the program effectively strengthened the prisoners' prosocial preferences and attitudes, which would potentially foster their rehabilitation and post-release reintegration.[46]

Each of these examples offers food for thought when considering how lab-in-field experiments might benefit initiatives aimed at facilitating the reintegration of violent extremists following prison sentences or repatriation. To further outline the possible benefits, it will be practical to consider how these processes play out. Recent experiences in Indonesia provide a useful case study.

Connections, commitment, and community

Given the importance of social dynamics and relational bonds among expert conceptions of radicalization theory, the modern history of Islamist militancy in Indonesia offers a pertinent example. While the jihadist movement has its origins in the Southeast Asian nation's fight for independence in the 1940s, a significant period came in the 1980s, when dozens of Indonesians made their way to the Afghan-Pakistan border where they trained and studied with the mujahideen. Most returned to Southeast Asia in the 1990s, extending and transferring their training in the Southern Philippines, and injecting themselves into remote conflicts back in Indonesia, which erupted following the end of President Suharto's long reign of power in the late 1990s.[47]

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43 Mario A. Maggioni, Domenico Rossignoli, Simona Beretta, and Sara Balestri, "Trust behind bars: Measuring change in inmates' prosocial preferences," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 64 (2018): 89-104.

44 See: Insight-Out, "Guiding Rage Into Power: A One-Year Accountability and Healing Program," https://grip-traininginstitute.org

45 Maggioni et al., "Trust behind bars," 99.

46 Ibid.

47 See: Solahudin, *The Roots of Terrorism in Indonesia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013).

Experts on the subject have highlighted the importance of strong personal ties among militants, established in Afghanistan and later in the Philippines.[48] When aspects of communal conflict on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi radicalized in the early 2000s, observers stressed that the solidarity formed overseas was "almost certainly more important than ideology or money in facilitating partnerships among jihadist groups."[49] These links grew stronger through common business interests, enrolment in certain Islamic boarding schools, and, crucially, inter-movement marriage, which created a "complex web of familial relationships" and entrenched the exclusivist ingroup identity.[50]

To some extent, the 2010s rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the Middle East altered ideological, strategic, and tactical dimensions of the jihadi movement in Indonesia, but personal relationships have remained central to recruitment and network cohesion. Research by Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten Schulze found that social bonds were the "common thread in encouraging entry as well as fostering commitment" to the militant networks.[51] Drawing on a dataset of 106 Indonesians, the authors identified four primary pathways to involvement: small religious study groups (known as *pengajian*); family connections; participation in domestic conflict; and close-knit boarding school communities. For Indonesian ISIS supporters, like those from a range of nations, true commitment involved abandoning their former social networks and travelling to Syria for a new life and identity.[52]

Counterterrorism, incarceration, and reintegration

In October 2002, coordinated bombing attacks in a nightlife district on the resort island of Bali killed over 200 people. The Indonesian government quickly bolstered its anti-terrorism legislation, and with support from foreign partners, established what became highly effective counterterrorism capabilities within the national police force. A unit called Special Detachment 88 (Densus 88) has been particularly successful, arresting and prosecuting well

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48 International Crisis Group, "Jemaah Islamiyah in South East Asia: Damaged but Still Dangerous," *ICG Asia Report no. 63*, August 26, 2003, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/jemaah-islamiyah-south-east-asia-damaged-still-dangerous.

49 International Crisis Group, "Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi," *ICG Asia Report no. 74*, February 3, 2004, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-backgrounder-jihad-central-sulawesi.

50 Sulastri Osman, "Jemaah Islamiyah: Of Kin and Kind," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2010): 164.

51 Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E. Schulze, "Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organizations," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018): 1.

52 Ibid, 7.

over a thousand people on terrorism related charges. Legislative updates in 2018 provided additional powers to conduct investigations and further avenues for prosecution. Barring sporadic, small-scale attacks mostly aimed at police themselves, the ISIS-energized jihadist networks in Indonesia have been quite efficiently thwarted and dismantled in recent years.

