



**PREVENTING
VIOLENT
EXTREMISM TO
COUNTER HOME-
GROWN JIHADISM:
LEARNING
BY DOING**

Fatima Lahnait

Senior Associate Fellow,
Institute for Statecraft and
Governance (London)

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During the last fifteen years, Europe has increasingly become a target for terrorist attacks. In response, various countries have launched national counter-radicalisation plans, combining hard and soft methods, in order to prevent individuals from becoming radicalised and participating in violent actions. These countries knew that there could be a threat from within and that some of their citizens weren't immune to radical ideologies like the ones promoted by the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaeda or Al-Shabaab. This was recognised by the European Union which, since the early 2000s, has made significant investments in policies, programmes and interventions aimed at tackling these issues.

Due to its long history of internal political violence, Spain has been actively involved in counterterrorism efforts.¹ At present, the threat from Islamist extremists is likely to replace that of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) as Spain's primary terrorist adversary. In fact, the country already suffered the worst Islamist attack in European history on March 11 2004, when the blasts from ten bombs on Madrid commuter trains killed 191 people. The attacks were carried out by immigrants who had spent significant time in Spain. More than a decade after those horrific events, Spain remains a target for Islamist extremists. Moreover, like other European countries, it is now facing an increasing radicalisation phenomenon that may lead to violent extremism and home-grown Islamist terrorism. In this context, on August 17th and 18th 2017, the tourist areas of Barcelona and Cambrils were the targets of terrorist attacks, killing 15 and wounding more than 100 people.

1. *Spain: Extremism and counter-extremism* - www.counterextremism.com

Spanish citizens of Moroccan descent, born and/or raised in Spain, were the perpetrators of the actions. They were part of a terrorist cell formed in 2016 and made up of at least ten members. Preventing such attacks is a challenging task.

Violent extremism is a broad concept. It covers the violent actions that extremists are responsible for (political violence, terrorism, hate crimes, etc.). A fundamental initial step in effective programming for preventing violent extremism is to understand what is driving it. There is no single cause or pathway into the process of radicalisation and violent extremism, but rather a wide array of factors. And there is no perfect solution/model to counter it.

RECRUITERS AND GROOMERS EXPLOIT VULNERABILITIES (SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL) AND MANIPULATE EMOTIONS TO PERSUADE AND LEAD RECRUITS INTO VIOLENT EXTREMISM. POLITICAL FACTORS AND THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN ARMED CONFLICTS CAN ALSO TRIGGER GRIEVANCES AND A SENSE OF REVENGE TOWARD THE HOME OR HOST COUNTRY

Drivers of radicalisation

Existing research indicates that the majority of radicals come from second generation Muslims born in Europe or who grew up there, while the others are converts. Most of them have little knowledge and proper understanding of the religion. It is mainly a youth movement and peer phenomenon. These second generation immigrants are often “stigmatized, rejected and treated as second-class citizens” (Ranstorp, 2016: 4), and yearn to belong to a group that accepts them.

What, then, moves an individual from radical opinion to radical action and violent extremism? Islamist violent extremism is the result of a personal journey, the combination of push (conditions that are conducive) and pull (individual motivations) factors and a system of belief that justifies the use of violence (UNESCO, 2017). These drivers and dynamics include grievances and resentments based on societal and social factors and tensions (identity and culture issues, real or perceived marginalisation and discrimination, strong sense of injustice and victimhood, etc.). Recruiters and groomers exploit vulnerabilities (social, psychological) and manipulate emotions (anger, frustration) to persuade and lead recruits into violent extremism. Political factors (for example, the ban on the Muslim veil, the fight against secularism, the West at war with Islam) and the impact of foreign armed conflicts (identification with the suffering of others, double

standard politics, Iraq/Syria, Palestine, etc.) can also trigger grievances and a sense of revenge toward the home or host country. Ideological and religious dimensions (belief in apocalyptic prophesy, a Salafi-jihadi interpretation of Islam, a desire and “call of duty” to protect the *umma*, rewards in the afterlife, and so on) build on these foundations.

The radicalisation mechanisms (different degrees and speeds of radicalisation) are therefore an interplay between push and pull factors within individuals. Further to that, new technologies have made it possible for anybody to be part of any virtual community and adopt any value system. For generation 2.0, social media (echo-chambers for extremist views) enable virtual participation in the cause and contact between like-minded people. Given the increasing number of individuals who engage in extremist groups online, issues around policing and restriction of the internet are subject to debate among preventing violent extremism (PVE)/countering violent extremism (CVE) practitioners, governments, and internet service providers.

