How ethnic and religious discrimination drive violent extremism

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The rights to equal protection and treatment before the law, without distinction as to religion or ethnicity are universally accepted human rights. States occasionally violate these rights while fighting terrorism and violent extremism. Such responses are counterproductive since they discriminate against communities and help recruitment into violent extremist groups. By discussing religion and ethnicity, this report addresses how democratic states need to guard against discriminatory practices that contribute to developing attitudes leading to violence and recruitment into violent extremist organisations.

▶ States should guard against discriminatory and abusive practices, by structuring the conduct of preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts within boundaries of international law, best practices and democratic principles.

▶ Agencies with a mandate to formulate counter-terrorism and PVE policies should promote dialogue within religious and ethnic communities, and engage them in the process of formulating policy to ensure ownership and transparency. Including members from civil society could ensure an inclusive approach to PVE.

▶ Relevant agencies should place more emphasis on factors that tend to be more prevalent in the process of developing attitudes that may lead to violence, such as politics, policy and socio-economic factors rather than identity factors such as religion and ethnicity.

▶ Relevant criminal justice institutions should act quickly to curtail discrimination at the hands of law enforcement and security services. This would demonstrate that such actions are not condoned.

▶ States should work with civil society to disseminate their message against violence more effectively and support civil society to increase its capacity for PVE activities.

Introduction

International human rights law recognises as a fundamental and inalienable right the equal treatment before the law, regardless of distinction of any kind such as religion or any other status.[1] States are required to adopt laws or other measures to give effect to these rights.[2] Where these rights are violated, states are immediately required to act to provide an effective remedy.[3] Consequently, when the rights of an individual or group are violated and the state does not act to address the violation, there are substantial grounds to bring legal action against the state.[4]

Religion and ethnicity have become factors embedded in the fabric of how people view violent extremism. They are directly affected when the law fails to protect the rights to freedom of religion and belonging to an ethnic group or distinguish them from acts of terrorism and violent extremism, or when states go beyond the boundaries of what is permissible by law to apprehend suspects or deal with convicted extremists.

A key reason why responses to terrorism have failed in their objectives is that the strategies states employ tend to damage and alienate the very communities that they are meant to help, mainly because of religious or ethnic discrimination.[5] Governments remain overwhelmingly and erroneously oriented towards a view of security that is focused on the security of the state, and have yet to evidence significant shifts towards providing human security. The responses are caught up in this tension and often result in discriminatory practices against vulnerable people.[6]

> Governments remain overwhelmingly and erroneously oriented towards a view of security that is focused on the security of the state

While not the focus of this report, for preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives to be successful, non-state actors such as civil society must be involved in their formulation and implementation. It is argued that preventative steps in addressing violent extremism should take a 'whole of society' approach: to work in partnership with civil society and local communities to ensure ownership, respect for human rights and adherence to national and international laws.[7]

In practice, one of the major issues related to PVE comes from an apparent conflict between the need to uphold democratic principles of pluralism, human rights and the rule of law on the one hand, and states' preoccupation with national security on the other.[8] National security agencies – primary actors in states' counter-terrorism (CT) and PVE efforts – tend to prioritise security over strict observance of human rights, which often discriminates against vulnerable people.[9] Discrimination occurs by association, when national security services take a blanket approach to CT, identifying a whole

group or community as a 'risk community' based on a shared identity with violent extremists.[10] The states' conflation of religious and ethnic identities of individuals and groups in CT and PVE initiatives undermines the fabric of democracy and respect for the rule of law that these initiatives are based on.

In the context of a human rights framework, this report first examines ethnic and religious identities in the context of violent extremism and states' responses. It then discusses discriminatory state practices in addressing violent extremism and the consequences that these practices have on CT and PVE. The report highlights a select number of good practices from states and concludes with a set of recommendations to state and non-state actors on addressing ethnic and religious factors in the context of CT and PVE.

Use of terminology

Several terms used in this report are contested, without generally accepted definitions. For the purposes of this report, we use the definitions below.

