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1   Executive Summary

This baseline study takes stock of the research frontier and identifies the state of the art when it comes to the literature on cumulative extremisms, including works on violent extremism. It does so by providing an overview and discussion of cumulative extremism and related terms; reviewing the literature on drivers for different forms of religious, political and ethno-nationalist extremisms and, in particular, research which has placed cumulative and reciprocal extremisms at the forefront; and mapping out good practices and initiatives when it comes to community resilience in the MENA region and the Balkans.

These are the ten main take-aways of this report:

- Cumulative extremism, reciprocal extremism and reciprocal radicalisation are terms used interchangeably by previous research to describe interactive dynamics between different forms of extremist movements.
- We suggest the term 'overlapping extremism' as a preliminary working term to describe situations where extremist movements draw from different social sources of mobilisation (similarly to how ethno-nationalist movements can draw on different layers of mobilisation).
- The relationship between ideology and behaviour (tactics) varies and while not all extreme groups are violent, and not all violent groups are extreme, it is still interesting to study the linkages between ideology and violence.
- Cumulative extremism can occur on three levels of analysis: individuals (increasing number of followers); organisations (increasing contentious or violent tactics), and communities (increasing polarisation). Yet, there may be interactive relationships on different levels where violent events at the organisational level lead to increasing radicalisation at the individual level.
- Cumulative extremism refers to either ideological interactions, tactical interactions, or both.
- Most drivers of violent extremisms are common for the different types of extremism – religious, political and ethno-nationalist extremisms. These include feelings of revenge and adventure, a history of crime, friendship with current extremists, and contact with radical mentors.
- Some drivers of violent extremisms are more applicable to particular types of extremism, for example, forced recruitment seems to be an important factor for ethno-nationalist extremists, whereas authoritarian personalities feature as a driver for far-right and Islamist extremists. While gender differences are apparent in all the different forms of extremisms, gender differences are less pronounced for far-left groups extremists than for traditional far-right or Islamist organisations.
- Research on cumulative extremism has focused predominately on West European states, particularly UK, whereas research on how these dynamics play out in other regions are largely missing.
- Specific drivers of cumulative extremism include revenge dynamics, degree of spatial distance, political opportunities (in particular, alternative arenas to carry out the battle), and internal heterogeneity as regards their overall strategy.
- A key role in understanding the dynamics of cumulative extremism is how the state manages and relates to extremist movements; more research is needed on this particular driver.

2   Concepts and definitions

One of the main challenges for understanding violent extremism is the absence of universally accepted definitions for key concepts such as violent extremism, radicalisation, reciprocal extremisms and cumulative extremisms. This section presents some of the most commonly used definitions for these terms, identifies some of the problems with the terminology used, and discusses how the term 'cumulative extremisms' can be understood, in light of previous research.

2.1   Extremism

In a general sense, extremism is a concept describing a phenomenon that occurs at the margins of, and in opposition to, a centre. Thus, extremist ideologies should be thought about as positions of individuals or groups that define themselves in contrast to a more moderate core. The definition of extremism is therefore dependent on the prevalent attitudes of a society, which set the context and boundaries in which extremism can be conceptualised. Thus, ideological extremism can be defined "in relation to the majority opinion of the affected population on a key ideological dimension." (Walter 2017, 16). Understanding extremism in this way implies that extremism will be context-specific to different types of societies and will therefore vary in time and space, and one position can be considered as moderate in one context but extreme in another. While extremism can, of course, be related to any ideological dimension in a given society, our interest within the context of the PAVE project is primarily on the overall principles of governance of a society and the main methods for achieving change. In the PAVE project proposal, we define extremism in terms of "any ideology that opposes a society's core values and principles" (PAVE 2020, 5). It is, of course, a matter for debate what these core values and principles really are, but the emerging scholarly consensus tends to define extremism in terms of opposition to democratic values and institutions, pluralism, and human rights.

In Neumann's conceptualization, extremism relates to aspirations of racial and religious supremacy: In the context of liberal democracies, this could be applied to "various forms of racial or religious supremacy, or ideologies that deny basic human rights or democratic principles" (Neumann 2013, 874-875). Based on this, distinctions could be made between *political* extremism and *religious* extremism (see Aroua 2018, 5). Yet, while Neumann's conceptualization would include religious, ethno-nationalist and right-wing extremisms, it would not, however, include left-wing extremism, where the dominant social groups are rather classes, and any supremacy would be defined subsequently in class-terms. A more general definition of extremism is therefore the following, used by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2020): "Extremism is the advocacy of a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based 'in-group' over all 'out-groups', and propagates a dehumanising 'othering' mind-set that is antithetical to pluralism and the universal application of Human Rights. [...] They may do this through non-violent and more subtle means, as well as through violent or explicit means. Extremism can be advocated by state and non-state actors alike."

Some authors conclude that subscribing to radical ideologies is not necessarily a precondition to violence, at least in the case of Islamist violent extremism, and that not all of those engaged in violence are ideological fundamentalists (Crone 2016, 592; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Sageman 2004, 117). However, ideology is relevant for understanding violent extremisms, as extremist groups are distinguishable from one another by their ideology, which shapes the content of their message, their strategies and goals (European Commission 2017, 11) and, although joining a group is often a social phenomenon, the intensification of the faith and beliefs is a process characterized by active personal learning about the new faith or ideology (Sageman 2004, 117). According to Berger (2017), there are three important elements of an extremist ideology: the content, the distribution and the identity. The content refers to the texts employed by the organisation and the values they claim to represent. For the content to resonate and to attract someone, it must appeal at an emotional and affective level. The distribution refers to the channels of communication, or how the ideas and values of the

movement are transmitted. Finally, the identity is a description of an in-group based on features such as race, religion or nationality, which is opposed to an out-group (Berger 2017). Overall, extremist ideologies contribute to develop a collective identity, guide mobilization and justify violence (European Commission 2017, 12).

2.2   Violent extremism

The concept 'violent extremism' is often interchanged with terrorism, political violence and extreme violence. The Australian National Counter-Terrorism Committee Framework (2020) defines violent extremism as "the use or support of violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals." This definition is commonly cited in articles and reports on the topic of violent extremism, so there seems to be significant consensus on this conceptualisation.

Adding the term 'violent' to extremism is done in order to narrow down the category of actors, recognizing that, within a movement, there are individuals and groups holding extremist positions that justify violence, but those who actually carry it out are often only a minority.

This term is often used to describe a broader set of different approaches to violence: in particular, the *justification* of violence, the *support* of violent actors, and the *use of violent means*. There are obviously quite important differences between these types of approaches to violence, and their internal relationship – how justification of violence leads to the use of violence, for example – is certainly something that has been the focus of scholarly discussion.

Still, while violent extremism does serve to make the concept under scrutiny more precise, it also introduces a set of conceptual questions, as the concept of 'violence' is a much-debated concept in and by itself. What is meant by 'violence' is commonly not defined in research on violent extremism. Previous research seems to implicitly understand it as direct violence, leaving aside broader (and possibly more elusive) conceptualizations of violence, including the concepts of 'structural violence (Galtung 1969) and 'cultural violence' (Galtung 1990).

Moreover, it is commonly not defined whether the occurrence of violence should be seen as a dichotomy or rather a continuum. Is it, for example, enough that any violence occurs for an extremist movement to be classified as violent extremist? If it is rather thought along a continuum, what would count as the threshold for the use of violence? Would *threats* of violence, instead of actual violence, be considered as violent? And what does 'armed' action mean? While conflict research by now has developed quite strict operationalizations on the use of violence (for example, see UCDP, CoW, MID[3]), what is seen as 'violence' is largely left undefined in the research on extremism.

2.3   Radicalisation

Whereas extremism often denotes a particular ideological *structure*, the term radicalisation is predominately used to describe the *process* towards extremism, although there is no complete scholarly consensus on this distinction.

The term radicalisation is well established in the social movement literature and is used in a more general sense, describing shifts towards more extreme aspirations as well as tactical shifts towards more contentious methods of social movements. For example, radicalisation is defined by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2003, 69) as "the expansion of collective action frames to more extreme agendas and the adoption of more transgressive forms of contention." Sometimes it is used to describe shifts from nonviolent to violent means of manifesting aspirations. Radicalisation is then seen as "the process

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[3] Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Correlates of War (CoW), Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID).

through which a social movement organization (SMO) shifts from predominantly nonviolent tactics of contention to tactics that include violent means, as well as the subsequent process of contention maintaining and possibly intensifying the newly introduced violence" (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2015, 11). This usage of the term has gained significant scholarly traction in the social movement literature, where it is used to define a process. In Della Porta and Diani's (2020, 7) words, radicalisation refers to "the shift of opposition movement organization toward the adoption of political violence."

A related term used in conflict research is the term 'escalation', which has been used to define shifts from non-violent to violent forms of conflict (Mitchell 1981), although the term also has wider interpretations (Kriesberg 1998). A note-worthy difference to the term radicalisation is that the term 'escalation' tends to refer to dyadic and relational shifts – the two sides in a conflict – whereas radicalisation is predominately used to refer to shifts on one side. This difference may stem from different scholarly orientations and approaches: social movement theory, in which the term radicalisation in central, tends to theorise social conflicts from the perspective of the opposition, with the main focus in the movement, whereas conflict studies tend to analyse conflicts as a system.

Radicalisation can be used to describe the process of adopting extremist ideas, a notion that has been also described as 'ideological radicalization'. However, as Crone (2016, 590) argues, "in a liberal society, where freedom of speech and opinion—within specific limits defined by the law—is a fundamental right, ideological radicalization is not in itself a problem, but on the contrary a right." Therefore, a case could be made for restricting the focus to only the process of adopting a violent extremist behaviour, also known as 'behavioral radicalization' (Crone 2016, 590). On the other hand, a more inclusive definition of radicalisation can also open up possibilities to explore how the different parts relate to each other. An inclusive definition would entail emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Radicalisation means "change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup" (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, 416).

While radicalization is the process of adopting extremist' perspectives and a framework of action anchored in an extremist worldview, it is important to clarify who is being radicalised. In the social movement literature, the actor of radicalisation can refer to an individual, an organisation or a movement, while in much of more recent policy-oriented work, especially dealing with Islamist radicalisation, the term has been used more narrowly to describe shifts and transformation processes only at the individual level. The PAVE project moves beyond this individualised focus of recent research, with its broader focus on community resilience.

2.4 Reciprocal extremisms

One important point of departure for the PAVE project is the recognition that extremism should not merely be studied in isolation and that several forms of extremism can be present at the same time, hence the term extremisms (*in plural*). The multiple forms of extremisms can manifest themselves in different ways, and two concepts are discussed from the outset of the PAVE project: reciprocal and cumulative.

The core intuition of reciprocal extremism/radicalisation is the need for any movement to use a significant other in order to mobilize: "Because victimisation and demonisation work well together, extremists are in a mutually beneficial relationship. To tell a coherent story, the victim needs a perpetrator as much as the perpetrator needs a victim. In extremism, this leads to an effect called reciprocal radicalisation" (Ebner 2017, 10).

This concept resonates with the idea that at the heart of violent extremist ideology there is a description of an in-group based on race, religion, or nationality, with a corresponding description of

an opposing out-group, and that a movement becomes extremist when it believes that the in-group can never be successful unless it engages in hostile acts against the perceived out-group (Berger 2017).

On the other hand, the out-group defined by each violent extremist group is not restricted to the violent extremist members of other groups, but it extends to broader segments of society. For instance, far-right extremists not only portray Islamist violent extremists as their enemies, but their narrative also sees the elite, the broader Muslim population and immigrants as part of the out-group. Similarly, Islamist extremists not only define far-right extremists as the out-group, but they speak more broadly about Muslims and non-Muslims, or believers and non-believers.

Reciprocal extremism is used to define situations where different forms of extremisms feed into- and react to each other. The antagonistic relationship between different forms of extremisms is manifested through *the definition of the out-group* ('othering') where extremists can play into each other's narratives and activate and maintain stereotypes of the other side, and *reinforce threat perceptions* in the sense that one form of extremism can create increased levels of fear and insecurity, which will prove a point that another form of extremism may have been making about their particular group being under attack. This can enhance the *sense of victimhood*, which is often part and parcel of the extremists' world-view. In addition, this will also help to *legitimise violence*, by providing credibility to arguments made for the justification of the use of violence. Reciprocal extremism can also lead to *spiralling actions of revenge* and counter-attack.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the level of reciprocity may vary, and one type of extremism may induce another without necessarily the reverse dynamic occurring. The term reciprocal can be problematic to use in such situations where one form of extremism affects another, but there are no mutual processes of re-enforcement. There may therefore be reasons to question an assumption that reciprocal radicalization/extremism affects both sides in an equal manner (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013, 9).

Reciprocal extremism is a sub-category of a phenomenon that has for long been studied in social movement research. A core interest, as we noted above, has been the radicalisation of social movements and, from this perspective, the reciprocal dynamics between different social movements (be them groups or organisations) have attracted scholarly attention. The focus has been on *movement and counter-movement interactions* – including, but not restricted to extremist groups and movements (Zald and Useem 1987; Carter 2017; Macklin and Busher 2015).