Over the past two decades, violent extremism has globally been addressed primarily through security-based counter-terrorism measures adopted to reduce/deter/counter the threat posed by violent extremist groups. Since a few years ago, more comprehensive approaches have been implemented to address the factors and drivers that make individuals join violent extremist groups. Countering violent extremism (CVE) counters processes of radicalisation that lead to violent extremism, not terrorism. It seeks to mobilise and empower actors that are not traditionally associated with national security, such as local authorities, educators, social workers, and civil society. The aim is to create awareness and resilience among populations that are perceived as potentially vulnerable or “at risk”, to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism (PVE) and assist radicalised individuals who are willing to turn away from extremism (so-called “deradicalisation”). The measures include public information campaigns, capacity-building for communities, targeted prevention programmes in schools, universities, youth and sports clubs, in religious centres, prisons (considered “hotbeds” of radicalisation), refugee centres, and on the internet.

**CVE PROGRAMMES
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Only a small number of people who become radicalised may go on to commit acts of violence to achieve their goals, and they don't turn into extremists overnight. An individual's progression to violent extremism is complex and there is no evidence to predict when or how an individual will act on violent impulses. But some factors have a stronger impact than others on the processes of radicalisation, such as indiscriminate repression and/or stigmatisation of a group based on their religious or ethnic background after a terrorist attack, and foreign violent conflicts.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE TO ENABLE NETWORKS OF PUBLIC SECTOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS TO LEAD CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE INTERVENTION SERVICES TO RAISE AWARENESS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM, PROMOTE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND BUILD RESILIENCE AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

National action plans: Contents and challenges

National action plans designed and implemented in several countries took those elements into consideration once they were highlighted through research. Most PVE and CVE programmes in Europe were implemented after a terrorist attack or attempt by home-grown terrorists. The strategies reflect local contexts and conditions, and were tailored with the purpose of mitigating the risk of and strengthening resilience against violent extremism. They provide opportunities for cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration and learning between domestic and international stakeholders and organisations for countering violent extremism. If the efforts are aimed at protecting and preserving the society at large, the fear that certain groups will

continue to be marginalised and stigmatised remains, encouraging an “us versus them” rhetoric.

In this regard, the role of local authorities should be to enable networks of public sector and civil society stakeholders to lead culturally appropriate intervention services to raise awareness of violent extremism, promote community engagement, and build resilience against violent extremism. Locally led programmes have more credibility and efficiency but, first, the authorities have to identify and promote the “right people/messengers” who understand the target audience, its culture and education. However, earning community trust is never easily achieved. People tend to be suspicious and, when it comes to PVE/CVE, they may treat prevention actors – even the ones active at the grassroots level for a long time – as agents or spies of the authorities/government in charge of implementing a hidden

agenda or interested in making profit from the subventions allocated to their organisations.

Religious or community leaders who promote “moderate” practices and interfaith/intercultural dialogue are also often seen suspiciously in some quarters. They are requested (or expected) by the local authorities to reach out and mentor vulnerable young people, and to deter those who tend to agree with violent extremist ideology (Mandaville and Nozell, 2017). As radicalisation and violent extremism is perceived by general public opinion to have deep links to religion – jihadists use religious rhetoric and ideology to justify their actions –, religious leaders/figures are (depending on the countries) actively engaged in PVE, despite the threats made by extremists, and in developing and spreading counter-narratives within the communities and in prisons².

The policy process underlying the development and implementation of PVE and CVE programmes should follow a basic four-step policy cycle. The assessment and definition of the issue should be the first step. The development phase of a programme would consider the most effective response to the identified issue. For example, is it more important to address an individual’s ideology or an individual’s identity, and the vulnerabilities related to each? The implementation step would then aim at achieving pre-defined objectives. The evaluation phase should follow, as it is valuable for determining whether the programme met its objectives (Romaniuk, 2015). To be fully effective, the process supposes a good knowledge of the targeted audience and understanding how the programme would be received in the community in which it would be implemented (to avoid a feeling of stigmatisation). Communication around the programme appears crucial.

