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Research Proposal

Fighting Islamic Radicalization In the West

Abstract

This paper aims to answer the following question: <u>How can Europe and the US counter Islamic radicalization?</u>

This paper discusses the problem of radicalization in the United States and Europe and the efforts put so far in order to combat it. The paper gives special attention to Islamic radicalization that leads to violence, as Islmic terrorism has been the most destructive form of terrorism amongst all other forms of violence in the last two decades. The paper discusses factors that may contribute to making some individuals respond to radicalization attempts, recruitment methods and whether prisons provide a breeding grounds for radicalization, as is often argued. Testimonies of former extremists are given that discuss some of the theories of the causes of radicalization. The paper also examines some of the counter terrorism programs that are beeing implemented in several European countries, Saudi Arabia, Canada as well as the United States and discusses shortcomings and faults in some of these programs. Finally, the paper proposes creating an institution that employs the efforts and expertise of different sectors of the community: the government, educators, psychologists and other social actors.

Research Design

The paper uses several qualitative research methodologies: case studies, literature reviews, TedTalk segments, government publications and recorded interviews. Descriptive literature, as opposed to other types of sources, are best suited to answer the research question, as the author is interested in focusing on how to prevent radicalization rather than the probability of it happening or any other aspects of the problem that would entail using quantitative data.

Sources were chosen from a large selection of research that discuss the process of radicalization, particularly the telltale signs that authorities look for in order to predict, hence attempt to prevent, radicalization. In order to avoid sample bias, the paper discusses case studies from several European countries, Canada, Saudia Arabia and the USA.

The paper incorporates both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include testimonies by former extremists and also interviews conducted with some of them. Secondary sources include various literature that discuss the research question. The author uses these sources to compare and contrast the various opinions and arguments of scholars and other actors

involved in the problem, such as policymakers, inmates, former extremists, converts to Islam, psychologists, professors of law, counterterrorism experts and counterterrorism program developers.

Finally, the data collected from these sources is synthesized and used to formulate the author's answer to the research question and propose a solution.

Introduction

Extremism has become one of the most dangerous and fastest growing threats spreading all over the world. Extremist ideologies by themselves do not necessarily lead to violence and the ensuing radicalization. Information spread in a matter of minutes on the Internet. This has eliminated geographical boundaries and made the process of radicalization easier and faster than ever before. Islamic radicalization in particular is one of the most dangerous, as evidenced by the increasing attacks of Islamic terrorist groups in Europe and the US in the last two decades. Countries have been racing to find solutions that not only target these groups but also try to detect potential danger. Governments try to achieve this by looking for suspicious activities, analyzing radicalization and recruitment methods, creating programs for prevention, and running rehabilitation programs to educate convicted extremists on how to abandon destructive ideologies by which they found the use of violence justifiable.

Factors that lead to radicalization

Different theories have emerged that try to determine what factors drive certain people to respond to radicalization attempts. Theorists debate whether succumbing to radicalization is a result of social, ideological or psychological factors.

Social factors that scientists believe might be a driver for accepting radicalization include childhood trauma, feeling alienated in society, the search for an identity, experiencing relative deprivation and feeling marginalized within one's own community. Feeling the need to "belong," and to be a part of something, these individuals become more receptive to extremist ideas, after which it becomes easy to be radicalized and to engage in acts of violence (LaFree and Ackerman, 2009). People who experience traumatic events or abuse turn their anger towards other groups or individuals. However, scientists maintain, it is very difficult to define when the turning point comes unless the individual talks with a professional, for example a social worker or a psychiatrist (Van Heelsum and Vermeulen, 2017).

Former jihadist Jesse Morton describes how suffering domestic abuse ultimately put him on the road for radicalization. As children, he and his sister have been abused by their mother. He tried to protect his sister and repeatedly complained to his father, grandmother and the school guidance counselor, all of whom did nothing to protect him. As everyone he trusted ignored his complaints and refused to intervene, he came to a painful realization: "society won't protect me." He felt responsible for protecting his sister from abuse, and this created the "concept of

self-sacrifice … and it is very much the sense of injustice and the willingness to sacrifice that ran congruent with what I adopted when I became a jihadi" (This is 42, 2019).

Morton's story also affirms the theory that people who harbor anger turn against society. Some individuals feel victimised and feel that society failed them, so they find relief in participating in acts of violence as this helps them vent their anger. Some of them are rebels without a cause until they find a cause. Nilsson explains that "[m]any recruits have previously expressed this radical revolt against society with criminality, and Islam and ideology have become a mere cover to legitimize violence" (2019).

Some scholars disagree with the opinion that violent behavior is triggered by social and psychological factors. Quintan Wiktorowicz, for instance, concluded in one study that "the social-psychological process by which individuals become active in radical Islamist groups is 'not all that different' from moderate, non-violent Muslim groups or from non-Islamic social movements, even if the content of the ideology differs" (2012).

Another group of researchers believe that terrorism starts with an ideology that promotes hate against a certain group. Hate can be invoked for various reasons. White supremacy and neo Nazi extremism, for example, is based on the ideology that Whites are superior above all people. Adopting such rhetoric can lead to acts of violence as a result of accumulated hatred targeted at the perceived "other."