2.5   Cumulative extremisms

One of the key terms of the PAVE project is 'cumulative extremisms'. This term is used as a way of making the point that extremism as a phenomenon should not merely be studied in isolation, but rather that different forms of extremisms can exist in parallel and in interactive relationships with each other. The term 'cumulative extremism' was coined by the scholar Roger Eatwell, who defined it as 'the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms [of extremism]'. (Eatwell 2006, 205). Defined in this way, we can see that it is used as a synonym to reciprocal extremism, as it tries to describe a similar phenomenon about dynamic interactions between extremist groups. The concept has gained a lot of traction both within and outside academia, but the discussion around it still suffers from some lack of clarity as to what it entails more exactly (Busher and Macklin 2015, Bartlett and Birdwell 2013, 12), as we will also clarify below. There is also a degree of conceptual disparity in the field, as slightly different terms are used interchangeably for the same phenomenon: *cumulative extremism* (Carter 2019, Carter 2017, Allchorn 2020, Busher and Macklin 2015, Eatwell 2006, Feldman 2012, Feldman and Littler 2015); *reciprocal radicalization* (Lee and Knott 2020, Ebner 2017, Allchorn 2020, Macklin 2020); as well as some other related terms although they tend to be less commonly used, such as *cumulative radicalization* (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013); *interactive*

radicalization (Virchow 2020, Macklin 2020); *re-active co-radicalisation* (Pratt 2015) and *tit-for-tat radicalisation*, the latter defined as a "reciprocal relationship between two or more extremist groups that actively feed off each other's messages and ideologies" (Jackson and Feldman 2011, 75).

The main focus of research on cumulative extremisms (regardless of which exact term is used) is "how the confrontational relationship between opposing social groups can radicalise those involved, possibly resulting in 'spirals of violence' and causing wider trends of social polarisation" (Carter 2017, 7). The point of departure is the assumption that there may be "a 'symbiotic relationship' between ideologically opposed forms of violent extremism; a relationship that sustains actors who would otherwise struggle to exist independently of one another" (Macklin 2020, 4).

The concept as such is broad and includes different types of actors, at different units of analysis, but specific studies often take different empirical focuses. There are three main types of actors that can stand in a reciprocal relationship: individuals, movements (or sometimes organisations), and communities (Carter 2019). Thus, actions by one violent extremist social group may lead to increased participation on another fringe, it may lead to shifts towards (more) violent tactics on an organisational level, or it may lead to increased polarisation on the community-level. Communities here refer to "women, men, social groups, and institutions based in the same geographical area and/or on shared interests" (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 27), and they can be understood in a narrower or broader sense. While the concept of cumulative extremism speaks to all these dynamics, it is important to be clear on what level of analysis the cumulative extremism is studied.

It is also important to bear in mind that radicalisation and extremism, as we pointed out above, can be either ideological, tactical or both. This applies to cumulative extremisms as well and different studies have had different empirical focus in their study of cumulative extremism.

In the last decades, the terms extremism and radicalisation (as well as terrorism) have been almost exclusively applied to non-state actors. Whether the state should be included in the scope of study is debated, its exclusion is something that for example the field of 'critical terrorism studies' have consistently pointed out (e.g. Jackson 2007, 248). This systematic omission applies to research on cumulative extremism as well: "the crucial role the state plays […] has been quite absent from studies into CE [cumulative extremism] thus far" (Carter 2017, 47). It is, however, necessary to point out that a definitional focus on non-state actors does not preclude paying attention to the policies, institutions and actors on the state-side. Exploring the role of the state can be done by including this in the explanations of extremism, rather than in the definition of extremism itself.

Cumulative extremism has been used to describe a structure of reciprocal relationships between antagonistic movements on opposite side of an ideological spectrum, for example, far-right movements versus jihadist movements. It should be analytically separated from a different phenomenon where two rival extremist groups within the same ideological fold compete over the support from the same identity-based (i.e. ethnic-sectarian) constituency. An example of this is the in-fighting and competition between al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East. A growing field study this type of rebel-to-rebel violence (e.g. Fjelde and Nilsson 2012; Cunningham et al. 2011; Christia 2012; Wood and Kathman 2015). This intra-insurgency or intra-movement in-fighting is not uncommon and typically shares many of the characteristics of cumulative extremism – in particular, the fact that the movements' mutual antagonistic relationship can spiral further processes of radicalisation.

Previous research has used the two components of the term – *reciprocal/cumulative* as well as *extremism/radicalisation* – as interchangeable. In the original PAVE project proposal, we made a point of distinguishing them from each other. The project proposal defined the term 'cumulative extremisms' as violent extremism "that feeds into several sources of mobilization (religion, tribal ties,

ethnicity, political affinity, etc)". On the other hand, "reciprocal extremisms" are seen as violent extremisms "that develop in antagonism with each other". However, this re-definition of the concept of 'cumulative extremisms' is, according to our perspective, problematic and should be avoided. The main problem with using this conceptualisation would be that it stands in contrast to previous research, how the terms were originally defined, and the emerging scholarly consensus around what this concept entails. Re-defining the concept of cumulative extremism may therefore lead to confusion when communicating the results of the project to a wider scholarly audience.

Still, we need a concept to describe the fact that sometimes violent extremist movements draw on several, overlapping, sources of mobilisation, based on various forms of social group-identities as well as ideological trajectories. In conflict studies, the term *cross-cutting cleavages* is used to describe situations when "ethnolinguistic identity is crosscut by other salient social cleavages, such as religion, socioeconomic class, and region of residence". (Gubler and Selway 2012, 207). The limitation of this term in this context is that is has only been used referring to cross-cutting dimensions of social group identities, especially in the study of multi-dimensional ethnicities, but not in regards to different ideologies.

Subsequently, and following established convention and developing the concept in light of previous debate, a suitable concept to use when seeking to examine overlapping (mutually enforcing) manifestations of extremist ideologies would be, we propose, *overlapping extremisms*, by which we mean *violent extremism that draws from several sources of ideological and identity-based mobilization within the same movement or community*. 'Overlapping extremisms' is thus a term to describe a multi-layered extremist structure, where the different sources of extremism serve to reinforce each other cumulatively, but within the same movement or community. For instance, Islamist preachers have appealed to religion but also to notions of nationalism among ethnic Albanians in the Diaspora, recruiting individuals to fight along the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (Spahiu 2020). We also propose the term 'overlapping radicalisation' to *describe the multi-layered and accumulative process of mobilization for violent extremism, drawing on several sources of ideological and identity-based mobilization within the same movement or community.*

These definitions should be seen as preliminary and should be refined along with the development of the project.

3   Drivers of cumulative extremisms

In this section, the drivers of different types of violent extremisms will be discussed, identifying their differences and similarities. PAVE focuses on the interface between ethnic-sectarian, religious, and political extremisms, and we follow that same categorization in our discussion here. However, as we have noted in previous section, these forms of extremism are not necessarily completely exclusive from each other and there is thus overlap between the different categories. As we will explore in this section, the drivers of violent extremism are not only individual, but these interact with structural motivators and group-level factors. While our emphasis is on literature dealing specifically with violent extremisms, we also draw on other literatures where relevant, including the broader civil war literature (e.g. which more rarely uses the term violent extremism but refers to related phenomena). Notably, the list of drivers here is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to point to some of the key factors found in previous research. In addition, after discussing some commonalities and differences for these different types of extremisms, this section specifically focuses on analysing research which has placed cumulative and reciprocal extremisms at the forefront. Lastly, we will turn to exploring some key questions regarding the when, who, how, and where of the radicalisation process to violent extremism.

3.1   Exploring Drivers of Violent Extremisms

3.1.1   Drivers of ethnic-sectarian extremism

With the Versailles Treaty ending World War I in 1919, the idea of self-determination for nation-states gained relevance in the international arena, marking the outset of what Rapoport (2017a) described as the Anti-Colonial Wave of terrorism. The conflicts that took place during this period include the National Military Front's (FLN) independence war in Algeria, the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters' (EOKA) in Cyprus, and the Israel-Palestine conflict, among others (Rapoport 2019a), although ethno-nationalist struggles are not restricted to this particular period. Ethnic extremist groups can be understood as those who support or engage in violence as a means to protect the interests of a group defined around historical divisions of rule, territory and cultural aspects. This first concept is particularly relevant in the Balkan context. On the other hand, in sectarian extremisms the dividing lines between groups can be closely interlinked with religion, such as the Shia-Sunni distinction described by different extremist groups in the MENA region. Whereas ethnic-sectarian movements cannot always necessarily be sorted under the category of violent extremism, it is useful to draw some key insights from the study of drivers of ethnic-sectarian conflicts, which we do in the following.

A particular feature of ethno-nationalist armed groups is their important degree of **forced recruitment** (Ness 2005, 358). In a sample of African rebel groups, approximately one-third used coerced recruitment (Beber and Blattman 2013). A study by Eck (2014) found that rebel groups appear more likely to employ coercive tactics of recruitment when military and economic shocks are accompanied by shortened time horizons. For instance, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) employed voluntary recruitment at the start of the conflict but turned to more coercive measures as military imperatives changed (Eck 2014, 386). Supporting these findings, Richards (2014) reached similar conclusions studying the Mai-Mai and the RCD-Goma rebel groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. On the other hand, groups such as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone employed forced recruitment tactics at the outset of the conflict and continued to do so over the course of the struggle (Eck 2014, 386). Regarding the LRA, a Christian extremist group that also mobilises along the Acholi ethnic group, **young teenagers** were targeted for recruitment, often coerced, for three main reasons: they were overrepresented in the population, they were more effective fighters than younger children, and they were more easily indoctrinated than adults (Blattman and Annan 2010).

However, coercive tactics are not the only nor the most common strategy to attract new recruits. For instance, Lilja (2009) describes the concept of **social entrapment**. This refers to situations when individuals are progressively drawn into rebel groups, starting with legal civilian activities which are subsequently converted into military roles. For example, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) initially recruited individuals into the LTTE civil service, facilitating them to be labelled as LTTE-affiliated (Lilja 2009). In another example of social entrapment, a woman who became a militant in ETA said that "it never once entered my mind that I might actually become part of ETA" and that "they might ask me to do something for them, by way of infrastructure or whatever. I mean they might ask you… look, there's this person coming, and he's with ETA, and you've got to take him into your home and hide him" (Reinares 2004, 468).

In the case of the IRA, while religion was a dominant boundary-marker and the basis for social segregation in Northern Ireland, it was not politically relevant for the conflict in and of itself (Mitchell 2006, 5) and several actors involved in the conflict such as the Sinn Féin leader Tom Hartley denied the religious aspect of the conflict, defining it as an anticolonial struggle (Juergensmeyer 2017, 41). Thus, while the Protestant-Catholic divide is religious in origin, it has come to encompass elements such as ethnicity, the settler-native dichotomy and the question of national identity (Rutten 2018, 22). Similar to other types of extremisms, catalyst events can motivate individuals to join violent extremist groups. In the case of the IRA or ETA, new members justified becoming involved in the groups by referring to the killing or torturing of friends and family members by the state, suggesting that violence was an act of **revenge** (Muro 2017, 48). Similarly, revenge has also constituted a tipping point to extremism for some people joining the PKK (Özeren et al. 2014, 337).

A study by Özeren et al. (2014) analysed over 2,000 members of the PKK to identify a profile of their members. The large majority were single, unemployed youth between 15 and 21 years old when they became involved in the organisation. While only 13% had another family member part of the organisation, many individuals decided to join the organization at the suggestion of their relatives. Women constituted 23% of the group. From the interviews conducted with detained members of the PKK, Özeren et al.'s (2014) study also identified the main motivations to join the group. Importantly, **family issues** were one of the most influential factors on the decision to enter the organisation, which included not being allowed to marry at choice and being exposed to physical or psychological violence at home. For example, forced marriages were described by both females and males as an important driver into the movement, where they believed they would live freely. While family issues were not always the only cause for joining, they often constituted a catalyst event to enter the organisation.

Kinship and friendship have also been identified as important factors (Özeren et al. 2014; Aytekin 2019, 70). For instance, according to the Özeren et al. study, one member reported that the most influential person in his decision to join the organization was his brother, joining the group to find him, whereas another was persuaded by his cousin, who said that "we will have guns, we can live freely" (Özeren et al. 2014, 334).

Some people described unemployment and **financial problems** as a motivation to join the group. For instance, several people were told that if they joined the organization, they would no longer worry about money. For others, the prestige and **status** of joining the movement was their main incentive. Among these, some were attracted to the hero-like image of current combatants, their uniforms, and the possibility to become commanders in the group (Özeren et al. 2014).

The **gender differences** in the various types of extremist groups are consistent, with more males taking part in those groups. In those conflicts where women play an active role, female fighters are estimated to constitute between 10–33% of the combatants (Bouta 2005, 5). However, women rarely reach the highest positions of power in those groups (Ness 2005, 358), and in cases like ETA, women only constituted 6% of the militants, very rarely reaching command positions and, as one member said,

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"ETA was a true reflection of the surrounding society as far as machismo is concerned" (Reinares 2004, 470). Within this organisation, women were often assigned domestic chores and some were subject to sexual abuses (Reinares 2004, 471).

