



Spotlight on PAVE partner AUB (American University of Beirut)– An interview with Rudayna Baalbaky

- a short summary of AUBs tasks within PAVE

In the PAVE project, AUB (through IFI) will lead the fieldwork in Lebanon. In this task, we will be drawing on the extensive experience of our researchers on cumulative extremisms (WP3) and on interactions between states and religious institutions (WP4). Moreover, AUB will take part in the elaboration of baseline studies, concept and methodology and will help identify capacity-building needs, by convening stakeholder and policy workshops.

- Get to know the PAVE members - a brief interview with Rudayna Baalbaky from AUB

- Introduction

I hold an MA in political science and comparative politics with special focus on the Arab region from the University of Saint-Joseph in Beirut, which is also where I currently live. Since 2015, I have worked as the coordinator for Arab and International Affairs program at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs. Before that, I worked briefly in the field of journalism and with various NGOs, and have always been politically active.



- What do you hope you/ we will achieve with PAVE (personal and consortium achievements)?

What I am looking at Consortium level is to inform policymakers about drivers of community resilience against violent extremism as well as factors of vulnerability within local communities - to inform better policymaking directed towards combatting violent extremism and political violence in general. This initiative is the perfect opportunity to deepen the literature available on the subject through an intersectional and participatory approach. I believe that this is an opportunity to do fieldwork in Lebanon, a country that is living through a historical moment since October 17, 2019, whilst battling with one of the most severe and devastating economic and financial crises. Despite the challenges that persist within this tumultuous political climate, working with local communities opens newer horizons and has a moral dimension of solidarity as it evaluates these societies based on their living and active elements in them. This an opportunity to deepen our understanding of violent extremism, reimagine it almost, through an institutional approach that explains the role of entrenched political systems and institutions in combating and producing violence, at a level that is not usually addressed. Because often, violent extremism is discussed either on a "macro" level or at a "micro," and motives are defined along ideological and cultural lines.

- Recently, AUB organised a first PAVE stakeholder meeting in Beirut. From your point of view, what was the most valuable take-away message and why?

I sensed that violent extremism also involves the extremism of a political system and not only non-state actors because the state or the political system must bear responsibility for the horror it inflicts, by failing to protect civilians from violent extremism, and can often themselves be products or sponsors of violent extremism. It is all part of the political game in Lebanon which is why strengthening social immunity through international programs is not sufficient - the challenge lies in addressing the systemic drivers of violent extremism. It cannot be separated from other Lebanese crises.

The other valuable take-away messages for me were that violent extremism should not be focused solely on a single societal environment, especially when there is a lack of confidence and injustice perpetrated by the state's handling of violent extremism.



- How does your regular work day look and what's the most exciting / rewarding part of your job?

A typical day for me, much like many workers in the academic environment, is not without administrative tasks, as I coordinate research projects while simultaneously engaging in the research itself. However, I have cherished human interaction, whether with the community of practice and stakeholders in Lebanon or with academic counterparts and researchers in other countries, especially in light of the pandemic and the lockdown imposed on citizens in all countries of the world. Additionally, I have enjoyed research design and fieldwork site selection - aspects of my work that are especially enriching and satisfying.

- Job-wise: Did you consider going into a totally different direction at some point or did you always know that this is the work you want to do?

I was always certain that I wanted my work to revolve around the change that began in 2011. Over time, it has increased and decreased, strengthened and weakened, but I could never imagine a different path for myself. Academic research is where I have always wanted to work as part of this change. I come from a society whose past and present are drowning in an enormous amount of political violence. When I graduated from university in 2011, calls for peaceful political change were growing, of which I am a passionate supporter and determined believer. I have considered my current field as a conduit to understanding the dynamics of change, to examine how peaceful uprisings transform into violent wars. I remain highly concerned with the prospects of successfully bringing about transitional justice, which I believe is the only way to secure sustainable peace and security in the region.

- What is your scientific interest (within and outside of PAVE) and what are your plans for the future?

Peace and conflict studies, Human rights and transitional justice, political violence, critical security studies. Pursuing a PhD program or a law degree.

- Are you a coffee or tea person?

I enjoy both, but coffee is vital for survival.