Hedayah
Countering Extremism
& Violent Extremism

BRIDGING RESEARCH & PRACTICE IN COUNTERING EXTREMISM & VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Editors
Emma Allen & Denis Suljić

ABOUT HEDAYAH

Hedayah was created in response to a growing desire from the international community and members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) - which now represents 31 countries and the European Union - to establish an independent, multilateral 'think and do' tank devoted to countering extremism and violent extremism. Since its inception, Hedayah has evolved into a passionate, driven, and international organization that brings together a vast network of unparalleled experts and practitioners to counter and prevent extremism and violent extremism. Twelve members of the GCTF are representatives of our diverse Steering Board, which provides strategic oversight. As the International Center of Excellence for Countering Extremism and Violent Extremism, we are committed to innovation, neutrality, integrity, diversity, and technical excellence by delivering groundbreaking research, innovative methodologies, and programs. Our approach is to deliver real and sustainable impact to governments, civil society and people impacted by extremism and violent extremism through local ownership and collaboration.

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INTRODUCTION

By Emma Allen

Each year, the goal of Hedayah's Research Conference is to gather together leading experts to share new research, methodologies, best practices, and findings for the benefit of the broader community of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in fields related to countering extremism and violent extremism. As a complex and multi-disciplinary field, information and knowledge sharing, and building connections between the diverse actors in this field, is vital to ensuring that prevention efforts are evidence-based and contextualized to maximize the potential for impact.

In 2023, the Research Conference was hosted in the Hague, the Netherlands, and saw presentations from researchers and practitioners on topics ranging from generative artificial intelligence through to understanding resilience and protective factors. This Volume collects selected essays from speakers who presented at the 2023 Research Conference across the eight thematic panels and two breakout sessions.

A number of the essays included in this Volume deal with online extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism, and consider both the current shape of this challenge across the ideological spectrum – looking at radical right attitudes to generative artificial intelligence tools in 'Far-Right Extremist Exploitation of AI and Alt-Tech: The Need for P/CVE Responses to an Emerging Technological Trend' as well as examining the narratives used in online platforms by pro-Daesh actors to raise funds to support terrorist activity in 'Show Me the Money: Pro-Daesh Online Fundraising Narratives'. Further, for those seeking to create evidence-based responses, 'Utilizing Short-Form Video to Counter Extremism' provides tools and guidance for responsible content creation in formats now common to modern social media by counter-extremism messengers.

This Volume also explores critical intersections of theory and practice for adjacent (and often overlapping) fields of international development and peacebuilding. In 'P/CVE Programming in Development CSOs/NGOs: Insights from a Systematic Review', the authors describe their important efforts to understand how these related fields can more effectively engage and the theoretical underpinnings that support this – this is expanded on in 'Conflict Sensitivity and Do No Harm: The Nexus Between Development CSOs/NGOs and P/CVE', which suggests frameworks for development actors and counter-extremism actors to engage in effective partnerships for P/CVE.

Similarly, in 'Localization in Peacebuilding and P/CVE: Challenges & Opportunities', which builds on consultation conducted at the Research Conference alongside a broader program of work, the authors outline ongoing efforts to respond to current trends towards 'localization' in both peacebuilding and in PCVE, and consider lessons learned from local practice and programming with a view to creating a broader analytical framework to guide practitioners in building sustainable local peace through peacebuilding and/or P/CVE programming. Finally, in 'Towards a Victim-Centered Approach to the Reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters', the author examines underlying assumptions in rehabilitation and reintegration and calls for centering victims.

Each of these essays offers valuable insights into new and emerging theory and practice across the wide range of issue areas that preventing and countering extremism and violent extremism can encompass – and critically, they offer recommendations for policymakers, researchers and practitioners to guide future policy and programming, and bridging research and practice.

UTILIZING SHORT-FORM VIDEO TO COUNTER EXTREMISM

By Joe Whittaker (Swansea University & Vox Pol Institute)
& Farangiz Atamuradova (Hedayah)

Introduction

A 2023 study showed that social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are the most popular online platforms among the teen population in the United States of America (Anderson et al., 2023). Such platforms are often known for content such as harmless dances and lifestyle videos, but also as a source of information and experiences shared in an easy and digestible way. It is well-known that while social media platforms and the online space have been convenient ways of communicating across the globe, malicious actors have also been targeting and leveraging these platforms for their own purposes. To address the latter issue, government policymakers and practitioners have been working to tackle online presence of malicious actors and messaging through strict online regulations and innovative approaches to content moderation.

However, in addition to such efforts, some of the best-situated actors to bring change in these platforms are content creators. Hence, it is crucial to ensure that these actors are equipped with necessary skills and knowledge to have a positive impact on their peers and audience, and in return contribute to the larger goal of decreasing the amount of hateful and malicious content online. To respond to this need, the authors of this essay developed a guidance framework for content creators, outlining key lessons that may help effectively create and share positive messaging or counter-narratives through short-form videos (Copeland et al. 2024). The guidance framework is one of the deliverables of a research project implemented by colleagues from Swansea University, Hedayah, and the Royal United Services Institute.

The research project was an outcome of a Terrorism and Social Media Conference' Sandpit event in 2022, where participants of the event formed groups based on their research interests. Each group was then given an opportunity to develop a short research proposal and pitch it to the selection committee, who provided feedback, allowing the groups to then develop and submit a more thorough proposal. The winning proposals received £5,000 for implementation. As the conference was focused on social media, representatives of some prominent social media platforms were present at the event, allowing for the group to directly discuss the current needs of the platforms. As such, the group developing the given project proposal identified the need to develop a short guidance document for creators, as well as a longer piece outlining existing literature and good practices on the topic of content development.

Methodology

The project team reviewed and collated existing secondary literature which was then used to produce an easily digestible framework for creators. Drawing from research on and practices of countering extremism and strategic communications – with a particular focus on how to leverage audio-visual content – the aim was to provide tech companies with the given framework or guidance, who would in turn share with their trusted creators.

The objectives of the project were to: create a framework based on current academic research and known good practices to help facilitate individuals to create positive and organic messages through short-form video content; increase resilience to extremism and hate on platforms that have introduced short-form video; transfer and translate academic knowledge, findings and theory into digestible and actionable guidelines for non-expert stakeholders (tech companies and content creators); and establish a three-way dialogue between academic researchers, a tech company and trusted content creators to provide a channel for feedback and refinement.

This essay provides an overview of the focus of the project, which includes an introduction into what short-form videos are, followed by a section on how malicious actors, including extremists, exploit short-form video platforms, before turning to approaches countering and prevent extremism on such platforms. The essay then presents aspects of the project and the key emerging elements found in the researched literature and concludes with several recommendations for future research and programming.

What is "short-form video"?

The last decade has seen a meteoric rise in the medium of short-form videos on social media. Unlike their longer-form cousins, such as YouTube which has a maximum video length of 12 hours or 258 GB for verified users (YouTube, nd), these types of videos are deliberately designed to be "short and sweet." Although short videos had existed online on several platforms before, it was the emergence and prodigious rise of TikTok, a platform dedicated solely to the format, in 2016 that made short-form videos a mainstay of social media. In just four years, TikTok had reached over two billion total downloads (Carmen, 2020) and by 2021 had one billion monthly users (TikTok, 2021). Users on the platform could originally create videos of up to 15 seconds, which was then increased to one minute, then three minutes, and then more recently 10 minutes (Smith, 2024). Despite the relatively long maximum video length, most videos still retain the spirit of "short and sweet", with an average video length of between 30 and 40 seconds (Ceci, 2023).

Perhaps the biggest indicator of the success of TikTok was the imitation by the biggest social media platforms on the Internet. In 2020, Instagram introduced "Reels" which allowed users to create 15 second multi clip videos and share them on their feeds (Instagram, 2020). This was later increased to one or multiple clips of up to 90 seconds (Instagram, nd-a). Facebook (which shares Meta as parent company with Instagram) also allows users to create "Reels" of up to 60 seconds (Facebook, nd-a). In practice, they often contain cross-posted content from TikTok or Instagram. YouTube answered by creating "Shorts" in 2020 which allowed users to produce videos of up to 60 seconds. In the first eighteen months of its existence, it generated over 5 trillion views (Wojcicki, 2022).

Extremist exploitation of short-form video platforms

Extremists have often been early innovators of new technologies, particularly social media platforms which offer the opportunity to spread their message and to attempt to recruit others to their cause (Bloom et al., 2017; UN CTED, 2015). This was apparent in the early days of the Internet, in which forums and chatrooms were exploited in this way (Sageman, 2008), as well as in the Web 2.0 era, in which groups like Daesh were able to build and maintain huge networks on some of the largest platforms on the Internet (Berger & Morgan, 2015; Carter et al., 2014; Klausen, 2015). Even in this current era of regulatory control, in which platforms are taking a more proactive and AI-based approach to content moderation, extremists are adapting to the hostile environment in which they face by innovating with new platforms such as Matrix, TamTam, and RocketChat (Fisher & Prucha, 2022; Weimann et al., 2023).

Extremists have sought to spread their message on short-form video platforms, although presently, all of the research on this phenomenon focuses on TikTok. Research conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue sampled over 1000 seed videos on the platform and found that some of the content on TikTok promoted white supremacist messages and glorified acts of terrorism (O'Connor, 2021). There were even a small number of incidents of crisis footage – such as the 2019 Christchurch terror attack – and weapons manufacturing advice being found on the platform. Ozduzen et al. (2023) investigated far-right content on UK-based TikTok videos, finding that narratives around injustice, grievance, and alienation are prevalent in the videos hosted on the platform. These narratives may, they argue, play a role in bolstering 'a shared discursive world of colonialism, nativism, and white supremacy amongst users, and especially children, adolescents, and young adults.' (Ozduzen et al., 2023, p. 846). They share a concern that this may act as a space in which individuals can radicalize online.

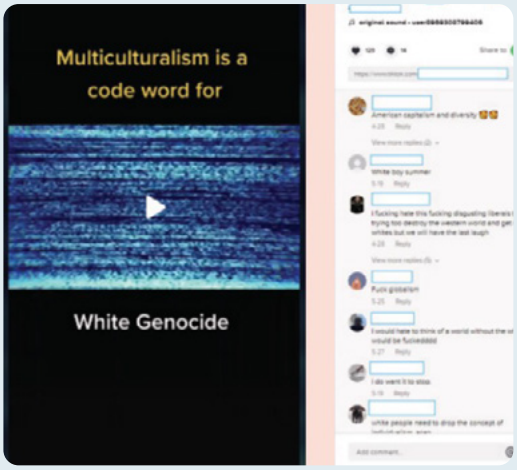


Figure 1: O'Connor's (2021) example of white supremacist content on TikTok

Research has often highlighted social media algorithms as the culprit for recommending and amplifying extremist content to users. The concern, which is often described as a "filter bubble" or "rabbit hole", is that an individual begins to interact with extreme content and TikTok's algorithm will use this as a data point and begin to recommend more and more of it until it dominates the user's feed (GIFCT, 2021). There have been several studies which have pointed towards an extremist filter bubble effect on social media platforms, although more recent studies have tended to paint a more ambiguous picture (Whittaker, 2022).

This concern has been raised repeatedly with regards to TikTok. For instance, Weimann & Masri (2021) argue that the platform's recommendation system pushes young people to unintentionally view antisemitic content and after they do so, will begin to show them more. This is particularly problematic, they argue, because extremists have found a home on the platform and the site's terms of service are not well policed. Shin & Shin (2023) test this empirically by tracking 50 users' behaviors on the platform. They find that the platform's recommendations may play an important role in navigating users to more extreme content and this may, in turn, foster polarization amongst users. Similarly, Grandinetti & Bruinsma (2022) conducted an ethnographic examination of conspiracy videos on TikTok, finding quickly that such content became an indelible aspect of the researchers' feeds and that the platform "quickly became a political outrage machine" (p.282).

Another important and concerning aspect of the exploitation of short-form video platforms by extremists is that they have a younger base of users. Weimann & Masri (2023) note that 41% of TikTok's user base is between 16-24, who they note are 'who are more naïve and gullible when it comes to malicious content' (p.11). Whether this is true not or not remains to be seen, but it is clear that the age is within the 'sweet spot' of radicalization – most database studies of terrorists have an average age in the mid-20s (for example, see: Bakker, 2006; Gill et al., 2017; Whittaker, 2021), suggesting that the 16-24 age band is one in which many begin radicalization journeys. While it is difficult to find demographic statistics about short-form features on other platforms, it is clear that they skew towards a younger audience too. For example, Broz (2023) finds that YouTube users under the age of 35 are more likely to engage with "Shorts" than their older counterparts, while the majority of Instagram's "Reel" audience are in the 25 to 34 age bracket, closely followed by the 18-24s (Shewale, 2024).

Countering Extremism on Short-Form Video Platforms

Moderation Tactics

As is usually the case on social media, content removal is the primary method of countering extremism online. This is often done using AI because the sheer volume of content is beyond platforms' capacities to manually assess and remove (Macdonald et al., 2024). TikTok is no exception to this, with the UK's media regulator Ofcom noting that the platform relies on 'proactive detection of harmful video content, rather than relying on reactive user reporting' (OFCOM, 2022, p. 29). They find that user reporting makes up less than 5% of total removal. This approach is mirrored by the other platforms that host short-form video capabilities, such as Facebook (nd-b), Instagram (nd-b), and YouTube (O'Connor & Moxley, 2023), who all rely heavily on AI as part of the content moderation strategies.

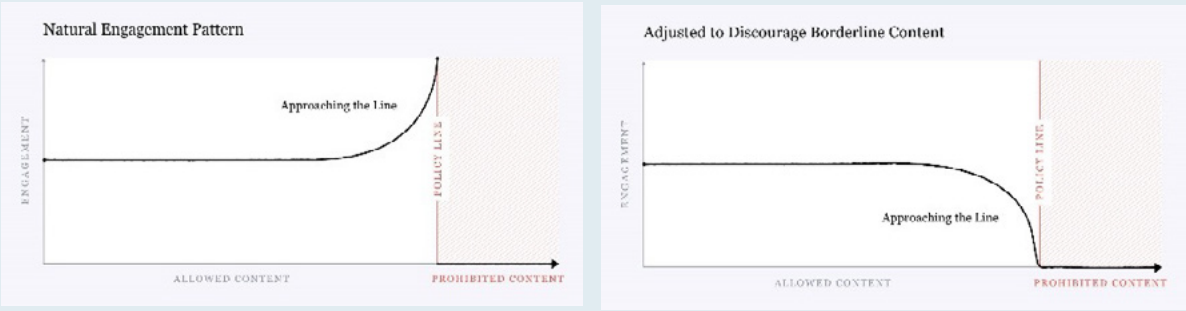


Figure 2: Zuckerberg's (2018) adjustment to algorithmically downrank "borderline" content to make it less visible

Such approaches are inherently limited – there will be false positives (videos that are removed that should not have been – raising issues with freedom of expression) and false negatives (those that are not removed that should have been) (Macdonald et al., 2024). Moreover, there is a broader concern that the algorithms that are written to perform content identification and removal will carry the biases of those that write their code, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities within society (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).

Platforms will also employ methods of making so-called "borderline" content difficult for users to access. This is often called "downranking" but can include: removing content from recommendations; deprioritizing it on users' feeds; or restricting the ability to share it. This is designed for content that is not clearly violative or illegal but rather skirts close to that point. In the context of extremism, it has often been called the "mood music" of radicalization (Macdonald et al., 2022). Just as with content removal, each of the main platforms that offer short-form video downrank borderline material in an effort to counter extremism, including TikTok (2023), Facebook and Instagram (Zuckerberg, 2018), and YouTube (2019).

Making content more difficult to access, but not removing it entirely, is often presented as a direct response to recommendation systems amplifying problematic content, as well as balancing free speech considerations (Whittaker, 2022). However, Macdonald & Vaughan (2023) argue that there are three ways in which the practice can be improved to be in keeping with human rights norms: greater definitional clarity of what constitutes "borderline content"; the necessity and proportionality of downranking; and increased transparency.

Strategic Communications

Given that both content removal and downranking are inherently limited, this leaves an important space for CVE strategic communications, as Reed and colleagues argue:

> The most success disruption approaches can have is to prevent extremist content from being available online. However, this simply creates an information vacuum, and vacuums will always be filled. Whilst disruption is one side of the coin, the other necessary side is an effective communication strategy to control what fills the vacuum.'
>
> -(Reed et al., 2017, p. 30)

In other words, removing and downranking content is an incomplete strategy. As well as not finding all the appropriate content (i.e. true negatives), there is no possibility of making a persuasive case to audiences that could be prevented from radicalization.

There are some examples of content creators who utilize short-form videos to try to spread persuasive messages. Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann (2022) interview four self-professed "JewToks" who make videos to respond to antisemitic hate with two strategies: Firstly, to create a different image of Jewish people and Judaism on the platform by educating their audience about Jewish history, culture, and religious customs. This is what those in the CVE sphere would call an "Alternative Narrative" (Elsayed et al., 2017; Zeiger, 2016) and a "Positive Narrative" (Ingram, 2016). Their second strategy is to mock antisemitic ideas directly, for example, playfully addressing the idea that Jewish people are rich and have devil horns, aiming to expose the narrative as irrational and inconsistent. This would typically fall under the category of "Counter-Narrative" (Briggs & Feve, 2013).

Similarly, Lee & Lee (2023) analyze 130 videos from the hashtag #StopAsianHate on TikTok to understand the ways in which female content creators are sharing their stories and forming solidarity when challenging anti-Asian racism. The videos covered topics such as: physical violence (including the Atlanta shooting in 2021 and violence related to COVID-19; fetishization; and Asian identity.

They found that the hashtag formed a discursive space and ad hoc community in which creators could make sense of anti-Asian racism. The focus of the study was more on the messages and creators themselves rather than the possible effects on a wider audience, Lee and Lee note that the messages disrupted 'dominant race narratives and mak[e] visible [the creator's] underrepresented perspectives, narratives, and lived experiences' (Lee & Lee, 2023, p. 9) which acted as a form of resistance against racism.

Tech companies also understand the importance of users creating prosocial messages and all have schemes in place to help to guide content creators to do so on their platforms. TikTok has had several programs, including the "Creators Forward" initiative, which was undertaken with the United Nations Development Programme to develop engaging and positive narratives (UNDP, 2022), and the "TikTok for Good" program which offers those creating positive messages assistance with account management, advanced analytics, and algorithmic promotion (TikTok, nd). YouTube runs a "Creators for Change" scheme which explicitly seeks to counter hate and promote tolerance and, in 2018, provided creators with $5 million to help with production and marketing support (Plaugic, 2018).

Although we argue that this is a space which can benefit from strategic communications, we should be clear that we do not believe it to be a silver bullet. Rather, the history of mass communication demonstrates that persuasion is difficult and must be done carefully if it has any chance of success (Hamid, 2020). A message is not a "free hit" which either makes a positive difference or does nothing.

Rather, a poorly crafted message can make its audience dig further into their views (Kaplan et al., 2016), give extremists more publicity (Reed & Ingram, 2019), or create "suspect communities" who feel targeted as potential terrorists (Hemmingsen & Castro, 2017). The history of strategic communications in CVE has been fraught with such blunders (Katz 2014). As such, the underlying logic of our guide was to attempt to bring together a range of lessons that can be learned for those who are undertaking CVE strategic communications to help to avoid repeating our mistakes in future.

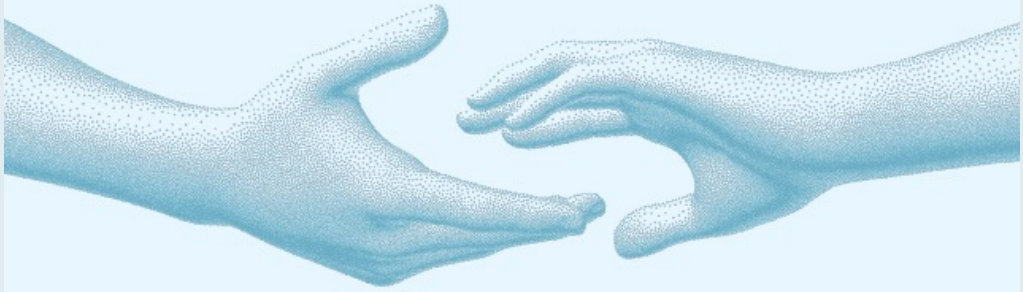
Guidance and Strategic Logic Document

As noted above, to tackle the issue of malicious actors using short-form video platforms, policymakers and tech companies have adopted content moderation regulations. However, this alone will not resolve the issue and requires an organic, bottom-up response. Short-form video platforms such as TikTok are already being utilized by content creators to develop positive messaging to counter hate speech and extremist ideas. It is likely that these creators are doing this without any specific guidance and are simply responding to the issue at hand. Organizations such as Hedayah (El Sayed et al. 2017) and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Tuck & Silverman, 2016) have developed a set of guidance documents aimed at providing key principles for developing an alternative or counter narrative specifically targeting extremism.