The Indonesian prison system thus has seen hundreds of prisoners convicted of terrorism pass through its gates. A small minority are serving lengthy sentences for involvement in serious crimes and attack plots, but most are in for relatively limited periods, especially those who secure remission by cooperating with authorities. In a 2020 report looking at recidivism among convicted terrorists in Indonesia, data from the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) showed that of the 825 individuals sentenced for terrorism offences between 2002 and May 2020 94 had either been re-arrested on terrorism charges, travelled to join ISIS, or otherwise engaged in violent extremist activity.[53] Over 120 prisoners were scheduled to be released by the end of 2020, and a further 150 in 2021.[54] Several hundred Indonesians have also been repatriated by the Turkish government since 2017, after failing to join ISIS in Syria.[55]

Inmates who decide to cooperate are exposed to initiatives aimed at de-radicalization in prison. Those who return from abroad and could not be prosecuted have undergone a one-month program to prepare them for reintegration.[56] Much of this work from the Indonesian government is conducted by the national counterterrorism agency, *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme* (BNPT). The agency sends officers to visit some of the responsive former prisoners at home, offering modest seed grants to help start a business.[57] Small non-governmental organizations (NGOS) also provide assistance, which may not be as well-resourced as state efforts but are fortified with local networks and more frequent engagements. Complicating matters, however, are similarly charitable organizations that

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53   Institute for the Policy Analysis of Conflict, "Terrorism, Recidivism and Planned Releases in Indonesia," *IPAC Report No. 66,* September 4, 2020.

54   Ibid, 10.

55   Chaula Rininta Anindya, "The Deradicalisation Programme for Indonesian Deportees: A Vacuum in Coordination," *Journal for Deradicalization* 18 (Spring 2019).

56   Ibid.

57   Cameron Sumpter, "Reintegration in Indonesia: Extremists, Start-ups and Occasional Engagements," *ICCT Perspective*, February 19, 2019, https://icct.nl/publication/reintegration-in-indonesia-extremists-start-ups-and-occasional-engagements/.

are loosely connected to the jihadist movement and seek to keep (former) prisoners and their families engaged in the networks.[58]

Community and stigmatization

Together with colleagues from the University of Indonesia, I conducted a study in 2018 that sought to learn how recently released convicted terrorists cope with life on the outside. Through interviews with 28 former prisoners, we asked about their practical experiences in terms of finding paid employment, reconnecting with their family and friends, accepting assistance from state and civil society organizations, and being welcomed or shunned by people in the community.[59] An important distinction among Indonesians released follow-ing terrorism sentences is whether they agreed to comply with certain requirements while in prison. Cooperation would lead to participation in targeted rehabilitation activities and subsequent reintegration support—in contrast to those who refused to cooperate with the government, remained steadfast to their convictions, and ignored attempts to engage.

The majority of those interviewed for our project comprised the former, which suggests their level of commitment to the extremist cause was lower than those who reject inter-action with the authorities. Many of our participants may have decided on their own to disengage from the movement following a cost-benefit analysis behind bars or through dis-illusionment over their network's tactics or leadership. Others may have been strategically cooperating with outsiders in order to reap the benefits while they consider a role change or a retirement from activity, given they had already sacrificed their freedom. As only one interview was possible with each individual, and we were skeptical of receiving truthful answers about illegal activity, we decided to avoid asking about their ongoing commitment to any ideology, organization, or movement. We were most interested in understanding social acceptance and stigmatization.

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58   V. Arianty and Muh Taufiqurrohman, "Extremist charities spread in Indonesia," *East Asia Forum*, March 17, 2020, https://www.eastasi-aforum.org/2020/03/17/extremist-charities-spread-in-indonesia/.

59   Cameron Sumpter, Yuslikha K. Wardhani, and Sapto Priyanto, "Testing Transitions: Extremist Prisoners Re-Entering Indonesian Society," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019).

An early BNPT blueprint for deradicalization and reintegration following prison stated that meetings would be held with relevant community stakeholders to prepare for the return of former extremist inmates to the given neighborhood, but such occasions are rare in practice.[60] Coordination generally depends on existing relationships among government officials, police, and local authorities. Sometimes community leaders known as Rukun Warga (RW) or Rukun Tetangga (RT) are involved in managing a prisoner's return, while in other cases they may not even be aware of the individual's presence or the type of crime they had committed.