A feature that distinguishes female involvement in ethno-nationalist groups from their participation in other forms of political violence is the high degree of **forced recruitment** (Ness 2005, 358). However, while coercive recruitment tactics are frequently used to bring women into violent extremist groups, much of their participation appears to be voluntary (Henshaw 2015). Another particular feature of female involvement in ethno-nationalist groups is their employment of **youths** (Ness 2005, 358). The use of girls and teenagers both in supportive roles and as fighters is a widespread phenomenon (McKay 2005), poverty and lack of economic opportunity have driven the comparatively large numbers of females who have engaged in ethno-separatist struggles, and many women who have reached leadership positions have grown up in these organizations (Ness 2005, 358). In cases such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), women constituted 40% of EPLF members, and 35% of the fighters in the EPLF army by the end of the struggle in 1991 (Wood and Thomas 2017). Motivations and reasons to join were to support the liberation conflict as well as to escape arranged marriages, sexual torture and rape by Ethiopian troops (Melake 2019, 50 cites Cowan 1983). In addition, women aimed to liberate themselves from the oppressive societal structures by welcoming the EPLF's goal of gender equality. In fact, Wood and Thomas (2017) found that embracing a Marxist-oriented 'leftist' ideology increases the prevalence of female fighters while Islamist ideologies among rebel groups produce the opposite effect, and that ideology also influences the roles that women play within the armed group. In addition, beyond their ideological motivations, in societies with markedly traditional gender roles, female combatants are able to increase their status through their involvement in the group, although this recognition is often not proportionate to their real role in the conflict (Ness 2005, 358).

3.1.2   Drivers of religious extremism

Religion is often seen as a driver of violence and it is usually mixed with ideology in public discourse (European Commission 2017, 12). On the other hand, religious devotion can also be a source of resilience to violent extremism (Travis 2008; UNDP 2017). In this section, we will present some of the main features of different religious violent extremisms and identify the key drivers. Violent extremists have relied on religious justifications for violence based on selected texts and interpretations of their respective religions, and can be found in all faith-traditions. We focus here on insights from the study of Islamist extremism as well as Christian extremism. Their main similarities in terms of their narratives and some conclusions on the drivers to these types of extremisms are presented.

Modern Islamist extremism has emerged from a series of critical events taking place in 1979: Iran's religious revolution, the Egypt-Israel peace treaty and, most importantly, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In solidarity with their Muslim brothers fighting in Afghanistan, radical Muslims rallied to their cause. Marginalized elites, mostly from the Hijaz region in Saudi Arabia, created a global network of charities focusing on inter-Muslim aid, thus facilitating the recruitment of foreign fighters in Afghanistan during the 1980s (Hegghammer 2010, 56; Williams 2011). This task was coordinated by the 'Afghan Services Bureau' (Maktab al-Khidamat/MAK), an organisation established by Osama Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam (Williams 2011) that can be seen as the precursor to Al-Qaeda. The rise of religious violence that followed, with a high point in the 9/11 attacks illustrating a shift towards the far enemy, has been described as the Religious Wave of terrorism (Rapoport 2017b; Gerges 2005, 25).

Religious factors can be important drivers behind violent extremists, but increasing religious commitments can also be a consequence (rather than a cause) of violence (e.g. Isaacs 2016). In the case of Islamist extremism, the religious infrastructure has been built and utilised by the Salafi-Jihadi movement, which has its own mosques, readings, networks and charismatic figures (European

Commission 2017, 12). It is also important to acknowledge that many jihadists claim religion as a primary driver for their behaviour (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 41; European Commission 2017, 12). As an illustration of this, a man who joined Al-Shabaab described that "all I could ever think about was the government is full of infidels, apostates and hypocrites" (UNDP 2017, 70). Similarly, many citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina travelling to Syria and Iraq were initially motivated by the perceived religious duty to assist their Muslim brothers (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 41). Yet, at the same time, the knowledge about religious doctrine, tradition, and practice can often be rather absent amongst many of the recruits. In this regard, the study by the UNDP (2017, 51) found that "the level of religious literacy is low among those most vulnerable to recruitment".

In the case of Islamist extremism, it is important to acknowledge that Muslim minority communities are often subject to prejudices and **discrimination**, discouraging personal contacts with members of the majority segments of society and negatively affecting those interactions that take place. All these factors can lead the minority to feel surrounded by a threatening society (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 240). The phenomenon of relative deprivation, which is the dissatisfaction with one's situation in comparison to others regarded as equals, can play a role in radicalisation (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 29). This phenomenon has two dimensions: a personal and a group deprivation, depending on whether the comparison is with individuals of the same social group or whether the comparison is between social groups. Interestingly, group deprivation seems to be associated with greater militancy and predicts collective action to a larger extent than individual deprivation (Koomen and Fränkel 1992; Smith et al. 2012), particularly among the comparatively well-educated and with better economic situations (Koomen and Fränkel 1992). However, only a very limited number of individuals experiencing discrimination and exclusion engage in violent extremism, so these factors are not sufficient for radicalisation.

Similar to the narratives employed by other religious extremist groups, the idea of **martyrdom** is a central aspect of Islamist extremism. Fighters who die in combat are promised an entry to Paradise before all the other believers (Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019). With the possibility of extra-worldly rewards after deaths, the potential costs of engaging in violence may be offset (Toft 2006).

The idea of an **apocalyptic scenario** or a great confrontation between good and evil forces is also common among these groups. The connection between apocalyptic sentiments and religious violence has been established also in the study of other religious movements (e.g. Juergensmeyer 2017, 140, 152). It commonly entails an image of a great war between good and evil, prophecies of imminent crises and divine redemption, creating a sense of urgency which may motivate people to join their movements (Juergensmeyer 2017, 140).

The narratives employed by religious extremist groups, similar to far-right discourses, are commonly based on the **rejection of multiculturalism** and the perception of people of other faith traditions as a threat to their communities. The opposition to multiculturalism is closely linked with an image of victimisation of the in-group.

Social ties and networks are important drivers behind violent extremism. For example, a study of 150 jihadist fighters of Al-Qaeda found that pre-existing friendship bonds played an important role in their affiliation with the group for two-thirds of them, and most of them joined the jihad in small clusters of friends (Sageman 2004, 111). Based on the examples described in Sageman's study, instead of a top-down process of the violent extremist organization trying to recruit new members, it was a bottom-up process of young people volunteering to join the organization, with an absence of the figure of recruiter. In addition, they were not particularly religious (Sageman 2004, 107-110). Similarly, a study by the UNDP (2017, 75) in Africa found that half of the people who joined a violent extremist organisation were introduced to the group by a friend, while only 17% were introduced by a religious

figure and 17% joined on their own. In this context, the recruitment into violent extremism was ultimately a highly localized process, even if it could be influenced by globalized ideas.

Another important driver is **government repression**. In the UNDP study just mentioned, 71% of the individuals who joined violent extremist organisations identified 'government action' as the key incident that motivated them to join (UNDP 2017, 5). This can be related to their own experiences but also to the social ties and networks discussed above, as the category of 'government action' included acts such as 'killing of a family member or friend' or 'arrest of a family member or friend' by government forces.

While **gender differences** are apparent in all forms of extremisms, there are also some particularities in each case. The role of women within Islamist extremism has become more noticeable over time (Ranstorp 2019, 22), but they often participate in support roles. For instance, many women have played a central role in propagating and spreading the jihadist ideology, recruiting other women and pressuring people to stay within the extremist fold, often acting online. They have also been key actors in raising funds, smuggling weapons, money and messages, and raising children in line with the group's ideology (Ranstorp 2019, 22). Despite the increasing role of women in active positions within Islamist extremist organizations, these groups still employ a narrative based on traditional gender roles, where women are mainly seen as mothers and wives. For instance, as female suicide bombers have increased over the years as part of groups such as Al-Qaeda (Sutten 2009), their involvement has also been used as a form of shaming Muslim men to recruit them. Zarqawi posted an online message where he wrote: "Are there no men, so that we have to recruit women? Isn't it a shame for the sons of my own nation that our sisters ask to conduct martyrdom operations while men are preoccupied with life?" (Dickey 2005). Islamists have also appealed to the pride of men after the actions of Palestinian female extremists using the Arab media (Sutten 2009, 17). The violent acts conducted by women have also been used by far-right groups to shame men into action, with no such parallel existing in far-left violent extremist groups (Ness 2005, 360).

Most European foreign fighters after 2013 had a **criminal background**, engaged in delinquency and experienced a sense of abandonment, but very few had even a basic understanding of Islam (Coolsaet 2015). In line with this view, some authors concluded that subscribing to Islamist ideologies is not necessarily a precondition to violence, and not all those engaged in violence are ideological fundamentalists (Crone 2016, 592; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). In fact, perpetrators such as the Kouachi brothers or the Copenhagen shooter involved in recent attacks in Europe did not experience a gradual ideological radicalisation leading to violence, but a prior experience with violence preceded their engagement with extremist ideologies and related violent attacks (Crone 2016, 592). A similar pattern of extremists joining a movement after a pre-existing engagement in violence and crime has also been found in the study of religious extremism in other contexts (Juergensmeyer 2017, 115).

Regarding the drivers into religious extremisms, a **history of personal issues** seems to be relevant in some cases. According to Rotella (2002, cited by Sageman 2004, 108), describing a group of close friends in Milan, "these are people with a lot of problems. Adapting to this country is devastating to them. In radical religious activity they found rules, a structure. It's not just religious, it's psychological and personal." In other words, for some people, the violent extremist group served as a way to escape their troubled situation.

Christian extremist attacks include events such as the bombings of abortion clinics in the US during the 1900s by Eric Robert Rudolph, but also events that can be seen as far-right extremist manifestations. For instance, within hours of the shooting that he conducted in 2011, Anders Breivik published a manifesto of over 1,500 pages titled "2083 – A European Declaration of Independence" in which the author focused on what he thought were the evil influences of feminism, cultural Marxism, and especially Muslim culture (Juergensmeyer 2017, 20). While those are typical features of far-right

narratives, the text also includes references to the defense of Christianity. For example, the title of the manifesto refers to the Battle of Vienna in 1683, when the Ottoman Empire was militarily defeated, ensuring that "most of Europe would not become part of the Muslim empire" (Juergensmeyer 2017, 21). The date in Breivik's title is the 400th anniversary of that battle, self-portraying Breivik as a re-creation of the historic efforts to save Europe and Christianity from Islam, even despite the fact that he was not a pious church-going Christian (Juergensmeyer 2017, 21).

Breivik's attack shared many features with the 1995 explosion carried out by Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma, framing their acts as the triggering event to a great battle to rescue society from liberal forces of multiculturalism. Both lamented the civilian deaths but conceived their actions as "necessary" (Juergensmeyer 2017, 23). The ideas defended by these two individuals are part of a Christian subculture in the West that believes that Caucasians have been granted superiority by divine right (Juergensmeyer 2017, 24), an idea that is central to the Christian Identity movement. Influential thinkers of the Christian Identity movement such as the neo-Nazi William Pierce, who critically inspired McVeigh, aimed to merge "religion and state" in a new society governed by religious law (Juergensmeyer 2017, 26). They also shared an apocalyptic view of history by which they were living in the Last Days and believed that there would be a great confrontation between freedom and a government-imposed slavery (Barkun 1994, 110). In addition, the movement held strong anti-Semitic ideas, claiming that the people who claim to be Jews had a diabolical nature and that they were imposters (Barkun 1994, 116). Gun control is also a central aspect to Christian Identity supporters, which is seen as a potential means of rebellion against the centralized power, and what has earned them the sympathies of the National Rifle Association (Juergensmeyer 2017, 28).

However, other currents of Christian ideology such as Christian Reconstruction have been behind acts of violent extremism against abortion clinics, with the broader goal of making America "a truly Christian nation" (Juergensmeyer 2017, 29). Employing a rhetoric based on ideas of victimization, Rev. Michael Bray, who conducted several attacks on abortion clinics, justified these actions claiming that Christianity gave him the right to defend innocent "unborn children" (Juergensmeyer 2017, 32). Analogously to other religious extremism, these individuals found justification for their violent acts in biblical texts.

An exception is the examination of recruits in the LRA, one of the most well-known Christian extremist groups. The LRA's almost exclusive reliance on coerced recruitment distinguishes it from most rebel groups in Africa and elsewhere. In this organisation, **young teenagers** were particularly targeted for recruitment, and were often coerced (Blattman and Annan 2010). As part of the LRA, females reported abduction with less than half the frequency than males, taking the roles of fighters or "wives" (Blattman and Annan 2010, 134). Rarely relying on material incentives, fear and intimidation were the primary means for compliance within this violent extremist group (Blattman and Annan 2010, 140). Analogously to the other religious extremist groups, the LRA justified their violent acts based on religious grounds. In this case, LRA's leader, Joseph Kony, claimed that "those who commit the worst atrocities are the closest to God. The killing is not even a crime. God is passing judgment. God is punishing a generation" (Eichstaedt 2009, 100).

3.1.3 Drivers of political extremism

3.1.3.1 *Far-right extremists*

While far-right extremist attacks remain a small fraction of the total violent extremism worldwide, these attacks have increased considerably during the last 15 years (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019; Ebner 2017), and high-profile events such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the attacks by Breivik in Norway and the recent shootings in Christchurch and El Paso have attracted attention to this type of extremism. Compared to other types of violent extremism, far-right violence is seemingly more unorganized and spontaneous, although highly organized forms of far-right violence can be found in

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some countries, perhaps most notably in Italy (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 10). Another general feature of this type of violence is that far-right perpetrators rarely issue demands or claim responsibility for the attacks they carry out (Pauwels 2019, Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 7) and the contemporary far-right is fractured, volatile and leaderless in most countries (Ebner 2017, 63).