With the existence of such broader guidance documents, and the ever-changing landscape of content sharing platforms, there was a need to develop more specific guidance frameworks for content creators using short-form videos to develop and share positive messaging campaigns. As such, authors of this essay along with other colleagues developed a research project to produce such guidance document (Copeland et al. 2024), which was accompanied with a longer strategic logic document (Whittaker et al, 2024) to explain the thought-process behind the shorter document.

2. Define your goals.

Think about what you're trying to achieve. There are several end goals that will impact the type of message you make. Determine your objectives, whether it is countering extremist narratives, fostering dialogue, or providing alternative viewpoints. You might want to disrupt and discredit the narratives put forward by extremist groups. This could include showing how misinformation spreads on social media. Or you might want to help your audience be more resilient to being drawn towards extremist ideas, or foster conversations and understanding between different groups. Rather than attempting to "counter" extremists' framing of an issue, you may wish to provide an alternative viewpoint. For example, stories showcasing the vast positives of diverse communities can promote values of tolerance and coexistence rather than hatred and division. Whatever message you choose, ensure it is context-specific and relevant to your audience. There are resources available that explain how to test your messages and content to help understand how your audience might react to them.



3. Build trust.

You are just as important as your message, your credibility and trustworthiness are paramount. It is close to impossible to change someone's mind if you are not seen to be a reliable and authoritative source of information by your audience. To be effective, you need to come across as both credible and sympathetic. Your audience trusts you, something that allows you to candidly engage with them. If you do not think you will be seen as a credible source of information on this topic by your intended audience, it may be time to rethink your strategy.

Figure 3: Copeland et al. (2024) Guidance Document for short-form video creators.

Researching existing literature on the topic of alternative or counter narratives, it was evident that most of these documents broadly highlighted similar principles such as the importance of knowing the specific context, the target audience, setting goals and objectives for the campaign, framing the message, selection of the messenger, developing a dissemination strategy, and setting out an evaluation framework for the campaign to be able to assess its success.

However, short-form video campaigns require specific considerations due to their nature, which sets them apart from other forms of communication. Such considerations may be evident or subtle but are crucial for a well-developed short-form campaign. We conducted an analysis of the existing academic literature from a range of academic disciplines which are relevant for short-form video, which yielded five noteworthy factors: format, production value, humor and tone, sound, and maintaining safety. Finally, to ensure a campaign's success and impact, it is important to develop and conduct monitoring and evaluation. The strategic logic document outlines the need for evaluation frameworks and how to best conduct monitoring and evaluation specifically of short-form video content. The document also outlines existing challenges in the field which are yet to be addressed.

Following the lessons that were drawn from the strategic logic document, which was mainly used to present the existing evidence and research on the topic of short-form video messaging as well as other guidance documents on development of counter narrative campaigns, the authors also produced a simple, non-technical, shorter document specifically for content creators (Copeland et al. 2024). The guidance document seeks to provide content creators with a framework to consult if and when needed for the development of short-form videos aimed at promoting positive social change.

Being aware that these creators already have the knowledge and skills to develop content for their existing audience, the guidance document does not seek to dictate the "dos" and "don'ts" of content creation, but only to offer them key principles and lessons to take into consideration when developing positive messaging.

The authors sought to develop a guidance document that helped content creators in creating messages that promote positive social change, keeping in mind the existing issue of online extremism and/or hate. Hence, the document does not call for creators to directly engage with hateful or extremist messaging, but instead to produce positive alternatives.

The guidance document has 12 recommendations for short-form video content creators. One of the recommendations is to keep the message local, which calls to understand the needs of the community and keep the messaging tailored to responding or engaging with those needs. It is also recommended for content creators to build trust with their audience and remain authentic. The effectiveness of a message is partially dependent on the credibility the messenger has in the eyes of their audience. Being empathetic in messaging can go a long way in establishing trust and having an impact on the audience.

Messages also need to be captivating, and one of the most effective ways to deliver a message on social media is through storytelling. This allows for the audience to connect to the messenger and also resonate with their story and the message they are seeking to bring to their audience. The guidance document also covers several more recommendations on how to produce strong short-form video campaigns, including engagement with their audience, staying on trend, capturing impact, and maintaining safety.

Development and publishing these documents is the first step in attempting to reach the target audience. As mentioned, the shorter guidance document was specifically written to be easily digestible. However, using short-form videos as a tool for strategic communication tackling extremism and hate online requires further work. What is advised, and needed, is to develop further materials, which will help reach the target audience (content creators) through the same medium they use: short-form explainer videos.

Furthermore, what is also needed is to establish an open line of communication with these creators. Conducting workshops and establishing a dialogue with such creators will help bridge the gap between practitioners and researchers who work on understanding and addressing the threat of extremism and hate crime and the messengers who have the direct access to the wider audience. With their feedback on the guidance document, necessary adjustments can be made to produce a more comprehensive and tested framework that can be shared with other content creators around the globe.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the fast-paced emergence of innovative technologies it is important to leverage them, when and where needed, to address societal threats such as extremism. In the case of social media platforms, it is important to produce necessary tools and frameworks for content creators to learn from and use in developing and sharing positive content with their audience. If content creators are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to produce and share impactful positive messaging, then the likelihood that their audience will grow more resilient to malicious and extremist content will increase, because they will be exposed to positive content that will help increase their resilience and there is a higher chance that it may cause a ripple effect in creation of similar, positive content online.

Recommendations:

- Evaluate how impactful positive content is in creating resilient audience online and offline;
- Research how content creators can break away from the existing echo-chamber and ensure positive messages can reach audience beyond their normal following;
- Establish dialogue between content creators and researchers and practitioners to help create materials depending on needs of the former and the expertise of the latter;
- Conduct workshops testing out guidance frameworks on the target audience (content creators) to better understand their needs and allow for a dialogue between two parties, providing an opportunity to improve the existing frameworks accordingly;
- Develop educational materials for content creators to support the development and spread of positive messaging online;
- Support capacity building of content creators as well as communication platforms to raise awareness on the importance of developing positive messaging and the power it has to prevent extremist content online and offline;
- Develop supporting guidance for content creators on how to ensure their own physical and mental safety when/if targeted by hate crime or malicious actors;

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FAR-RIGHT EXTREMIST EXPLOITATION OF AI AND ALT-TECH: THE NEED FOR P/CVE RESPONSES TO AN EMERGING TECHNOLOGICAL TREND

By Dr. William Allchorn

Introduction

Far-right groups have increasingly been able to mobilize and weaponize technology for activism and their campaigns. Recent research reports have suggested that such groups have been able to exercise an 'opportunistic pragmatism' when using online platforms (Davey & Ebner, 2017), creating new bases of convergence and influence in such disparate places as Germany, Italy and Sweden (Davey & Ebner, 2017 & 2018; Havlicek et al 2018). While success in this space has been limited, such instances demonstrate a shift away from parochial concerns and a move towards more transnational ambitions in using technology to disseminate far-right messages and ideology to a wider audience (Caini and Kröll 2014; Froio & Ganesh 2018).

Indeed, this dialogic turn is symptomatic of the plethora of social media platforms that characterize the modern internet. No longer are far-right groups content with talking amongst themselves, as was the case with the early internet, on bulletin boards, chat forums, and closed online spaces. Increasingly, these actors have taken advantage of 'likes', 'retweets' and 'pins' in order to disseminate (usually sanitized) versions of their messages to a wider audience. What is problematic about this content is its often banal and coded nature, using notions of tradition, heritage, and the military (Brindle and MacMillan, 2017) in order to boost followership and widen exposure to nativist narratives and messaging (Copsey, 2017).

A more recent example of how far-right extremists have exploited online technologies for their own propaganda, recruitment and kinetic attacks is the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools. Recent reports have shown how such groups have exploited existing generative AIs to explore the possibilities of propaganda creation (Baele, 2022), image creation (Mattar, 2023), and the design of recruitment tools (Veilleux-Lepage et al, 2022) in service of nativist ends. This research essay reports the findings of an exploratory study into how UK far-right groups are talking about the uses of artificial intelligence and how P/CVE practitioners can scaffold timely interventions in this space to meet such efforts.

Context: The 'Dialogic' Turn in UK Far-Right's Online Activism

The far right in the UK has been at the forefront of using online technologies to propagate its message and mobilize followers for the best part of a decade. As early as 2007, it was noted that the neo-fascist British National Party's (BNP) website was one of the most visited party-political websites in the country (Hope, 2007). Able to 'gamify' its content through competitions to spot keywords and act as an alternative news platform, the BNP website attracted nearly seven times as much content as that of the UK Labour Party and nearly three times more than the Conservatives. This earlier period of far-right use of the internet in the UK was therefore limited to websites and online chat forums.

More recently, the UK's far right has moved from using the internet simply as a broadcasting tool for getting propaganda 'out there' to a conversational one – using Web 2.0 and social media to engage supporters and target sympathetic audiences. One group that was successful in developing this more outward-facing and professionalized use of social media platforms in the UK was the anti-Islam street protest movement and political party, Britain First. Founded by the BNP's former Head of Campaigns and Fundraising, Jim Dowson, Britain First posted seemingly benign material around tradition, the Royal Family, and the British Army in order to tempt non-aligned users into liking their social media posts.

As one 2017 research study of the group's social media presence found, the most shared content on the Britain First pages were not those pertaining to the group itself, but articles problematizing the refugee crisis and reporting on so-called 'Muslim grooming gangs' (Brindle and MacMillan, 2017).

More recently, there has been a further shift in the use of internet platforms by the far right in the UK as a way of sharing and communicating their activities to a wider audience. In particular, the live-broadcasting function of social media sites has enabled far-right activists to make a living from their activities as alt-journalists: door-stepping and harassing so-called 'enemies of the people' in order to drive followership, and therefore donations, to crowd-funding platforms such as Patreon, Kickstarter, and IndieGoGo.

An example of this in action is the former leader of the English Defence League, Tommy Robinson. Originally recruited by Canadian-based alt-journalism outfit Rebel Media in 2016, Robinson has fully incorporated live broadcasting into his guerrilla-style form of solo activism; whether that be reporting on far-right demonstrations and terror events, or staging vigilante attacks on mainstream journalists and researchers. This has been picked up and copied by James Goddard, formerly leader of Yellow Vest UK, an anti-Islam and pro-Brexit campaign, with devastating effect: harassing MPs and journalists outside of the UK Parliament in order to further their divisive politics and drive donations (Giordano, 2019).

How UK Far-Right Extremists Talk About Their Uses of AI

Methods

The recent public attention paid to generative AI and its potential exploitation for good and malevolent purposes has not escaped the UK far right. In particular, it is important to note how such extremist groups are talking about these technologies as a way to get ahead of the curve when designing P/CVE responses in this space.

Below are the findings of my own exploratory content and sentiment analysis of three non-violent UK far-right groups– Patriotic Alternative, Britain First and Identity England, plus one leader, Tommy Robinson - that were deemed a representative sample of the UK-based milieu. Great attention was devoted to not just how they intended to use, but how they discussed, artificial intelligence on their Telegram channels. Posts were harvested in October 2023 from four public channels using a key word search (AI, Artificial Intelligence, Chat GPT, LLMs, Chatbots, Deepfake), thematic analysis (core themes (xenophobia, racism, exclusionary nationalism) vs. peripheral themes (anti-modernity, anti-science, anti-government) and sentiment analysis (positive, negative or neutral appraisals) of posts collected.

In terms of limitations, it is noteworthy that the earliest mentions of AI within these channels can be traced back to 2021. However, these discussions represent a fraction (likely under 1-2%) of the overall content when compared to the wider range of topics these groups engage with. Like mainstream actors, most of these groups are in the preliminary stages of their engagement with AI, focusing on exploring and discussing its potential applications.

Key Findings

The analysis has unveiled four key findings:

The UK far right's exploitation of AI is preliminary, and the discussion is largely negative

In general, the appraisal of generative AI among the UK far right is negative and there is no serious or sustained engagement with the idea of harnessing AI to achieve their goals – besides a few podcasts, blogs and AI-image generation attempts (see below) – on public-facing channels and platforms. In this study, only one post viewed AI in a positive light, encouraging members of the organization to generate their own AI images as part of broader community-building activities. The rest (as described below) involve active derision and conspiratorial critiques of the technology.

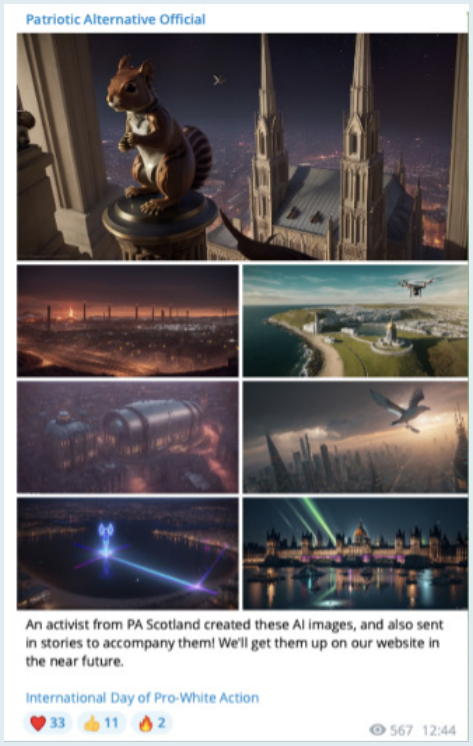

Figure 1: Patriotic Alternative AI Image Generation Competition

Their discussion of AI tends to focus on anti-government and anti-globalist critiques of the technology rather than core ideological concerns

Rather than focusing on their own use of AI, much of these groups' online discourse surrounding these technologies revolves around the intentions of mainstream actors in their adoption and deployment of AI. At a more substantive level, discussions within the surveyed Telegram channels often center on these technologies being perceived as tools for a "replacement" type agenda that would see the "elimination of humanity", institute "global control" and be part of an "anti-human agenda" (Fig. 2 & 3).

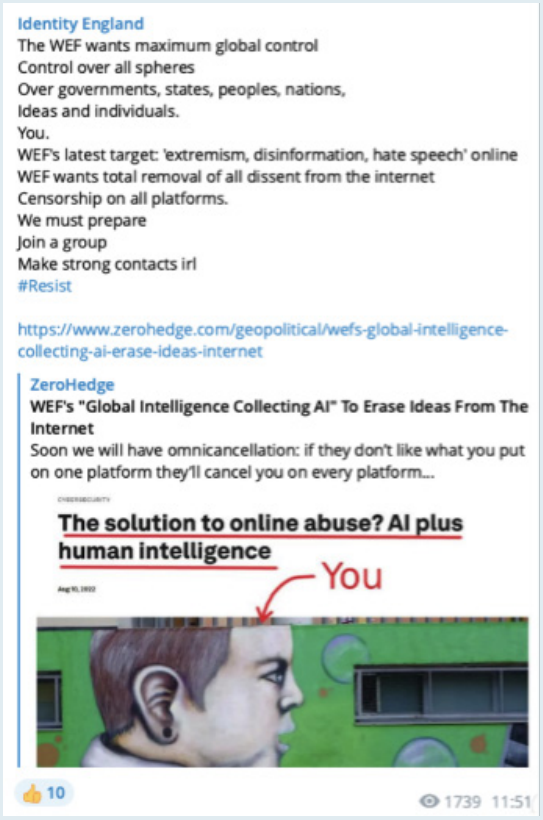

Figure 3: Identity England sharing conspiracy theories about the World Economic Forum (WEF)

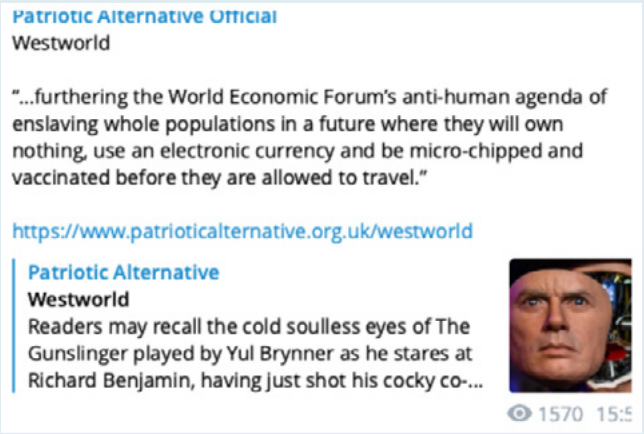

Figure 4: Patriotic Alternative's 'Westworld' Blog Post

At a more marginal level, concerns were expressed by the groups that connected more readily with the exclusionary nationalist core of their far-right ideology (Carter, 2018). Interestingly, for example, only two posts surveyed actively connected AI with the far-right's core anti-immigrant and antisemitic ideology. For example, these groups falsely allege that European post-pandemic recovery funds are being used to tackle illegal immigration over developing AI technology and also used AI to dispute answers about the scale of Jewish extermination at Auschwitz-Birkenau. This is perhaps unsurprising given the addition of more populist and conspiratorial narratives to their ideological appeals in recent years (Allchorn, 2021).

Discussions of AI tend to focus on allegations of broader 'liberal' bias

One final common trope among the online postings of the groups surveyed is allegations of bias about the current suite of generative AI tools. For these far-right groups, Google's Bard and Open AI's ChatGPT are inherently political – progressing what they see as a broader (and corrosive) 'liberal' agenda. As an alternative to using well-known, ostensibly 'woke' LLMs, these groups recommend the usage of alternative models that represent a more stridently libertarian or conservative value system. These include ChatGPT clones such as RightWing, Freedom & Truth GPT, and the open-source, decentralized HuggingFace platform in order to put forward their nationalistic agendas unimpeded (Knight, 2023).

In particular, the issues discussed here revolve around debates around sexuality and gender identity – layering in moral panics concerning the perversion and 'grooming' of young children. In one post (Fig. 4), for example, former EDL leader Tommy Robinson tells his followers to "get [their] kids off of Snapchat" due to what he claims is "non-binary AI". In another, he circulates a screenshot of a user trying to trick ChatGPT into problematic discussions on pregnancy and gender roles – implying that heteronormative conversations are in violation of ChatGPT's content moderation policy. This – like with anti-government and anti-globalist tropes – is used to stir moral panics among his followers and act as an opportunity for recruitment and radicalization.

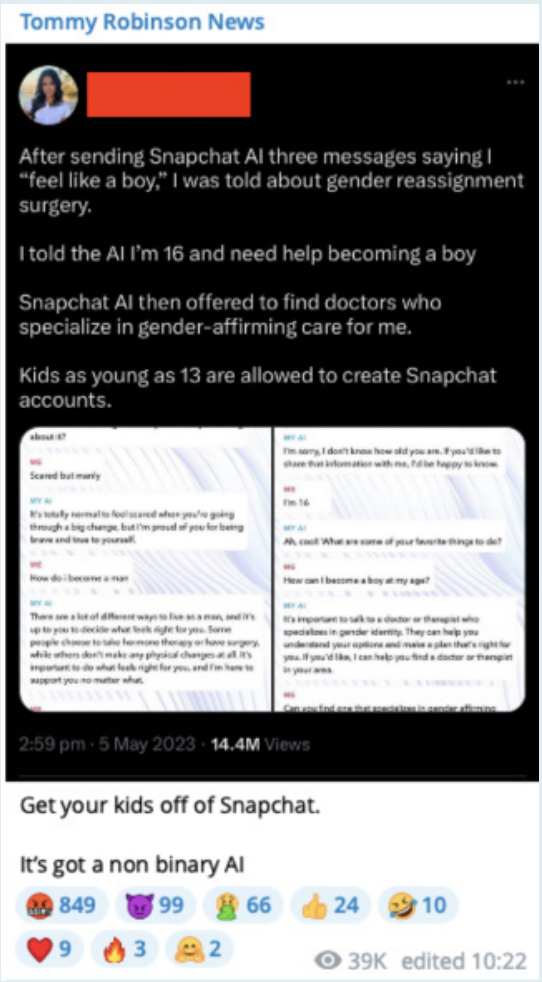

Figure 5: Tommy Robinson's 'non binary Snapchat' post

Conclusions/Recommendations

In contrast to the far right's adept use of social media, their use of AI in propaganda, recruitment and attacks is still in its infancy. Whilst there have been some experimental efforts, as outlined above, such efforts remain tentative at best and, particularly in the UK context, are mainly met with negativity and conspiratorial skepticism. However, it's important to recognize that violent groups may harness AI for offline activities, for example, to support endeavors like 3D-printing weapons (Basra, 2022), or drone technologies for kinetic attacks (Aguilera, 2023).