The Spanish approach to PVE/CVE

Radicalisation has affected Spain since long before the 2014 uptick of Islamist extremist activity with which several European countries were confronted. In recent years, the Spanish government has largely focused on preventing attacks from the growing threat of Islamist extremism and the recruitment of would-be jihadists and foreign fighters (who pose a security threat upon their return from conflict zones like Syria, Iraq or Libya). Given its experience

2. A number of those who succumbed to recruitment by violent extremist groups were radicalised and recruited in prison.

with ETA, Spain's jurisprudence and bureaucratic systems have the capacity to investigate and prosecute suspected terrorists. Its police forces – Guardia Civil and Policía Nacional – have the experience to counter and neutralise home-grown terrorists.

The Spanish approach to counter-terrorism PVE/CVE is based on four pillars (similar to the UK ones):

- Prevention: acting against radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism at its sources (by tackling its drivers);
- Protection: reducing Spain's vulnerability to attacks;
- Pursuit: addressing terrorist activities; and
- Response: restoring normality after an attack.

In 2015, Spanish police arrested 100 suspected Islamist extremists. The government's efforts to counter domestic extremism are closely associated with its clampdown on illegal immigration and efforts to integrate existing immigrant communities and promote social cohesion. The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, where recruitment and support for extremism is significant, are a major CVE concern. Barcelona has a long history of radical Islamism. Between 1996 and 2013, nearly 29% of people sentenced for jihadist-related terrorism offenses were arrested in the Barcelona province (Reinares y García-Calvo, 2015).

In May 2016, the southern Spanish city of Málaga joined the Strong Cities Network (114 global cities), an institution launched by the United Nations in September 2015 to build community resilience and cohesion in order to counter violent extremism. The network aims to support cities and other local authorities on an international basis and to enhance local approaches to preventing violent extremism by facilitating information sharing, mutual learning, and the creation of new and innovative local practices. The network's key tenets are to connect, inform, empower, build, innovate, and represent.³

Málaga serves as a pilot for the implementation of the Spanish national strategy against violent extremism. It includes youth radicalisation intervention and community-based programmes to improve communication between government and non-governmental organisations.⁴ The local level plays a

3. See: <http://strongcitiesnetwork.org>

4. See: <http://www.osce.org>

key role in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, and in designing and implementing prevention policies and programmes, as the actors know their areas and populations. This was developed during the summit organised by the Alliance of European Cities Against Violent Extremism held in Barcelona on November 15th 2017.⁵ Preventive measures to tackle violent extremism were presented to mayors and representatives from 40 European cities and 18 countries. Ada Colau, the mayor of Barcelona, emphasised the effectiveness in the long term of prevention, with a focus on education, youth empowerment and access to professional and social opportunities rather than repression, saying:

“Barcelona is a city of peace. Terror will not stop us from being who we are: a city open to the world, courageous and supportive”⁶. The mayors all agreed that their cities have to adapt to the challenge of violent extremism, promote and stay committed to a culture of peace and dialogue, respect for human rights and social cohesion – via community engagement – in order to prevent violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations. It is safer to act in a pre-crime space and to use prevention tools and strategies.

Early identification: The Danish approach to PVE/CVE

The Danish approach towards countering violent extremism privileges prevention. It includes supporting local governments and actors in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. This approach is essentially focused on the early identification of risky behaviour and signs of concern among professionals and focuses on a preventive social agenda rather than a security one. Their approach targets three levels called the “prevention triangle” (Fink, Romaniuk *et al.*, 2013). The *general level* consists of building and strengthening the state’s resistance against extremist propaganda through campaigns and general education, with a focus on inclusion, democracy, and civic citizenship. The *group level* focuses on specific vulnerable groups, for example, youths at risk of radicalisation, and attempts to forestall the radicalisation process through, for instance, role model visits and dialogue workshops. Finally, the individual level includes intervention to reverse

5. Created by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Efus, and the cities of Rotterdam (Netherlands) and Aarhus (Denmark) following the Aarhus conference, in November 2015, to develop capacity building activities and exchange initiatives, experiences and resources. <http://www.vvsg.be/nieuws/Paginas/The-Aarhus-Declaration.aspx>

6. See: <http://catalannews.com/society-science/item/alliance-of-european-cities-against-violent-extremism-meets-in-barcelona>

the radicalisation process, with the support of professional mentors and parent coaches. For example, dialogue workshops would be held to raise awareness among young people in vulnerable areas about the phenomena of radicalisation and violent extremism. They would be trained to use critical thinking, to adapt their behaviour towards each other, and reconsider their preconceptions about minorities. After the workshops, participants would be surveyed to capture their thoughts about the event and whether it changed their behaviour or attitudes in a lasting way.