Acceptance: A two-way street

Half of our project's participants were living in communities in and around the nation's capital and largest city, Jakarta. The other half were in a small city in Central Java called Surakarta (or Solo), which has a history of militant Islamism in certain neighborhoods. Generally, the prisoners returning to the greater Jakarta area reported feeling ostracized by their communities, while the Solo natives largely felt accepted. The sample size of 28 was probably too small to make any concrete claims about this distinction, but accounts of individual experiences illustrated the extent to which reintegration following a prison sentence is a fundamentally social process, ideally requiring acceptance and engagement from both sides. Most of the participants may well have already disengaged from the movement in terms of intent to commit violence, but their responses showed they often saw themselves as outcasts from broader society.

One man who was released in 2015 after serving five-and-a-half years for firearm trafficking said when he went home: "it's not like someone just returning to their village from Jakarta—I mean, they don't welcome us gladly. They may be polite in person but in their heads is a question mark... They keep their distance if we approach them or try to talk to them. It's difficult to start interacting again."[61] Another younger militant who walked free in 2017 after almost five years inside was frustrated that he couldn't find a job: "It's impossible," he said.

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60   See: Deputi Bidan Pencegahan, Perlindungan dan Deradikalisasi, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (2013), *Blueprint Deradikalisasi*, 84.

61   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

"Not even my friends trust me, let alone a new employer."[62] Others felt repudiated from both the general public and their former network. An ex-prisoner who served five years of an eight-year sentence said: "I received stigma from friends in my old community—the ISIS people. They accused me of being an infidel, godless, hypocrite and so on. Then I also got it from society, because they consider us criminals... I ended up moving to a new house because of negative rumors in the community."[63]

Those who returned to an area without being noticed tried to conceal their history: "We still hide the fact I was in prison from the neighbors," said a former who served just over four years of a seven-year sentence. "Because they're new people and I'm worried they won't accept us," he explained.[64] "None of the neighbors knows about my background," revealed another. "If they knew, they would be rude to us—that's why I try to hide it."[65] An ex-Jemaah Islamiyah member released in 2014 moved back to a community full of family members who supported him, but he struggled to fit in with wider society: "Negative stigma is the main obstacle... The terrorism stigma is there, right, so when I apply for jobs—well, many people are still afraid of us."[66] Another said he found it hard to develop new relationships outside his old network: "I feel excluded actually, but that's just how it is."[67]

Some of the participants claimed to have made attempts to prove themselves and gain the trust of their communities. One man who served ten years for accommodating a wanted terrorism suspect said he consciously tries to overcome ostracism. "If I see that anyone is keeping their distance from me, I would treat them—invite them for a meal... the important thing is that we open ourselves up for communication."[68] Taking initiative following release, another former said he visited the neighborhood head as soon as he returned. "I also got actively involved in neighborhood watch patrols," he claimed. "Interacting with others depends on ourselves, right," added a man released in 2016 after three years behind bars. "If we open up, then, Inshallah, we can change. But if we stay exclusive, well, we'll always

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62   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
63   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
64   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
65   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
66   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
67   Interview with former prisoner, Jakarta (March 2018)
68   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

be kicked down by the government."[69] Another former militant acknowledged that earning acceptance takes time, recalling that people at his local market were initially afraid of him. "After seeing our behavior for one year, they start to think: Oh, they're normal people."[70]

Sentiment, behavior, and reception

The interviews also revealed attitudes towards and experiences with reintegration assistance and the tribulations of trying to start a small business to make ends meet and focus on something constructive. From the answers outlined above, it is fairly clear that social acceptance was important to many of the participants, which is encouraging, but also raises further questions. Above all, it is difficult to know whether (or the extent to which) they were telling the truth. While the conversations were relaxed and they appeared authentic, the desire to be considered positively by others could be a practical concern to facilitate day-to-day activities and function in the local economy. Seeking acceptance does not necessarily mean one intends to reciprocate that faith. Perhaps this is too cynical, as some of the participants seemed to have genuinely pursued new relationships, but attitude change is more effectively observed through behavior than sentiment.