These destructive ideologies go beyond borders and time. The story of former white supremacist and neo Nazist Duke Schneider (or Pitbaull, as he was famously known in his professional wrestling career) can attest to that. From a young age, Schneider became fascinated with Hitler's speeches and the message he promoted. *Mein Kampf* became Schneider's Bible, and he became a leader for white supremacy, giving speeches while touring different cities and giving interviews to the media. In his rhetoric, "he compared undocumented immigrants to cockroaches" and diluted the Holocaust by claiming that "Germans, too, had suffered," not only Jews (Goldstein, 2017).

Similarly, Islamic extremists adopt an ideology by which they justify their hatred to others. They view other groups as anti Islamic entities that have the intention of destroying Islam as a religion as well as a culture. Consequently, these extremists view the "other" as an enemy that must be attacked. These individuals fall under the influence of terrorist leaders who reinforce their indoctrination by interpreting religious texts to suit their goal. Cloaking their intentions with religion, they do not hesitate to change the interpretation of Quranic verses and religious texts to convince those with limited or no understanding of Islam that it is permissible--actually encouraged--to kill non-Muslims and to attack civilians in non-combat situations. They provide opinions and views that further fuel anger and the us-vs-them mentality. Analysis of farewell videos left by suicide bombers reveal that all of those who accepted to go on suicide missions believed that their actions were "sanctioned by the divinely revealed religion of Islam."

Interviews with the mothers of suicide bombers also confirm the result of this analysis (LaFree and Ackerman, 2009).

A third group of scientists attempt to explain vulnerability to being radicalized from a psychological perspective, arguing that cognitive dissonance can be an important factor. According to Simply Psychology, cognitive dissonance is defined as a "situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors. This produces a feeling of mental discomfort leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to reduce the discomfort and restore balance" (McLeod, 2018). When an individual finds it difficult to reconcile two contradicting ideas, that individual will adopt the stronger one. Rather than change their cognitions of an issue, some individuals will ultimately choose to change their behavior to fit the ideology they decided to follow.

Interviews with former jihadists in Sweden reveal that it was cognitive dissonance and not pressure for radicalization that pushed them to travel to other countries such as Syria and Bosia to engage in fighting. Two of the interviewees say that they struggled with the same ethical dilemma: wanting to do something to help Muslims and at the same time finding the idea of killing other Muslims unacceptable. One of them was radicalized at a mosque while the other chose to go on his own with no prior exposure to any radicalization pressure.

It is important to note that the interviewees were radicalized in the 1990s, a time when it was permissible to openly preach for jihad. In order to fight the danger of spreading communism, "many western countries, along with Saudi Arabia, looked favorably on Muslims who were willing to fight the communists in Afghanistan" (Nilsson, 2019). At that time mosque leaders were allowed to openly call people for jihad to help their fellow Muslims in Afghanistan, and Western governments were well aware of that.

The role of technology in recruitment

Terrorist groups use various tactics for recruitment, one of which is taking advantage of technology. Because of the Internet, the process of radicalization now goes much faster than before. In addition, with the Internet accessible to all age groups including youth, recruits continue to be of younger age (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). Use of technology and social media is a particularly essential tool for groups to spread their ideology and speak to different levels of society. For example, Hamas and Hezbollah each have various websites that target different audiences. They publish content in a multitude of languages and tailor their messages to suit different age groups. Hamas even has a children's magazine (Hoffman, 2017).

These groups have their own private television stations and their "colorful, well-designed and visually arresting graphic content … intended particularly to appeal to a computer-savvy, media-saturated, video game-addicted generation" (Hoffman, 2017).

Some groups also have Twitter and Instagram accounts where they communicate daily with their supporters and followers (Hoffman, 2017). They produce video games and rap songs that glorify their mission and call for action. They also use the internet and media to spread their message, seek fundraising and reach the widest audience possible. They have thus been able to recruit individuals from various parts of the world, not only in their home country.

The role of prisons in recruitment

Terrorist groups try to find potential recruits in places where there are large gatherings, such as prisons. However, there is a debate over whether prisons indeed provide an opportunity for recruiting new members. Some literature shows evidence that prisons in fact facilitated recruitment of groups such as Irish Republicans, German Marxists and Egyptian Islamists. It has also been shown that individuals with a criminal record are particularly prone to being radicalized, as they already have the aptitude to break the law and do not require a long time to be conditioned to the idea (Rushchenko, 2019).

Bert Useem, however, argues that it is only by pure chance that "some terrorists will have prison records—just as some terrorists will have played dodgeball, or performed in a high school band." In addition, Useem continues, prison security has been greatly enhanced over the last few decades and attempts of radicalisation are much more easy to detect than before (2012). However, research still produces contradictory results; it has not yet been able to provide a clear understanding of relations inside the prison, how the process of religious conversion works or even why and how certain individuals succumb to radicalization while others do not.