Looking forward, it is advisable for practitioners and policymakers to get ahead of and proactively address these trends. This could involve blue-teaming potential AI uses for P/CVE interventions, such as the creation of assets for counter-messaging campaigns. Other actions could include incorporating regulation and incentives for safe-by-design to prevent the harmful uses of AI products by terrorist or violent extremist actors and using responsible rhetoric to temper moral panics or fears concerning this new technology.

Technology companies developing such products should engage in red-teaming exercises to assess possible extremist exploitation and uses during the design process. Moreover, they should approach the release of open-source versions of AI technologies cautiously, involving end-users in discussions and avoiding hasty releases without thorough safety testing.

Our understanding of this issue is still in its nascent stages. There is a pressing need for studies providing a deeper understanding of the extent of the scale and potential for real-world threats posed by extremist exploitation of AI. These are essential to better inform law enforcement and security agencies about the potential application of AI in kinetic attacks. These efforts are pivotal in redirecting the trajectory of this emerging technological field towards safety, prevention, and the promotion of pro-social uses. By investing in these initiatives, we can mitigate the risk of further exploitation by malicious actors, ensuring that AI serves as a force for positive societal change.

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SHOW ME THE MONEY: PRO-DAESH ONLINE FUNDRAISING NARRATIVES

By Meili Criezis and Chelsea Daymon

Introduction

In 2019, the collapse of Daesh's last pocket of its so-called territorial Caliphate culminated in the liberation of a town called Baghouz located in south-eastern Syria causing a surge in the total population of people living in the refugee camps of Al Hol and Al Roj; a majority of whom are women and children.

Although numerous countries continue efforts to repatriate foreign nationals, the situation has become both an ongoing humanitarian crisis and a precarious security situation. Some security officials broadly label individuals in the camp as Daesh supporters but as highlighted in a 2023 RAND report, the situation is more complex and those supporting Daesh are in the minority (Sudkamp et al., 2023, p. 31). However, Daesh-affiliated individuals continue to intimidate others in the camps through violence, threats, and attempts to apply Daesh's interpretation of Shari'ah on those around them via self-formed Hisbah (enforcement) units (Cook & Vale, 2018).

In this context, online environments have enabled people to create fundraising initiatives from inside the camps, the virtual transfer of money to these fundraisers, and direct communication between the creators of these donation campaigns and potential donors. To address this subject matter, this study focuses on messaging disseminated by overtly pro-Daesh social media accounts and channels. Online fundraisers play a significant role in funneling money to Daesh-affiliated individuals, whether in the camps, elsewhere, or to Daesh itself.

To encourage donations, campaigns focus on narratives that elicit emotional cues such as fear, anger, victimhood, and loss. Emotional cues are shown to be persuasive elements in non-verbal, narrative messaging (Cesario & Higgins, 2008; Hurley, 2020). Messaging components surrounding camp fundraising campaigns provide richer insights drawn from qualitative analyses by examining not just what is said, but also how narratives are accompanied by images that support the overarching goal of a message.

The authors are cognizant that this type of research does come with its own set of limitations, especially those associated with online users. As other research focused on Daesh social media has stated, perhaps the most glaring drawback centers on the inability (for the most part) to verify a user's identity or confirm their true "motives for espousing specific perspectives" promoted in posts (Hummel, 2021, p. 8). Pro-Daesh networks themselves every so often circulate warnings to supporters about scammers pretending to be Daesh-affiliates and indeed it is possible that some fundraising content is actually the effort of scammers (Mironova, 2020).

Additionally, the motives of eliciting money can at times also be murky and multifaceted. In interviews with camp residents, Vera Mironova highlights dynamics and complexities that go beyond whether someone does or does not have a clear affiliation with Daesh both online and offline:

> "Those in the camps told me that the pro-Islamic State women still do not share money with women who are no longer supporters…the money tends to keep coming only if the women maintain their support for the Islamic State – so, many women actively show their support"
>
> - Mironova, 2020

This point is important to note when discussing pro-Daesh fundraising and analyzing the various narratives that these campaigns employ to raise donations. Although the language of the messaging may be strongly pro-Daesh, we must consider that in some cases, one's survival depends on displaying a façade which could be maintained by using pro-Daesh language to raise money for basic needs. However, regardless of true motivations behind the messaging, the content seeks to target and connect with audiences sympathetic to Daesh.

Ongoing research examining how money is transferred through various networks and the people involved continues to deepen our understanding of Daesh fundraising activities (Alexander, 2020; Hummel, 2021; Mironova, 2020; Sudkamp et al., 2023; Vale, 2019; Zelin, 2019), but the messaging and narratives used to promote these campaigns has not been as extensively studied. This essay focuses on these narratives, with the hope that the findings complement previous work and contribute to future research about Daesh fundraising and propagandizing strategies designed to strengthen these campaigns.

In short, in addition to mapping fundraising networks themselves, we must also examine the interconnected relationship between logistical fundraising elements of the campaigns and narrative messaging used to generate interest, emotional connection, and ultimately, donations from target audiences. Many of the posts employing these various narratives do not directly mention fundraising or explicitly ask target audiences to donate but instead use various forms of messaging to supplement the overall fundamental purpose of the channels: convincing audiences that they must donate to those in the camps. Through a range of narratives, the messages collectively aim to create a set of comprehensive and convincing justifications for donating.

Methodology

We identified pro-Daesh Telegram and TechHaven channels dedicated to sharing content about and from the camps. We chose Telegram and TechHaven as our platforms of analysis due to their similar features, including the more closed nature of these platforms (i.e. they are generally not as open as more public platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter/X), the presence of encryption capabilities, and the prevalence of pro-Daesh users in these virtual spaces. By selecting similar platforms, as opposed to including mainstream social media sites, we are able to provide a specific assessment for messaging shared in online environments that tend to be more closed in nature and specifically targeted toward Daesh supporters. Data collection lasted from August 15, 2023, until February 7, 2024.

Initially, we archived a total of 15 channels but narrowed the data set to channels that almost exclusively posted about the camps. The other 7 channels which we ultimately excluded posted about the camps, but often featured other types of content. On a final note, we included the full posting history available to review from the 8 channels up until February 7, 2024.

We set individual posts as the unit of analysis, which came to a total of 613 separate posts and came to a final list totaling nine overarching narrative codes .We removed any repeated posts from the data set to prevent redundant coding and an overrepresentation of narrative categories.

After reading through the consolidated content, we created an initial list of codes which we gradually narrowed down to a final list of nine codes encompassing re-occurring narratives. Due to the complex subject matter of this analysis and not wanting to promote or provide account names that are collecting Daesh-related funds, all content quoted in this article will be attributed to posts from a "fundraising channel."

Finally, the authors want to make a special note about the sensitive nature of analyzing pro-Daesh narratives. Many of these narratives are highly intertwined with Islamic scripture and certain religious interpretations. It is important to remember that the use of religious language and imagery by pro-Daesh users is not a representation of Islam but represents extremist interpretations of religion by an extremist organization and those espousing extremist ideologies.

Narratives that, for example, value charity work, discuss the importance of coming to the aid of those in need, or draw attention to the plight of people who face hardships and oppression are important and positively impactful. It is crucial to separate those normal circumstances from what is discussed in this report, which is narratives constructed to ultimately serve Daesh-affiliated fundraising efforts. The analysis and paraphrasing of messaging created by these channels, which are presented in the following section, should be read within this specific context.

Results

This section provides the percentages for the number of times the following narratives appeared in the data followed by a more in-depth discussion of each qualitative code.

Victimhood:	52.85%
Enemies:	32.79%
Promised rewards:	21.70%
Personal testimonies:	20.39%
Gender:	15.33%
Fear:	10.77%
Necessity of tests	9.30%
Guilt-tripping:	7.50%
References to Daesh:	4.24%

Victimhood

As the most commonly occurring code in this study, this category encompassed three prominent framings: 1. women (and sometimes children) endure hardships in the camps; 2. "sisters" and "brothers" of the wider Ummah (greater Muslim community) are victims of oppression at the hands of non-believers; 3. more general descriptions of larger dynamics between the oppressed and the oppressor. This victimhood narrative frequently relies on incorporating simultaneous messaging about enemies and how the actions of adversaries directly contributed to persecution. For example:

> "put aside your personal expenditures and desires this month….invest in your akhirah [hereafter] by donating to imprisoned sisters in Al Hol…many are now injured after attacks on them by the soldiers…"
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

The above quote highlights the suffering of women in the Al Hol camp at the hands of their enemies ("the soldiers"). It seeks to spur readers into action to secure rewards in the hereafter and fulfil the duty of coming to the aid of the oppressed.

Other messaging relies on visual media to convey the victimhood narrative:

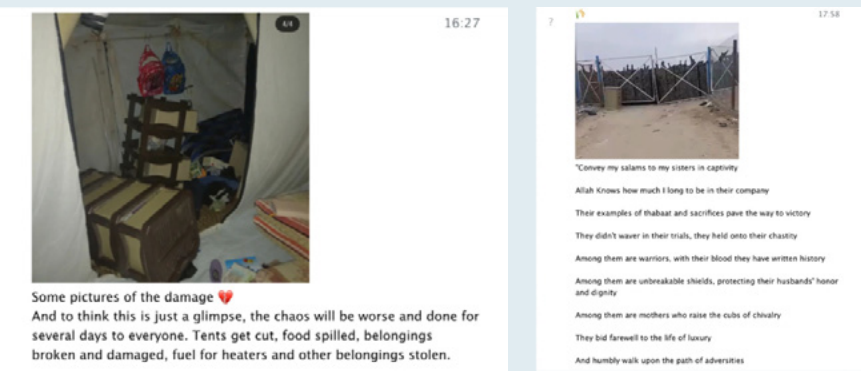

Figure 6: Images 1 & 2 - Posts from fundraising channels

By accompanying text with imagery, the narrator adds depth to the messaging through the act of providing photographic evidence. The second image is particularly interesting in that it centers the victimhood narrative in text and image while also emphasizing steadfastness exhibited by "sisters in captivity". In other words, although women in Al Hol endure hardships, the messaging portrays them as asserting a courageous agency despite their circumstances.

Victimhood also encompassed messaging describing the harsh circumstances of the environment itself whether referencing intense weather conditions, sparse supplies, or uncomfortable living situations in general. In other words, this messaging emphasized how women and children in the camps are victimized by both their enemies and harsh environmental factors. Annotations about the environment are used to further emphasize the importance of donating. Additionally, environmental narratives helped promote a humanitarian angle by stating that donations help secure supplies for daily living, accordingly making life somewhat better for individuals living in the camps under such harsh conditions.

Victimhood clearly constitutes an important narrative for fundraising initiatives while also adding layered complexity by creating a deeper multi-dimensional framing. It frames Daesh-affiliated women as victims in need of aid who are also courageous, steadfast, and "humble". This aligns with pervious Daesh propaganda that used victimhood as an emotional cue while at times reversing the role of Daesh-affiliated individuals from victims to heroes (Alexander, 2020; Hummel, 2021; Mironova, 2020; Sudkamp et al., 2023; Vale, 2019; Winter, 2022; Zelin, 2019).

In short, it implies that donating is the least one can do while Daesh-affiliated women endure abuses yet remain heroic despite their circumstances. On a final note, efforts to repatriate women are viewed as yet another indecency that the women must endure, per a statement from one fundraising channel, "Yesterday the coalition was in Al-Roj Camp. Some of the sisters were called to register for repatriation… May Allah protect them from their evils."

Ultimately, emphasizing victimhood seeks to draw sympathy from target audiences, reminding them of the hardship "sisters" face in the camps, who are in need of money to alleviate their situation. Content pairing victimhood messaging with descriptions of enemies (i.e. those "oppressing" the "sisters") adds the additional framework of adversarial dynamics designed to draw out anger from Daesh supporters which the creators of such posts hope will further convince audiences to donate.

Enemies

A large number of posts identify adversaries; namely soldiers from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who guard the camp, Kurdish guards, Shia, Jews, the American military, and more generally, "oppressors" and "kuffar" (disbelievers). These fundraising channels often provided details on what they frame as various harms the aforementioned "enemies" carry out against camp residents or the wider Ummah. In terms of more direct calls for donations, some messaging pairs detailed descriptions about camp raids by camp guards which impact women and children residing in the camps. These narratives, seeking to gain sympathy, are accompanied with requests for an increase in donations:

> "To donate for the sisters and their cubs contact: @[redacted]. Brothers and sisters we need to really increase our efforts in this time to collect sadaqa (charity) for them because as these r4ids [sic] take place, the khanazir (swine) steal/damage the few belongings of the sisters that they used to survive through their captivity…"
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

Promised Rewards

The inclusion of promised rewards serves two prominent functions: highlighting the reminder that people who endure suffering are promised great rewards if they remain on the 'straight path' and urging people to donate with guarantees that they will be rewarded. Framing the necessity of donating not just as an act of charity to help "the oppressed" but as a religious duty heightens the importance of sending money:

> "Blessed are those who fulfil their duties to the imprisoned widows and orphans and families of the prisoners, blessed are those who don't have to bear the burdens for neglecting the oppressed believers on the Day of Judgement, blessed are those who Allah Guides to the deeds He is Pleased with!"
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

> "We are now collecting monthly donations for the sisters in the camps. Those who want to participate helping the widows orphans and the needy for there [sic] everyday living expense please DM me. Don't miss this opportunity, and be a part of this great reward. @[redacted account username]."
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

Personal Testimonies

Incorporating alleged first-hand testimonies from people in the camps, and/or those who were allegedly present during the Battle of Baghouz, provides a certain authenticity to the content and allows readers to bear a more direct form of 'witness' to the hardships endured by those sharing their personal accounts. However, messaging does not just focus on the negative aspects. It also includes general accounts of day-to-day life in the camps and some posts describing experiences framed as being little miracles:

> "Diaries of the camp: We were amazed that the tomatoes grew in this hot dry land. SubhanAllah (Glory be to Allah) our tomato tree literally grew from nowhere [sic]. One of the kids threw some seed and Allah done the rest. It is now growing day by day and has 15 tomatoes now."
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

Content incorporating third person descriptions about the camps and messages appearing to be written by women themselves offers a more intimate retelling of events. Testimonies of day-to-day life in the camps provide relatable, human accounts that offer easily digestible narratives for a situation that, for many, is unimaginable. Furthermore, relatable narratives in the form of stories are shown to be persuasive elements for impacting people's emotions (Aaker, n.d.).

Some Telegram channels asked readers to send personal messages and letters to women in the camps; completing a circle of communication between the camp residents and readers. Once again, this is a way of eliciting emotions between funders and the funded. It appeals to people's desire to help, while also making interactions 'real' for those willing to send money.

To some extent, this also reflects fundraising campaigns of legitimate organizations, which might offer sponsors the ability to write to the child they are sponsoring, and have sponsors receive letters from the children they fund (Biswas & Deylami, 2019; Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2020; Cook & Vale, 2018; Write to Your Sponsored Child, n.d.). Consequently, some Daesh camp fundraising campaigns are using similar marketing strategies employed by genuine humanitarian organizations.

Gender

Some messaging references expected gender roles. Women are described as "mothers who raise the cubs of chivalry…warriors [who] protect their husbands' honor and dignity"; they are "pure and chaste one[s]" and are described as the "backbone of the Ummah." The words "women/mothers and children" were often mentioned together further reinforcing the role of motherhood and linking women's experiences in the camps as being tied to children's experiences.

Ideal men are described as patient individuals who "find pleasure in toil and find comfort in pain, quietly translating the needs of this stage into action…" and do not let fear or risk deter them from coming to the aid of oppressed women. Some messages also mention the role of fatherhood, and in some instances, gendered framings are also used to shame men for not behaving in a manner expected of them:

> "Where are the men? Those who stood up in in [sic] an army for a single woman? The ones who wouldn't let their wives out if it wasn't for a necessity? Those who were the pillar of the hearth, those who by their mere presence repelled the desires of perverts….where are the men who fought for Allah who fought for the glory of Islam…who did not turn back from the battlefield…O you who recognize yourself be ashamed…"
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

Many of these gender narratives are accompanied by ways to donate. These are usually in the form of links, emails, or private accounts to contact. Thus, while gender narratives are promoting perceived roles for women and men associated with Daesh, shaming men into action, and portraying women as the mothers of the next Daesh generation, these narratives are being used to acquire funds. Camp fundraisers understand the utility that gender narratives provide. On one hand, women are portrayed as victims, suffering in the hard conditions of the camps, while on the other, they are supporting the continuation of Daesh ideology and insurgency (Saleh, 2021).

Within the camps, Daesh-affiliated women have also created children's 'schools' in hopes of solidifying Daesh ideology in a new generation, and fundraising channels frequently featured children in posts along with drawings they have created, hoping to draw sympathy from potential donors. These activities (i.e. policing, enforcing, and teaching) reflect duties that Daesh allowed women to fulfil in the so-called territorial Caliphate. However, now that Daesh's territory has completely collapsed, we see the continuation of these activities in the camps where remnants of Daesh's state-building principles are still being applied (Biswas & Deylami, 2019; Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2020; Cook & Vale, 2018).

On an additional side note, messaging also highlights differences in physical locations of men and women which reflects how an individual's threat potential (being in the camps versus being in prison) may be assessed along gender lines, "We often think of the sisters in the camps and the men in the prisons" (Quotes from fundraising channels).

Fear

The incorporation of narratives discussing fear serves multiple purposes. Posts in this category include the following framings: fearing God if one does not uphold their religious duty to provide "help and support" (i.e. by sending donations); fearing being led astray in a more general sense and entering into a state of disbelief; not allowing fear of one's enemies to overwhelm one's commitment to God (and through implied messaging, commitment to Daesh); listing reasons why disbelievers should fear God's wrath in the hereafter; and finally, sharing testimonies where Daesh-affiliated women describe feelings of fear when faced with trials. Acknowledging types of fear is not something to be avoided but instead acts as a motivator, a deterrent, a way to gain sympathy, and a reminder that one's enemies will face divine retribution.

However, most importantly for fundraising purposes, these Daesh fundraising narratives using fear as a motivator remind readers that they are being tested and failing the test will lead to consequences:

> "Many atrocities and crimes have been taking place against our honorable sisters and the children in the camps ...Not only has the ummah been afflicted by these idle useless individuals (people who do not come to their aid) but also with those who, instead of fulfilling their obligation of supporting the oppressed muslimeen...fear Allah!"
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

Necessity of being tested

Narratives explaining the necessity of being tested were particularly important because they reminded target audiences that facing periods of hardship is not just a part of life but in fact act as a necessary test of one's faith and dedication. Emphasis on promised rewards frequently accompanied this code as a reminder that those who remain unwavering will be compensated greatly for their continued dedication. Going even further, some messages directly state that the more hardships one endures, the greater they will be rewarded, "Indeed the greatest of rewards are with the greatest of afflictions." (Post from a fundraising channel)

One form of propaganda associated with online camp donation campaigns are purported first-hand accounts from women and children living in the camps. In one such alleged testimony, a woman who claims to be present during the Battle of Baghouz, states,

> "So be patient and persevere and fear Allah, whatever he commands you to do and forbids you to do... I take Allah as my witness! Your victory will inevitably come, because relief comes only with patience."
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

In terms of direct relation to fundraising activities, this narrative ultimately provides justification as to why people should continue donating: those in the camps are not defeated parties who have become disfavored by God (and therefore are unworthy of aid) but instead, they are portrayed as righteous individuals who are promised the greatest of rewards for enduring hardships.

Guilt-tripping

"Guilt-tripping" refers to narratives that attempt to evoke feelings of guilt in target audiences by shaming them for not doing more to help the oppressed and/or remain sincere in their faith. Messaging under this category tends to take three overarching approaches: 1. direct harsh admonishment to those who have not done enough; 2. passive-aggressive wording designed to imply that one should feel shame if they do not take X,Y, or Z action; and 3. Quotations from the Qur'an, tafseer (religious explanations), and religious scholars that remind target audiences about their duty to support Daesh-affiliated women in the camps by sending donations and making dua (supplications) for their well-being.

The following quote exemplifies the first category:

> "Do you leave them in misery at the hands of those who mock and ridicule your religion day and night, who celebrate the grief and sorrow of the ummah and violate their honor? Do you leave them to the hypocrites that accuse their chastity and laugh at their difficulties? Do you not realize that these are your sisters, your mothers, your daughters, your pride and honor that are being harmed?! Shake off the disgrace and humiliation and help them with what you can."
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

The following quote exemplifies the second category:

> "Brothers and sisters we need to really increase our efforts in this time to collect sadaqa (the giving of alms)…please do not let them [women in the camps] down, sacrifice your expenditures this month and put aside your desires for the sake of Allah…"
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

The following quote exemplifies the third category:

> "If you have been blessed with the provision of wealth, know that everything has upon it an appointed time. It may be extended or cut short and the knowledge of such is only with Allah. One of the ways in which it may be cut short is by death hence the saying of Allah تعالى in surah Al-Munafiqun 63:10…Allah save us from humiliation on Yawm Al Qiyamah [judgement day]."
>
> - Post from a fundraising channel

As demonstrated, guilt-tripping narratives seek to make readers feel personally responsible for any continued suffering of those in the camps and perhaps even more seriously, it tells readers that they are not fulfilling their religious duties by using their wealth in a generous manner. By making people feel shame, guilt, and complicity in oppression, these messaging narratives employ negative rhetoric to push them to donate.