Security vs rights? Conflicting goals and synergies in the UK

But if prevention has been widely acknowledged as an important component of counter-terrorism strategies, legitimate concerns exist in some European countries that PVE may become an excuse to restrict civil society, freedom of expression and human rights. The extent of individualised risk factors for radicalisation, coupled with country-specific priorities and values, has given rise to a broad range of approaches and interventions for preventing violent extremism around Europe.

Both the Channel programme in the United Kingdom and Hayat in Germany are PVE initiatives that address ideology and identity as equally important issues. Channel uses a multiagency joint referral model. The police work with public bodies, including local councils, social workers, health services, schools and the justice system to identify those at risk of being drawn into terrorism, assess what the risk might be and then develop tailored support for those referred to them. It has a national infrastructure that is adapted and delivered locally.⁷ Channel includes a panel of experts from the local community (such as social workers, or people who know the individual who has been referred) who work together to discuss risks and appropriate next steps. It is a voluntary intervention process that requires participants' consent to participate.

Channel is a key part of the UK's Prevent strategy, which was created in 2003 but only made public a few years later as part of the wider counter-terrorism strategy called CONTEST (Prevent – Prepare – Protect – Pursue). It was reviewed in 2011 in order to separate direct counter-terrorism activities from integration work with communities. The programme deals with all forms of extremism and aims to stop people becoming violent extremists or supporting terrorism. Prevent has three objectives:

7. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>

- Challenging the ideology that supports terrorism and those who promote it;
- Protecting vulnerable people; and
- Supporting sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.

Several grassroots not-for-profit organisations contribute to the Prevent agenda by implementing the programme at community level. For several years, the London Tigers group (based in London) has used diversionary tactics to engage former and current gang members and prompt a sense of brotherhood through sport. Based on this work, the group expanded into the implementation of PVE/CVE by taking referrals from the Prevent and Channel programmes. The organisation's new focus is to build a sense of identity that encompasses both religion and a sense of national heritage.⁸ By so doing, the London Tigers grasp jihadism through the lens of gang culture. Other British organisations developed "Young Leaders" programmes to apply the Prevent agenda. Their objectives are to foster the leadership skills of young people and raise their awareness of violent extremism and encourage peer to peer discussions on the issue.

Despite its success, criticisms of Prevent abound, including that it alienates and stigmatises Muslim communities, restricts freedom of thought and expression and impacts human rights.⁹ The statutory Prevent Duty – enforced in 2015 – requires social services, faith leaders, teachers, National Health Services, doctors and others to refer any suspicions about people to a local Prevent body. Since then referrals have flourished. Individuals perceived to be at risk of radicalisation are referred to a local Channel board consisting of school representatives, social workers, chairs of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, Home Office Immigration and Border Force officials who, as part of CONTEST, will then review the referral and decide if further action is necessary. One of the main criticisms is that teachers have to police their own pupils/students for signs of potential radicalisation – young people being considered both "at risk" and "a risk" – radical opinions can't be challenged at schools anymore and students refrain from expressing themselves. The situation undermines trust between teachers and students.

8. *Contemporary Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism*, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *Countering Violent Extremism Through Public Health Practice: Proceedings of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

9. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/09/prevent-referrals-double-since-2017-uk-terror-attacks>

Bringing on board relatives and imams: The German and Italian approaches

Hayat – a family-led model – focuses specifically on countering Al-Qaeda and ISIL narratives and ideologies. It relies on counsellors to act as bridges between institutions, individuals at risk, and their families. Hayat has two different channels for referral, a government hotline and a community hotline, both of which offer first-line assessments. The United Kingdom and Germany have PVE strategies that include former extremists. They have proved to be efficient, under strict control, in addressing the issue of jihadism and violent extremism, especially with young people with whom they share their experiences and disengagement stories.

The absence of terrorist attacks on Italian soil does not mean that Italy has been immune from the jihadist ideology. Measures for the prevention of “jihadist radicalisation and extremism” have been drafted (Solfrini, 2017). Italy is trying a socioeconomic approach to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism among young people. Starting in September 2016, more than 500,000 18-year-old citizens of the European Union living in Italy, regardless of ethnicity or religion, became eligible to receive vouchers valued at more than €400 each, which allow recipients to visit museums for free and go to concerts and movies for reduced prices. The access to leisure activities was a tool to enhance a sense of belonging to the society. A proper analysis of this initiative requires the benefit of hindsight. Following reports about radicalisation, a strategy for preventing radicalisation in prisons has been adopted. Although Italy has a Muslim population of just 2.5%, the share of Muslims in Italian prisons is estimated to be between 15% and 20%. One of the strategy’s aspects is to increase the number of prison imams who are vetted and committed to promoting principles of equality, citizenship, and Islamic pluralism (D’Emilio, 2017).