The conflicting views of whether prisons in fact play a crucial role in Islamic radicalization are sometimes caused by inaccurate or exaggerated estimations. A widely cited policy report, *Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization*, describes prisoners' radicalization as a "threat of unknown magnitude." Statistics, however, show a different picture. A study conducted by the Congressional Research Service revealed that "of the fifty-three identified terror plots of "homegrown violent jihadist activity," only one case, that of the JIS (the Jam'yyat Al-Islam Al-Saheeh), definitively involved violent extremism connected to an American prison". Other reliable sources, such as court records and testimony given by relatives and friends of convicted individuals, show that the latter turned to violence and extremism a long time after they were released from prisons (SpearIt, 2013).

In spite of their opposite views, there is an agreement from both sides that Islam does play a significant role in rehabilitation, and affirm its ability to attract others to convert. Inmates see the positive change in others around them and become interested in understanding the cause of this positive transformation, a point that is further supported by research: "When people say they feel peace or that they have found freedom within their imprisonment, any listener cannot help but be swayed by the obvious emotion with which they speak" (SpearIt, 2013).

This conclusion is significant because it shows that when inmates covert to Islam they in fact become better, more peaceful people, not worse. With the discipline it requires, religion puts order in a person's life. As one convert put it, "Without 'Order' there is chaos and disorder. And it is this psychological, spiritual, and physical disorder that man seeks to drastically change through Islam while facing incarceration. With 'change' comes purpose. And with purpose comes Order." Another inmate attests to having seen "people who were so confused about their present situation [incarceration] that they would victimize each other. But…many of them have rehabilitated themselves. These men are now ready to be placed back on the street to keep another generation from coming into prisons" (SpearIt, 2013).

It is important to note that this positive change in personality is not exclusive to Islam per se. Once a person finds a a new ideology or a belief system that shows them the futility of resorting to violence of any kind (theft, killing, extremist violence etc) and teaches them discipline and self control, they develop the ability to have better judgement, which in turn affects their behavior, their relationship with others and how they conduct themselves in society. Historically, for example, reformers in prisons encouraged inmates to convert to Christianity by inviting them to practice cloistered reflection or silent prayer. By reflecting on their past actions and their consequences, they are able to see what changes they need to make to change the lifestyle they once adhered to. The difference in Islamic teaching is that it encourages communal activities as well as individual endeavours, for example forming learning groups (Halaqa) and performing prayers in groups (Jamat), as a way for individuals to strengthen one another and the community.

Terminology dilemma

One of the main reasons causing this debate is that there is no consensus on the meaning of the term "radicalization." This word is sometimes used as an equivalent to the word "violence," other times it refers to the notion of holding "radical beliefs" as a choice of an ideology without it necessarily being turning into use of violence (SpearIt, 2013). This lack of unanimity on how and in which context to use the word leads to ambiguity and threatens the credibility and accuracy of analysis.

Among other definitions, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the meaning of the word "radical" as: "associated with political views, practices, and policies of extreme change," "of or relating to a mathematical root" and "of, relating to, or constituting a linguistic root" (Merriam-Webster). Not a single entry or definition includes any reference to the term "violence". This should be a reminder for researchers to be conscious of placing the word in its correct context. SpearIt, ISPU Fellow and assistant professor of law at Saint Louis University School of Law, agrees that "the distinction between radical thought and actual violence must not be blurred because, most importantly, it reminds us that a certain way of thinking can never be declared illegal or suffer censure." It is the difference between a right that is protected by the First Amendment and an act criminalized by law. Moreover, current data has not established whether radicalism can be an

indicator of potential terrrism, as most of those who espouse extremist ideologies do not actually engage in acts of violence (2013).

An exchange that took place during a 2011 congressional hearing between Representative Laura Richardson (D-CA) and a formal New York State Department of Corrections official is a case in point. In an attempt to establish a clear definition of the word "radicalization," Representative Richardson asked the official whether he agreed to the definition of radicalisation as "the process in which an individual changes from passiveness or activism to become more revolutionary, militant, or extremist." After he affirmed that he indeed agreed with the definition, she then asked him whether the act of joining a gang would fit that definition (which of course was true). Representative Richardson was trying to prove that radicalization can take any form and can be associated with any kind of violence, and that ascribing it solely (or mainly) to Islam serves no purpose and achieves no gain. The Representative finally stated that focusing on one group "on the basis of race or religion can be deemed as racist and is discriminatory… [It] is flawed and should not be done in the House of Representatives" (SpearIt, 2013).

Other factors

Sociologists have also defined what they call "push and pull factors" as possible determinants for whether a person will respond to radicalization attempts. Push factors refer to what makes a person vulnerable to radicalization, for example the search for identity, having a sense of loss or feeling marginalized. Pull factors are those that encourage a person to succumb to being radicalized, for example when family members or a trusted friend invite them to join, or when a group creates a room for that person to feel that he "belongs" and that he can contribute to a shared goal to serve a higher purpose.

Prison environment is especially conducive to being affected by push and pull factors. While incarcerated, many inmates have hopes of establishing new beginnings and look forward to a better life once they are released. Many also contemplate their previous lifestyle and search for a way for a better future. These conditions make them more receptive to new ideologies, especially religious ones (Rushchenko, 2019).