The term 'far-right' refers to a political ideology that is centred on the following elements: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, demands for a strong state and an anti-democratic attitude. We can distinguish between radical right actors who operate within democratic boundaries and extreme right actors who openly reject democracy and support violent or other non-conventional means to achieve political change (Mudde 1995). The far right comprises both radicals and extremists, who all share three central aspects: acceptance of social inequality, authoritarianism, and nativism (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 6).[4]

According to Koomen and van der Pligt (2016, 240), far-right extremists feel a threat based on the **perceived lack of opportunity** afforded to ordinary people by a society with values that do not correspond with those of the group. The government and the elite are seen as having no interest in their own nation and people, favouring ethnic and religious minorities over the majority white population and embracing internationalism instead or prioritizing their own interests (Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019). In addition, they perceive a threat in the arguments of their political opponents, which they see as weak in their defense of a liberal and overgenerous welfare state (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 240; Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019).

However, people join far-right extremist groups for diverse reasons. For example, former neo-Nazis in Scandinavia joined these groups less because of political reasons and more as a masculine rite of passage (Kimmel 2007). The interviews by Kimmel (2007) show that the extreme right draws adherents from **young, male**, and from the lower social classes. In addition, a history of **personal issues** is present among several of them: many had been bullied at school and had weak family ties. As one interviewee reports, "before I joined, I felt like a nobody, I felt like a loser, I felt like, worthless. […] Their world offered me a world where I was better – just because I was white" (Kimmel 2007, 211). In this group, they were often introduced to the movement by friends or older family members.

Those in **weak socioeconomic** positions often suffer discrimination from the majority population and consider certain minorities as threatening (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 241). However, far-right groups are not only conformed by heavily tattooed, uneducated extremists, but have a broad recruitment potential with diverse profiles (Sterkenburg 2019, 16). For instance, individuals who consider themselves members of the online alt-right movement are often students or well-educated individuals (Sterkenburg 2019, 17).

In terms of individual factors, **authoritarian** personalities are common among these members. Given its conservatism, authoritarianism appears to align most easily with Islamist and far-right extremism, and it is often associated to social dominance orientation, defending inequality (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016). On the other hand, weak social dominance orientations are more commonly associated with far-left radicalisation (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016).

A history of **personal adversities and crime** have also been identified as drivers of extremism. Interviews with former far-right extremists in the US show that 45% reported being physically abused as a child, compared to a prevalence of 28% in the general population; and 72% reported problems with alcohol or illegal drugs (Simi et al. 2015). In addition, in the US, only a minority of far-right homicide offenders have higher education, which is significantly lower than those Islamist and far-left extremists, and over a half of them had prior arrest records and were significantly more likely to have

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[4] For a more detailed description of the different types of far-right extremist ideologies, see Sterkenburg (2019, 7).

criminal histories (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 10). Thus, it is important to consider these individuals conditions as potential contributing factors to extremism.

Similar to Islamist extremism, **women** in far-right extremist groups have adopted increasingly active roles over the past decades, but within traditional far-right extremist groups and the alt-right movement, women are not regarded as equal members, and they are often involved in support roles (Sterkenburg 2019, 20). Their participation often entails writing messages for websites, social media or flyers, recruiting and doing administrative work (Sterkenburg 2019, 20). Although some women join far-right extremist groups to support their partners, many of them join on their own, seeking group protection, or they are motivated by a sense of belonging (Sterkenburg 2019, 20).

It is important to note that there are many different far-right extremist groups, including neo-Nazi groups, anti-immigrant protest groups, conservative-Christian advocate groups, and lone wolves. Often, an individual is a member of several of these organisations. This membership fulfils needs such as belonging to a subculture, protection, joy in the thrill of violent clashes with political opponents and authorities, and an intellectual quest (Sterkenburg 2019, 16-17). In particular, Sterkenburg (2019, 19) distinguishes five profiles of far-right extremist members according to their main motivations: thrill seekers, political seekers, option seekers, social seekers and ideological seekers. The **drivers for each type of member are different**, and some profiles share parallelisms with alternative descriptions of violent extremist members proposed by Nesser (2006) and the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008). For instance, social seekers, who are primarily motivated by a sense of belonging and are not ideologically driven, largely correspond to what Nesser (2006) categorises as "drifters" in a typology that we will present below.

3.1.3.2   Far-left extremists

Fidel Castro's victory in Cuba in 1959 and the long Vietnam War (1955–1975) critically influenced other far-left violent extremist groups, particularly throughout Latin America, initiating the New Left Wave of terrorism (Rapoport 2017c). The groups active during this period include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union, the Red Brigades in Italy, and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) (Rapoport 2017c). However, compared to far-right attacks, far-left violent acts have been increasingly uncommon since the 1980s and have caused fewer fatalities in recent years (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019), with the far-left experiencing an important decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 242).

In the case of far-left extremists, the main perceived threat is the **inequality** inherent in society, as on the extreme right, there are political threats, such as the views of political opponents who advocate inequality in certain respects. Far-left extremists typically aim for a social revolution that would free oppressed groups, such as workers and peasants, from capitalism (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 240).

Similar to other types of violent extremism, individuals who join far-left extremist groups can do so for a variety of reasons, including feelings of **revenge**. For instance, a detained FARC member mentioned the assassination of several of his friends and the threats against his former political organisation as motivations to create an armed underground organisation. He established contact with FARC members through this group and decided to join the former along other people (Beltrán Villegas 2014, 153).

While Koomen and van der Pligt (2016, 243) argue that, on average, far-right extremists are **less well educated** and have a **lower socioeconomic status** than far-left extremists; it is relevant to acknowledge that most recruits joining the FARC, for instance, were poor and had low levels of education (Beltrán Villegas 2014).

3.1.4   Commonalities in Drivers across Extremisms

Having reviewed the drivers of these different types of extremism, we reflect on some commonalities, and also some differences, across ethnic-sectarian, religious, and political extremism. Radicalisation towards violent extremism takes place at the intersection of an enabling environment and personal trajectory, where the actual process is triggered by personal experiences, kinship, friendship, group dynamics and socialisation into the use of violence (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9). In the different types of violent extremism, we see similar cognitive and emotional effects of threat: perceived injustice, sentiments of exclusion and humiliation (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9; Koomen and van der Pligt 2016). These sentiments have always been prime motivations for change. However, a common feature of radicalisation processes is that the actual use of violence involves only a very select number of individuals, who are at the extreme end of a pool of possible radical expressions (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9).

Regarding demographic characteristics, the youth, and in particular young men, are overrepresented in all extremist ranks. One explanation for this observation is that the youth are more likely to be influenced by the glamourizing of violence in war films and computer games (Bourke 2014). Some of the most popular computer games are based on conflicts in the Middle East, and games such as Call of Duty typically portray an idealised image of the "good guys," with a strong sense of loyalty to their comrades and joking attitudes, that contrasts with the dehumanized picture of faceless insurgents (Bourke 2014). As an illustration of this excitement about violence among the youth, interviews with young males who joined far-right skinhead groups in Quebec show that most of them displayed a real fascination with physical activities, guns, including prohibited ones, and violence (Tanner and Campana 2014, 26). Most of them had developed this fascination before joining a skinhead group and some confessed that they had become members of the skinhead group "just for that" (Tanner and Campana 2014, 26). On the other hand, it has been argued that the quest for significance typical for that age group might play a role (Kruglanski et al. 2009), as well as their desire to prove themselves by accepting risky challenges (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 41).

In general, with few exceptions, violence is cross-culturally considered a male arena (Ness 2005, 354), and all forms of extremism present a disproportionately high male representation (Bakker 2007; Groen, Kranenberg and Naborn 2011). According to Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, possible explanations can be found in men's greater aggressiveness, their tendency to compete in intergroup relationships and their higher social dominance orientation (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 242). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how certain masculinities are vulnerable to extremist influences (Allan et al. 2015, 23). At the same time, women's generally lower social dominance orientation and the goals of the groups can partly explain why the gender differences are less pronounced among far-left groups extremists than on traditional far-right or Islamist organisations that incorporate sexism as part of their ideologies; as the left's struggle for equality makes it more appealing for women (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 242; Ness 2005, 355; Wood and Thomas 2017). In general, there seems to be a tendency to recruit more women and children if a conflict drags on and the availability of male recruits becomes scarcer (Bouta 2005, 6; Sutten 2009, 33; Reinares 2004).

Overall, we can conclude that most of the drivers towards violent extremism are shared by the different types of violent extremist groups, be them ethno-nationalist, religious or political in nature. For instance, studies examining the drivers for different types of violent extremist groups underscored the influence of radical mentors (Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente 2017; Khalil and Zeuthen 2016; RAN 2017, 4) and the importance of family and friendship ties to current extremists (Özeren et al. 2014; Aytekin 2019, 70; Sageman 2004, 111; Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente 2017, 7; Kimmel 2007; Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008) as group-level factors. At a more structural level, state fragility and instability has been identified as a contributing factor to extremism (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 42; Allan et al. 2015, 38). Likewise, regarding their history of crime, this was a key feature of most European foreign fighters (Coolsaet 2015), several members in religious extremist groups

(Juergensmeyer 2017, 115), far-right extremists in the US (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 10), and the PKK (Özeren et al. 2014, 335). In addition, there are numerous emotional reasons for being drawn into violent extremism that do not directly relate to ideology, such as a sense of belonging, status, adventure, or revenge (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016; Sterkenburg 2019). Overall, a disposition against what is seen as the elite of the society is a common driver amongst both Islamist and far-right extremism: "Most scholars agree that far-right and Islamist extremist groups share a common enemy, the 'establishment', as well as a common target audience, disenfranchised youth" (Ebner 2017, 11).

While there is a lot of similarity in terms of the drivers for the different types of extremism, some factors are more salient for certain types of extremisms. One such factor is forced recruitment. Ethno-nationalist groups have more frequently employed coercive means for attracting new members (Ness 2005, 358). These tactics are more likely to be used when military and economic shocks are accompanied by shortened time horizons (Eck 2014). Another such factor are authoritarian personalities: given its conservatism and social dominance orientation, these traits are often associated with far-right and Islamist extremists (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016).

3.1.5   Disputed drivers of extremism

Previous studies show ambivalent results for the influence of factors such as mental health, education, and socioeconomic conditions in the radicalization process. To make sense of these contradicting results, we should keep in mind that not all studies refer to the same population, and some of these factors may only be relevant for *some* individuals joining violent extremist groups. In particular, it is relevant to acknowledge that most studies have focused on individuals radicalising in West, often as part of Islamist extremism, but the drivers of violent extremism for those individuals may be different from those relevant in other regions.

3.1.5.1   Mental health disorders

In the past, it was common to assume a link between personality traits and violent extremist acts. However, this assumption is disputed in contemporary research. Interviews with violent extremists from different sites have not found evidence of mental illness (Nasser-Eddine et al. 2011, 34; Sageman 2004) and several studies found that mental diseases among violent extremists are not more prevalent than the occurrence among the population at large (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9; Moghaddam 2005; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 804). For instance, Juergensmeyer (2017, 128) concludes from his interviews of various members of violent extremist groups that one of the features of violent extremism is its "banality," meaning that these individuals do not seem to present deviant personality traits. A similar conclusion was reached previously by Hannah Arendt (1963) regarding the Nazi Holocaust, and, in a less severe context, by Philip Zimbardo (2007) in his experiment of the Stanford prison. In addition, the ability to carefully plan and execute violent extremist operations is not typical of mentally disturbed individuals (Nasser-Eddine et al. 2011, 34; Sageman 2004), and links to a suicidal-type personality, as understood in the field of psychology, could not be established among suicide extremists (Townsend 2007).

However, a study by Krasenberg and Wouterse (2019) points out that several radicalised individuals present specific neuropsychiatric disorders like autism spectrum disorder or schizophrenia. As these authors argue, some of the existing evidence about mental health and violent extremists gathered by practitioners is classified, which could be explained by ethical issues connected to publishing confidential data. Nevertheless, a study examining 120 cases of lone actor violent extremism concluded that there might be some connection between mental health and violent extremism. The results for this sample, which was almost exclusively male and with a medium age just under 30, shows that 23% of them had a clinical diagnosis of a mental health disorder, 15% of them had an absence of

a mental health disorder, and the clinical diagnosis was unknown for the rest of the sample (RAN 2017, 2).

In line with the above finding, some researchers and practitioners argue that we can observe a greater prevalence of mental health disorders amongst violent extremists due to online entry, mass recruitment tactics and increased exposure to threats, grievances and propaganda (Krasenberg and Wouterse 2019). Thus, while it is important not to stigmatise people with mental health disorders, there are some features that can potentially facilitate the radicalisation process in some of these individuals. For instance, common facets of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are their circumscribed or restricted interests, their need for order and routine, and their social naivety. Extremist explanations can feed into those needs, promising absolutist solutions and more easily manipulating them. Nevertheless, individuals with ASD are not more prone to violent behaviours overall than the general population. However, in combination with psychotic illness, radicalisation may serve as a frame, or a means for expressing the psychotic disorder (Krasenberg and Wouterse 2019, 7).

As an illustration of these mechanisms, Faccini and Allely (2016) conclude that Anders Behring Breivik presents diagnoses of Asperger's Syndrome, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and Antisocial Personality Traits. According to these authors, a narcissistic decompensation contributed to experiencing a depression, followed by a rewrite of his life story in which he becomes a hero defending Europe against a conspiracy, ultimately culminating in the attacks in Norway in 2011.