Democracy describes a system of government formed by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.[11] The presupposition is that democracy entails respect for the rule of law.

Ethnic identity is the extent to which one identifies with (a) particular ethnic group(s). It refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership.[12]

Human rights comprise a vast spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights contained in a substantial international legal framework on human rights. This framework consists of a wide range of international treaties. An elaboration of these can be found in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) *Digest of Jurisprudence of the UN and Regional Organisations on the Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism*.[13]

Radicalisation describes the process by which individuals or groups develop or become susceptible to extremist ideologies.[14] The term used here does not in any way insinuate a linear process, but could include multiple ways in which radicalisation occurs.

Religious identity is a specific type of identity formation. It is the sense of group membership of a religion and the importance of this group membership as it pertains to one's self-conception.[15]

Rule of law describes a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency.[16]

> ## National security agencies tend to prioritise security over strict observance of human rights

Terrorism is used here to denote the use or threat of violence for the purpose of intimidation or coercion for political, religious or ideological ends.[17]

Violent extremism is used here to indicate 'a willingness to use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those of a political, social or ideological nature and may include acts of terrorism'.[18]

Ethnic and religious identities in the context of violent extremism

States' responses to violent extremism, particularly and solely focused on military and security operations, often involve targeting of certain groups of individuals, whether deliberately or inadvertently.[19] Operations that are rooted in prejudice in terms of ethnicity, religion or similar factors generate feelings of discrimination in targeted communities, which may create a perception that states are deliberately targeting communities because of the members' religion or ethnicity.[20] This disparity in states' relations with ethnic or religious groups raises serious concerns over discrimination and equal treatment before the law.

Discriminatory practices in states' responses to violent extremism merit some attention. There are links between violent extremism and exclusion of groups based on their ethnic and/or religious identity. For example, a range of identities can be ascribed to al-Shabaab. Its members are Muslim and predominantly of Somali ethnicity. Kenya, which borders Somalia, has its own ethnic-Somali group, whose members have historically been marginalised, a situation that could drive some to join al-Shabaab.[21] Following attacks on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Garissa University in the north-east and Kenyan towns close to the border with Somalia, several crackdowns have involved mass arrests and law enforcement officers' harassment of Kenyans of Somali ethnicity, on suspicion of their having links to al-Shabaab.[22] The presumption that all or most members of ethnic and religious groups ascribe to extremists' ideological positions and violence is in flagrant breach of citizens' rights and exacerbates their lack of trust in their governments.[23] Consequently states' efforts to counter violent extremism based on these forms of exclusion have limited effectiveness.

Religion

In the post-9/11 era religion has come to be closely associated with terrorism, but this is an extremely contentious issue. With recent terrorist attacks in various cities in the West, there has been intense debate about connections between Islam and terrorism. Post-9/11 discourse largely associates terrorism with specific interpretations of Islam, although a distinction needs to be made between public perceptions on the issue and views that security specialists hold based on empirical studies. In this discourse, the use of mosques and other Islamic teaching institutions has been singled out as an avenue through which violent extremism is taught.[24] Indeed, one of the problems with the 'war on terror' discourse has been that it has largely ignored other forms of extremism by emphasising the link with Islam. The situation is made worse when those who claim responsibility for terrorist attacks profess to follow Islam,[25] all the more when these attacks are aimed against those who stand in the way of ideals relating to the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and other associated ideals.

> Kenya has its own ethnic-Somali group, whose members have historically been marginalised – a situation that could drive some to join al-Shabaab

It is important to distinguish between those who identify as Muslims and those who use it to fulfil an extremist or violent agenda. Of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, the majority practise their faith peacefully and abhor the violence by groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.[26] This majority does not associate itself with violence, and social movements such as '#NotInMyName' – protesting against the use of Islam by violent extremist groups – are evidence of this.[27] Other religions are not, however, exempt from elements of extremism that might lead to violence.