In his interview, Jesse Morton establishes a similar idea. He likens being under the influence of drugs and alcohol--to which he was addicted before becoming a jihadi--to being under the influence of an ideology. He was trying to get out of his personal turmoil by using drugs and alcohol. When he became radicalized, "the ideology simply became the drugs and alcohol" he used in order to numb his pain (This is 42, 2019).

Testimony by former extremists

Interviews with former jihadists confirm the fact that it is very difficult to form a general picture of how radicalization happens. These former jihadists come from different backgrounds, have

faced very different challenges and, most importantly, were radicalized and deradicalized for different reasons.

While Jesse Morton suffered from domestic abuse that ultimately made him run away, Mubin Shaikh was born in a Muslim family in Canada. Aspiring to become a better Muslim, he came into contact with radicalists who persuaded him the only way to achieve the highest religious level is through jihad. He still adopted the same ideology when years later, while attending an Islamic university, he met a scholar who succeeded in correcting this view. The two maintained extensive discussions for nearly a year and a half, at the end of which Sheikh came to realize that he had fallen prey to false ideologies and tactics extremists use as they "cherry pick and mutilate the understanding of Islam" (TedArchive, 2016).

Manwar Ali, another former jihadi, was born in the UK to a Bengal family. Witnessing the injustice done against Muslims in several parts of the world, he felt he needed to act, and soon engaged in fighting in Burma, Afghanistan and Kashmir. Over the span of 15 years, he fought, preached for jihad, recruited, trained and raised funds to continue fighting. He shared the common goals of other fighters to get rid of the Russian invaders and establish an Islamic caliphate. His transformation started when he eventually realized that endless fighting and violent, meaningless deaths led nowhere and achieved no goal. He finally understood the reality of those who "use the idea of jihad to justify their lust for power, authority and control over the world" (TedTalk, 2016).

Current efforts to fight radicalization

In 2006, researchers in the Netherlands developed a 4-phase model that details the process of radicalization. The reasoning behind the model is that certain changes in behavior are interpreted as warning signs that a particular individual is potentially on the road to becoming an extremist, ultimately engaging in extremist violence. This model was used as the building block for the *Cities Local Integration Policies* (CLIP), a program initiated and funded by the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). In this program, experts use preventive strategies to interrupt the process of radicalization. Each strategy targets one of the four phases in an attempt to stop it before it turns into the following phase (van Heelsum and Vermeulen, 2017).

For example, in Phase I of model is that a person will withdraw from the groups he used to be a part of, show signs of frustration or unhappiness and drop out of school or become unemployed. Slootman and Tillie, the model developers, found that Muslim and extreme-right radicals shared various similar grievance, for instance being victims of society because of perceived unfair practices. Policy makers in this case have an opportunity to interfere by addressing these individuals' grievances before these feelings of alienation push them to phase II (van Heelsum and Vermeulen, 2017).

The NYPD issued a report that presents several case studies on terrorism related incidents in five major cities: Madrid (2004), Amsterdam (plots to attack the Dutch Parliament and assassinate several members), London (2005), Melbourne (plots to attack several institutions, 2005) and Toronto (plots to use trucks to detonate bombs, 2006). After analyzing the background, life and environment of the members indicted in these incidents, the report identified certain traits common among these members, upon which a 4-stage model of radicalization was built (2007).

For example, in Stage 3 of the model, individuals might stop going to the mosque and decide instead to meet at apartments or other private places. This is because mosques no longer serve their radicalization needs. In addition, the group will not be able to freely discuss their extremist ideas or plans in front of other attendees.

In 2006, the UK implemented the Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET) program (Barclay, 1). The program is based on the analysis that youth who have experienced traumatic events, such as emotional or physical violence and neglect, will take any opportunity offered to them to feel less alienated and to feel that they belong to a group. Officials reveal that the program has been quite successful in reaching vulnerable youth. There are, however, sceptics who view the program "not as firewall but rather as a conveyor belt for further radicalization" (Vidino, 2010).

In 2015, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue launched The Strong Cities Network (SCN), the first global network that unites governors, policymakers, civil society groups and other stakeholders in the fight against extremism. In addition to providing deradicalization programming, the network also helps cities build resilience to combat all forms of extremism by providing training, research, project implementation and capacity-building. This network has members in cities in major global regions, and helps local communities adapt their strategy to better suit the needs of that particular community.

Faults with the current programs

One of the main points that need to be addressed is simply understanding the basics of being a Muslim. The difference between a moderate Muslim and a strict/salafi one needs to be understood in terms of the Islamic view of different levels of religiosity, not in terms of how non Muslims view Islamic practices. For example, a non Muslim might think that a person who suddenly starts to practice the five daily prayers is going through a "radical" change, whereas Muslims know that this is the minimum any Muslim is supposed to do. Muslim children start practicing the five faily prayers (Salah) at age 7 or 8. Similarly, changing behavior or adopting a new lifestyle, for example turning away from social events that involve alcohol, dancing and exessive mingling between the two sexes, might seem to a non Muslim as a dangerous turning point, while a Muslim will see this as a positive sign and an effort to achieve a higher level of piety and to stay away from temptations.