In sum, the data available does not seem to be conclusive on the relationship between mental health and radicalisation. While the majority of members of violent extremist groups do not appear to present mental health disorders, some features of autism and psychotic illness can facilitate the radicalisation into lone actor attacks, for instance through social isolation. Nevertheless, mental health disorders alone are not a good predictor of radicalisation, and the fact that someone is being treated is considered a protective factor. Krasenberg and Wouterse (2019) propose several recommendations when intervening with individuals with mental health disorders that are drawn into violent extremism.

3.1.5.2   *Economic situation and education*

In some violent extremist organisations, most of the recruits are poor and unemployed (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 42; UNDP 2017, 39; Özeren et al. 2014), and some people describe unemployment and financial problems as a motivation to join these groups. For instance, several people were told that if they joined the PKK, they would no longer worry about money (Özeren et al. 2014). On the other hand, among groups such as the alt-right, ETA and Islamist extremists living in the West, these individuals are often well-educated, have a job and can be above the average in regards to education and socioeconomic status at the time they join the movement (Sterkenburg 2019, 17; Reinares 2004, 484; Koomen and Fränkel 1992). For example, less than 1% of the recruits of ETA were unemployed when they joined the group, 16% were students, and the vast majority had a job (Reinares 2004, 484). Thus, while some studies suggest that violent extremists do not come from economically deprived backgrounds or have little education (Moghaddam 2005, 161), others identify the lack of basic education and employment as potential contributing drivers to extremism (Azinović and Jusić 2015, 42; UNDP 2017, 39). In the study by the UNDP, the most immediate need of the respondents at the time of recruitment was often a perceived want in relation to education, and a significantly larger percentage of those individuals who decided to join violent extremist groups reported the lowest levels of secular schooling compared to the reference group (UNDP 2017, 39).

The study by the UNDP (2017, 57) shows that a larger percentage of those who voluntarily joined a violent extremist group were unemployed at the time of recruitment than reference group counterparts. On the other hand, it is surprising that at least 35% of those members who joined voluntarily and at least 64% of those who forcefully became part of a violent extremist group were not

paid at all for being members of the organisation. Another interesting finding is that those individuals who were studying or employed when they had their first contact with a violent extremist organisation took a longer time until they effectively joined the group since their first contact with the organisation (UNDP 2017, 57), suggesting that a lack of education and unemployment could accelerate the radicalisation process. Research by Paul Collier also supports this link. He argued that a preponderance of young men in society with few licit earning opportunities was strongly correlated with the likelihood of civil war, particularly in contexts with a high availability of lootable primary resources (Collier 2000).

Overall, a limitation of the current research on drivers of violent extremism is that it has mainly focused on the individual and the state level, largely ignoring the conditions of the communities where they live as potential contributing factors in this process. However, in the study of cumulative and overlapping extremisms, some studies have examined community-level conditions that can facilitate these radicalisation processes (e.g. Ebner 2017, 157; Turčalo and Veljan 2018).

3.2 Drivers of Cumulative Extremisms and Overlapping Extremisms

3.2.1 Cumulative Extremisms

The existing literature on reciprocal extremisms evolved from the examination of movement-countermovement dynamics in the United Kingdom (Eatwell 2006), and a large part of the existing literature has focused on the British context, exploring the interaction between far-right and anti-fascist groups since the 1940s, as well as the most recent confrontation between anti-Muslim groups and Islamist extremists (Carter 2019; Macklin 2020; Allchorn 2020; Bartlett and Birdwell 2013; Feldman 2012; Macklin and Busher 2015). In addition, studies analysing groups outside the UK have almost exclusively focused on the West, mostly regarding the interaction between far-right and Islamist extremisms (Ebner 2017; Carter 2017; Pratt 2015; Virchow 2020), while notable exceptions exist (Turčalo and Veljan 2018). Thus, based on this emerging literature, a few insights concerning the drivers towards these forms of extremisms are presented, acknowledging that it is still an open empirical question to what extent these insights are generalizable to contexts in other regions of the world.

There is an increasing awareness that far-right extremists and Islamist extremists are referring to the other and feeding each other's rhetoric, which they both use to justify their existence and incite violence against one-another (Hénin 2019; Ebner 2017), exemplifying the phenomenon of reciprocal radicalisation/cumulative extremism. While Islamist extremists cite anti-Muslim discrimination and racism as a justification for their violent actions, far-right extremists refer to the so-called "White Genocide" and claim that all Muslims are evil to justify their "White Jihad" (Ebner 2017, 139). However, curiously, they converge on several basic points, such as the idea that Muslims and non-Muslims cannot cohabitate (Hénin 2019). For instance, according to far-right extremists, the differences between the white race and the "others" are either biologically or religiously determined, or just impossible to overcome (Sterkenburg 2019, 11). Similarly, while both Islamist and far-right extremists accuse each other of lacking respect for their women, misogyny and traditional gender perceptions are central to both ideologies (Ebner 2017, 10). In another parallelism, while the far-right talks about the "Islamisation of the West," Islamist extremists fight against a perceived "Westernisation of Islam" (Ebner 2017, 10). Mitts (2019) finds support for the proposed relationship between an increase in supporters for the far-right, taken as an indication of anti-Muslim hostility, and radicalisation towards ISIS. Relying on data covering thousands of twitter users (e.g. followers of ISIS accounts), Mitts (2019) finds that areas in Belgium, France, Germany, and the UK, who voted for the far-right were more likely to show evidence of online radicalisation (Mitts 2019).

Within this literature, revenge has been identified as one important driver towards reciprocal extremisms. Based on their very nature, violent extremist groups that develop in opposition to each other – and sometimes even emerge in defiance of another movement – are motivated to commit

violent acts as a reaction to events perceived as provocative. Numerous examples can illustrate this dynamic. For instance, in 2012, the German far-right group Bürgerbewegung Pro NRW conducted several anti-Islamic demonstrations in front of mosques, where the controversial Jyllands Posten-cartoons depicting Mohammad were shown (Virchow 2020, 11). While in most cases these protests did not provoke any public reaction from Muslims, on one occasion Islamists extremists attacked members of the far-right party with iron bars and stones (Virchow 2020, 11). In another example, in 2016, Salman Abedi lost a British Libyan friend, who was run down by a car and then stabbed in Manchester (Ebner 2017, 152). Perceiving it as a religious hate crime, he vowed revenge and, in 2017, he killed 22 people at the Ariana Grande concert in the same city (Ebner 2017, 152). In another instance, in 2013, after the killing of the soldier Lee Rigby by two Islamist extremists in London, a fourfold increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes took place (Ebner 2017, 154; Bartlett and Birdwell 2013). However, while some authors describe a process of "spirals of violence" following violent events (e.g. Bartlett and Birdwell 2013; Ebner 2017, 155), in the British context the escalation of violence was restrained to certain repertoires of action and was temporary, resembling more "spikes" than "spirals" (Macklin and Busher 2015, 58-59). In fact, based on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), in several Western countries, we can see that spikes in Islamist attacks and far-right attacks tend to coincide (Ebner 2017, 153), but eventually decrease. As another illustration of this dynamic, following a series of racist murders in the 1970s, the opposing anti-fascist groups responded with marches, vigils and street battles, but not with counter-murders (Macklin and Busher 2015, 58-59), thus limiting the so-called spiralling effect. As one explanation for the restraint in their violent responses, Carter (2017, 47) argues that the fact that both far-right and anti-fascists drew supporters from the same constituency, namely the white working class, limited the repertoire of escalation in this case, whereas the existing social divisions in Northern Ireland did not facilitate the same level of moderation between unionists and nationalists.

In the wider study of movement and countermovement interaction, one driver for violence is the physical proximity and meetings taking place between different social movements, for example during demonstrations and counter-demonstrations (Zald and Useem 1987), a finding reinforced by Carter (2019). In line with these studies, Ebner (2017, 157) finds that the 'radicalisation hotbeds' of far-right and Islamist extremists in Western countries often overlap geographically, suggesting that their close contact with opposing groups contributes to their radicalisation. Whether this spatial dimension is a driver that would generalize to the wider universe of extremist movements is still an open question. However, it is worth to pay attention to the physical arenas of interaction between extremist groups as a potential driver for violent cumulative extremism.

The extent to which extremist movements define themselves in opposition to another group, as well as the symmetry in the relationship, helps to explain the occurrence of cumulative extremism (Carter 2019, 202). The nature of the relationship, such as when extremist movements are closely coupled, may also help to explain when cumulative extremism follows a de-escalatory path, as de-escalatory actions on one side will be more likely to be followed by similar moves by the other side (Carter 2019, 204).

Another important driver for cumulative extremism has to do with the political opportunity structure, in particular, the available alternative mechanisms for channeling extremists' frustration, aspirations, and political energy (Carter 2019, 205). If more peaceful channels of influence are blocked, then it is more likely that the reciprocal relationship between extremist groups will take a violent form. The political opportunities should, however, not be understood as limited to the domestic political field, but rather encompass both broader cultural and global trajectories, as well as access to media and other means of disseminating their messages to their constituencies (Carter 2019, 206). Carter (2019, 201) also finds that when a movement can be perceived to truly represent their constituency and threatens the interests of other groups, this can generate processes relating to cumulative extremism. In addition, the degree of internal heterogeneity as regards their overall strategy or goal can also be

of importance for when we observe processes of cumulative extremisms. Indeed, this was of importance for the development of the counter-jihad movement (Carter 2019, 201).

A key potential driver to cumulative extremism, which has received surprisingly little attention, is the role of the state. How the state reacts to extremist groups can shape the nature of their interaction. Therefore, an important factor for understanding "if and how CE [cumulative extremism] may grow and evolve is the way the state acts towards one or all of the movements concerned. Indeed, by far the most influential actor in any episode of contentious politics – let alone any M/CM [movement/countermovement] conflict – is the state" (Carter 2019, 206).

Still, it is important to emphasize that the occurrence of two or more extremist groups in a country or region does not necessarily need to lead to cumulative extremism. The presence of one violent extremist group may also have the adverse effect on another: "Rather than leading to greater levels of support for each group, it could be that an extremist group's actions only serve to isolate them further." (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013, 12). Thus, two forms of extremism are not always and necessarily locked into a reciprocal relationship towards each other, and an increase in one form of extremism may also decrease the space for another movement on the opposite fringe. Moreover, there is no automatic or deterministic relationship between extremist violence on one end leading to violence on another: extremist violence does not spiral in never-ending reciprocal interactions. There are also cultural, political and strategical restraints ('brakes') that mitigate against spirals of retaliatory violence (Macklin 2020, 3).

Apart from the behavioural retaliation for previous actions, the narratives of reciprocal extremist groups tend to reinforce each other, with their stories being two sides of the same coin (Ebner 2017, 155). However, it remains to be explored whether these dynamics have served to attract more followers into these violent extremist groups, increasing the appeal of ideology as a driver towards violent extremism. Thus, while extremists on both sides have achieved growing rates of support through social media (Ebner 2017, 11), it has not been sufficiently established whether this rise in followers is due to the increasing referral to antagonistic extremist groups, or whether it is driven by other features of their sophisticated communication strategies, such as their appeal to local grievances and emotions.

In sum, cumulative extremisms appear to be particularly influenced by feelings of revenge at the individual level, by the physical proximity between opposing groups, their symmetry, and internal heterogeneity, and, at a more structural level, by the political opportunity structure to channel their grievances through nonviolent means. However, based on the existing research on reciprocal extremisms, we do not know whether some of the remaining drivers towards violent extremism (e.g. a sense of belonging, family and friendship) are particularly pronounced in reciprocal extremisms.

3.2.2   Overlapping Extremisms

Likewise, similarities and differences in the drivers of overlapping extremisms – understood as extremisms that draw from several sources of mobilisation within the same movement – and other types of extremisms have not been explicitly explored in current research. However, many of the examples included in this review can be understood as overlapping extremisms: the LRA is a Christian extremist group that also mobilises along the Acholi ethnic lines, the PKK was inspired by a Marxist ideology and presented itself as a defender of the Kurdish identity, individuals such as Anders Breivik and Timothy McVeigh justified their violent acts based on both far-right ideas and Christian Identity-inspired notions, and IS has developed a narrative centred on the formation of a Caliphate based on sharia law but has also capitalised the Shia-Sunni divide. From the examination of the relevant drivers towards violent extremism in these examples of overlapping extremisms, we can reach two main conclusions: first, the ideological appeal of these groups seems to allow them to reach broader

audiences, and, second, the importance of drivers that are more commonly associated with a particular type of violent extremist group appears to be maintained even if the group draws on additional sources of mobilization.

Regarding the first aspect, as previously discussed, individuals join violent extremist groups for a variety of reasons and these organisations often adapt their message to capture the interest of different audiences (Bloom 2017; Greene 2015; Eichstaedt 2009). Thus, the fact that overlapping extremist groups have a more varied set of narratives available could facilitate their recruitment of individuals who are motivated by different ideological discourses. For instance, whereas IS has gained adepts from foreign countries employing a narrative centred on religious arguments, Juergensmeyer (2020, 63) finds – in interviews with former IS members and refugees who escaped the rule of IS – that many of the group's foot soldiers were primarily motivated by Sunni Arab empowerment.