THERE ARE LINKS BETWEEN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND EXCLUSION OF GROUPS BASED ON THEIR ETHNIC AND/OR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

For example, in the United States (US), Eric Rudolph, believed to be a follower of a white supremacist religious group, pleaded guilty to carrying out deadly bombings at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1998. In a statement accompanying his guilty plea, he quoted from the Bible to support his use of violence. In this case, it was clear that his actions represented an extremist interpretation of Christianity.[28] During the conflict in northern Uganda between 1986 and 2006, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was responsible for committing atrocities against people living in that region. The LRA traces its ideology to a mix of Christian and traditional religious beliefs. The LRA followers believed that its former and current leaders, Alice Lakwena and Joseph Kony, had been inhabited by spirits who direct the movement to create a society that embraces Mosaic Law.[29]

An important question to ask is whether religion with its various forms of interpretation, is the sole source of the extremism, or whether it is a tool used to organise around socio-economic, ideological or geopolitical concerns. A long history of actions and reactions creates these dynamics and it is sometimes difficult to track these in a linear fashion. Atran asks the question, what is 'the original spark that ignites people's passion and minds?'[30] According to Olivier Roy, 'An estimated 60 percent of those who espouse violent jihadism in Europe are second-generation Muslims who have lost their connection with their country of origin and have failed to integrate into Western societies'.[31] Subscription to violent extremism and those who promote it in the name of religion reinforces their attitudes to violence. This suggests that factors in addition to religion might lead individuals to develop attitudes that lead to violence.

The same is true in developing countries. The 2003 war in Iraq, for example, saw an increase in the number of female suicide bombers in response to the death of loved ones caused by multinational or state forces in Iraq.[32] In that case, although the women were Muslim, their primary motivation for joining extremist groups was the death of their family members. It is equally true that the process of developing attitudes to violence as part of an extremist group happens over a period of time, although one event, such as the killing of family members, could be a trigger for acts of terrorism.[33] There is nevertheless

trepidation that the majority of perpetrators of terrorist attacks make their arguments in extremist interpretations of Islam and as a result, Muslims have experienced discrimination, victimisation and other forms of abuse.[34]

The state, as the custodian of the social contract between its citizens and the laws that govern them, has an important role in curtailing violent extremism that is justified on the basis of religion.[35] It ought to protect its citizens against violence rooted in extremist interpretations of religion. This should be done within the framework of the rule of law and based on approaches that promote, protect and respect human rights.[36] A solely securitised approach to CT and PVE, including monitoring religious spaces and merely seeking religious leaders' endorsement of PVE and CT strategies further undermines states' legitimacy and efforts to address extremist ideology and attendant violence.[37] While security responses have their place, states should consider additional approaches such as advocacy, outreach and education of affected communities, which address dynamics related to developing attitudes that lead to violence.

> The state has an important role in curtailing violent extremism that is justified on the basis of religions

Islamic texts, their authenticity and how they are interpreted have become questions of utmost importance and increasing contention among Muslims globally.[38] These contentions, particularly in the Middle East, West Africa and the India-Pakistan region, have the capacity to undermine PVE and CT strategies where extremist groups take advantage of the same contentions to propagate their own messages. For states to effectively respond to violent extremism and acts of terror that have a religious character, more nuanced national and international approaches should therefore be adopted.[39]

Ethnicity

The emergence of ethnic marginalisation, particularly in African states, is a colonial era and post-independence governance legacy.[40] By way of example, Ake speaks of Nigeria as having made 'modest contributions to human

rights and democracy' following the prospects of independence. She notes that:

> attention shifted from uniting against colonialism to manoeuvres for getting a good share of the spoils of the nationalist struggle. In the course of [ethnic] rivalries, those ethnic groups which did not feel that they were strong competitors for power in the post-conflict era began to worry about marginalisation and discrimination.[41]