The NYPD report shows a complete lack of understanding of even the basics of Islam. The report lists giving up cigarettes, drinking and gambling as "key indicators within this self-identification stage that suggests progression along the radicalization continuum" (2007). A little research would have shown researchers in the NYPD that drinking and gambling are in fact completely forbidden in Islam. Those who engage in this behavior know that they are disobeying their religion, so when they start to abandon this behavior it only means they are *just beginning* to take their religion more seriously than before.

Another "catastrophic sign" the report lists is "[b]ecoming involved in social activism and community issues (2007)". Law enforcement researchers have thus concluded that when a Muslim engages in community work, a commendable and admirable activity encouraged by Islam as well as all other cultures, this is an alarming and suspicious behavior that calls for intervention and justifies monitoring.

Vidino (2010) argues that "some ideas espoused by Islamist groups severely undermine integration and social cohesion, making governmental intervention *opportune*" (my emphasis). This suggests that authorities find it justifiable to monitor families who choose to adhere to certain practices, such as segregation between men and women in social gatherings, refraining from shaking hands with the opposite sex, choosing a certain dress style, or who keep at bay from social events where alcohol is served. Again, in terms of Islam, all these practices merely reflect different levels of adherence to religious rules that are interpreted as no more than a choice of a certain lifestyle, strange as it may seem to a non Muslim. Applying more security measures against those families will make Muslims feel targeted and violated, as it places judgement on their choice of lifestyle.

Existing research maintains that these programs have not been effective in reducing violent attacks or the spread of extremism ideology. Counterterrorism scholar and former CIA officer Marc Sageman emphasized that "[d]espite decades of research, . . . we still do not know what leads people to engage in political violence." It is not uncommon for these programs to lead authorities to suspect innocent behavior (Patel et al).

John Horgan, director of the Center for Science Writings at Stevens Institute of Technology and a scholar on terrorist psychology, states that we really do not know what exactly we are trying to prevent. Even worse, when something has been prevented, we do not know for sure "how or whether we might have prevented it" (Haroro, 2018).

In his article "*Radicalisation: the Journey of a Concept*,"Arun Kundnani argues for the futility of radicalization models. In his view, national security bodies are mistaken in imagining that by closely monitoring Muslims' spiritual and mental lives, a sequence of the radicalization process can be deduced. Kundnani further explains that "radicalisation literature fails to offer a convincing demonstration of any causal relationship between theology and violence" (2012). Kundnani notes that

One further point worth noting is that, because security officials are interested in patterns of belief and behaviour that *correlate* with terrorist risk, irrespective of whether they *cause* terrorism, questions of causality are usually left unaddressed in the radicalisation discourse, despite its claim to be interested in 'root causes'... This implies a more sophisticated counter-radicalisation practice that addresses the interdependence of theology with emotions, identity and group dynamics.

Proposed solution

In addition to the current counter terrorizm efforts and policies, there is a need for another layer of defense to further combat the spread of dangerous ideology. Indeed, preventive approaches are crucial to fighting terrorism "because the survival of the United States as a democratic superpower is at stake. This is not an exaggeration" (Moghaddam, 2005).

This paper proposes establishing an institution that will organize programs which use the collective effort and expertise of researchers, legal authorities, Islamic scholars and educators to form a program that exposes the problem of radicalization in order to effectively address its danger. Saltman et al (2016) stress that

Civil society is a mandatory component in developing credible and targeted counternarratives for countering violent extremism. Civil society can harness credible voices, grassroots authenticity, and a localised perspective. However, often civil society NGOs and activists lack access to the expertise, support and the creativity other sectors hold. Local to national governments, technology and creative sectors are all needed to effectively counter violent extremism. Violent extremism is a challenge faced by the whole of society and it will require a society-wide solution.

While many counter radicalization programs highlight the need for collaboration among different actors, this paper emphasises the importance of including Islamic scholars in the dialogue. Young Muslims can become confused by extremists ideologies they are exposed to on the Internet, and scholars can focus on the points that extremists use to manipulate their young audience. Vidino strongly suggests that "an effective counter radicalization strategy must be prepared to intervene in ideological and theological matters" (2010). Employing local partners for this task is more likely to create trust and make the audience more connected.

This institution will construct local programs that help communities face the dangers of radicalization. With the help of various sectors and actors, it will introduce programs that aim to achieve the following goals:

1 - Emphasise the importance of prevention

Globalization and access to the Internet have facilitated a lot of things, including the spread of extremist ideas and the process of recruitment. Ideologies now cross borders and reach thousands of miles in a matter of minutes. Changing times call for a change in strategy to combat the spread

of extremism. Tracking activity to contain potential violence no more suffices. Particularly with the increase in homegrown terrorism, prevention is now more crucial than ever for the fight against extremism to be effective.