With respect to the second aspect, several examples support the idea that overlapping extremist groups can benefit from the drivers specific to the different sources of mobilisation that they rely on. For instance, their appeal to the Sunni community did not prevent IS to rely on the Salafi-jihadi network for funding, recruitment and inspiration for their narratives and practices. Similarly, the LRA was strongly characterised by their reliance on forced recruitment (Blattman and Annan 2010; Eichstaedt 2009; Eck 2014), which is a feature most commonly seen in ethno-nationalist groups. In addition, in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where ethno-nationalist and religious extremisms are closely linked, different factors have contributed to the radicalisation process of individuals travelling to Iraq and Syria: beyond structural elements such as unemployment and lack of formal education, political elites have promoted polarising ethno-nationalist narratives (Turčalo and Veljan 2018). Furthermore, the war dynamics during 1992–1995 shaped the ability of foreign Salafi preachers and fighters to influence the traditionally tolerant Bosnian Muslims (Bardos 2014, 74-75; Turčalo and Veljan 2018). During the war, the members of the El-Mujahid unit, which was composed of foreign combatants from Arab states, prioritised persuading Bosnian Muslims to practice radical Islam over their combatant roles (Karčić 2010, 526). In the post-war period, the reconstruction of many mosques and schools was facilitated by foreign Salafi donors (Karčić 2010, 525; Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 10), and those former war-time strongholds of El-Mujaid experienced greater support for Salafism and departures to Syria and Iraq than regions such as the Bosnian-Podrinje Canton, which was cut off from the rest of the territory during the war by Serb-controlled paths (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, 11). In another example, the lack of government support by the Albanian government to their ethnic Diaspora has been identified as a factor facilitating the influence and recruitment by extremist Islamist preachers among those individuals abroad (Spahiu 2020, 21). In particular, these imams have played a key role in advising their followers with personal matters at the same time as they appealed to religion and their ethnic Albanian identity as a means to radicalise them (Spahiu 2020, 21).

In sum, whereas existing research has not explicitly examined the particularities in the drivers of reciprocal- and overlapping extremisms, we can tentatively conclude that revenge plays a more important role in reciprocal extremisms, whereas overlapping extremisms are able to expand their ideological appeal and make use of the particularities of the sources of mobilisation that they utilise. However, more research is needed in order to assess the robustness of these claims and to broaden the regional scope of reciprocal extremisms.

3.3   The Process of Radicalisation: When, who, how, and where?

3.3.1   When: Catalyst events for radicalisation

Certain catalyst events can temporarily or permanently exacerbate existing threats, turning underlying intergroup conflicts into present dangers requiring an immediate response. Examples of such events range from public ridicule of a group's faith to the death of a member at the hands of a rival group, including the recent experience of excessive repression by state authorities and profound social

changes in their country (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 18; Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 242; Muro 2017, 48).

In addition, illustrating the effect of revenge and catalyst events, the number of anti-Muslims attacks in Britain increased following terror attacks in other countries, particularly after the Paris and Copenhagen Islamist attacks (Travis 2015). These patterns also show how extremists oversimplify the reality when defining group boundaries: whereas the initial attacks were conducted by Islamist extremists elsewhere, the revenge attacks took place against Muslims living in Britain with no connection to the initial events. Importantly, as all opinion polls indicate and violent extremist groups seem to ignore, violent extremist violence is condemned by large majorities in most countries of the Muslim world as well as within Muslim communities inside Europe (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9).

3.3.2   Who is radicalised?

3.3.2.1   Lone wolves or part of a movement?

During the First Wave of terrorism, also called the Anarchist Wave, the group Narodnaya Volya and most of its Russian successors were committed to assassination as their principal tactic, assassinations planned by organizations even when a single individual committed the act (Rapoport 2017d). However, anarchists in Western Europe and the Americas often operated as "lone wolves," defined as individuals whose actions were "neither initiated nor backed by any underground organization" (Rapoport 2017d, 7 cites Ivianski 1997, 51).[5]

Since the 2000s, individuals undertaking sole acts of terror have become increasingly common due to the crescent radicalisation experienced by individuals as opposed to groups (Nasser-Eddine et al. 2011, 8; RAN 2017). However, most acts of deadly violence take place as part of armed groups, and even those acts that appear to be solo ventures often have networks of support and ideologies of validation behind them (Juergensmeyer 2017, 10). The features that define individuals engaging in lone actor attacks are broadly similar to those for individuals who join violent extremist groups in general: for instance, they share the feelings of humiliation and their self-perception as victims. In addition, they tend to be young, male, single, unemployed, and have a pre-existing history of crime (RAN 2017, 4-5). However, some research suggests that a larger proportion of lone actors have mental health issues compared to group actors. Their radicalisation process often develops over months or years, but sometimes more rapidly, often linked to a catalyst event such as a news report, a domestic event, a work-related dispute or a police encounter (RAN 2017, 5).

While lone actors conduct attacks on their own, their radicalisation process often involves an interaction with others. As Crone (2016, 588) argues, "radicalization is a social process; the idea of the lone wolf being radicalized in isolation is a myth." Similarly, Frenett and Dow (2015, 5) claim that "it is increasingly agreed upon that it is rare for individuals to radicalize entirely in absence of any outside communication. Radicalisation remains a social phenomenon and the fact that some of these social interactions have migrated online does not change this." Thus, the consensus is that self-radicalisation is extremely rare, if possible at all (Muro 2017; von Behr et al. 2013, 20). For instance, in line with these views, the study by Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente (2017) shows that most Islamist extremists in Spain radicalised in the company of others. In some cases, an "enabler" who presents him or herself as a faith leader is approached by the vulnerable individual (RAN 2017, 4).

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[5] Similarly, the the Centre for Terrorism and Counter terrorism at Leiden University in the Netherlands defines lone actor terrorism as: "The threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of purely personal-material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others)."

Given the social component of radicalisation, it is relevant to understand the recruitment strategies of violent extremist groups. These strategies can take different forms: violent extremist recruiters can appeal to ideology, coerce using physical or emotional distress, leverage family relationships, cause dishonour or shame, and conduct internet campaigns (Sutten 2009, 33).

The study by Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente (2017) shows that, for Islamist extremists in Spain, their contact and guidance by some agent of radicalisation and their pre-existing social ties were key factors. The role of the group in the radicalisation process is evident in this case: 87% of them radicalised in the company of others, while only 13% self-radicalized (Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente 2017, 3).

3.3.2.2   Profiles in radicalisation

Evidence from various case studies of violent extremist organizations suggest different paths to radicalisation, acknowledging that individual traits may connect individuals more firmly to certain paths than others. Petter Nesser (2006) identified several types of member profiles in jihadist cells in Europe: the entrepreneur, his protégé, the drifters and the misfits. While Nesser (2006) described these profiles and provided examples for each in the context of jihadist cells in Europe, those descriptions can largely apply to other violent extremist organisations. Based on his proposal and the descriptions made by the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008), the typical profiles of violent extremist members in general are presented:

1. *Entrepreneurs*. Members who play leadership roles in violent extremist organizations are often charismatic persons motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice, and they are often resourceful, educated, well integrated and sometimes even considered as role models in their communities (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 12; Nesser 2006).

2. *Veterans*.[6] For experienced combatants, their previous involvement in fighting can provide them a certain heroic image. This is the case for experienced Islamist veterans, but also for ethno-nationalist combatants and far-right extremists after the Second World War (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 12).

3. *Protégés*. This variety tends to enter violent extremism through a combination of loyalty to the leader and political activism. While they are often intelligent, skilful and socially well adapted, these individuals may also be easily manipulated by other respected group members, such as the entrepreneur (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 12; Nesser 2006).

4. *Drifters*. This is not a clear-cut profile. For some youths, the experience of belonging to a group and being accepted by peers or leaders is highly valued, and the search for community and group solidarity plays a central role for them. At least initially, these members may not be particularly committed to political attitudes or hold an extremist worldview. They usually lack a history of personal or economic problems. While they do not display on their own any important readiness to violence, conformity and the need to impress others may motivate them into taking action. Thus, they rarely initiate the process of radicalisation into an extremist ideology or violence but are, by definition, supporters and followers (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 13). As Nesser (2006) describes them, they become part of the cell by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or by having social ties to the wrong people.

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[6] This profile does not have a name in the original categorization by Nesser (2006), and its features are integrated into the entrepreneur type.

5. *Misfits*. A history of personal hardships is characteristic of this particular profile. They are socially or politically frustrated youth with personal experiences of discrimination, unfair competition with other groups over scarce resources or lack expectations for a good future. This feeling of rejection may lead to the perception of not having any significant bond to the society they live in. Usually, they have limited education and they may suffer from unemployment and economic difficulties. Similar to drifters, they do not hold any strong extremist ideas or ideologies initially. Violent acts are legitimised more by diffuse feelings than by ideological reasons (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 13). At the extreme end of the category of misfits, we can encounter individuals with a long and varied criminal record, who can be recruited in prisons or in the criminal underworld (Nesser 2006). Violence in these cases constitutes an everyday element in handling conflicts, and it embraces militant actions to cope with personal problems. Although they may lack discipline, such persons may be instrumental to the violent extremist group due to their readiness and experience with violence and competence in profit-oriented criminal activities (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 13).

In a study by Jensen, Atwell Seate and James (2018) of 31 violent and 25 nonviolent US-based extremists, the authors explore different pathways to violent extremism using a QCA methodology. They find that **community crises** are present in almost all violent extremist individuals but are not as prevalent among nonviolent extremists.[7] Thus, they conclude that experiencing a community crisis constitutes a "near" necessary condition for violent extremism. On the other hand, factors such as recruitment processes or physical vulnerabilities are not found to be necessary for many pathways to violent extremism.

Some violent extremist group have adapted their propaganda message and targeted very different audiences in parallel, and the increase of online recruitment has facilitated their ability to aim at specific individuals on the basis of their talents and the needs of the organisation (Bloom 2017, 605). For instance, IS employed a twin propaganda approach: one graphic and violent, and another that bases its message in concepts of altruism, with positive messages, soft lighting, and smiling children (Greene 2015). Propaganda intended to attract formerly imprisoned gang members is based on images of ultraviolence, war, and promises of excitement and action, which is significantly different from those messages aimed at recruiting doctors, nurses, and engineers (Bloom 2017, 606). In addition, projecting a strong sense of belonging and offering the opportunity to marry potential martyrs and to become mothers of a new generation have been arguments used by IS to attract women (RAN 2015, 3). Similarly, the PIRA adapted its message to attract young recruits depending on their environment: they used a patriotic-based narrative if the family was part of the upper class, it was framed as a form of social advancement if the family was less well off, or it was characterized as a revolutionary act of self-discovery if the family was opposing and had to be circumvented (Bloom 2017, 609). Other groups such as the LRA have also screened people and assigned them duties adapted to their talents (Eichstaedt 2009, 99).

Considering the above, understanding that violent extremist groups consist of different types of individuals who undergo different paths of radicalisation highlights the need to develop flexible CVE programs that fit each separate profile. Thus, interventions should target the relevant drivers of extremism in each case.

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[7] Community crises are understood as collective feelings of intense trouble, difficulty, or danger that often produce instability within a community.

3.3.2.3   Do women and men have the same motivations?

There is a lack of reliable evidence on the motivations of women engaging in violent extremism (Ní Aoláin 2013, 1095). However, according to Sutten (2009, 22), women join violent extremist organizations for a variety of reasons, including revenge for a loss, ideology, financial adversities, personal or family shame, and the need for protection of themselves and their family. Many of these reasons are similar to those of their male counterparts, but some present particular singularities.

Female violent extremists are often afforded an improvement in their social status due to the position they hold within a violent extremist organization (Ness 2005). Gaining equality with their male counterparts can be a strong motivation to participate in violent activities (Sutten 2009, 24). For example, the emancipation of women was a strong motivation for many combatants in Vietnam's independence conflict (Turley 1972), and several armed groups have used appeals for equal participation as a form to attract female combatants (Ní Aoláin 2013, 1098).

Financial hardships can result from the loss of a husband, father or son. In these circumstances, women are often involved in violent extremist activities to make up for this loss and support their families financially to provide basic subsistence requirements (Sutten 2009, 24). Sometimes, they have sacrificed themselves as suicide bombers to enable the rest of the family to survive (Sutten 2009, 25). After the death, suicide bombers are honoured and receive substantial financial benefits (Zedalis 2004, 20). Their images are also used as recruitment posters, picturing them in heroic positions (Zedalis 2004, 20).

Personal or family shame can also motivate females to become suicide bombers as they would become martyrs. After conducting the suicide attack, discretions in their past are forgiven and their family honour is restored (Bloom 2007, 3; Victor 2004). In many cultures, women that are raped or have extra-marital sex are seen as a shame for her and her family, and some failed suicide attackers have mentioned rape as a motive for their attempt (Sutten 2009, 25; O'Rourke 2009; Goodwin 2007). Similarly, several LTTE female members cited rape as a general motivation to join the organisation (Alison 2003), and some of the first Palestinian female suicide bombers that conducted attacks in 2002 deviated from gender expectations (Victor 2004). For instance, some of them were involved in extra-marital affairs and one was divorced and unable to bear a child (Ness 2005, 367). On the other hand, the Palestinian population showed the strongest disapproval of the attack conducted by a mother of two young children compared to the other female bombers (Ness 2005, 367), illustrating the difficulties of armed groups to balance the justifications for women joining combat roles and the traditional gender norms associated with them.

There do not seem to be important differences in the ideological motivations, feelings of revenge and seeking protection to join violent movements.[8] Different interviews on the subject seem to indicate that women express the same political motivations and willingness to fight for them as men (OSCE 2005, 5). Religious and ethnic beliefs are often a touchstone for the motivation and commitment of females involved in violent extremism. For instance, according to Ness (2005), the LTTE female suicide bombers were primarily motivated for political reasons. In another example, while having a boyfriend who was a member of ETA led to a number of women becoming involved in the group, this does not to mean that young women recruited lacked ideological affinity with the organisation (Reinares 2004, 467). In fact, there are also analogous examples with men joining a violent extremist group motivated by sentimental links with members of that group. For instance, a man who was already ideologically aligned with the PKK only decided to join the group when he believed the propaganda of his beloved (Özeren et al. 2014, 335).