References to Daesh (direct and indirect)

Only a small minority of content references Daesh, reflecting a strategic approach that generally favors obscuring true motivations behind fundraising efforts. Some channels go further by posting a disclaimer that they are "not affiliated with any group". Instead, fundraising initiatives rely on more subtle in-group references to connect with like-minded individuals. Avoiding overtly pro-Daesh references accomplishes several objectives:

- Helps fundraising channels/pages/accounts avoid detection by content moderation and law enforcement which would disrupt the campaigns.
- Allows messaging to incorporate a broader framing that describes these efforts as being humanitarian in nature.
- Provides a level of plausible deniability that funds are actually being donated to individuals associated with terrorism.

However, the small number of examples where messaging took a more overt and bolder approach included wording that referenced the Battle of Baghouz, images or texts from official Daesh propaganda, and the mentioning of "martyrs" from previous battles. One channel referred to Daesh simply as "the State" in efforts to avoid detection – the preference for incorporating this wording (i.e., "the State") is also commonly used by other Daesh supporters on social media.

Conclusion

Prominent narratives found in fundraising initiatives created by and for Daesh-affiliated individuals in the camps revealed a layered, interconnected, and complex messaging strategy designed to elicit donations from target audiences. Through both positive (promised rewards, a sense of fulfilment in having come to the aid of the oppressed, etc.) and negative motivators (feelings of guilt for not having done enough, facing punishment in the hereafter, etc.), online fundraising channels seek to evoke an array of emotions in readers while also encouraging them to view themselves as being directly responsible for the well-being of women and children in the camps.

More specifically, juxtapositions presented in the posts provided an overarching black and white worldview: you are either a genuine Muslim who fulfils his or her duty to come to the aid of the oppressed or you are a misguided individual who will face harsh penalties in the hereafter; you are either on the side of people in the camps or you are on the side of the their enemies; you either realize that you must fear God more than any worldly consequences or you are a coward who allows fear to stop you from doing what is right (i.e. sending donations). Irrespective of the scenario, the correct solution, as per the messaging narratives, is to donate.

Regardless if fundraising is directly mentioned or not, the overarching focus of these channels center on propagandizing strategies designed to elicit donations. It is important to again re-emphasize that the narratives produced by these fundraising channels are created by individuals who employ extremist religious interpretations to serve their harmful objectives.

Those running these fundraisers have become increasingly aware of law enforcement efforts to better track donation flows and identify the individuals behind campaigns. In efforts to provide a layer of security for the fundraiser, channels have resorted to providing points of contact for anyone wishing to donate as opposed to outright posting Western Union, PayPal, Qiwi Wallet, GoFundMe, or crypto currency addresses (Mironova, 2020). They will also regularly change the donation addresses to make it more difficult to track.

In summary, the key take aways concerning the relationship between each previously discussed narrative and its relative fundraising objective include:

- **Victimhood:** draws sympathy from target audiences by showing the suffering of women and children in the camps to highlight the dire need for donations.
- **Enemies:** uses examples of women and children in the camps suffering at the hands of their enemies to garner anger toward enemies and sympathy for camp residents in hopes that this will lead people to donate.
- **Promised Rewards:** states that donating not only helps those in need but also secures great rewards promised by God; it is portrayed as both a selfless and self-serving act which guarantees mercy and rewards in the hereafter for those who donate.
- **Personal Testimonies:** establishes a more personal connection with target audiences by highlighting alleged first-hand accounts from women (and sometimes children) in the camps as well as those who allegedly witnessed the Battle of Baghouz. Intimacy is designed to resonate deeply with readers who, ideally for the fundraiser organizers, will develop emotional investment and in turn, donate.
- **Gender:** promotes perceived roles for women and men associated with Daesh and uses these narratives to support fundraising campaigns. Some messaging also employs gendered messaging to make men feel guilty for not fulfilling their duty to protect and help women and children.
- **Fear:** uses the threat of divine retribution to encourage people to donate before it is too late.
- **Guilt Tripping:** directly or indirectly states that those who have not donated but continue with their normal lives and wealth should feel culpable for the continued suffering of those in the camps.

- **Necessity of Being Tested:** reminds readers that people in the camps are not disfavored by God but are in fact the most righteous of the Ummah undergoing the hardest tests so that they may receive the greatest of rewards in the hereafter; coming to their aid by donating means coming to the aid of a worthy people.
- **References to Daesh:** directly or indirectly implies connections to Daesh and shows pro-Daesh sympathizers that they are donating to fellow 'sisters' in need.

Policy Recommendations

Due to the nature of this analysis along with the real-world consequences of it, based on the findings, six policy recommendations are provided:

1. Above all, until individuals are repatriated to their home countries and the camps are closed, fundraising campaigns will continue. To date, many countries have been opposed to taking their detained citizens back (Mehra et al., 2023). However, by not addressing this issue and leaving individuals in limbo, a series of other concerns and problems arise - in the case of this analysis, pro-Daesh fundraising campaigns based on camp narratives.

2. When considering pro-Daesh camp fundraising campaigns, online posts imply that funds allegedly go towards humanitarian purposes (e.g. providing fresh water, medical supplies, school supplies, etc.) to women and children in the camps. As previous reporting shows, the conditions in the camps are dire (Margolin & Jablonski, n.d.; Program on Extremism, George Washington University et al., 2023; Yacoubian, 2022). Humanitarian supplies are needed. However, there is no guarantee that funds donated to these online campaigns go to women and children in the camps, let alone the problematic fact that funding campaigns are being promoted in pro-Daesh spaces online. Thus, there is a high likelihood that donated funds are funding terrorism in some shape or form.

3. One way to track elicit funding is through engagement with accounts that are posting fundraising materials, links, additional accounts, and emails - in other words, to follow the money. Mock donations may help track funds, potentially providing valuable information to law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

4. Technology companies need to remain aware of how fundraising efforts may vary across platforms and the specific in-group signaling that certain language use and imagery implies. This analysis provides the main narratives found within the online spaces we examined associated with pro-Daesh camp fundraising campaigns. However, other online spaces may reveal other narratives as well. As a result, it is not an exhaustive list and further research can offer greater insights to help technology providers detect, disrupt, and mitigate pro-Daesh fundraising campaigns on their platforms. One such future research direction could include examining the activities of fundraising accounts on mainstream platforms such as Instagram or Facebook and identifying fundraising narratives shared there.

5. It is crucial to intervene in and stop any abuses of camp residents (whether by guards or by other camp residents) and document incidents where such mistreatment has taken place (Keaten & Mroue, 2024). First and foremost, human rights violations leave lasting harms, while also contributing to worsening overall conditions in a potentially volatile situation. Children, who were brought into these conditions, are particularly vulnerable and it is especially important to remove them from these environments. However, there are no easy solutions and the trauma of taking children away from their mother must be considered. In some cases, placing the child with extended family members in safer environments is a viable option and initiatives focused on reintegrating youth into wider society must continue. As displayed in this report, camp abuses and the suffering of children are used are propaganda tools in online fundraising campaigns. As a result, such conditions help garner sympathy and donations from online users.

6. Repatriation is generally viewed negatively by Daesh-affiliated individuals in the camps, and they create an environment that pressures others to adhere to Daesh ideology (Saleh, 2021; Vale, 2019). To deter women from accepting repatriation, these individuals threaten other women with physical violence if they express desires to return to their home countries (Loveluck & Mekhennet, 2019). Although difficult given the conditions, finding a way to guarantee protection from Daesh-affiliated camp residents for those who wish to be repatriated until they can depart from the camp is important. Countries must also continue clarifying the repatriation process in accordance with their respective legal systems and provide avenues for families to remain connected when possible.

The ongoing issues posed by the camps require continuing attention, including preparations to receive repatriated populations and improving camp living conditions. Gaining deeper understandings about the narratives disseminated by online fundraising initiatives organized by or for Daesh-affiliated individuals ideally contributes to identifying solutions to disrupt donation flows and to developing ways to address the diverse array of propaganda messaging.

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LOCALIZATION IN PEACEBUILDING & P/CVE: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

By Rachel Sullivan, Brendan Kendhammer and Kateira Aryaeinejad

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Introduction

Over the past 20 years, "localization," or efforts to shift funding, power, and decision-making away from international donors and towards community-level actors, has been one of the most important initiatives in the peacebuilding and P/CVE space. On the peacebuilding side, scholars and practitioners adopting the "local turn" have long championed incorporating local perspectives and knowledge into conflict assessment and peacebuilding planning (Autessere 2017) and creating the space and opportunity for local actors to sustainably define and build their own peaceful communities (Lederach 1997).

Similarly, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers working to prevent and counter violent extremism have long known that extremist groups build support by "incorporating and responding to community concerns [and] exploiting grievances and gaps in governance," (Aryaeinejad and Sullivan 2023) and have advocated for approaches grounded in local, contextual knowledge that provide voice and program ownership to local stakeholders (Holmer 2013, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the question of whether or not these new initiatives will result in more successful peacemaking and P/CVE activities is an open one. However, donors like USAID have committed to ambitious new goals in awarding funding directly to local organizations and placing "local communities in the lead to set priorities, co-design projects, drive implementation, and evaluate the impact of its programs" (USAID 2023b, p. 2), achieving these goals means reckoning with the fact that many large donors are "not built to work with local organizations" (Fine 2024, p. 2). Going forward, there is considerable confusion and uncertainty about how to balance (1) donor concerns about risk, available local capacity, and finding the right partners with (2) local concerns about autonomy vis-a-vis donor priorities and needs.

In light of this continued tension and the need to resolve it with actionable insights that can improve the chances of more effective peacebuilding and P/CVE, the RESOLVE Network's research initiative, "Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism: Learning from Local Peacebuilding Approaches," launched in 2021 with support from USAID's Bureau for Africa, Office of Sustainable Development to develop research and tools that can help policymakers and practitioners navigate the gap between our aspirations for localization and the challenges ahead.

Building upon RESOLVE's existing research on violent extremism and community-based armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa, the project began with a mapping paper and then developed a series of in-depth case studies and policy briefs to provide practical recommendations for the field. The lessons and findings from this research will inform the development of a comprehensive analytic framework, model, and action guide to aid donors and practitioners in building sustainable local peace through peacebuilding and/or P/CVE programming.

In developing this proposed framework, one of the key issues we are exploring is how localization efforts in peacebuilding and P/CVE are shaped by donor reliance on intermediary organizations and practitioners to actually design, implement, and evaluate much of their programming targeting local communities. Often, this conversation has focused on how these intermediaries, ranging from more affluent implementing partner firms–sometimes referred to as "prime partners"–to the many mid-sized and smaller organizations that don't fit official donor definitions of "local partners" but are nevertheless currently indispensable in program administration, due to their project management, skills, registration within host countries and fiduciary bona fides, will have to adjust their business practices to align with new donor priorities to give more funding directly to local partners.

Much less has been said about how these intermediaries–many of whom bring their own complex experiences, positionalities, and relationships to local communities and conflicts–actually shape the practice of localization and influence/are influenced by their experiences working with and through local actors. The development workforce is highly globalized, yet we often operate with a simplistic vision of independent and institutionally separated local "agents" and "partners" who are "from" the conflict-affected areas and "international partners" who are outsiders (e.g. USAID 2022a, p. 10), a framing that misses the considerable fluidity of roles and experiences within the large ecosystem.

Indeed, many putatively "local" actors and partner staff have lived and trained abroad and share many of the same assumptions and values as donors, while "international" program staff may in fact have strong regional, national, or even subnational ties to the conflict environments they work in, and may be wary of their own role in propagating top-down norms and assumptions at the expense of genuinely shifting initiative and ownership to the community level.

The 2023 Hedayah International Research Conference provided an opportunity to explore the role of intermediary actors because, in many ways, it is a gathering of exactly that community. Conference participants and attendees from around the world bring experiences as researchers and practitioners in conflict reduction, peacebuilding, and countering violent extremism that run the gamut from direct partnerships with donors to extensive time working in local communities (including their own).

USIP/RESOLVE hosted a breakout session during which we led a facilitated discussion to gather insights from this professional community into how they think about and deploy the idea of localization in their own work. We centered our conversation on two primary questions:

- When you think about "localization" in the context of your work, what does it mean? What are your goals?
- What are the biggest barriers or challenges you see in "localizing" P/CVE (and peacebuilding) programs?

We also focused on understanding the challenges professionals working within this field (and often occupying multiple roles within it) face in achieving the goals set by donors and communities, and on exploring what these practitioners want donors to know about how to build more successful and sustainable local partnerships. These findings are central to our efforts to build a more effective synthesis between the localization goals emerging out of the development sector and the "local turn" approach from peacebuilders and P/CVE practitioners, and will play a major role in the forthcoming framework.

The Working Context of Localization: A View from the Middle

Who are "local partners" in the context of peacebuilding and P/CVE, and what does localization expect from them? While they often use the aspirational language of responsiveness, inclusion and "plac[ing] local communities in the lead" (USAID 2022b, p. 4), historically and in practice most donor[1] policies measure localness from an organizational perspective, defined by where a potential partner is legally organized, the citizenship of its owners/managers/staff, and where it operates (USAID 2023a).

By contrast, donors and practitioners influenced by the "local turn" downplay the more technical aspects, focusing instead on criteria like the amount of initiative, ownership in agenda-setting, and decision-making actually transferred to community members (Vernon 2019, p. 3). What is often lost sight of in these debates is the fact that localization in P/CVE and peacebuilding isn't just a matter of who is funded and how, or even of who is empowered. It is, at its core, a "theory of change," a claim about how situating effort and agency in one part of the conflict ecosystem rather than another will lead to more effective and sustainable conflict reduction.

[1]USAID, for example, considers localization as "the set of internal reforms, actions, and behavior changes that the Agency is undertaking to ensure our work puts local actors in the lead, strengthens local systems, and is responsive to local communities." For more on USAID's approach to localization, please see their website https://www.usaid.gov/localization

The problem, as we have discovered in our initial research and consultations, is that for most participants in this system the localization theory of change is badly underspecified. In fact, as we described to participants in our breakout session introduction (Figure 1), there's much uncertainty about how exactly funding and empowering local actors actually causes the desired outcome, or about under what conditions these efforts succeed or fail. At times, localization is used by donors or international actors when strong national institutions or legitimacy for external intervention is lacking.

In such cases, localization in P/CVE and peacebuilding is often an exercise in building capacity within "already existing local formal and informal institutions, and supporting systems that strengthen civil society and link traditional authorities with local governance structures" (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015, p. 830), in the hopes that they will succeed where outsiders have failed By contrast, critical peacebuilding theorists often emphasize the significance of local knowledge as the bridge between one side of the theory of change and the other, arguing that we cannot "'build' the state and 'build' peace" in the same way that we "can design and build a bridge or a tunnel" by relying on universal best practices (De Coning 2013, p. 4). The result of this disagreement in exactly how localization is supposed to reduce conflict and extremism is that many localization initiatives and programs suffer from a "black box" in the middle of their theories of change. Put bluntly, we believe localization is good, but we are uncertain how it actually works to improve the outcomes we care about.

The problem, as we have discovered in our initial research and consultations, is that for most participants in this system the localization theory of change is badly underspecified. In fact, as we described to participants in our breakout session introduction (Figure 1), there's much uncertainty about how exactly funding and empowering local actors actually causes the desired outcome, or about under what conditions these efforts succeed or fail. For donors or international actors, localization is often the prescription when the diagnosis is a lack of strong national institutions or legitimacy for external intervention. For them, localization in P/CVE and peacebuilding is often an exercise in building capacity within "already existing local formal and informal institutions, and supporting systems that strengthen civil society and link traditional authorities with local governance structures" (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015, p. 830), in the hopes that they will succeed where outsiders have failed (or cynically, that they will at least bear the responsibility).

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How else can we better understand what goes on inside the "black box?" One possibility is that, due to the nature of their identity and experiences, intermediary organizations and actors might be able to cast more light on how localization works (or doesn't work) in practice. These "middle" level participants are key bridges between the donors and local partners and communities. They often serve as translators of industry jargon and assumptions/models and community experiences between the two, and often have considerable experience in connecting local knowledge and perspectives with international best practices and expectations.

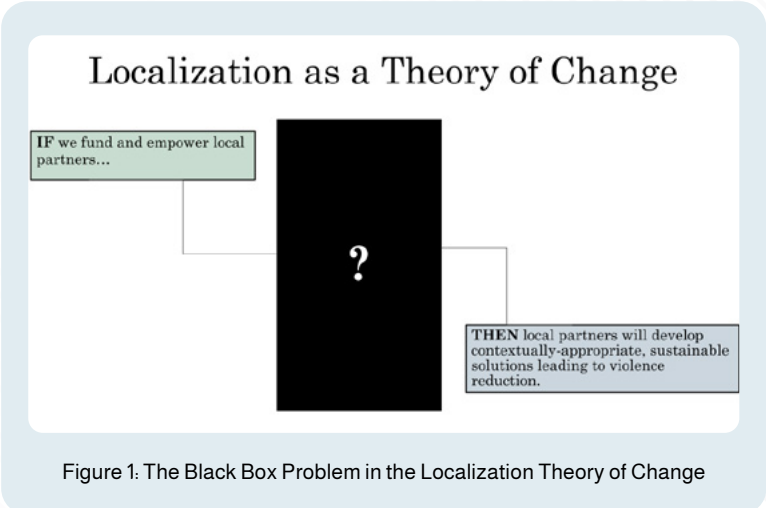

Figure 1: The Black Box Problem in the Localization Theory of Change

By asking them about what they see as having worked or failed in the past, what they understand as the key goals and challenges of localization, we think we can gain a much better understanding of how to improve P/CVE and peacebuilding in practice.

Methodology: Doing Research at the Research Conference

The RESOLVE team led a breakout session with an estimated 20-30 participants at the 2023 Hedayah International CVE Research conference, aimed at soliciting input on the question of localization in P/CVE and peacebuilding. Participants were conference attendees who self-selected into the session and included those with experience as "local" partners to donor-funded programs, as intermediaries between community-level practitioners and the international community, and as researchers tasked with evaluating local peace and extremism prevention efforts. RESOLVE began the session by providing participants with a two-page document on the project background and proposed outline, and then offered them an opportunity to respond to the primary discussion questions anonymously via Mentimeter[2].

Participants were instructed to provide up to five responses to each prompt, which could be single words or short phrases. RESOLVE then presented participants with an overview of the framework project, including a discussion of the theory of change problem, utilizing Figure 1. RESOLVE then facilitated discussion with the participants of the Mentimeter results, delving deeper into the questions posed and encouraging further reflection from participants based on the material covered in the presentation and their own knowledge and experience.

The findings below present us with a unique, if limited, set of perspectives on some of the realities, preoccupations, and opportunities for localization in P/CVE and peacebuilding practice. As discussed, many of the participants are drawn from "the middle," and as such their reflections in this session offered us an opportunity to dig deeper into some of the themes that will be treated and further validated in the final framework document.

Bringing Localization into Local Peacebuilding and P/CVE

The breakout session began by asking participants – first via Mentimeter, and then via facilitated discussion following the presentation – to define localization in the context of their work and what goals they hope to achieve through it. This exercise allowed us to create a snapshot of what localization means to the participants as a group, and then to use that as a starting point for deeper discussion. The Mentimeter results are included below in Figure 2 as a word cloud, which depicts the terms or phrases submitted as a cluster where each is larger or smaller based on how often they appear in the dataset:

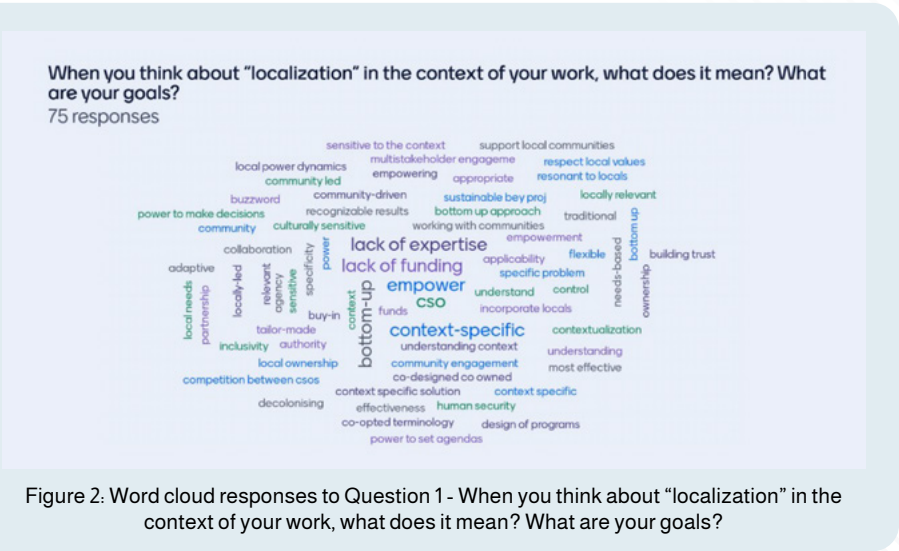

Figure 2: Word cloud responses to Question 1 - When you think about "localization" in the context of your work, what does it mean? What are your goals?