So far, the US does not yet have an effective strategy for prevention. In his *Terrorism Prevention in the United States*, Haroro J. Ingram states that

> Overall, the assessment from experts and the response from communities has been that preventative efforts in the United States have significantly deteriorated in recent years. 23 What is positive, however, is that the October 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism highlighted the need to *'institutionalize* (my emphasis) a prevention architecture to thwart terrorism' as a key priority action.24 Amidst years of stinging criticism by experts, legal scholars and local communities alike with problems that were as much about optics as substance, regardless of administration, it is clear that a policy reset on preventing ideologically-motivated violence in the homeland is required

Ingram also suggests that community members such as educators, welfare workers and religious leaders "need to be aware of 'warning signs' that an individual is at-risk of engaging in self or other directed violence and the options for getting them help," and that a community-based collective effort is essential for establishing a preventive strategy. This strategy can only work by collaboration of the government with different sectors of the community (2018).

Some experts believe that this approach can be successful in detecting potential threats. Several countries in Europe have already established this strategy as a basis for their own extremism prevention programs. However, this paper suggested an earlier step that can prevent a person from even contemplating the possibility of espousing extremism ideas. He will have been educated and well prepared to rationally resist attempts of radicalization.

This suggestion however is not without shortcomings. Assessing warning signs can be a very subjective process, and it leaves room for personal judgement that varies greatly from one person to another even if they are both trained the same way. In addition, giving this huge responsibility to an educator or a social worker puts extreme pressure on that person. How can one decide that a casual statement, a certain change in behavior or even a new attitude is alarming? How can someone decide that a fleeting moment of anger or an outburst of emotion is indeed just that, or something deeper? When someone in fact does report another, then it turns out it was a false alarm, what does that do to the relationship between these two people? One will live with guilt, the other will live with a sense of betrayal and humiliation. The fault with this suggestion is that it turns the whole community into judges, each with their own assessment of a certain situation.

In his policy paper, Ingram goes on to explain that "[G]iven the diversity of America's violent extremism problem, focusing on ethnic or ideological indicators is likely to be ineffective or counterproductive." Instead, he suggests focusing on behavioral or psychological changes as indicators of a shift in ideology, regardless of the nature of that particular ideology (2018).

This is precisely why this proposal is going to prove successful and effective: it is not a program implemented in a confined space such as a school or a mosque, nor is it directed towards a certain group, neo Nazists, White supremacists, Christian fanatics or Islamic fundamentalists. It is a program geared towards a whole "community," people from different backgrounds and different ideologies will be involved and educated about the threat and danger of extremism.

2 - Encourage an open dialogue among youth

Young people are influenced by the radical ideologies they encounter over the Internet. As they are exposed to these dangerous ideas, they have no opportunity to filter the information they receive, or to think critically about what they listen to. Therefore, they need the opportunity to learn from and engage in conversations with the right people. "Ordinary people who do not have the proper religious literacy," write Ridho Agung Juwantara et al, "will easily follow the teachings found in the social media without being able to assess right or wrong" (2020).

Canada has implemented an educational program that encourages school students to have open discussions about extremism. Students watch videos of former extremists and survivors of extremism tell their stories, their journey through radicalization, their regrets, and the consequences of their actions. Students then participate in answering questions

Classroom dialogue in Canada
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY71088saG4&ab_channel=TED, 2017

Dr. Erin Saltman, director of Programming for the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), participated in creating the program. She emphasizes the importance of engaging various civil society voices. The program enlists the help of not only educators but also app developers and artists to develop media content targeting a specific age and audience. For example, a team of artists, techies and comedians created a satiric video that makes fun of Islamophobia and tailored specifically to target 15 to 20 year old social media users (2017).

Dr. Saltman also helped develop a program that uses an even more direct approach. By following conversation over social media, former members of extremist groups can initiate conversations with young people who show tendencies to being prone to radicalization. Conversation is encouraged by connecting with youth and letting them know someone else has been going through what they are experiencing, offering them a safe space to ask questions and address their concerns. This approach proved successful; 60% of youth in fact responded to direct messages sent to them, and another 60% of those who responded maintained conversation (2017).

3 - Expose the tactics used by terrorist groups for recruitment

Radicalization can be prevented by teaching youth the tactics extremists use for recruitment so that they do not fall victims to this process. Munib Sheikh's experience reveals how he abandoned extremism once he had the opportunity to understand how he was deceived by twisted ideologies. He learned how extremist groups tailor the ideas they indoctrinate so they suit their goals. Exposing such tactics will help protect youth from these ideologies *before* they are influenced by them.

Young people need to understand how terrorist groups succeed in brainwashing thousands of people using psychology or religion, or a mix of both. Recruitment tactics that these groups use can be explained from both psychological and religious perspectives.

For example, the Tamil Tigers were the first group to employ suicide bombing tactics to carry out terrorist attacks (Law, 2009). In the proposed program, experts in psychology can explain how terrorist groups romanticize the concept of dying for a higher purpose, while religious scholars can explain how religious terrorist groups falsely interpret religious texts to make martyrdom seem like a religious obligation worthy of praise. It does not matter what the "higher purpose" is; it could be ethnonationalism, religion or any idea that justifies use of violence against civilians in order to achieve a goal, which is unacceptable in principle. Here, we can see how youth are engaged in discussions that incorporate legal, historical, religious and psychological aspects all at once. This creates a connection with the real world and puts things in perspective. Youth are then able to see the whole picture rather than be given a "list" of what to do or not to do, and what to watch out for to avoid getting into the trap of radicalization.