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[8] Ideology can be seen as a political belief system, an all-embracing political doctrine that claims a monopoly of trust, and an officially sanctioned set of ideas used to legitimise a political system or regime (European Commission 2017, 11).

Interestingly, because most cultures embrace gender norms in which women are unsuited for combat positions, armed groups often attempt to justify the inclusion of women in fighting roles while maintaining culturally accepted, traditional femininity traits. For instance, LTTE female fighters were expected to maintain the traditional qualities attributed to femininity (Balasingham 2001). Thus, the reproduction of normative gender values seems to be central to maintaining a popular support base that sustains a culture of female martyrdom (Ness 2005, 368).

Regarding revenge as a driver to violent extremism, the loss of a loved one can be one of the most prevalent motivations for women to support or conduct violent extremist activities. Most notable, the Chechen "Black Widows" released videos justifying their threats for violent incidents in the Sochi Olympics as a form of revenge for the loss of their loved ones (Toto 2015). In addition, O'Rourke (2009, 710) found that, while one-third of female suicide violent extremists had experienced the killing of a family member in the military conflict, only 3% of the male suicide violent extremists had experienced such a situation. This disparity, she argues, can be partly explained by the violent extremist groups' rhetoric for recruiting female combatants, which uses the killing of a close relative to incentivise recruitment while highlighting the victimisation of women.

Finally, another reason for women and men to join or support armed groups is because of their own protection or their family's protection. In ungoverned or remote locations, families and individuals may turn to support violent extremists because they can benefit from the protection from criminals or are afraid of possible retaliation if they do not support them (Sutten 2009, 26).

In the study by the UNDP (2017) in Africa, the differences between women and men joining violent extremist groups are manifested by the emotions that motivate them to become members of those organisations. Women in this region more often joined violent extremist movements driven by emotions of fear and hate than men, whereas men were more driven by vengeance than women. Interestingly, hope/excitement was a common motivation for both women and men, which resonates with other studies identifying an interest in a "fun adventure" as a reason for joining groups such as Al-Qaeda (Bartlett 2008, 2). On the other hand, guilt was very rarely a driver of extremism for both women and men (UNDP 2017).

Overall, both women and men who know members of an extremist group are more likely to join it. According to Bloom (2007, 3), one of the most reliable predictors of a women's involvement in a particular violent extremist group is her relationship to a former or current member in that movement. Similarly, for example, men were often introduced to a right-wing extremist group in Scandinavia by friends or older family members (Kimmel 2007).

3.3.3   How is radicalisation achieved?

Regarding the **narratives** employed to attract followers, Smit and Meines (2019) summarize the key insights from a RAN Policy and Practice Workshop on far-right and Islamist extremisms. They conclude that it is important for CVE to differentiate between the various violent extremist overarching narratives, to consider the local context, to understand the underlying emotions and grievances to which the narrative appeals, and to avoid using the same binary discourse employed by extremist groups.

These narratives can refer to **foreign interventions**. For instance, IS has capitalized the resentment against US military actions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria or the occupation of Palestinian territories under the narrative of "Islam is under attack" (Smit and Meines 2019, 3). In her study of the Pakistani Taliban movement, Kanwal Sheikh demonstrates how the movement's violent extremism to a large degree was driven by "fear of elimination of Islam" (Sheikh 2016, 184). Regarding symbolic threats,

many Muslims have an image of the West as immoral, lacking solidarity, and some believe that the West opposes Islam and aims to destroy it (Ranstorp 2019; Smit and Meines 2019; Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 42). Another important aspect of the narratives employed to attract new followers is their link to the **local context**. This connection to local circumstances can reinforce their narrative and strengthen their appeal (Smit and Meines 2019, 3; UNDP 2017, 33). For instance, the Islamist extremist argument "you will never be accepted, you will never succeed as a Muslim in Western societies" builds on a sense of belonging and can resonate with the local experiences of the individuals it targets. This feature has inspired the involvement of local role models as part of CVE programs in order to make their message more credible (Smit and Meines 2019, 4, citing Russell 2018). In addition, many extremist narratives tap into existing emotions and grievances, such as perceptions of injustice and belonging (Smit and Meines 2019, 4). Finally, another feature of the extremist narratives is their simplification of reality into good and evil, of **us versus them**. Simplifying the social reality they live in, identity is often determined exclusively by attributes such as ethnicity, race or religion (Berger 2017; Sageman 2004, 116), and presents their own group as victims.

More broadly, a common feature among the ideologies of different violent extremist groups is their **justification of violent acts** that would otherwise lack any support from society in general, and that are effectively condemned by large majorities in most countries (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9). The propaganda employed by these groups is often filled with self-serving historical comparisons and facilitates the psychological process of "moral disengagement" by which an individual can distance him or herself from the responsibility of the violent act (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 17).

However, ideology alone is neither necessary nor sufficient for radicalization to take place. For instance, many far-right and skinhead youths joined these movements because of their attraction to fulfil needs regarding identity, protection or excitement, and some of them gradually adopted racist views once inside the group (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 15). In addition, although narratives can be effective for persuading and mobilising people, there has to be a connection with a potential recruit first. Thus, the different locations of recruitment will be discussed.

3.3.4   Where does radicalisation occur?

3.3.4.1   The role of the Internet

The accessibility to the internet has allowed extremist groups to expand their message and has broken down barriers for individuals wanting to become radicalized. The extremist propaganda does not only consist of communicating the group's message, but they also make direct online contact with individuals once they show interest in a particular page, video or tweet (RAN 2016, 2). Among the main strategies employed by extremists to attract potential recruits online, they offer the possibility of one-to-one video chats with recruiters, they allow for the immediate involvement in the organisation (which can take the form of spreading their propaganda), they relate to modern culture through popular games or music, and they make use of role models such as the German rapper Deso Dogg with whom they can engage (RAN 2016).

In addition, recruiters often contact individuals online and channel them towards private and encrypted social media platforms, such as Telegram, where they can communicate more freely. They can also contact individuals and generate funding through seemingly humanitarian causes (Ranstorp 2019, 19). Sometimes, platforms or accounts initially discuss issues that attract popular support, for example animal cruelty, but later come to spread xenophobic messages (Smith and Colliver 2016). Through the internet, potential recruits can access visually powerful video and imagery which seem to substantiate the extremists' political views. However, the study by von Behr et al. (2013, 19) does not consistently support the claim that the internet accelerates the process of radicalisation.

From the perspective of the person being radicalized, the internet allows them to break physical barriers, and the greater anonymity in this setting can encourage shy individuals to contact extremist groups (von Behr et al. 2013, 18). It can also provide a sense of protection and security from detection. In the case of Islamist extremism, the internet can facilitate the involvement of women, as it may be unacceptable for women to meet in person with male extremists or to join their groups; and it may also be unacceptable for them to express certain thoughts in public outside the online realm (von Behr et al. 2013, 18). A former member of a far-right movement describes how the internet "was the easiest way to make contacts and to take over and coordinate responsibilities, to gain reputation and advance" (Köhler 2012, 6).

A current challenge to counter violent extremism is the extent of extremist content available online and the difficulty of exposing all fake news and propaganda available on extremist sites (Smit and Meines 2019, 6). In the case of IS, the frequency with which the group's media releases products has diminished dramatically since its peak in 2015, with the decline beginning as early as 2016 as the group suffered increasing military setbacks in Iraq and Syria (Milton 2016). Media production declined even further as IS lost much of its territory there in 2017 and early 2018. Even in its diminished capacity, however, it still attempts to attract new members, both foreign and local (Munoz 2018). Despite IS' decreasing media production, there has been an 85% increase in social media platforms featuring Islamist extremist content, mainly through smaller platforms (Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019). Importantly, online hate speech is not only a problem in itself, but it can also lead to real-life violent crime. A recent study has shown how far-right anti-refugee sentiment on Facebook predicts violent crimes against refugees in otherwise similar municipalities in Germany with higher social media usage (Müller and Schwarz 2018).

An important difficulty is balancing censorship and freedom of speech. For instance, much of the content that inspires many lone actors identifying with far-right extremist groups cannot strictly be considered illegal (Smit and Meines 2019, 6). Currently, as an attempt to counter the spread of extremist content online, many of the larger social media companies, such as Facebook and Twitter moderate their online content and have committed to removing all hate speech within 24 hours (Smit and Meines 2019, 6, citing Alde'emeh 2019). In addition, while far-right platforms like 8chan have been taken down, there have been insufficient efforts to counter the wider problem (Ebner 2020).

On the other hand, while constituting a minority, some authors suggest that claims about the internet being a site of radicalisation are overblown. Ryan (2010) for example, points out that the same qualities that make the internet easy to exploit, such as the democratisation of media, are also precisely what makes it difficult for violent extremist groups to control its message. In addition, a UNDP report in 2017 focusing on violent extremism in Africa found that the radicalisation process in this area appears to rely significantly less heavily on the internet as a venue for recruitment compared to other regions (UNDP 2017).

Beyond social media platforms and online forums, in recent years online multiple-player games and their chatrooms have also become a place for recruitment (Ebner 2020, 3). Furthermore, violent extremists have also created their own "mods" (modifications) for actual video games, with white power versions of popular shooting games like Counter-Strike (Ebner 2020), an IS-style jihadi mod for GTA 5 (SITE Intelligence Group 2020), and Hezbollah-developed games, Special Force and Special Force 2, which provide an alternative fighting perspective (Bourke 2014).

The use of online games has taken place as part of a broader phenomenon of "gamification," which means adding game-playing elements to situations that are not games, by violent extremist groups. This phenomenon is evident from the comments in the livestreamed attacks on Christchurch, which indicated that the real-life killings were perceived as a game (Ebner 2020, 1). Furthermore, sympathisers of the Christchurch attacker created video-game-style versions of the livestreamed

events (Ebner 2020, 1). However, the gamification of terror is not exclusive of far-right violent extremists, and groups such as IS have also used these techniques to tap into new audiences, particularly young members (Ebner 2020).

The study by Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente (2017, 4) finds that 35% of those detained for jihadist activities in Spain radicalized in a mostly online context, 24% in a mainly offline environment, and the remaining did so in a combination of both an online and an offline setting. In addition, almost all of those who self-radicalised did so in online contexts.

3.3.4.2 Other locations of recruitment

While the Internet has become increasingly important for the radicalisation of people into extremist groups, recruitment often occurs through a combination of both online and offline contacts. The offline sites of recruitment vary according to the type of extremism that we refer to. In the case of Islamist extremism, recruitment efforts are often a combination of making an initial online contact that is continued offline through social events, religious meetings or demonstrations (Ranstorp 2019, 19). Common locations of recruitment for Islamist extremists are mosques and underground study circles, radical feeder groups, prisons, and schools and higher education facilities (Ranstorp 2019). On the other hand, the frequency in which these sites have been used as recruitment locations may vary in different studies. For instance, the number of extremist madrassas in Pakistan is small, and the problem of madrassa-based radicalisation seems to have been overstated in this context (Allan et al. 2015, 40).

The main locations of recruitment for far-right extremists share some similarities with those of Islamist extremism beyond the use of the internet. For instance, academic sites and friendship networks are common in both types of extremisms. The following locations are relevant for far-right extremism: protest groups, political parties, sports, universities (Sterkenburg 2019, 18-19) and music events (Madriaza and Ponsot 2016, 33; Tanner and Campana 2014, 29).

An interesting similarity between the locations of recruitment of Islamist extremists and far-right extremists is their use of programs of charity to attract followers into violent extremism. In addition, claiming to provide security in their local communities, far-right extremists groups have mobilized vigilantes or paramilitary groups who portray themselves as protecting their own people (Sterkenburg 2019, 17). Another common feature is the use of friendship networks to draw people into violent extremism. When the recruiter is someone the potential recruit already knows and trusts, they become much more open to join far-right groups (Sterkenburg 2019, 19). Similarly, friends and relatives were common agents of radicalization among individuals who joined Islamist extremist groups, and people often joined in groups (Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente 2017, 7; Sageman 2004).

4   Good practices and initiatives

"I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism."
  -Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary General (UN General Assembly 2015, 3).

In recent years, policymakers and practitioners have recognised that "hard," security-centric measures alone are insufficient to address violent extremism, a threat that is increasingly diffuse and unpredictable. These approaches ineffectively address the enabling environment for violent extremism, such as networks, grievances, and ideologies that may contribute to radicalisation. As a result, the international community has adopted an increasingly proactive and preventive approach that focuses on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) (Chowdhury-Fink and Barakat 2013). This approach has increased the number of actors involved to include those in development, conflict prevention and mitigation, education, culture, and diplomacy; focusing on the communities and actors most directly affected by or engaged with extremist activities (Chowdhury-Fink and Barakat 2013, 1). However, women continue to be largely excluded from national debates and strategies on P/CVE (Bhulai, Peters and Nemr 2016). The term Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) was introduced in 2015 in the UN Action Plan, and it puts the emphasis on pre-emptive, long-term actions that address the drivers of violent extremism before it occurs (UN General Assembly 2015). More recently, the concept of Transforming Violent Extremism (TVE) has been used to recognise the possibility of changing the motivations that lead individuals into violent extremism to a different type of agency and involvement (Search for Common Ground 2017, 4).