The word cloud indicates a total of 75 responses, and of those responses the largest words and phrases depicted are: empower, bottom-up, context-specific, civil society organization (CSO), lack of expertise,

[2]Mentimeter is an audience engagement platform that allows presenters to utilize tools such as live polling and quizzes, and to generate word clouds from the data collected.

and lack of funding. The word cloud also includes references to power and power dynamics, terminology, specificity, relevance, ownership, trust, effectiveness, collaboration, and agency, in tandem with sensitivity, respect, and flexibility. These terms offer an initial snapshot of what participants associate with localization in the context of their own work, including their goals.

To better understand the intent and mechanics of the topics raised in the Mentimeter poll, RESOLVE facilitated a discussion with the participants utilizing the word cloud presented above. As many of the participants were drawn from the "middle" where they serve as the bridge between local partners and international donors, they provided very practical level insight into how the intent of localization is being translated and received.

One theme that stood out from the initial exercise was the identification of a lack of funding or expertise, which both appeared in larger font in the word cloud, and so we asked the participants to first expand on those topics. Some of the participants suggested that the issue is that there is a gap in thematic knowledge at the local level on violent extremism-related topics, while others suggested that this may be an issue with not being up to date on advances in the field, including trends and terminology. Still others suggested the issue may be that the field dismisses or is too inflexible to incorporate local knowledge, or perhaps that it is creating an unhelpful division between local and global expertise of the issues and trends in P/CVE in the first place, both of which are needed. In this view, local expertise should be centered and valued, but international partners should help by providing global expertise.

A key distinction that arose during this discussion was in the difference between practical and organizational knowledge. Much of the difficulty in working with local partners stems from the fact that international partners require them to have specific organizational capacities. Participants referenced, for example, the need to have an accountant, as well as the capacity to meet monitoring and evaluation requirements. Others recommended that international partners should consider what is appropriate in terms of expectations of what a local partner has or should have, recognizing that such expectations may be disruptive to the work that these actors are already doing.

Participants further illustrated this tension within localization between operational capacity and P/CVE knowledge by sharing their experience in working with civil society organizations (CSOs). They noted that national CSOs tend to be better equipped to work with international partners, but that subnational CSOs tend to have the most contextual, "local" knowledge. Participants also flagged that CSOs that are accustomed to working with international partners may have adopted their knowledge from those partners, and that CSOs tended to be affiliated with elites and elite perspectives, and/or driven by individual personalities.

These characteristics of CSOs can make them highly variable in terms of their ability to fulfill the objectives of localization. Others highlighted that while some local organizations do excellent work, their work is "piecemeal" and there is no "one stop shop." These organizations may be able to complement one another, but they may also be in competition with one another and disagree on goals, priorities, and definitions. While it is difficult to generalize about the nature of CSOs across country contexts, this discussion highlighted the practical challenges for these intermediaries when attempting to sort through the tensions between the capacity, knowledge, and situation or placement of an organization in order to choose appropriate local partners for P/CVE programming. Participants also expressed confusion and doubt about how localization changed or added value to their current approaches to work, particularly conflict analysis and peace assessment.

Some were able to share experiences with participatory action research, which they said produced not only more contextualized information but also provided greater ease in creating linkages and identifying patterns and relationships. Several participants expressed support for localization of knowledge generation, meaning that funding is directed toward research done by people who are from or embedded in the context of the research. In particular, participants emphasized the idea that those who were more "protagonists"– in that they were closer to the community-level experience of conflict – or who have been affected by a particular phenomenon, are who they would like to see doing research, which could potentially be done by working with local universities.

Yet, they retained concerns about the scale and scope of this work, notably in contexts where conflict may impact tens of millions of people and where local analysis is not representative of the whole phenomenon, and thus may not be sufficient on its own.

Barriers and Challenges

During the second half of the consultation, the discussion delved further into the barriers and challenges for successfully localizing peacebuilding and P/CVE programming. RESOLVE once again presented the Mentimeter word cloud results to the group to facilitate discussion, as shown in Figure 3 below:

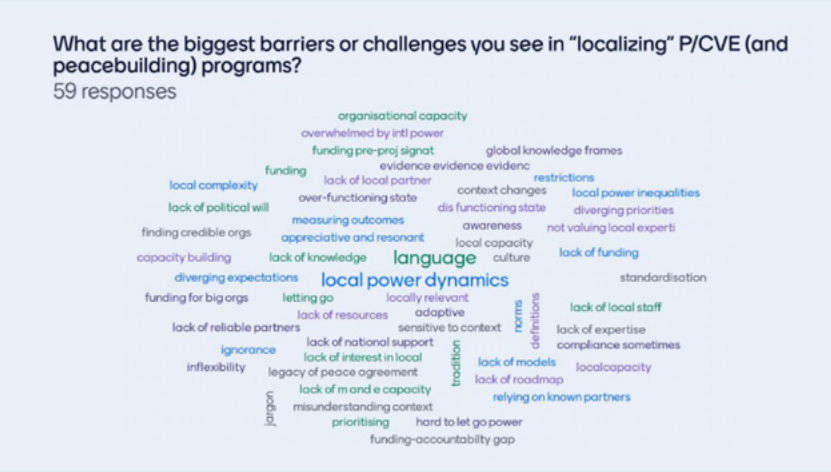

Figure 3: Word cloud responses to Question 2 - What are the biggest barriers or challenges you see in "localizing" P/CVE (and peacebuilding) programs?

This time, there were 59 total responses and the most commonly used words and phrases were local power dynamics and language. As during the first discussion, the view from the "middle" of the localization process reflected a great deal of experience with navigating the lack of system-level knowledge and confusion emanating from above and below. In the word cloud these can be seen through references to the lack of credible organizations, reliable partners, local staff, funding, resources, models, political will, expertise, knowledge, and capacity needed to do the work. Other challenges highlighted point to constraints such as inflexibility, compliance, setting priorities, changing contexts or needing to be sensitive to contexts, in tandem with values, awareness, and interest.

To gain a better understanding of what these barriers and challenges look like in practice, RESOLVE once again led a facilitated discussion with the participants using the word cloud as a starting point. One of the main themes that emerged from this discussion was the issue of scope in relation to funding and reporting. Participants reflected both a concern that donors would be dissatisfied with the scale of impact from localized projects, and that localization at the community level is insufficient to tackle broader societal problems, such as marginalization. Any expectation of outcomes from these projects will have to be limited to their local contexts, and cannot necessarily lead to the type of broader impact that funders typically want to see. However, participants raised the key question: does a smaller, more localized impact mean that localization is not effective?

Participants had several different responses to this question. Some framed peacebuilding as needing to address local conflicts that are taking place in unstable, post-conflict environments, and violent extremism as a phenomenon that requires local context to address, meaning that both types of violence require work to be done at this level. This perhaps suggests that our understanding of the work needs to shift. One potential area where this might need to occur is in the selection of indicators used for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

While participants recognized the value of M&E, they noted that some indicators of success in localization can be limiting, such as emphasizing "improvement" or "enhancement" in contexts where that is not relevant. Others suggested that perhaps what we should be focusing on is increasing the number of small, local programs to have greater impact in localization. In their experience, these participants have found that there are often existing, village-level initiatives that are already doing work that could effectively be expanded or supported with a small amount of funds.

Indeed, participants suggested that some international organizations are best positioned to be a convening power or consortium for sub-grantees, where they provide funding and mentorship to a group of local partners, which some already do. However, they raised the concern that compliance issues can interfere with their ability to work in this way, as not all local partners are able to meet the requirements. They wondered if it would be possible to loosen these requirements, as some donors have started to do, potentially with smaller amounts of funding, or to pair the organizations that do not meet the requirements with an organization that does.

However, some participants cautioned that while the use of consortiums and sub-grantees may help with reporting requirements and build the capacity of local partners, there is still a risk that international partners may become more gatekeepers for funding than mentors, and may ultimately co-opt local partners, which would frustrate the objectives of localization. Others pointed out that M&E also does not currently take into account the money lost on overhead and indirect costs, and how these may affect project outcomes, which is something to consider for such a model.

From this discussion, it is clear that meeting funder expectations is a core preoccupation of those working to localize P/CVE programming. Yet, they are concerned that existing objectives and indicators are not appropriately calibrated. This misalignment of expectations reflects the dynamics highlighted in the theory of change problem in localization, which will need to address not only some of the underlying assumptions that are not serving the programs, continuously review changes made in funder, national government and other policies in their alignment with localization objectives (as some concerns be may mitigated or enhanced), but also to define an end state for localization efforts that is both desirable and achievable.

Tentative Recommendations: What is Success in Localization?

Building on the findings in the breakout session on what localization looks like for intermediaries, including their goals and the challenges and gaps they see, RESOLVE asked them to define what successful localization would look like in peacebuilding and P/CVE. Their conceptualizations provide us with initial recommendations for addressing the problems in the existing localization theory of change, serving as a guide star for translating intent into practice based on the view from the middle:

1. **Ownership of the project is transferred to local partner(s):** Participants indicated that the end goal of localization would be for ownership of a project or initiative to transfer to local partner(s), where they are in a position to determine how to take the project forward in a way that is responsive to their needs. It is striking to note that this recommendation often emerged most strongly from those with "middle" level experience who, presumably, would be less likely to participate in these programs after local ownership was achieved. This suggests that their experiences have led them to believe that despite their expertise and experience, continued reliance on external direction and expertise hampers the ability of local actors to genuinely lead and adapt externally initiated programs to their own needs.

2. **The project is sustainable:** How long it is sustained and in what format would be up to the local partner(s), but participants suggested that if the local partner(s) or other local actors were able to seek additional funding, replicate, and/or repurpose the project to address additional and/or evolving needs, these would indicate success. Localization proponents have long-proposed that sustainability is a key metric for success, but it's significant here that "middle"-level participants identified examples of program repurposing away from the initial goals and proposed outcomes to something more community-driven as clear examples of sustainability success.

3. **Trust has been built and maintained between international and local partners:** Participants highlighted trust as an area that has previously been neglected but is key to success. Much of the discussion on these points focused on the process of and approach to work, with an emphasis on listening to build shared understanding and goals between international donors and their local partners. This could be reflected, for instance, in coming to agreement on appropriate terminology or dispute resolution mechanisms for a given context. This point may seem obvious, but it is notably under-emphasized in much of the practitioner literature focused on localization and local peacebuilding. The reality is that even fully "localized" programs are likely connected to larger national and international initiatives, and cross-level trust is still important even if the project is "locally owned." Intermediary actors can and will play a key role here.

4. **Policy impact is evident:** Participants suggested that policy impact beyond the immediate P/CVE initiative(s) to broader societal institutions would indicate success, for instance influencing policy related to education or prisons and other areas. This is especially true for small-scale local programs, which do not often receive the kinds of sustained external promotion and engagement that large programs run by major implementing partners or national governments do. Intermediary actors can play a key role in elevating the visibility of these programs and helping to connect their successes with impacts outside their original, local scope.

5. **A successful initiative should be inclusive and center people:** Participants indicated that the end goal of localization would be for ownership of a project or initiative to transfer to local partner(s), where they are in a position to determine how to take the project forward in a way that is responsive to their needs. It is striking to note that this recommendation often emerged most strongly from those with "middle" level experience who, presumably, would be less likely to participate in these programs after local ownership was achieved. This suggests that their experiences have led them to believe that despite their expertise and experience, continued reliance on external direction and expertise hampers the ability of local actors to genuinely lead and adapt externally initiated programs to their own needs. concerns from critical peacebuilding and P/CVE scholars that some localizing initiatives romanticize local "traditional" leaders as inherently legitimate partners, rather than critically examining how tensions within and among local stakeholders might affect their programming efforts. Once again, "middle" actors are often an important source of information and expertise that might help avoid this problem.

In addition to describing these components of success, the participants also highlighted several key dynamics that might impede defining, measuring, and achieving success. In particular, they referred to international donor and partner responsibilities to recognize their own power and potential impact on those around them when attempting to localize their work, and to be mindful that their presumptions of what success looks like may not be applicable, such as the expectation that community empowerment will prevent mobilization to violence up the chain, or that a community will want to sustain a program long-term, incorporating a do no harm or a conflict-sensitive approach.

Conclusion: Next Steps for the Framework

The goal of the breakout session hosted by the RESOLVE Network at the 2023 Hedayah International CVE research conference was to learn more about how a group of often neglected "middle" participants in P/CVE and peacebuilding programs understand the goals, challenges, and successes of localization. Given localization's central place in current donor strategy and a large body of existing research on local peacebuilding, understanding how these participants experience and evaluate localization efforts is a key component of our effort to develop a systematic framework and toolkit for USAID's localization efforts in these areas. Through this session, participants highlighted their hopes and concerns, and emphasized in particular the possibilities of localization as a way to provide real local ownership and agency to communities used to experiencing peacebuilding and counter-extremism efforts as a top-down project developed elsewhere. RESOLVE's next steps are to take these findings and incorporate them alongside the voices of donors, policymakers, researchers, and local actors into the forthcoming framework.

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P/CVE PROGRAMMING IN DEVELOPMENT CSOS/NGOS: INSIGHTS FROM A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Introduction

After long being overlooked, the intersection of development work and efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism is receiving increasing recognition as a critical element in the global security landscape. Whether explicitly acknowledged or not, development non-government organizations (NGOs)[3] play a pivotal role in addressing the root causes of extremism through their work in poverty alleviation, social justice, and community development, although they commonly do not frame or analyse their interventions through this lens (Barton et al., 2019; Ware et al., 2023). This paper presents the preliminary analysis from a systematic review focused on development NGOs' primary-level programming for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

The review aims to identify common themes in evaluations and research to discern effective strategies, challenges, and areas for improvement and further study in P/CVE initiatives. The full review is pending publication, but this paper synthesizes key themes from 115 papers, providing insights into the interplay between development and P/CVE, the challenges of terminology, stigmatization, coordination, and trust, and the complexities of impact, resourcing, and inclusivity in these programs.

Methodology

Our systematic review process adhered to the PRISMA 2020 quality checklist (Moher et al. 2015; Page et al. 2021). After a preliminary scoping search, the research protocol was developed and reviewed collaboratively by the research team. This review focused specifically on community-level P/CVE programs by development NGOs, differentiating from broader scopes of existing studies (e.g., Brett et al., 2015; Carthy et al., 2020; Gielen, 2019; Hassan et al., 2021; Jugl et al., 2021; Pistone, 2019).

We included both peer-reviewed and grey literature empirical studies that detailed approaches, effectiveness, and recommendations of P/CVE programs. Our selection was limited to English language sources and excluded studies on securitized counterterrorism (CT) together with studies not explicitly related to P/CVE. Moving beyond the bounds of typical systematic review practices, we included studies regardless of their perceived methodological quality, in line with Pawson's (2006) advice on acknowledging valuable insights from studies that might otherwise be discarded. With this in mind, the quality of sources was appraised using Hassan et al.'s (2021) checklist, resulting in only two papers from the shortlist being excluded due to quality concerns.

The primary search was conducted in November-December 2021, with additional searches for new material conducted in July 2023 and January 2024. We used broad terms such as "violent extremism" in smaller databases and specific phrases such as "P/CVE + NGO + community" in larger databases like

Google Scholar. Our search was comprehensive, including various combinations of keywords related to NGOs and community-led P/CVE initiatives. The initial 18,893 hits was reduced to 3,065 by reviewing titles; by reviewing abstracts this was reduced further to 419 papers for full text review. Sources that did not focus on NGO-implemented, community-level P/CVE programs were excluded, resulting in 115 papers included in this study.

Given the relatively recent conceptualisation of P/CVE it was expected that the vast majority of papers identified would have been published in the last decade or so, and this indeed proved to be the case. We did not specify a date range; however, no studies were identified prior to 2008.

Data collection was recorded in Excel, encompassing database and website searches, shortlisted sources, and final selections. We carefully scanned each search hit for relevance, shortlisted articles were thoroughly reviewed, and relevant data were extracted. The entire process, including reasons for excluding certain articles, was meticulously documented.

[3]Many papers in the systematic review used the term 'civil society organisation'. CSOs are also known – especially when international in scope - as non-government organisations (NGOs). For the purpose of this study the terms CSO and NGO is treated as synonymous.

We conducted a thematic analysis using a grounded approach to inductively identify themes across the 115 final papers. This emphasized critically reviewing the studies' methods, key findings, and lessons learned. The themes identified were consistent and appeared to have reached saturation.

Development and P/CVE Interconnections

The nexus between development and P/CVE underscores the complex relationship between security and development. The conditions exacerbating the risk of individuals being radicalised and recruited into extremist groups – such as limited opportunities for meaningful employment or advancement, social isolation, crippling poverty, exclusion, and injustice – are substantially the same issues targeted by development NGOs. Equating development goals too closely with P/CVE objectives, however, can risk diminishing the broader impact of development programs and overshadow the importance of human security (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

In this view, development objectives are primary and a reduction in radicalization into violent extremism is a secondary intended outcome. This comes back to a key assumption that strengthening resilience, community cohesion, economic opportunities, and social justice contribute towards reducing violent extremism. But scholars such as Brett et al. (2015) caution against development NGOs blindly repackaging development projects as P/CVE without specifically considering the intricacies of P/CVE, noting that some NGOs who have tried this approach have had minimal impact on P/CVE goals.

Terminology

The terminology surrounding P/CVE was raised in almost every paper in the systematic review with all authors noting its problematic nature for NGOs, given they rely on the principle of neutrality, and thus the need for careful language usage within communities. Authors highlighted the current reality that many applications of a P/CVE framework tend to rely on outdated ideas that envisage a consistent, linear, trajectory to radicalization, together with unsubstantiated links between ideology and violence, which can be seen as contextually insensitive and intrusive (Barzegar et al., 2016).

With this meaning embedded in the terminology, use of the P/CVE label and related terms can undermine NGO activities and distance community members (Al-Kadi & Vale, 2020). Communities may feel offended by the malignment of their ideology or their group, or they may fear retaliation from local violent extremist actors if they engage with P/CVE programs (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014; Kessels & Nemr, 2016). Additionally, community members and partners may become suspicious that NGOs using P/CVE terminology are working within some governmental or broader agenda (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

While no papers provided clear solutions to the terminology problems, they did highlight the importance of differentiating between CT and P/CVE and distancing NGOs from securitized approaches (Brett & Kahlmeyer, 2017). The papers recommended that donors, NGOs, and communities should develop suitable context and conflict sensitive definitions of P/CVE by replacing pejorative terms (such as extremism) with neutral ones, such as social change, personal development, peace-messaging, and coexistence (Alves dos Reis, 2021; Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014).

The ethical need to be transparent about programs with P/CVE objectives was raised, but how this should be framed or explained to communities was unresolved, other than papers suggesting that these explanations need to be subtle and well considered (Brett et al., 2015).

Stigmatization

A significant theme in the literature is the stigmatization of certain communities within P/CVE efforts (Cherney et al., 2018; Freear & Glazzard, 2020). Over-surveillance and religious profiling can backfire, potentially serving as catalysts for extremism (Barzegar et al., 2016). The focus on specific groups, such as Muslim communities and young men, to the exclusion of others, undermines the need for a balanced approach towards all forms of extremism.

Experts at a roundtable reported in one paper "overwhelmingly" agreed that grievances are at the root of radicalization and "the disproportional attention given to ideological factors by PVE policy-makers and experts is hindering progress on prevention" (Holmes, 2017, p. 86). Identifying ideology can have adverse effects as demonising beliefs can distance everyday people NGOs might want to be engaging. Community members would understandably be reticent to affiliate with an organization that presumes their vulnerability to recruitment and radicalization to violence (Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Further, extremist groups leverage examples of religious profiling and persecution to generate sympathy and support for their cause (Mirahmadi, 2016). Some observers, such as Barzegar et al. (2016) noted the need for law enforcement agencies to be vigilant in investigating and persecuting civil rights violations, and anti-Muslim hate crimes, to regain trust of communities and NGOs and to actively combat the impression that Muslims are responsible for most violent extremism.

While many of the programs discussed in the systematic review papers focus on Muslim communities, authors noted that the focus should be on all forms of violent extremism equally, including western centric anti-government extremism, white supremacy, and the radical right (Barzegar et al., 2016; Hassan et al., 2021). In addition, it was argued, this equal approach should be consistently communicated to the public to avoid targeting and stigmatization.