Former members of various terrorist groups can be invited to give talks about their experience. Youth will then have the opportunity to listen to, rather than be told of or read about, the regrets they have and the losses they incurred as a result of engaging in violence. Stories told by families of those who lost their lives to extremism can also be effective. This will help youth see a new dimension they probably never thought about before: the lasting pain extremists leave behind to their families.

Some former jihadist leaders who were later rehabilitated are now working to fight the same ideologies they once espoused. Jesse Morton, for example, currently consults with organizations countering violent extremism and is the research coordinator of the Institute for Strategic

Dialogue's Against Violent Extremism (AVE) Network in North America. He is also a member of a global network called "Against Violent Extremism," This 500-person network was co-founded by Gen Next, Google Ideas and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, and it includes former extremists and survivors.

Morton also launched *Ahul-Taqwa* (people of consciousness) magazine which aims to counter extremist rhetoric. Morton explains that "jihad is justice. If understood properly it fits what military strategists today call 'Just War Theory.' The 'Just Terror Tactic' articles ISIS English-magazines propose is completely barbaric and un-Islamic. Jihad has conditions and is solely confined to fighting those that fight you" (2020). Indeed, Morton's story carries with it valuable experiences of pain, personal struggle, transformation and survival that can positively impact young people and show them other dimensions of the issue they most probably never knew before.

Inviting former members of extremist groups to talk directly with youth gives an exceptionally powerful message. Reflections, lessons and advice that come from people who lived this lifestyle and experienced for themselves its detrimental consequences give them more credibility and make them better connect with their audience. Saudi Arabia, for example, has employed many rehabilitated jihadist leaders in its rehabilitation and deradicalization programare. Dr. Anne Speckhard, adjunct associate professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University 's Medical School in Washington D.C, emphasizes that "the credibility of the clerics involved is paramount" for the success of the program"(Soliman, 2021).

4 - Address the root of Islamic radicalization

To address Islamic radicalization in particular, youth need to understand the correct interpretation of Quranic verses and religious texts related to the subject of fighting. As evident from the stories told by former jihadists, a major factor that encouraged them to engage in violence was the distorted interpretation they were indoctrinated about how to become better Muslims and to fight to end injustices done towards Muslims. Introducing the correct understanding will eliminate the chance of youth being influenced by distorted ideologies that extremists promote.

Prisons in Saudi Arabia have implemented a comprehensive prison rehabilitation program that teaches inmates how to change violent ideologies. Through debate, clerics guide inmates to understand how they were "tricked into their jihadist beliefs." Former jihadists also learn the importance of choosing only reliable sources to seek knowledge. Many Islamic scholars maintain that Al Qaeda and similar groups influence people by providing "a narrow and deeply mistaken reading of the Qur'an" (Soliman, 2021). The solution that this paper proposes invites youth to also learn how to choose where they receive knowledge from and gives them an environment where they can express their thoughts and worries.

Ensuring the former inmates enter their new and free life armed with the essential skills and tools that help them resist going back to former activities. That is why the program used in Saudi Arabia also provides psychological treatment when needed and focuses on rebuilding the character and preparing former inmates to ease their way back in society. In addition, the program helps former inmates form their own social and family life by paying for their wedding expenses.

Ingram proposes that the BOP (Bureau of Prisons) implements a special intervention program in prisons. This program will have preemptive goals targeted at at-risk prisons who might fall for radicalization, as well as rehabilitative goals for those who have committed hate crime or terrorism related crimes. Similar to the program implemented in Saudi Arabia, Ingram's suggested program can help inmates adopt more rational ideologies and teach them how to resist resorting to violence as a way of achieving their goals (2018).

This proposed program will use the expertise of all parties involved to expose the problem of radicalization and bring it to the surface rather than dig for it. Youth and the community at large will better understand the methods that terrorists use and the ideologies they promote, and offer tools that strengthen youth and help them avoid falling into the trap of being radicalized. To fight a distorted ideology, a new one must replace it.

By implementing this proposed program, young people become a part of the solution rather than potentially part of the problem in the future. Engaging youth in effective discussion is crucial; they participate by active listening, asking questions and gaining firsthand knowledge.

YouthCAN, a global network first introduced in Norway in 2015, applies a similar approach. This program is managed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). In 2015, young people in different parts of the world decided to take action against the spread of violence caused by terrorist groups. Several youth summits were held in different countries with support from governmental as well as international bodies. These events proved that: "1) Youth activists internationally need safe spaces for dialogue and creative development; and 2) There is a need for different sectors to proactively support youth-led initiatives, especially government and tech sectors" (Saltman, Dow and Bjornsgaard, 2016)).