France: Secularism and PVE/CVE

France has been struck several times by Islamist terrorism since January 2015, with more than 240 lives lost. The country has traditionally taken a repressive approach against terrorism and extremism, close to the traditional American one (Hellmuth, 2015). CVE was introduced along with the new counterterrorism strategy in April 2014. Hence, the country was late to develop any measure designed to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. However, the new French strategy was very comprehensive and was based on the sacred secularism principle. The new model comprises 4 key pillars:

- A nationwide counselling hotline called the “*le numéro vert*” (Green Line) introduced in 2014 and run by the Interior Ministry’s Coordination Unit for Counter-Terrorism (Unité de Coordination de la Lutte Anti-Terroriste, UCLAT);
- A nationwide online based counter-narrative campaign designed to increase visibility of the Green Line counselling hotline, called “*Stop Djihadisme*” and launched in January 2015 (Gee, 2015);
- In January 2016, the third pillar was introduced: dedicated deradicalisation-focused prison wings, with specially trained staff to focus on inmates convicted of terrorism.¹⁰ It closed ten months later;
- The opening of dedicated deradicalisation centres across France, with the idea of instilling French civic values as some form of counter-narrative to the violent extremist ideology.¹¹ One-to-one tailored mentoring for the residents (on a voluntary basis) was organised, but the only deradicalisation centre that actually opened in September 2016 closed down after much controversy in July 2017. It received only nine residents, and none after February 2017. €2.5 million was spent.¹²

Although the strategy had a few good results, in 2017 a parliamentary commission called most of the CVE strategy a failure. The report of the commission condemned the lucrative “business of deradicalisation” developed by the organisations in charge of implementing the projects.¹³ Fraud and even abuse of the clients were then revealed. Within three years, the French government spent close to €100 million without proper evaluations and monitoring of the subsidised organisations in charge of implementing the prevention and CVE projects. Faced with the tragic events the government had to react to tackle the major threat of Islamist violent extremism. The lessons have been learned.

The latest CVE initiative is called RIVE (*Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes*) and it is an ambitious project, unique in Europe, implemented secretly in France since the end of 2016. The pilot version has 14 adults in its charge, both men and women, and attendance is mandatory. It aims to

10. See: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/argumentaire/lutte-contre-la-radicalisation-en-prison>.

11. See: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/03/10/un-premier-centre-de-deradicalisation-ouvrira-avant-l-ete_4880551_3224.html.

12. See: http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/07/28/fermeture-de-l-unique-centre-de-deradicalisation-de-france_5165938_1653578.html.

13. See: http://www.senat.fr/espace_presse/actualites/201707/rapport_final_de_la_mission_dinformation_sur_le_desendoctrinement_le_desembrigadement_et_la_reinsertion_des_djihadistes_en_france_et_en_europe.html

disengage them from violent extremism and reinsert them into society. The approach is holistic and specific to the profile and needs of each individual.¹⁴ French values and *laïcité* don't seem to be the major component of the project, and a Muslim chaplain provides religious guidance if needs be.

Conclusion

In recent years, there has been a shift in focus away from traditional security measures to more holistic approaches, in order to prevent violent extremism. Building resilience against violent extremist ideologies at the individual and community levels and addressing the root causes of violent radicalisation became crucial. And there is a clear urgency to address radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism in prisons as well.

Every terrorist attack is a stark reminder of the need for effective strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism, especially when considering that the jihadists are “made” in European societies and not imported. But PVE proves to be challenging and is still in its infancy in some European countries. Solid evaluations of its effectiveness are lacking, so it is too early to fully demonstrate PVE's outcomes and to measure the full extent of the strategies' successes and failures. Nonetheless, there is an emphasis on the willingness to understand and share what works best in this field and what doesn't. In that respect, the effective cooperation mechanisms at the European level ensure exchanges of good practices. Learning by doing remains essential. Three years after it stunned the world by proclaiming a caliphate, the Islamic State has lost most of the territory it once controlled. But its ideology remains. Violent extremism – in all its forms – still represents a major challenge.

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