This is where lab-in-field experiments would be useful. A majority of the former prisoners we interviewed appeared to have disengaged from violent extremism, and most may have been on personal journeys of deradicalization as they adapt to post-prison life. Playing experimental games with such participants would therefore expect to demonstrate quite diverse prosocial behavior. They could reveal accurate interpretations of how former members of an extremist network now view people who they once considered the 'others' of an outgroup. Similar to the study with prisoners in California, longitudinal lab-in-field games could be employed before and after a deradicalization program or course of reintegration assistance, together with a control group to evaluate effectiveness. Experiments could also be conducted among community residents to measure attitudes toward prospective returning prisoners. Results could then be factored into locally tailored reintegration programs.

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69   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)
70   Interview with former prisoner, Surakarta (April 2018)

It would be most revealing to conduct lab-in-field games with uncooperative violent extremist prisoners as they finish their sentence and face freedom. Inmates who refuse to sign declarations of loyalty to the state, which are required to apply for remission and receive parole in Indonesia, would be an ideal target population, and could be held up against those who met the requirements. Outgoing prisoners choosing to remain ideologically aligned to their movement are difficult for BNPT officers to engage when they return home, as programs and assistance are voluntary. Militant jihadist organizations in Indonesia tend to brand any engagement with the government, or civil society organizations, as an unacceptable betrayal of the ingroup and pressure members to reject any associated assistance. Convincing hard-liners to play behavioral science games may be difficult, but given the financial incentive involved, a carefully framed experiment conducted by the right people might grant participation even among the more extreme. Findings would identify individuals capable of outgroup sympathy and therefore those more likely to undergo a process of change under certain conditions.

Conclusion

Radicalization to violent extremism is most often a social process with deeply antisocial outcomes. As people replace their individual identity with that of a group's, they demonize anyone outside the ingroup through discrimination and support for organized violence. After spending several years in prison for the pursuit of communal goals, an individual's commitment to the cause may have waned, at least to the point where everyday interaction with outgroup members becomes possible, and even cordial. Alternatively, the prison experience may have reinforced their dedication to the extremist ingroup, and any post-prison outgroup social engagements are either avoided or endured for purely practical reasons. Determining an outgoing prisoner's mindset along these lines is clearly helpful in theory, but not easily gleaned in practice.

Risk assessment instruments for violent extremist offenders are important tools for targeting rehabilitation programs effectively and making decisions regarding parole, ongoing threats, and required surveillance. The most prominent and effective examples are based on a method known as structured professional judgement, which involves a combination of

detailed metrics and personal interpretation (science and art). Relevant agencies in Indonesia have been trialing different risk assessment suggestions for years, but procedures are time consuming and require a level of expertise that is not always readily available. Lab-in-field experiments are not a substitute for risk assessment, but these incentivized games can provide telling evidence of an individual's likely social behavior in the real world, and the prospect of productive reintegration outcomes.

Key takeaways for researchers

Based on the insights from this chapter, researchers pursuing similar studies should take into account the following:

- **Lab-in-field experiments such as the dictator game can be used to determine** levels of prosocial behavior.

- **Measuring empathetic behavior can provide evidence of potential reintegra-** tion outcomes and possibly indicate signs of disengagement from violent extremism.

- **Participant and control groups should be clearly defined, including, for exam-** ple, cooperative former prisoners convicted of terrorism, uncooperative former prisoners, members of receiving communities, and the general public.

- **Gameplay incentives need to be sufficiently valuable to ensure that decisions** are taken seriously.

- **The identity and behaviour of the person facilitating each game is important,** as perceptions towards them and the general dynamics of their presence can impact in-game decisions.

- **Games should also take place in neutral locations with limited spectators who** could influence the choices made.

- **Various versions of lab-in-field games measure different prosocial preferences** so experiments must be designed with specific groups in mind, taking into account variables such as culture and socio-economic factors.

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