Coordination Across Stakeholders

Effective coordination between NGOs, governments, communities, and other stakeholders is essential for successful P/CVE activities (Alves dos Reis, 2021; Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014). Regular convening, sharing of resources, and transparent decision-making are recommended to build trust and efficiency in these collaborative efforts (Dzumhur, 2020; Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Within this, national and international actors should support locally led work, and build local capacity and partnerships. Governments can support coordination by acting as a backbone institution, incentivizing collaboration, and understanding communities' special situations (Kessels & Nemr, 2016; Voluvik, 2021). Governments can also improve coordination by removing barriers and red tape that impact the effectiveness and efficiency of NGO operations (Abah & Amoah, 2019).

Furthermore, stakeholders should have clear lines of responsibility and understand their role and how that interacts with other actors in the space (Barzegar et al., 2016). This includes the importance of developing memorandums of understanding. Although not often considered, corporates may offer further support and technical expertise to P/CVE networks (Barzegar et al., 2016; Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Localisation

The need for P/CVE work in development NGOs to be driven from the bottom up was clear in the literature (Briggs, 2010; Holmer, 2013). Local groups usually have better rapport and trust in the communities where they work, as well as largely being comprised of local staff with deep contextual knowledge (Achsin et al., 2019; Brett et al., 2015; Sonrexa et al., 2023). Via this model, external organizations can ask "how can we help support you?" and in line with that answer, externals can work with and not on communities, helping build community capability to design and deliver locally led programs that respond to contextually specific push and pull factors. The findings indicate that these local approaches result in better implementation, impact, and sustainability (Acil Allen Consulting, 2019; Al-Kadi & Vale, 2020; Holmes, 2017; Kessels & Nemr, 2016).

Trust

Building trust is paramount, given the multi-directional trust deficits among government, NGOs, and communities, often exacerbated by the securitization of violent extremism (Acil Allen Consulting, 2019). This securitization can result in individuals and communities fearing surveillance, suspicion, internment, and extrajudicial killings. When communities lack trust in government, NGOs may fear community rejection when working with government, but without government approval to operate, community members can be too scared to engage with NGOs due to fear of retaliation (Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018; Cherney et al., 2018).

Many NGOs advocate oppositional or critical beliefs regarding the government and its policies, or critique authorities or officially advance abuse allegations on behalf of communities, which may strain relationships and hinder collaboration (Abah & Amoah, 2019; Kessels & Nemr, 2016). This can result in a general government distrust of NGOs involved in advocacy for communities from which extremists have come, and suspicion of their wrongdoing, which can then deter donors (Cortright et al., 2012).

It is noted that NGOs tend to have a positive relationship with communities and that P/CVE activities are more likely to succeed if this relationship is prioritized, with the NGO engaged from the outset to enable time for the development of trusting bonds and local knowledge (Bala, 2017; Holmes, 2017). As staff attrition, and short funding cycles that result in program closure, have a negative impact on trust, donors need to recognise that by prioritising long-term funding they can support trust building and contribute to improved staff retention.

In terms of NGO activities, inter- and intra-communal trust deficits require strong and inclusive programming and facilitation. This could include steering away from some counternarratives if the counternarratives undermine beliefs widely held in the community (Barzegar et al, 2016; Holmes, 2017). There needs to be safe space for exploration of ideas, even unpopular ones (Barzegar et al., 2016). Furthermore, by including diverse stakeholders in decision making and treating people as co-creators rather than beneficiaries there is an additional benefit in developing trust, particularly when this is done authentically and with adequate time and other resources (Alves dos Reis, 2021; Creative Associates International, 2018).

Resourcing

The systematic review reveals a common concern regarding inadequate and restrictive funding. Authors consistently indicate that funding for P/CVE initiatives is often insufficient, short-term, and usually allocated for specific uses, thus limiting the flexibility of NGOs in resource allocation (Achsin et al., 2019; Barzegar et al., 2016). Additionally, it is notable that most programs have a heavy reliance on foreign donors, which complicates the sustainability of programs beyond pilot phases (Abah & Amoah, 2019; Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018).

An important but well-known finding of the systematic review is the tendency of funding to be focused primarily on specific projects, rather than supporting the broader operational needs of NGOs (Al-Kadi & Vale, 2020). This project-centric approach can impede the development of a robust organizational foundation essential for effective implementation and scaling of P/CVE programs. The papers within the systematic review also observe that the unique challenges of P/CVE work, including navigating complex social dynamics and security concerns, may require more substantial resource commitments than other development programs (Alves dos Reis, 2021).

NGOs express a preference for more flexible funding models. Such flexibility would grant them greater control over managing operational costs and adapting projects to meet specific community needs, rather than being restricted to externally designed and time-limited projects. Control over funding would enable NGOs to invest in capacity development for their staff and partners. This investment could encompass training in conflict management, P/CVE frameworks, project management, communication strategies, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems.

The systematic review emphasizes the necessity for substantial and long-term funding commitments for P/CVE programs (Barzegar et al., 2016; Kessels & Nemr, 2016). These resources are crucial for the local co-design of projects, which is time-consuming but vital for ensuring community relevance and engagement (Ife, 2016). Resources also support training and interaction opportunities to ensure personnel are culturally competent and credible within the communities they serve. Additionally, such funding can facilitate hiring consultants who can offer short-term technical expertise when required to enhance the quality and impact of P/CVE initiatives.

As such, the systematic review suggests the need for a re-evaluation of current funding models for P/CVE programs. A shift towards more flexible, long-term funding would enable NGOs to build stronger, more resilient, and effective programs.

Inclusivity and Marginalized Groups

A notable gap in the literature is the lack of attention given to Indigenous, sexually and gender diverse, and disabled groups in P/CVE work. Additionally, while women are often emphasized, there is a tendency to stereotype their roles, overlooking their diverse contributions and vulnerabilities, while simultaneously overlooking other aspects of gender (Al-Kadi & Vale, 2020; Alves dos Reis, 2021). With the attention on women, papers analysed for the systematic review outlined that programs focused on mothers were restrictive around women's roles in ways that limit P/CVE efforts. For example, the idea that women should identify, confront, and address a family member radicalizing can lead to a blame culture where the radicalization becomes her fault because of unrealistic expectations (Al-Kadi & Vale, 2020).

While many women-led P/CVE initiatives have been developed, these are often ignored and under-funded (Al-Kadi & Vale, 2020). At the same time, traditional leaders are often hesitant to include women and youth due to assumed lack of valuable contribution (Brett & Kahlmeyer, 2017; True et al. 2018). To combat sexist and reductive sentiments, NGOs need to implement and build awareness around a gender strategy (Creative Associates International, 2018). They should build their capacity to work with girls and women, which includes supporting women's positive roles in PCVE without instrumentalising or securitizing them.

As well as nuancing the contribution of women, gender analysis should include a focus on the full spectrum of gender. Further, NGOs should consider their work through a lens that includes the vast array of marginalized groups to ensure that programs are designed to address local dynamics comprehensively and inclusively.

Sustainability

There was strong agreement across the papers that there needs to be more attention paid to ensuring sustainability through succession planning and through building in reflection and processes to enable adaption for improvement and emerging issues (Abah & Amoah, 2019; Acil Allen Consulting, 2019). This requires long-term funding to give time for P/CVE programs to become established and for results to show. As well as an emphasis on active community involvement, some studies found that sustainability is enhanced through transparency surrounding NGO timeframes and contributions, and by providing community members with clear roles and responsibilities to enable continuation of program objectives without external support (Alves dos Reis, 2021; Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018; Voluvik 2021).

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of P/CVE programs presents a complex and varied landscape. The findings from several studies indicate evidence for increased tolerance for different perspectives, knowledge, confidence, and social capital (e.g., Alves dos Reis, 2021; Acil Allen Consulting, 2019; Gerston, 2021). Whilst there are instances of positive impact, overall results are decidedly mixed, with many being ambiguous or overstated. For example, Achsin et al. (2019, p. 1) evaluated a specific P/CVE program and deemed it "quite effective" and "quite successful". They raised concerns, however, about whether the audience selected for participation was appropriate, indicating uncertainty about the program's actual reach and impact. Similarly, Aldrich's (2014) study on a radio program in multiple African countries found no statistical difference in P/CVE outcomes between control and test sites.

Despite this, Aldrich noted the cost-effectiveness and broad reach of the program, suggesting a potential for widespread impact if the content could be improved to realise positive outcomes. In the same vein, Al Masri and Slavona (2018, p. 7) analysed interventions across various organizations and found that, "Across organisations and approaches…with a few exceptions – there was no evidence that the interventions were contributing to PVE." This raises questions about the generalizability and effectiveness of such programs.

On the other hand, Brett and Kahlmeyer (2017) observed positive results in a P/CVE program they evaluated. A closer look through a gender perspective, however, revealed a disparity: the program was more successful for men than women. This example highlights the importance of evaluating programs through an intersectional lens that considers how and why interventions affect different groups (Finkel et al., 2018; Magrie et al., 2021).

A meta-analysis of eight outcome evaluations by Jugl et al. (2021, p. 42) showed that "effects varied strongly across the included studies". This inconsistency across studies underscores the challenge in establishing a clear understanding of what works in P/CVE.

A reoccurring problem with the P/CVE evaluative literature was a tendency to overclaim results. For example, a project involving 21 participants claimed that: "The combined assessment results evidence that [the program] was effective at reducing and preventing violent extremism" (Boyd-MacMillan, 2016, p. 33). But the basis for this claim is unclear, especially given the small sample size. In another study, Feddes et al. (2015) suggested that a combination of empowering individuals and strengthening empathy can counter violent radicalization. This assertion seems speculative, particularly since the participants in Feddes et al.'s study were not previously radicalized, making it difficult to ascertain the direct impact on preventing violent extremism.

Several programs included in the systematic review chose indicators that did not directly align with their scope or influence, relying instead on external factors. This misalignment leads to challenges in accurately measuring the impact of these programs and prevents linkages that could demonstrate the contribution of NGO programs to outcomes. Thus, outcomes and indicators should be aligned to what is within the scope of the program and the implementing organisation to affect (Kelly et al., 2022). For example, NGOs can impact the conditions that cause violent extremism.

While many programs showed significant positive changes in resilience, social cohesion, understanding, and access to resources, the link between these outcomes and their contribution to P/CVE remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for evidence supporting the assumptions that these outcomes effectively contribute to P/CVE.

The effectiveness of P/CVE programs, as evidenced in the systematic review, demonstrates a spectrum of results, from positive impacts to ambiguous or overstated claims. The disparities in findings, along with issues like gender-specific outcomes, overstated claims, and misaligned indicators, point to the necessity for more nuanced, context-specific, and evidence-based approaches in P/CVE programming. Future research and program design must address these complexities to enhance the overall effectiveness of interventions aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The inadequacy of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and practices was noted throughout the systematic review as a significant challenge for development NGO P/CVE programs. This includes difficulties in evaluating preventative outcomes and impacts, further complicated by the limited evaluation capacity among NGO personnel (e.g., Achsin et al., 2019; Al Masri & Slavova, 2018; Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018; Holmer, 2013; Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014; Jugl et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2021). These deficiencies have led to inconclusive findings regarding the impact of initiatives on reducing violent extremism.

A common issue was the absence of well-articulated theories of change (Alves dos Reis, 2021; Brett et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2021). Additionally, most evaluations were only conducted ex-post at the end of programs, without baseline data, which limits the ability to measure changes over time and attribute outcomes directly to the program interventions (Bala, 2017).

To enhance M&E systems, organizations should establish monitoring processes linked to the theory of change outcomes and indicators from the program's inception (Brett, 2023; Dzumhur, 2020). This proactive approach can provide more accurate and relevant data for evaluating program effectiveness. Additionally, regular needs assessments and conflict analyses should be integrated into monitoring data processes (Briggs, 2010; Dzumhur, 2020). This ensures that programs remain relevant and responsive to the evolving contexts in which they operate.

Evaluations showing the most robust results tended to focus on skills, awareness, behaviour, attitude, social cohesion, and resilience, rather than directly attempting to measure a reduction in the number of potential violent extremists (Kelly, 2023). As mentioned above, to link these broader measurements to the primary objective of reducing violent extremism, there is a need for deep evaluative research. P/CVE programs often rely on largely untested assumptions about what works, for whom, and in what contexts (Kessels & Nemr, 2016; Khalil & Zeuthen, 2014).

This lack of evidence-based approaches results in uncertainty about the programs' effectiveness and the appropriateness of their strategies in various contexts. Thus, research should aim to test the assumptions underlying P/CVE programs; for instance, that increased tolerance, community connection, and inclusion effectively contribute to reducing violent extremism.

The challenges in M&E within P/CVE programs, as highlighted in the systematic review, point to a need for more sophisticated and comprehensive evaluation strategies. By establishing strong baseline data, aligning evaluations with program objectives, and focusing on a range of relevant outcomes, P/CVE initiatives can better assess their impact and refine their approaches. The key lies in developing evidence-based practices that validate the assumptions of P/CVE programs and accurately measure their effectiveness in diverse contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the early analysis of the systematic review focusing on development NGOs' programming for P/CVE, several recommendations can be made to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers:

Recommendations for Policymakers

- Encourage policies that recognize the interconnections between development and P/CVE without conflating them. Policies should support broader development goals, with P/CVE as a complementary outcome, rather than a primary focus.
- Develop and enforce policies that prevent the stigmatization of specific communities in P/CVE efforts. Ensure that policies are inclusive and address all forms of violent extremism.
- Allocate funding that allows for flexibility and long-term investment in development and P/CVE programs. This includes support for capacity building, local co-design, and organizational development.
- Facilitate and incentivize collaboration between NGOs, local communities, government bodies, and private sector entities to enhance the effectiveness of P/CVE programs.

Recommendations for Practitioners

- Emphasize bottom-up approaches in program design and implementation. Engage local communities as active partners rather than passive beneficiaries.
- Focus on building trust with communities and other stakeholders. This includes transparent communication, consistent engagement, and respect for local norms and values.
- Avoid terms that may be perceived as pejorative or stigmatizing. Work with communities to develop context-appropriate terminology that accurately reflects the goals of the program.
- Ensure that P/CVE programs are inclusive, addressing the needs and perspectives of marginalized groups, including women, youth, Indigenous populations, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities.

Recommendations for Researchers

- Develop and implement rigorous M&E frameworks that go beyond measuring outputs to capture the actual impact of P/CVE programs. This should include longitudinal studies to assess long-term effects.
- Conduct research on aspects that are currently under-explored, such as the impact of P/CVE programming on marginalized groups, and the effectiveness of different approaches across diverse contexts.

- Advance research that tests and refines theories of change in P/CVE programming, helping to clarify the causal pathways through which these programs achieve their intended outcomes.
- Conduct policy impact studies that examine the impact of specific policies on the effectiveness of P/CVE programs, providing evidence-based guidance for policymakers.

These recommendations aim to support policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to collectively enhance the effectiveness and impact of development NGOs' efforts in P/CVE.

Conclusion

This early analysis of the systematic review on development NGOs' P/CVE programming underscores the complexity of these initiatives. Effective strategies require a nuanced understanding of the development-P/CVE nexus, sensitive use of terminology, inclusive approaches, robust coordination, and sustainable resourcing. While challenges such as stigmatization, trust deficits, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems persist, there is also a clear path forward through localized, transparent, and inclusive programs. The full systematic review, once published, will offer a more comprehensive analysis and recommendations for strengthening P/CVE efforts globally.

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CONFLICT SENSITIVITY & DO NO HARM: THE NEXUS BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT CSOS/NGOS & P/CVE

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Introduction

For over a decade, awareness has been growing of the need for more holistic approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Increasingly, authorities seek to deal with the issue both further upstream (to prevent radicalization) and downstream (to disengage individuals and reintegrate people). Both recognize that underlying grievances are often legitimate, and can crush aspirations and contribute to radicalization. These approaches thus require working in partnership with communities and civil society agencies, with a focus on strengthening prosocial resilience and engaging young people, in particular (Cherney et al., 2019; Holmer, 2013; Schmitt, 2017).

At first glance, international and community development agencies may seem to be a natural fit for such partnerships, particularly in the preventative, whole-of-community space. They already have considerable expertise designing and implementing programs to address inequality, deprivation, marginalization, human rights violations, et cetera, in diverse contexts, and seek to strengthen social cohesion, community resilience, livelihoods, and so on across their programming.

These are all very important components of holistic P/CVE. Also, a growing number of development agencies have come to recognize that violent extremism (VE) is a widespread problem in many of the contexts within which they work, and to note that their programs will always influence the dynamics of conflict and extremism, positively or negatively, even if only to a small extent.

Approximately 20% of the almost USD 250 billion official development assistance (ODA) given by OECD nations annually already flows to civil society organizations (CSOs) including non-government organizations (NGOs) for this sort of work (OECD 2021). These organizations also have access to their own public funding bases. The availability of P/CVE centered funding and synergies in development programming, particularly at the primary preventative level, are clear. As a result, there have been many efforts to integrate P/CVE into aid strategies and engage with CSOs/NGOs (e.g. DANIDA, 2015; ICRC, 2017; Kessels and Nemr, 2016; NRC, 2018; TAF, 2017; UNDP, 2019).

However, such partnerships are not straightforward. For development CSOs/NGOs, being seen to be working in P/CVE is often problematic and, as such, most have avoided involvement until quite recently. The reasons are not hard to identify. Development CSOs/NGOs have built their reputation with donors and public, plus their trust with communities, on the perception they are neutral actors—or if anything, that they are on the side of the communities they serve, championing rights, critiquing authorities, and pursuing allegations of abuse or injustice.

Because funding and public attention about P/CVE has focused primarily on the security aspects, especially counter terrorism, development CSOs/NGOs involvement in P/CVE can undermine their image and pre-existing relationships with donors and communities. The environments within which extremism flourishes are often characterized by violence and fragility, and already present many challenges to trust-building. Engaging with the P/CVE agenda risks eroding the independence at the heart of most CSO/NGO strategies, and can make them the target of suspicion by authorities.

Similarly, they risk the perception they are closely tied with the state security apparatus, and/or international agendas, and involvement increases the direct risk to staff and recipients. For these reasons, most development NGOs, particularly international development CSOs/NGOs, have until very recently largely avoided working in the P/CVE space.

Of course, a substantial number of CSOs and NGOs are involved in P/CVE, and they have developed considerable expertise, and make very valuable contributions. The point is, however, that the CSOs/NGOs involved in P/CVE are a different set of CSOs/NGOs to those who would describe themselves as 'development' agencies. What we call 'development' CSOs/NGOs here, are agencies that implement programs at the community-level, based primarily on community development approaches or international development principles, and largely avoid working in the P/CVE space.

Such principles include things like participative democracy, rights, economic opportunity, social justice, and so on, through organization education and empowerment (IACD, 20218). Meanwhile, those agencies who do work in the P/CVE space would not usually identify as 'development NGOs'. Thes are two largely discrete groups are CSOs/NGOs, that have rarely overlapped or engaged with the other in partnerships, at least until recently. We have anecdotally, however, recently observed a growing desire by these development agencies to engage with P/CVE issues, and in P/CVE partnerships. This paper explores ways to bridge that divide, proposing conflict-sensitivity and Do No Harm as the familiar nexus able to help these agencies frame and engage in P/CVE work.

This paper presents preliminary findings from a multi-year research project (2021-25) by the authors exploring Appropriate Development Agency Responses to Violent and Hateful Extremism (VHE). The project is funded by the Australian Research Council and is being conducted in partnership with Plan International Australia, engaging country offices in several countries. Our project seeks to assist Plan International, as an example development agencies, find sensitive and appropriate ways to realize their enormous potential in P/CVE. This involves exploring alternative terminology and frameworks, and avoiding a security focus and anything that might compromise their neutrality.

The project expands the idea of extremism to include what our respondents have referred to as hateful extremism. We define this concept as the incitement of hatred, hate speech and hate acts, and the use or threat of violence by extremist social movements seeking to bring about political and societal change in the name of ideological ends, sometimes framed in terms of religion and/or identity, by means that dehumanize and bring harm to others (Sonrexa et al., 2022). Notwithstanding the challenges outlined above, civil society—and particularly development NGOs—are perhaps the best-placed actors to address hateful extremism. The project starts with the premise that we cannot, and should not, attempt to police peoples' beliefs, but that development NGOs can and should target the first destructive behaviors that flow out of some people's extremist beliefs: intolerance of diversity, marginalization and dehumanization of others, toxic nationalism, misogyny, et cetera, together with all attempts to coercively control others.