YouthCAN is a part of the The Strong Cities Network program. It engages youth in activities that help prevent them from falling prey to extremism ideology. For example, youth participate in activities where they define patterns of hate speech or other violent-motivated activities, then they have to come up with effective anti-violence campaigns. Instead of lecturing youth on danger and giving them answers, youth work hard to come up with solutions for facing these challenges. The program can be adapted for different communities and regions to best suit that particular part of the world.

GOVERNMENT
(facilitate, infrastructure, finance, charity, scale)

PRIVATE SECTOR
(facilitate, regulate, finance, innovate, scale)

CIVIL SECTOR
(credible voices, authentication, innovate)
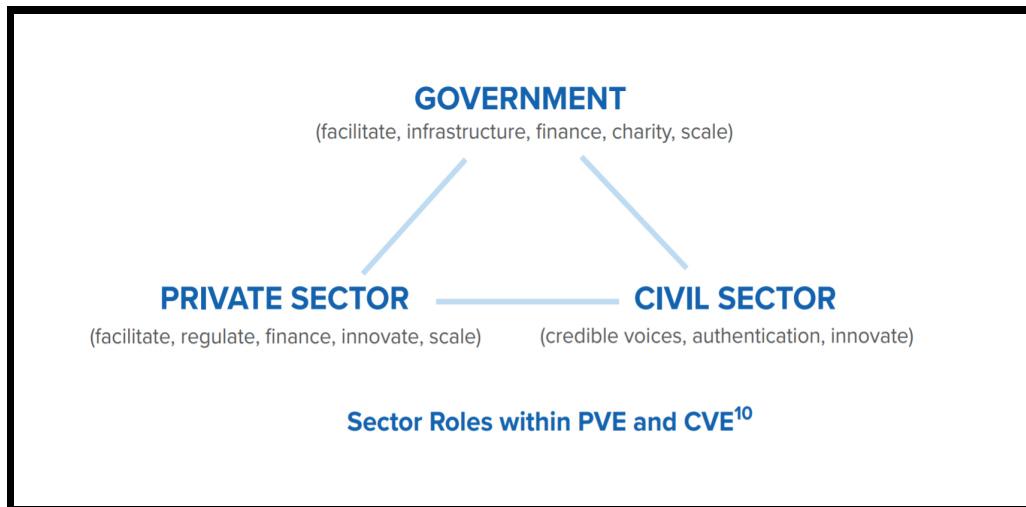
Sector Roles within PVE and CVE[10]

Diagram showing the strong roles that each sector has in PVE and CVE work. (Saltman et al, 2016)

A testimony from a young participant from Senegal attests to the importance of engaging youth and providing them the opportunity to have an active role in their communities: "The best part of my Young Cities experience was our last day of training when we could interact with municipal stakeholders. At that moment we had the opportunity to exchange on good practices and future collaborations" (Strong Cities).

The program proposed in this paper requires the consultation of psychologists as well. Fathali M. Moghaddam emphasizes that "[p]sychologists have a unique role to play in formulating and implementing international policies to influence interobjectivity—the understandings shared within and between cultures" (2005).

Through the CLIP program, Europe works to strengthen the resilience of families by directly engaging with them. The proposed program can implement a similar approach, for example a program that families can safely turn to if they suspect their children are exposed to certain dangerous ideologies. This however will not achieve the desired results unless a solid and deep trust is first established between authorities and the community. Families will never seek help if they feel that doing so will be used against them instead of helping save their loved ones from potential danger.

The institution can also guide youth to other important issues that they can be a part of. For example, many of them have perhaps read about environmental activist Greta Thunberg, but few might have contemplated taking action for this cause or a different one. A program can be introduced to youth in which they learn more about how to become involved in current issues and influence them to become a part of something productive. They need to believe that each of them can very well become the next Emma González or Greta Thunberg and make a positive change in the world. Youth is a power that can be employed in different ways. When they do not

find a constructive venue that channels their energy into something productive, they can be easily pulled into destructive ideologies and behavior.

Finally, this paper stresses that increasing supervision in prisons is another important step. Even though there has not been conclusive evidence that prisons open the door for radicalization, shortage in prison staff is a common problem in many countries, including the US. State officials and lawmakers, union representatives and analysts all agree that "[i]t's important the states find a solution … Understaffed prisons result in long hours, fatigue and stress for guards, and canceled recreational and social programs for inmates, such as family visits — all of which can lead to potentially dangerous situations." The problem is further complicated by the fact that the starting pay is sometimes as low as $13.61 an hour for an officer (Fifield, 2016). In addition to providing a more supportive environment for inmates, increasing supervision might in fact help decrease any potential attempts of radicalization.

Conclusion

Extremism in all its forms has affected many countries. Globalization and accessibility to the Internet has enabled ideologies, good and bad, to quickly spread and attract millions all over the globe. In order to effectively counter the spread of extremism, it is important to look at prevention rather than detection. Prevention can be more effectively achieved by initiating dialogue about the problem and giving the opportunity for communities, especially youth, to be involved in the discussion with all actors and stakeholders. Knowledge is power. Educating the community, especially young people,will give them the tools they need to avoid falling victim to dangerous ideologies.

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