One definition of countering violent extremism (CVE) considers it as a preventative and noncoercive form of programming that engages with individuals understood to be 'at risk' of attraction to violence (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016, 2). CVE programs should be designed to counter the key drivers of violent extremism in the specific locations in which they occur. The programs can consist of, for example, community debates on sensitive topics, media messaging, interfaith dialogues, or training of state governance and security actors (Giscard d'Estaing 2017, 104; Khalil and Zeuthen 2016, 2; Abu-Nimer 2018, 4). For instance, in response to the driver of state repression in a specific context, candidate CVE responses could include advocacy for institutional reform, training of state actors or state-community forums (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016, 27). On the other hand, when revenge is identified as a key driver for violent extremism, possible CVE responses could include messaging initiatives, support for moderate religious leaders or psychosocial support (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016, 27).

Some common challenges to address violent extremism in different contexts are access to the communities, challenging their worldview and conspiracy theories, and dealing with legal and illegal organisations, given that some legal groups can absorb extremist elements whereas others can serve as a gateway into violent extremism (Ranstorp 2019; Frenett and Dow 2015; Sterkenburg 2019, 25). Regarding Islamist extremism in particular, relevant challenges are understanding the complexity of Salafi ideology and adapting to the shifting landscape of extremism following the decline of IS, in which the movement is becoming more decentralized and where former foreign combatants are returning to their home countries (Ranstorp 2019).

A challenge for identifying best practices in CVE programs is the difficulty in assessing their effectiveness and compare the success-rates between different approaches (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2013, 100). Thus, while we are not able to sufficiently assess the relative effectiveness of each initiative, we will present a set of examples of practices that can contribute to inspire and guide initiatives and good practices in countering and addressing violent extremisms. In particular, we will present examples in

the Balkans, the MENA region and elsewhere that illustrate different, and largely complementary approaches to CVE, based on the categorisation proposed by RAN (2020a).

4.1   Initiatives in the MENA region and the Balkans

In the MENA region and the Balkans, several initiatives to counter violent extremism have been designed at the level of the community, and many of them focus on the education or re-education of individuals regarding their ideology and religion. The following are examples that illustrate existing practices in the communities, education and alternative narratives, as well as prisons.

4.1.1   Communities

The US Institute of Peace (USIP) and its Iraqi partners Sanad for Peacebuilding and the Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF) have conducted a series of dialogues between tribes following the IS killing of 1,700 cadets in 2014 (USIP 2020). The objective of the program was to avoid violence and prepare for Internally Displaced People (IDP) returnees (USIP 2020). Their work helped to achieve local reconciliation agreements between tribal leaders who committed to respect the rule of law and not resort to violence when the relatives of suspected violent extremists returned to their communities (Idriss 2019, 7).

Another practice to prevent violent extremism in the communities is to set up community centres where people from different social groups can mix and participate together in several activities. For instance, this practice has been implemented in Iraq as part of programs such as "Maan Lil-Salam," opening Youth Centres in Nineveh after its liberation from IS (Un Ponte Per 2020), and a program run by Première Urgence Internationale, which also promotes collective community projects that help people to work together (Première Urgence Internationale 2019). In Afghanistan, the USAID-led Community Cohesion Initiative (CCI) implemented community cohesion meetings, sports events, and small-scale infrastructure activities to strengthen the links between selected communities vulnerable to insurgent exploitation (USAID 2019a).

In the region of Mitrovica, Kosovo, the NGO Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) works with the aim to facilitate contact and dialogue between citizens in the region, both Serbs and Albanians, to restore confidence and friendship among them (Community Building Mitrovica 2020). Other initiatives at the community level are the New Social Initiative (2020) and, including but not limited to the Balkans and the MENA region, the Strong Cities Network (2020). In particular, the latter program, which is managed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), facilitates the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned on building social cohesion and community resilience to prevent violent extremism across cities on an international basis, through both regional workshops and international conferences.

In addition, the program "Up to Youth," managed by Global Communities with the support of USAID, aims for youth empowerment for positive changes in their respective communities and helps to build youth resilience to risky behaviors, focusing on different municipalities in Kosovo (USAID 2019b). More specifically, they work to mobilise youth, build skills for them to actively participate in their communities, and contributes to creating an enabling environment for the youth.

4.1.2   Education and alternative narratives

The UNESCO is conducting a program on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education (PVE-E) in liberated areas and wider Iraq (UNESCO 2020). Collaborating with the Iraqi Ministry of Education and several NGOs, their goal is to integrate PVE in school programmes and educational policies to promote tolerance and peaceful co-existence contributing to long term prevention of violent extremism (UNESCO 2020).

In 2003, three years after al-Qaeda launched its first website and as violent extremist websites were established in Saudi Arabia, the online social campaign As-Sakinah was launched to counter extremist ideologies through an intellectual and academic approach (al-Mushawwah 2013, 44-45). The program creates an open dialogue that aims to counter violent extremism and eradicate negative narratives while promoting a moderate Islamic ideology (al-Mushawwah 2013, 50-51). As part of their work, they expose what they consider as fallacies and deviant understandings of Islam, and they provide advice to families that detected signs of radicalisation in one of their members (al-Mushawwah 2013, 51). The program counts on about 40 clerics and defenders of Islam and is supported by the Saudi Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs (al-Mushawwah 2013, 44).

In the Western Balkans, the "Resonant Voices Initiative" was launched in 2017. They work to expose false, biased or manipulated content online that feeds division; they map online radicalization trends; and they provide training, mentoring, and technical support to counter-narrative campaigns run by journalists, activists and community leaders (Resonant Voices Initiative 2020).

4.1.3   Prisons

Egypt developed a deradicalisation strategy focused on debate and dialogue in the Scorpion Cell of Cairo's Tora Prison (Chowdhury-Fink and El-Said 2011, 7). The process started in 1997 when members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya (IG) unilaterally announced a cessation of violence, and a similar procedure was followed in 2007 concerning the group al-Jihad al-Islami (IJ). While the de-radicalisation processes of both IG and IJ were internally launched by imprisoned leaders of those groups, the Egyptian government facilitated those processes once they started: respected scholars from Al-Azhar University were invited to visit prisons to debate and discuss key issues with the leaders of the two violent extremist groups, they allowed meetings between the imprisoned leaders and other members to renounce violence, and they relocated those who objected to abandoning violence (Chowdhury-Fink and El-Said 2011, 7-8; Stracke 2007, 7). Furthermore, the Egyptian authorities allowed leaders of IG and IJ to publish articles in popular newspapers explaining their rejection of violence (Chowdhury-Fink and El-Said 2011, 8).

In addition, starting in 2004, Saudi Arabia launched the al-Munasaha wa al-Islah (advise and reform) committee, targeting individuals detained on terrorist-related charges (Stracke 2007, 8). This de-radicalisation program aimed to teach the prisoners the 'true teachings of Islam,' which prohibit the use of violence against civilians, both Muslims and non-Muslims (Stracke 2007, 8). In addition, it also offers social and economic incentives for individuals who cooperate with the program, as well as a recommendation from the Ministry of Interior for their release (Stracke 2007, 8). A similar program has been carried out by Yemen in 2003, when they established the committee of al-Hawar al-Fikri (the intellectual dialogue) led by an Islamic scholar (Stracke 2007, 10). As in the Saudi program, the committee can recommend inmates to be released and it aims at transforming their extremist ideas (Stracke 2007, 10).

4.2   Initiatives elsewhere

Beyond the Balkans and the MENA regions, other CVE practices can offer complementary insights on effective approaches to addressing violent extremism. While there are numerous approaches taking place in Europe and countries such as Canada or the US (see for instance Impact Europe 2020; RAN 2020b; Ambrozik 2020), we will only present here three examples that illustrate three different approaches to CVE: a focus on the practical aspects of disengagement, an engagement with women, and an online intervention.

4.2.1   Disengaging from extremism

Avoiding ideological confrontation with the users, the Swedish program Exit Fryshuset helps people to safely leave racist, violent and extremist groups. Robert Örell (2016), the director of the program, describes how the Exit program tries to integrate violent extremist members back into society, given that their ideas tend to isolate them from their communities. They deal with different needs of the person: psychological, emotional, legal, financial, and social, with specialized professionals for each area. Their work involves changing the mindset of the person without confrontation or judging attitudes, in an environment of confidentiality, but also helping them in practical aspects such as training for finding a job. Serving as role models, they often make use of former extremists that successfully abandoned those groups (Örell 2016). The program was founded in 1998 by Kent Lindahl, himself a former Nazi (Kimmel 2007).

This program exemplifies a general difference between most approaches in the Middle East and those adopted in European countries: whereas the former approach tends to focus on ideological or theological re-education, the latter approach usually places less emphasis on ideology and instead focuses on practical and economic assistance in connection with abandoning violent extremist groups and assists with forming new social ties outside the extremist organisation (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2013, 100). A potential advantage of the European approach is that its indirect, subtle influence on ideology is less likely to provoke reactance and a strengthening of the original attitudes by the person (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2013, 108).

4.2.2   Female counter-terrorism

Starting in 2008, Sisters Against Violent Extremism is the world's first female counter-terrorism platform (SAVE 2020). Headquartered at the Women without Borders offices in Vienna, SAVE has several country chapters and coordinates a network of women that actively engages in CVE (SAVE 2020). For instance, they are working closely with mothers and families to empower them as parents and help them to identify early signs of grievances, anger, and actions that might lead to radicalisation (Chowdhury-Fink and Barakat 2013, 5). This initiative has the potential to complement other CVE practices, since working with mothers, wives, and sisters can broaden the reach of programs to influence individuals and groups that are often difficult to access (Giscard d'Estaing 2017, 106); and adopting a gender lens can reveal additional warning signs for extremism and violence (True and Eddyono 2017).

4.2.3   Countering on-line radicalisation

This pilot CVE methodology targets individuals at risk of being radicalised online (Frenett and Dow 2015). They focus on Facebook and identify users at risk of engaging in violent extremism based on demographic factors, pages liked, and group membership. Former extremists who were part of far-right and Islamist groups with experience in offline interventions contacted the identified at-risk individuals online following different strategies (Frenett and Dow 2015). An analysis of the types of messages that were most effective at eliciting a response and a continued interaction provides important insights on the best practices: Casual, sentimental or reflective messages offering non-judgmental assistance or sharing their personal stories were successful at initiating sustained conversations with the at-risk individuals. On the other hand, antagonistic or scholarly messages that challenged their ideology, asked personal questions or highlighted the negative consequences of their actions were found to be largely ineffective approaches (Frenett and Dow 2015). While long-term effects of engagement were not assessed in this pilot project, it showed good potential. For instance, one candidate messaged "[I] am curious to hear how and why you've changed your mindset" and another who initially refused getting help, later wrote "I need help if u can help me" (Frenett and Dow 2015).

In response to the increasing use of social media by violent extremist groups for recruitment purposes and influencing others, several researchers have developed tools to identify those accounts involved in recruiting and planning violent attacks. For instance, Sánchez-Rebollo et al. (2019) developed a methodology that analyses Twitter messages to detect the leaders coordinating violent extremist networks and their followers, and similar work has been conducted by other authors such as Lisa Kaati et al. (2015). Along similar lines, researchers at Uppsala University have recently launched Dechefr, a digital system that scans entire websites and is able to help police and security forces to identify hate, radicalised thinking and violent intentions before they are put into action (Uppsala University 2020).

4.3 Initiatives and their connection to Cumulative Extremisms and Overlapping Extremisms

Most of the examples of practices and initiatives presented in this section do not appear to be specifically designed to address cumulative extremisms or overlapping extremisms. For instance, the Saudi social campaign As-Sakinah aims to promote a moderate Islamic ideology, but it does not focus specifically on the interaction between Islamist extremists and other extremist groups nor on other sources of mobilisation beyond religion. Similarly, the deradicalization programs in Egyptian prisons have focused on specific armed groups, and the Swedish program Exit Fryshuset works for the reintegration of extremist individuals through a non-confrontational approach without paying particular attention to the potential cumulative or overlapping aspects of the extremisms involved.

On the other hand, practices at the community level appear to be well-suited to address specifically cumulative extremisms. For instance, the USIP-facilitated dialogue and the local reconciliation agreements between tribal Iraqi leaders ahead of the return of IDPs addresses the driver of revenge, which is particularly characteristic of reciprocal extremisms. Similarly, initiatives facilitating contact and dialogue between community groups, such as that conducted by the NGO Community Building Mitrovica (CBM), seem suitable for preventing cumulative extremisms within those communities, as the increased cohesion between diverse groups would challenge discourses based on a dehumanising othering along those lines. Regarding programs based on education and alternative narratives, the existing information on the UNESCO-led program in Iraq and the "Resonant Voices Initiative" in the Western Balkans is insufficient to assess to what extent they refer to the reciprocal aspects of extremisms in their practices.

While the presented programs do not appear to address overlapping extremisms in particular, many of these efforts could partly contribute to address these types of extremisms. For instance, initiatives contributing to community resilience and alternative narratives to specific extremist discourses can all contribute to limit the ideological appeal of overlapping extremisms. However, beyond the general difficulties in evaluating the success of CVE programs (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2013, 100), more research is needed, in particular, in order to better assess to what extent the different practices and initiatives are effective for addressing cumulative and overlapping extremisms.

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