Our project seeks to map VHE dynamics in four countries of priority for Plan International, as our industry partner, namely, the Philippines, Indonesia, Kenya and Mozambique. From these, our project aims to create new tools for use by development NGOs in VHE analysis, during both project planning and implementation, and to generate an indicator bank suitable for monitoring and evaluation of such projects, together with programming recommendations compatible with Plan International's current suite of activities.

Our hypothesis, fleshed out in this paper through the data collected in three of these countries, is that the nexus allowing development agencies to bridge the concerns listed above and engage in P/CVE (or better, preventing VHE), is for VE to be thought of and analyzed as a form of conflict, and thus analysis and planning to be based on an expanded version of the conflict sensitivity or Do No Harm (DNH) analysis tools already widely used in the development/humanitarian sector.Development NGOs already use such tools to design programs that minimize risk of exacerbating conflict tensions and maximize conflict-calming or peacebuilding potential, whatever their program focus. By using the language of conflict, expanding definitions to consider VE as a type of conflict, and incorporating analysis of VHE dynamics into conflict sensitivity/DNH approaches, we find that development NGOs can more naturally deliberately engage in P/CVE work in ways that avoid many of the pitfalls outlined above.

Methodology

We have conducted 143 key informant interviews and 117 village-level focus group discussions so far for this project, in Indonesia (Java, Oct-22, Jan-23 and Sep-23), the Philippines (Manila and Mindanao, Sep-23 and Mar-24), and Kenya (Nairobi, Mombasa, Jul-23 and May-24). While we have further fieldwork to complete in Mozambique, a range of substantial preliminary findings are already clear and are presented in this paper. These three countries are particularly interesting, because of their different geographical and sociopolitical contexts. All three are developing strongly, economically, which always has challenges around distribution of benefits and equity. And all three have significant local as well as international development architecture, with a proliferation of both international and local development NGOs working on a range of challenges.

All key informant interviews were conducted in-person and online personally by the authors of this paper. Informants were conflict advisors, academic researchers, civil society leaders and development NGO executives, with a few from the security sector and state policy roles. Most interviews were an hour long, and analysis was conducted on notes transcribed during the interviews.

Focus groups were conducted with local residents in villages known to have issues with violent and hateful extremism. We collected data in 86 groups: 14 groups with 151 community members in Central and West Java during January-February 2023, 36 groups with 212 participants in West, East, and Central Java during September-October 2023, and 36 groups with 305 participants in the Lanao del Sur region of Mindanao, Philippines, during March 2024. Focus group discussions were segregated into youth, women and heads of households, to better hear more marginalized women's and youth voices, and enable disaggregated data. Questions focused on peoples' concerns, their perceptions of risk (particularly of youth radicalization), their understanding of the nature of the issues, and their thoughts on what would strengthen resilience to extremism in their context.

The authors of this paper conducted the Indonesia groups personally, in partnership with Indonesian researchers from Universitas Indonesia and competent interpreters. The focus groups in the Philippines were conducted by researchers from Mindanao State University with close face-to-face oversight, research training, and debriefing sessions conducted by the authors of this paper who were based in Cagayan de Oro two hours north-east of the fieldwork zone. This approach was necessary as the Lanao del Sur villages all lie in regions the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade list as 'do not travel'. In both Indonesia and the Philippines, the active involvement of local researchers enabled ethical navigation of potentially uncomfortable topics. Their role was vital in facilitating discussions, determining when a particular subject warranted further unpacking, or pivoting when participant hesitation or discomfort indicated it was time to move to a different topic.

This methodology was guided by rigorous ethical considerations, with ethics approval granted by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Melbourne, Australia). Participants and informants are de-identified throughout this paper, because some informants requested anonymity and anonymity was promised to all focus group participants.

Preliminary Findings

Philippines

Our detailed conflict and VE analysis for Mindanao can be found in our paper, Ware et al. (2023b). Interviewees and focus group participants in the Philippines expressed deep concerns about the terminology of VE and P/CVE being used in the context of Mindanao. Certainly, all informants connected with development CSOs/NGOs were adamant that VE and P/CVE terminology should not be used in communities, or in public descriptions about programs, and would thus even hesitate to use such language in the planning discussions for their projects.

Of key concern was that this terminology, when used, often conflates many different interrelated layers of violence and conflict, or tries to separate out one single type of violence to be addressed independently, even though the dynamics are complex, multidimension and deeply interrelated. In so doing, VE and P/CVE, by definition, was only ever applied to non-state actors and individuals, whereas most felt that extreme state policies and extreme behavior of the security sector, at times, has been deeply intertwined yet excluded by such terminology and framing. Several informants insisted that state actors had themselves effectively become terrorists, and perpetrator of extreme violence, highlighting issues in the framing and control of the label 'violent extremist'.

Mindanao has long experienced conflict—as one informant put it, "the same conflict was already there before it was called VE, and long before ISIS engagement". The island has struggled with clan violence (rido) and multiple separatist insurgencies since Spanish times, if not earlier, plus decades of communist struggle. Many VE perpetrators were initiated into violence through clan-based rido conflict. Some VE groups have recruited people already socialized to violence as a means of solving grievance, well before those individuals were radicalized.

Some from weaker clans have been attracted to VE groups in an attempt to provide greater protection. Some groups who were originally otherwise 'legitimate' insurgent groups, who happened to be Muslim, have reached out to international jihadist networks seeking support for their local cause. As such, analyzing and responding to VE in isolation from other conflict dynamics is particularly problematic.

This is not to say that VE should be minimized, ignored or simply treated as reasonable. Just as VE should not conflate clan or separatist violence into responses, so must VE not be conflated into simply being a form of separatist violence. Both interview and focus group respondents did identify VE as a distinct problem, and saw a real distinction between VE, clan violence and insurgency – but insisted they are so deeply intertwined that they need to be understood and addressed in parallel. Most see VE as an extreme response to largely legitimate political, economic and social grievances, shared by many. The focus groups around the Lanao del Sur region of Mindanao did, however, still call these groups 'black groups', and express their fears and concerns about the actions of such groups. Some did, nonetheless, express feelings that the greater danger to their families and communities was the state security sector, particularly if the security sector felt their village was connected to or supporting the 'black groups'. Furthermore, while they fear the black groups, they also felt these groups were unlikely to target them, as fellow Muslims from the same ethnic background.

Recruitment to VE groups and networks in Mindanao is, at least until now, more via kinship and clan lines than, say, social media and online. There are concerns in villages, particularly amongst mothers and heads of households, that the increasing rollout of telecommunications in more remote areas of Mindanao may lead to increase online radicalization. Youth in the same villages, however, suggest they have not seen signs of it yet and their concerns for their friends remain around in-person recruitment of vulnerable youth, particularly those already embroiled in clan violence, those who drop out of education and those whose guardians cannot supervise them adequately, due to poverty, chronic illness or parent death.

Push factors identified include, unsurprisingly, historical and ongoing injustices and grievances, land disputes, poverty and perceptions of deprivation, particularly inequitable access to services including justice mechanisms. Pull factors identified include the sense of security VE groups provide against feelings of insecurity created by rido clan violence and fear of the security forces. The number of firearms in Mindanao makes the situation quite volatile, particularly with the difficulties disarming Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) members and other combatants, leading to deep feelings if insecurity. Land, water and other resource disputes are a major trigger for violence, implicating the political economy into VE recruitment and violence. Recruitment is aided by the widespread perception that VE groups are strongly led, but clan leaders and former militant groups now governing the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) are corrupt and ineffectual. Recruitment is believed to be driven at least as much by a desire for security, more than the pull of an ideology.

This analysis of the context in Mindanao highlights how deeply intertwined VE and other types of violence are in Mindanao. Thus, addressing VE is problematic without thinking about and investing programming dollars to equally address other conflict dynamics.

Kenya

We likewise have published a detailed conflict and VE analysis for the coast region of Kenya, Ware et al. (2024). The VE dynamics in the coast region of Kenya, as identified through key informant interview, have many similarities with Mindanao. Our key informants almost universally expressed similar concerns about use of the terminology, its ability to leave communities feeling targeted and vulnerable, and its tendency to conflate complex dynamics. Land and resources grievances and disputes are likewise triggers, if not central to many of the recruitment narratives in Kenya, meaning VE is deeply intertwined with other conflicts in the region.

For the Muslim minority, a colonizer narrative is strongly felt and expresses grievances about the growing power and land acquisitions of Christian Kenyans from elsewhere in the country, who are taking control of the best bits of their historic lands. This is amplified in coastal Kenya by narratives of coastal Muslim Kenyans' historical independence from British-controlled Kenya under Zanzibar rule. The Christian colonizer narrative is therefore strong, and plays into recruitment narratives. At the same time, VE is enmeshed with intercommunal land and water access disputes between pastoralists and nomads, as well as the mobilization of groups for political violence connected to electoral politics.

Most informants see the underlying grievances contributing to VE recruitment as largely legitimate, and that some extreme security responses have led to perceptions by many that state security actors are (or can be) just as bad as VE groups—and perhaps create a more immediate sense of risk. The dangers of conflation, or a singular focus on addressing VE, was thus a common concern, with informants stressing the need to address legitimate grievances and intercommunal tensions concomitantly with addressing VE.

Compounding grievances around dispossession, lack of access to legal and justice mechanisms, and other key development issues in the coast region are the very high rates of unemployment and poverty. There is a strong perception among the Muslim population that they face a lack of opportunity, at all levels, due to discrimination and marginalization. This is capitalized upon in recruitment, much of which targets unemployed youth—particularly those who have already engaged with political or criminal gangs.

Kenya is an extremely religious context, with some people of all backgrounds being tempted to turn to simplistic, quick fix religious alternatives being promoted by less scrupulous figures. For some, particularly unemployed and marginalized Muslim youth, jihadist religious narratives may appear attractive in this context. However, it must be recognized that this is not solely a phenomenon within the Islamic community. There are reports of even some marginalized coastal Christian youth being converted by jihadist VE groups, as well as some dangerous fringe Christian groups on the coast able to attract and harm large numbers of people.

This is perhaps demonstrated within the Christian community by the arrest of Pastor Paul Mackenzie of the Good News International Church on the coast near Malindi. Mackenzie was arrested on terrorism-related charges after he convinced 429 followers to starve themselves to death in 2023 in preparation for the return of Jesus. Mass graves, including a large number of children, were found in the Shakahola Forest (Reuters, 2024). Pastor Ezekiel Odero of the New Life Prayer Centre and Church in Kilifi, was also arrested in 2023 in suspicion of similar activities. Investigations are ongoing (Kalekye, 2023). Regardless, Odero's church has grown a reputation for bottled 'holy' water and prayer handkerchiefs, and peddling other quick fix answers to soothe people's sense of marginalization and powerlessness.

The point is that in an extremely religious context with a pool of people feeling desperate due to unmet needs, it is not hard for unscrupulous leaders to manipulate people using religious ideas, however shallow and marginal. Recruitment by al-Shabab and other VE groups in Kenya should therefore not be seen solely in terms of espoused jihadist ideology, and analyzed or addressed in terms of VE, but needs to be located and responded to within the context of much broader social dynamics of underdevelopment and grievance, as well as the political economy and social tensions associated with multilayered resource, political and intercommunal conflicts.

Indonesia

Indonesia provides a very powerful contrast to the dynamics of VE in Philippines and Kenya. Our research was solely focused on the island of Java, although our data collection did span West, Central and East Java. Java does not have the same layers of clan, insurgent, communal or others nested conflicts. West Papua, and to some extent Aceh, may have some of this multilayered conflict, but VE dynamics in Java are very different to those in Mindanao, Philippines and the coast region of Kenya. We suggest that the key reason for this is that VE has not embedded itself within other complex and multilayered conflicts.

Rather, VE in Indonesia is driven by Salafi groups who promote very strict and narrow Islamist views, intolerant of diversity and seeking to control the behaviors of others, particularly women. The vast majority of Muslims in Indonesia reject such intolerance, and many Javanese groups point to traditional Javanese (and Indonesian) values of tolerance and diversity as key protective factors. Traditional culture, religious and civic education offer strong protective factors. Nonetheless, these VE groups appeal to a small minority in Java, and have some traction. Recruitment plays largely on borrowed Middle Eastern narratives around global coloniality and oppression of Islam, not local grievances derived from other interrelated conflict dynamics.

Without going into a more detailed analysis of VE dynamics and ways to address VE in Indonesia, the point we make here is simply that in the absence of other nested clan, insurgent, intercommunal, land/resource, et cetera conflicts, analysis of VE and program development for P/CVE is much more straight forward. Still, programming that promotes human rights, respect, equality, diversity and tolerance, while providing economic, sociopolitical and gender empowerment, are widely considered effective, as our evaluation of programs in Indonesia show (Kelly et al., 2023).

It is also highly significant that the idea of hateful extremism being particularly problematic, and a good upstream way to talking about the issues for development CSOs/NGOs, came out most strongly in Indonesia (Ware et al., 2019; Barton et al. 2022)—more so even than the Philippines and Kenya.

Discussion and Recommendations

Programming required

The above context analysis for our three case studies highlights quite clearly that in all cases, key components in more upstream work to try to prevent VE amongst the whole of society, include work to strengthen social cohesion, tolerance of diversity, respect for individual rights, equitable access to services including justice, and equal participation socially. Programs that address marginalization, poverty, economic insecurity and inequality and gender issues are highly relevant.

Justice and mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution are essential, including bringing groups together in sustained dialogue and cultural exchange. These are all things many development CSOs/NGOs, local and internation, have considerable expertise addressing. Our research also pointed to the power of inter-faith activities, and the inclusion of respected, mainstream, moderate religious leaders in peace promotion and conflict resolution.

Key issues for development NGOs

Key issues identified in the research, particularly for involvement of development CSOs/NGOs, are the VE and P/CVE terminology and framing (e.g. that only non-state actors can be violent extremists), and that VE is deeply interrelated with other types of conflict present in the sociopolitical context. VE recruitment draws heavily on the same grievances as other conflicts, particularly those around historical injustices, official and communal discrimination, poverty, inequitable access and opportunity, et cetera. Likewise, intolerance and hateful extremism are key issues in each context. Perhaps we might better think of this as non-physically violent extremism, to highlight that it does seek to do significant harm to others via forms of non-physical violence and coercion.

A way forward for Development NGOs – integrate into Conflict Sensitivity / Do No Harm

We have two recommendations for development CSOs/NGOs, and the donors and agencies that want to partner with them, based on this data and analysis.

Our first recommendation is that for development CSOs/NGOs to move away from P/CVE terminology and frameworks and engage in this work more confidently, they should think in terms of primarily addressing hateful extremism, as defined above, rather than directly working on the harder, more security-focused, violent extremism. By addressing hateful extremism—the incitement of hatred, intolerance of diversity, marginalization and dehumanization of others, including toxic nationalism, misogyny, and other forms of coercive control of others— development CSOs/NGOs are addressing the early or upstream behaviors that for some, precede full-blown violent extremism. Addressing these is a broader social good to be pursued regardless.

Our second recommendation is that violent and hateful extremism should be thought of, analyzed, and addressed as one component of a wider conflict sensitivity / Do No Harm framework, rather than in isolation. Conflict sensitivity is an umbrella term for a diversity of analytical frameworks and tools already widely adopted by development, humanitarian and peacebuilding agencies, to help agencies to adapt interventions to the complexities of conflict (Schmeild et al., 2023; Ware, 2023).

The term is often used interchangeably with 'Do No Harm', although do no harm is better thought of as one specific conflict sensitivity approach (perhaps the most widely adopted). The foundational understanding underlying all conflict sensitivity approaches is that the design and implementation of development or humanitarian activities will always impact conflict-peace dynamics, regardless of attempts at neutrality. Impacts may be either positive or negative, and the contribution of such programs, on their own, is usually weak compared to other international, national, regional and local factors and actors.

Nonetheless, there is ample evidence that the social, economic and political impacts of interventions can amplify grievances, incentivize conflict or exacerbate tensions (Uvin, 1998; Anderson, 1999), as much as relieve them, if not analyzed and carefully considered in the design and implementation of projects. Interventions can contribute to the worsening of conflict or even be subverted as an instrument of war (e.g. Uvin 1999; De Waal, 1997; Goodhand, 2002, 2006).

Conflict-sensitivity is thus premised on the understanding that the design and implementation of interventions has the potential to reduce, sustain, amplify or even trigger conflict, and therefore that careful analysis and adaptation of project design is required to minimize harm and maximize positive impact—regardless of the type of program or primary project objectives.

Careful analysis of the context, actors and dynamics of a conflict is thus essential, then careful analysis of project design to try to anticipate the interaction between potential interventions and conflict, to adapt the proposed design to minimize harm and maximize positive impact. We would propose that the same is also true of VHE—that the design and implementation of development-humanitarian interventions in areas plagued by VHE will always have some impact on VHE dynamics, and if not analyzed and carefully considered, inadvertent harm is possible and opportunities to reduce VHE risks are likely to be missed.

We therefore recommend that conflict sensitivity / Do No Harm analysis tools and frameworks be expanded to also consider VHE dynamics. Specifically, in addition to the usual components of conflict sensitivity / Do No Harm analysis, the following factors should also be analyzed in program design and monitored throughout implementation: local VE push and pull factors, the role/use of history and grievances and how they are articulated in VE recruitment and radicalization, what is attractive about recruitment narratives to those who join, local terminology used to speak of extremist groups, hate speech and hate imagery being shared, how intolerance and exclusivity are promoted and by whom, and so on.

On the other side, analysis of resilience and prosocial protective factors, how positive alternatives are promoted and normalized, and by whom, is also very important to inform development CSO/NGO programming decisions.

Our argument is that incorporation of these sort of dynamics into the conflict sensitivity/Do No Harm analysis already being conducted by development CSOs/NGOs, and allowing them to use the terminology of conflict and hateful extremism, will allow these agencies far more scope to be engaged in upstream P/CVE programming and partnerships.

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TOWARDS A VICTIM-CENTRED APPROACH TO THE REINTEGRATION OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

By Peter Knoope

Introduction

Twenty years after the infamous events of 9/11, the establishment of the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba in its immediate aftermath, the numerous arrests of terrorists around the world over the last twenty years and the military defeat of ISIS in the Middle East, counter terrorism professionals are increasingly confronted with new challenges. How does society deal with violent extremist offenders? The question remains the same whether in a prison cell in Brussels or in a camp in the Middle East. Can they truly be deradicalized? Can further spread of their ideology be prevented? Can their minds - or at least, their behaviors – be changed? Can recidivism be reduced or avoided? Can they be rehabilitated? Are approaches that are used for `regular` criminals applicable? And most importantly, are experiences from Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) useful as an inspiration?

This paper examines how programs to rehabilitate terrorist offenders have developed over the years, explores fundamental flaws in the system, where these flaws are rooted and why that produces resistance to reintegration. Such resistance may not be based on research findings, but it nevertheless keeps terrorists from being effectively re-socialised. Since re-socialisation and reintegration of terrorists is often hampered by public resistance, there is a need to find alternatives. This paper looks at a victim-centred approach to the reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) as a necessary potential alternative to existing failing policies.

The growth of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies

There are no reliable figures of the number of terrorists in detention worldwide (Hill,2020). The numbers vary per country and statistics are often unavailable or questionable. If camp-based populations in Syria are included in the statistics, the numbers are in the range of more than 100,000, with over 57,000 individuals in Syria's Al-Hol camp alone (REACH, 2021). The issue is huge in size but also of major importance in terms of security and political sensitivity. Not many governments are prepared to take the risk of allowing a former terrorist to walk free, even after incarceration, when there are no full guarantees for future public security.

At the same time, despite years of military operations around the world, terrorism shows no signs of quickly abating. The number of global terror attacks in 2021 amounted to 5,226, with terrorism reportedly becoming more concentrated. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 48% of global terrorism deaths, with the Sahel becoming home to some of deadliest terror groups (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022)

The issue of rehabilitation and reintegration is one that has emerged from the United Nations (UN) in the context of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), defined as "individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.

(S/RES/2178/2014)" With swathes of recruits in recent history travelling to countries to support terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaida, the Taliban, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (also known as Da'esh), the international community became aware that domestic approaches to containing terrorism alone were insufficient, and that international cooperation was needed to prevent their travel, and to facilitate their return. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 (2014), which was the first time that the need to develop and implement Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (PRR) strategies for returning FTFs was mentioned in the international arena (S/RES/2178/2014).

Security Council Resolution 2396 (2017) also stresses the need to develop PRR strategies but takes these ideas further. Firstly, it points out that prisons can serve as potential incubators for radicalisation to terrorism, citing the need to ensure proper assessment and monitoring and rehabilitation of prisoners. Further, it adds that Member States "may need to continue to engage with offenders after release from prison to avoid recidivism, in accordance with relevant international law and taking into consideration, where appropriate, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners."

Secondly, it outlines the need for differential measures for children who may be more vulnerable to radicalisation and in need of particular support such as counselling, and to be treated in accordance with applicable international law, as well as women who may have participated in terrorist activities in a variety of different roles. Thirdly, it speaks to the issue of rehabilitation in consultation with local communities, mental health and education practitioners as well as other civil society actors. It is indicative of the current paralyses in reintegration efforts that consultation with local communities is only mentioned as one of several groups to incorporate in these policies, - reflecting a lack of prioritization of local communities as central actors in reintegration efforts.

In addition, the Security Council Guiding Principles on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (the 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles and its 2018 Addendum (S/2015/939 and S/2018/117) go into detail on prosecutions, but only give brief mention to rehabilitation and reintegration as alternatives to prosecution in appropriate cases and the need to proactively engage with civil society. The UNSC also has specified that rehabilitation and reintegration strategies depend on the national legislation and criminal justice system of each Member State but sets this out in the context of being introduced at "differing stages of criminal proceedings as an alternative to incarceration or in addition to incarceration, including as part of a reduced sentence…also, on a voluntary basis, in cases where returning foreign terrorist fighters have been acquitted, charges have been dropped." (S/2019/998, 2019).

Despite these guiding principles and resolutions, the 2021 Global Survey of the Implementation of UNSCR 1373 (2001) and other relevant resolutions by Member States has found that very few Member States have been able to develop PRR strategies, and where these have been developed, they have been implemented on an ad-hoc basis, mainly due to insufficient structural, financial, and human resources. Only a handful of States have consulted with communities affected by terrorism, thereby raising questions over their legitimacy and the effectiveness of measures, while there is also a noticeable gap in measures aimed at preventing terrorism resulting from structural conditions such as good governance. Strategies should also ensure adherence to human rights and international humanitarian law (United Nations Security Council Counter – Terrorism Committee, 2021).

It is also worth noting that in some contexts, including parts of Africa, the issue of FTFs is not as great a concern as localized and fragmented home-grown terrorism. Linkages to Daesh often operate under a "marriage of convenience," (UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2022). while other regional terror groups, such as Boko Haram in West Africa, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel region, and Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa often build on local grievances, including a lack of service delivery, socio-economic grievances, and a lack of inclusive governance. Comprehensive strategies to prevent radicalisation are therefore needed to build a sustainable peace. Due to high levels of local support and penetration within local community structures efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate terrorists, once disengaged or captured and imprisoned, should be considered.

The failure of Member States to develop effective PRR strategies is not only reflective of the practical constraints facing Member States. It also raises questions of distrust, political will, and pragmatism. Moreover, it begs the question of what Member States intend as the outcome of their Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) efforts – is it to be forward-looking and to guarantee non-recurrence? Or is it to ensure justice and accountability? And if so, who determines what kind of justice should be applied, and what the conditions are for civilians or communities to accept terrorists back into their environment?

Resistance to reintegration

Terrorists are generally portraited as violent, scary, and inhuman. These individuals follow a violent ideology that they believe gives them a licence to kill, with macabre images splashed around the internet. A logical consequence of this grim picture, resulting from government messaging and media reporting to the public, is that killing a terrorist is an acceptable response and that a terrorist does not deserve any better. The public is often told to hate them, be frightened of them and be on the alert for signals and indicators of threats and radicalised and extremist individuals.

It is therefore logical that suggestions of rehabilitation, especially those that focus on the well-being and counselling of the terrorist him or herself, evoke a natural and predictable reaction that opposes any such programming - after all, there is a strong policy contradiction if government is perceived to counselling and helping the very individuals that we have been told to mistrust, report and, if need be, kill.

In a study on community perspectives of former terrorists in Nigeria, Ike et al (2020) note that the communities are sceptical towards monetizing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes since they can be used for corrupt purposes by the government, as the basis for abuse, and because receiving financial compensation could prevent militants from wanting to move beyond the scheme. The study also found that community members believed that favourable incentives were awarded to militants rather than those rejecting violence; with a lack of confidence in the genuine repentance of former combatants (Ike et al., 2020). It is worth noting that there is nothing exceptional about the situation described in Nigeria, but rather that similar perceptions are found across the globe.

This is unsurprising. Are communities expected to understand that those who have turned their backs on society to fight it should be welcomed back in? Is it reasonable to expect that the very people that have targeted, killed, and kidnapped people within the community should be received without any hesitation? The reintegration of former terrorists requires at least some acknowledgment of the suffering and the fear, the feelings of revenge and the doubts of those who feel themselves (potential) victims of the acts of terrorists.

Nevertheless, the fact that military operations have failed to quell terrorism suggests that the current approaches need to be complemented by others. In conflict settings, individuals can become associated with terrorists in a variety of roles – from cooks to women forcibly recruited as wives to those kidnapped and unable to escape. At least some nuance in the approaches is therefore needed to address the range of engagements with terrorism and to prevent new cycles of violence. Moreover, as the next section shows, deradicalization practices can work and should be considered as a first step towards reintegration.

Lessons learnt from deradicalization practices

One of the first deradicalization initiatives appeared in Saudi Arabia in 2007, which came in the form of the *Mohammed bin Nayef Counselling and Care Centre for terrorists*.[4] Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Nayef bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud played a key role in setting up the program in 2007 after a series of terrorist attacks including bombings and kidnapping. The counselling program in the center includes a diversity of individual and group sessions, with art, sports, vocational training, religious counselling and psychological support. In the program a lot of individual and tailored attention is paid to the former terrorist offenders.[5] It is labor intensive and costly.

The core of the program in Riyadh is to make extremists aware of the proper interpretation of the religion. It is based on the idea that some individuals take a wrong turn in their life but are still our brothers and need guidance. The program therefore employs intensive religious instruction by deconstructing extremists' interpretation of the Holy Qur›an. Many countries have established rehabilitation programs based on the Saudi Arabian model. The Saudi government has always claimed high success rates (up to 80 percent) for their program (Boucek, 2008). Experts have claimed that this may be due to the strict selection of the participants, and full understanding is difficult given the lack of public independent evaluation of the program. Some dispute the reported success rate.

Still, the model has served as an example for many governments establishing their own centers, without taking into account that the Saudi point of departure was and still is that `*some individuals take a wrong turn in their life but are still our brothers and need guidance*`, which sits uncomfortably with other messaging killing a terrorist is a legitimate action. Much policy and practice that drew on the Saudi approach has not taken these contradictions into account. The implication of this fact is that often the disengaged or even deradicalized former extremist is met with public resistance and lack of acceptance.

[4]The Saudi initiative was in turn inspired by Egyptian approaches thirty years ago.
[5]Information based on personal visit in 2012 to the Centre by the author.

"In the Netherlands a former member of the infamous Hofstad-group was convicted for membership of a terrorist organisation. She was detained for three years. She disengaged and is currently building up her new life. Amongst other activities she is working in the area of prevention of radicalisation. Recently a Member of Parliament discovered her involvement in some work for a political party. The MP publicly protested and had her removed from her job. Her effective disengagement and deradicalization was no guarantee for her return into the society. Anxiety and feelings of revenge got the upper hand (NOS Nieuws, 2022)."[6]

It should not come as a surprise that as early as 2010 the International Peace Institute (IPI) in their study called `A New Approach? Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism` recommends that "communities affected by radicalization in deradicalization should be involved". IPI states that `If the community doesn't accept that deradicalized individuals are no longer a threat, programs will not ultimately be successful and will lack credibility (International Peace Institute, 2010). Still in the Handbook on Reintegration of Terrorist Offenders published in 2021 by UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021) the issue of acceptance by the community is addressed in only two pages, out of a total of 201 pages. The reader of the Handbook may find the topic briefly described on page 185 and 186.

This may be seen as indicative of the attention paid to the topic by some experts and UN agencies. The community in which the former terrorist needs to be reintegrated can be perceived as rather an afterthought. The (potential) victims of terrorist actors are almost forgotten in the daily practice of the rehabilitation efforts of former terrorists. The acceptance by communities seems to be taken for granted despite the policy recommendations that advocate the opposite.

As an example of a good practice, in Somalia, NGO Soyden facilitates the reintegration of low-level defectors into communities by engaging local actors. Its programming includes engaging elders, women's groups and business in mediation between clans and trauma healing exercises. Its 12-week program, the Peace Tree, is a voluntary 12-week program used to teach forgiveness and empathy, while also focusing on emotional control and brain functioning. The NGO self-assesses that its programs are highly effective – an assessment that some partners involved in the programs shared (United Nations University, 2018).

Even in countries where there is no dedicated centre, the idea that underpins the original Saudi initiative – that rehabilitation is possible and should be attempted - is being copied by other governments. Individual training, and religious and other counselling, to prepare the inmate for return is the major point of attention. The Manual on Rehabilitation of radicalised and terrorist offenders for first-line practitioners published by the EU RAN (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020) phrases the approach as follows:

Preparation for release. This phase is one of the most critical transition periods; close accompaniment is therefore crucial. The main objective is to design a post-release plan detailing the necessary steps for offenders, once released. This plan is based on a rigorous and realistic assessment of their personal capacities and prospects of social and functional integration, after release.

Other major influential international fora, including the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF)[7] and the Hedayah Centre of Excellence (Hedayah, 2021) have published similar approaches and have laid down these instructive best-practice-based-advice in handbooks for practitioners. It should therefore not surprise us that most national policies when it comes to the question `how to deal with terrorists in jail` can cite the Nayef model as a source.

[6]Quote translated into English by the author.
[7]The GCTF's Framework Documents can be found online at https://www.thegctf.org/About-us/GCTF-framework-documents

Is the fear for recidivism backed by the facts?

Finding information of recidivism rates is challenging. Only small amounts of data exist, and often involves getting access to judicial sources of data. Due to the transnational nature of terrorism, it can be difficult to gather data across countries. Different studies also use different methodologies. Furthermore, it is necessary to collect data over an extended period of time (Renard, 2020) to capture more diverse and accurate findings.

Despite these efforts, research has shown that, despite concerns over the release of terrorist offenders, these individuals are unlikely to relapse into violent extremism. A study of more than 500 jihadi offenders in Belgium between 1990 and 2019 showed low rates of recidivism (Renard, 2020). This study also reviewed a compilation of studies on terrorist recidivism demonstrating recidivism rates mostly under 5%. Table 1 below demonstrates the findings.

Country	Recidivism rate	Number of terrorism related offenders	Time span
Northern Ireland	2.2 %	453	1998 - 2011
Belgium	2.3 %	557***	1990 - 2020
England and Wales	3 %**	196	2013 - 2019
Netherlands	4.4 %	189	2012 - 2019
Spain	7 %	199***	2004 - 2018

Table 1: Terrorist Recidivism in European Countries (Pap & Örell, 2021 [8])

The findings show that there is no academic basis for the level of anxiety in communities when it comes to security concerns. They are unfounded. Terrorist recidivism is very low (World Population Review, 2024) compared to other forms of criminal behaviour[9]. Therefore, it seems that terrorism is a once off activity. But exposing this fact will not automatically resolve the resistance. The discrepancies in policy and messaging from authorities alone are sufficient reason to distrust the facts and figures. First, the public is told that the terrorist is a danger to society and the citizens subsequently, when that same terrorist is in prison, the public is simply told that the former terrorist must be helped, assisted and unconditionally welcomed.

But there is more to it. The very fact that someone has turned their back on society and has chosen to use violence for political reasons and out of a militant interpretation of religion requires some explanation and signs of repentance. This is especially the case for a community that feels threatened. The public knows that the very nature of terrorism implies that victims are randomly chosen. We can all be victim of the next terrorist attack. At a concert, a Christmas market, a pub, a church or a random boulevard during a vacation. Reuniting the potential victim with the person that made the choice to see that individual as a legitimate target and an enemy, requires more than investment in academic research and in the wellbeing of the perpetrator.

Towards a victim-centred approach through a transitional justice lens

If societies wish to heal, increase levels of acceptance of formers and at the same time prevent a recurrence of terrorism by seriously involving the receiving communities, transitional justice may offer a prism through which the rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs should be viewed. Transitional justice attempts to find the delicate balance between truth, justice, accountability, social cohesion, reparation, and addressing the structural drivers of conflict. Key elements include the right to know, the right to justice, the right to reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence (Olojo et al., 2022).

Especially this final point is of utmost importance to the receiving communities. Communities need some form of guarantees that recidivism will not occur, and not in generic or academic terms – the community wants a guarantee that this specific terrorist has changed their mind or at least their behaviour. It certainly is also helpful if the conversation can take place between communities and the former terrorist offenders about the motives and experiences under the banner of `right to know'. This can help to address the structural drivers of the phenomenon of terrorism.

[9] The percentage of ex-detainees that commit a criminal offence within a period of two years after release is 47% in the Netherlands.

Under the right to justice, the limits of trials, especially in the developing world, are well-known, being costly and time-consuming and often leaving victims unsatisfied when prosecutors fail to obtain enough evidence to find perpetrators guilty. International trials can lack legitimacy, and domestic courts face resource challenges in prosecuting the wide range of perpetrators involved (especially after being broken down by conflict).

Victims also deserve the truth - about what happened to family members, and to other victims. In South Africa, amnesty was offered in exchange for the truth or perpetrators faced prosecution, which satisfied victim desires for truth as a form of acknowledgement, arguably a form of justice in its own right (Du Toit, 2000). Moreover, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) emphasised the pre-amble to the 1993 Interim Constitution, which called on "the need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimisation" (Ellis, 2000). It was under this premise that the model applied a "carrot and stick" approach – a combination of reward and punishment to coax people into the truth and reconciliation process.

Recent iterations of transitional justice use a blend of prosecutions for those accused of the most serious crimes, such as crimes against humanity, rape and murder, while perpetrators lower down the ranks are subjected to truth commissions, localised justice mechanisms, and reparations deemed important by the community. In East Timor, perpetrators were requested to do community service (2017, Wilks)[10] that served to rebuild the community, therefore being more forward-looking and restorative. It is for this reason that transitional justice also considers issues such as reparations (monetary and non-monetary compensation for victims), memorials, and social cohesion.

Transitional justice also examines political and institutional reforms, human and people's rights, and inclusion to prevent recurrence of atrocities. By addressing the structural issues that led to conflict in the first place, there is a higher chance that there will not be further conflict. In the framework of a preventative CT/CVE policy this advantage should not be overlooked. Restorative justice mechanisms may solve some of the root causes and drivers for violent extremism.

In this regard, transitional justice offers a converse lens to PRR strategies, that move away from being perpetrator to victim-centred. From an epistemic perspective, it is important to understand the concept of victim, what the victims see as justice and to ensure that measures fit with these needs, thereby empowering the victim to be a holder of rights (UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2017).

This does not mean that those accused of the worst crimes should not be held accountable, but rather than approaches should also consider differing levels of responsibility (including for women and children) and pragmatic means of addressing the situation. Applying a victim-centred perspective also provides greater legitimacy to a process, by creating an equalising effect and giving greater visibility to community needs (UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2017).

The application of transitional justice to cases of violent extremism

Some initial studies have been undertaken to understand how transitional justice could be applied to violent extremism. For example, the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, in partnership with the Institute for Integrated Transitions, has looked at various mechanisms for punishment and leniency, including amnesties; prosecutions; traditional justice; and disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR), rehabilitation, and other programs that offer alternatives to criminal justice. The project examines case studies of Nigeria (Boko Haram), Iraq (IS/Daesh) and Somalia (al Shabaab) and finds that:

> "Harsh and overly aggressive prosecution practices, plus lack of clarity surrounding screening criteria, undermine the ability of individuals to seek a sustainable exit from violent extremist groups. Likewise, poorly conceived approaches to amnesty have made their usage less legitimate in the eyes of the population, despite the need for some leniency as part of any comprehensive attempt to prevent and counter violent extremism. "
>
> -United Nations University, 2018

[10] A practice that reduces recidivism rates with an estimated 15 percent in criminal offences in comparison with recidivism rates after incarceration.

The study therefore suggests that transitional justice can assist with 1) enticing exit, 2) providing accountability, 3) offering redress to affected communities, and 4) addressing the conditions conducive to the creation and support of such organisations. Across the case studies, it is argued that overly broad approaches to prosecution and screening have made the problem of terrorism and extremism worse. Over-prosecution can strain resources unnecessarily, present an either/or choice to members of terrorist organisations of either staying or being prosecuted, and detract from rehabilitation and reintegration efforts (United Nations University, 2018).

At the same time, reintegration efforts have been imperfect. In Nigeria, research found that greater transparency was needed for both its defectors program and its rehabilitation program, and further identified considerable resistance to reintegration. In Mosul, Iraq, residents were asked about punishments for hypothetical collaborators depending on the type of collaborative role that these collaborators played, and research found that residents believed that those with the closest association to fighters should have the harshest punishment. Furthermore, Mosul residents were more likely to hypothetically allow IS collaborators into the neighborhoods if they had done a form of restorative punishment such as community service. Reintegration can therefore be a tricky topic that requires extensive, meaningful and timely community consultation.

Is DDR an appropriate application for deradicalization and reintegration?[11]

One element of transitional justice pertains to Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR).
This contradiction is even more relevant since in the majority of cases there is no underlying peace agreement between a terrorist organisation and the targeted State. In most cases the fighting between the terrorists and the State and the targeting of civilians is ongoing while the rehabilitation process starts.

In the case of the regular post-conflict policy in the field of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, the program is the result of an agreement that comes with an end to the violence, with increased levels of stability (Rufer, 2005) and other advantages in economic and human terms. Acceptance of the former combatants, even though not always easy in post-conflict DDR practice, may be higher than in a situation where there is no guarantee for an end to violence and other advantages of a peace dividend, especially since DDR in post-conflict situations is often paralleled by policies targeted at reconstruction, development and compensation.

Those parallel policies are meant to indicate and practically prove to the public that peace has advantages for the public and especially for those who suffered the negative consequences of the violence, not just for the former violent actors. In the policy and practice of rehabilitation programs for terrorist offenders, this element is often absent. This lack of a guaranteed peace partly explains the public resistance. There is no evident incentive on the side of the public that has suffered the direct or indirect consequences of political violence to accept the terrorist back into their ranks.

The gender dimension

Although it is often believed that women are less likely to engage in terrorism than men, the evidence suggests that the picture is more nuanced (Counter- Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2019). While Resolution 2396 (2017) notes that women should be included in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of strategies for the return and reintegration of FTFs, gender stereotypes still play a strong role when it comes to reintegration and resocialisation. In most of the countries in the Western Balkans, for instance, female FTFs are pro-actively brought back from the camps in the Middle East[12].

These women go through a resocialisation program without being brought to justice. The same is true for the women FTFs in Kazakhstan (Central Asia Program, 2022). So far, the experiences show that recidivism is low amongst these returnees. It is however still too early to draw definite conclusions, but it appears that the lack of imprisonment hardly influences, in negative terms, the future orientation of these FTFs.

[11] DDR was and still is an integral part of ambitious, multi-fractional peace support operations (PSOs). These were not only to contribute to the consolidation and stabilisation of fragile ceasefire and peace agreements but finally to lead to the establishment of the rule of law as well as the formation of democratic structures and a market economy as preconditions for a sustainable, 'liberal' peace.
[12] Up to an estimated seventy to eighty percent of the population of the Al Hol camp in Syria is made up of women and children under eighteen years of age.

Conclusion

Public resistance to reintegration of terrorist offenders is a phenomenon across the board. The Reintegration component of Deradicalization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDR) programs is especially confronted with obstacles. Acceptance by communities is a major challenge - few want to welcome "terrorists" returning. This is due to a combination of factors that start with the basic orientations of the approaches.

These approaches focus on the ideas and positions of the perpetrators, contradict narratives and concepts of terrorism and deny the interests of the (people that perceive themselves as) victims. The potential solution to these weaknesses must be found in a mechanism that allows for a much more central position of (potential) victims. This will open a window of opportunities but also new challenges - challenges, amongst others, related to the definition of victims and the relations between justice, reparation and healing. The authors found inspiration in the model developed by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu of the ANC in the early nineties in post-conflict South Africa, a model that became famous as the Truth and Reconciliation mechanism, and one worth studying and unpacking to evaluate its value in terrorism cases. It is a known fact that recidivism is low in terrorism cases, and further that incarceration has little added value in this respect.

However, the focus of most PRR programs is on both punishment and rehabilitation of the perpetrator. This seems the very opposite of what needs to happen if prevention is the objective. Nelson Mandela has inspired the world with his paradigm of reconciliation - it is worth it to revisit his thinking to find solutions in the framework of counter terrorism.

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Hedayah's annual Edited Volume series aims to support ongoing efforts in preventing and countering extremism and violent extremism by collecting the latest research essays on a diverse range of related topics, incorporating findings relevant to theory and practice. The Edited Volume 2023 collates essays written by academics and practitioners considering the constantly evolving landscape of extremism and violent extremism, exploring vital intersections with other fields, considering extremist, violent extremist and terrorist use of technology and online platforms, and outlining targeted research designed to support practitioners in both online and offline interventions.

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