The Great Lakes region of Africa has suffered ethnic animosity as a part of colonial and post-independence governance legacies. Rwanda, a former Belgian colony has experienced mass crimes based on ethnic identity. The Belgian colonial authorities favoured the Tutsi ethnic community to the Hutu and Twa ethnic communities.[42] It is argued that the Tutsi and Hutu identities were colonial constructs, as the Rwandan people speak one language, Kinyarwanda, and have similar cultural practices. At independence, administrative and state control were left to the Tutsi, which led to divisions between Hutus and Tutsis over control of state resources.[43] Tensions eventually culminated in a genocide in 1994. Archives of testimony from trials at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda sitting in Arusha, Tanzania, point to the indoctrination, misinformation and incitement of the Hutu majority to violently rise up against Tutsis and moderate Hutus using radio, print media and television.[44] This form of extremism led to the deaths of an estimated 937 000 people over the 100 days from 7 April 1994.[45]

> Ethnic groups are faced with social ills such as unemployment, lack of access to medical and other services that the state ought to deliver to them

A number of states struggle with weak governance and practices that place entire ethnic groups on the periphery of state power and access to state resources. Consequently, ethnic groups are faced with social ills such as unemployment, lack of access to medical and other services that the state ought to deliver to them. The conditions and circumstances that led to such conditions can drive people to form or join violent extremist groups. In Somalia and Nigeria, for example, violent extremist groups such as al-Shabaab and Boko Haram have their roots in ethnically homogenous ideologies fighting to create a caliphate for themselves.

As the Warsaw Declaration of the Community of Democracies suggests, deepening democratic governance in states includes a rejection of ethnic and religious hatred, violence and other forms of extremism.[46]

In Myanmar, in a bid to prevent the emergence of new territorial entities within the state, the government has employed ruthless military tactics against various ethnic communities, often targeting the civilian population in defiance of human rights and international law. A recent example is the resurgence of

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Uganda

Rwanda

Burundi

RWANDA HAS EXPERIENCED MASS CRIMES BASED ON ETHNIC IDENTITY

military operations against the Rohingya people by the Myanmar military. An OHCHR report cited incidents of mass-rape, extrajudicial killings and ethnic cleansing.[47] The conflict has clear ethnic and religious undertones: the government of Myanmar (a primarily Buddhist country) refuses to recognise Rohingya people (a primarily Muslim ethnic group) as one of Myanmar's ethnic groups. In 1982, in response to ongoing counter-insurgency in the region, the government of Myanmar declared that all Rohingyas were illegal immigrants refusing to recognise them as citizens of the state.[48] The conflict re-emerged in 2012 under the guise of the 'war on terror'.[49] As a result of government operations, hundreds of thousands were displaced, and more than 100 000 people ended up in 'refugee camps', where they are poorly fed, ill-treated and their freedom of movement is severely restricted.[50] While a violent extremist group operates 'on behalf' of the Rohingya people and presents security concerns for the Myanmar government, such a blanket approach to this security issue is unlikely to solve the overall problem.

An ethnocentric approach to violent extremism will limit the visions of those who are responsible for developing PVE strategies. Associating a PVE programme with a particular religion, culture, ethnic group, nationality, or race could alienate the very members of the community whose cooperation is essential for the programme to succeed.

States' discriminatory practices in fighting against terrorism and violent extremism

The success and scale of the operations of violent extremist groups, especially those which operate transnationally, is dependent on the financial, physical and ideological support of sympathetic communities around their area of operation and beyond. To garner this support, violent extremist groups identify and prey on people with a shared identity – such as ethnicity, religion or ideology – and build their propaganda efforts on anti-establishment, anti-state and anti-mainstream messages and conspiracy theories, exploiting drivers of radicalisation and recruitment. These factors are not universal; they vary depending on the society in question and may be unique for each individual.[51]

The problem arises when states take abusive and discriminatory actions against a particular identity group in the name of countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. Such actions inevitably bolster the message

of violent extremists' propaganda and are likely to be conducive to the spread of violent extremist ideology.

Discrimination through selective application of legal norms

Discrimination may take a procedural form, where different standards are applied to people based on their ethnicity or religion. For instance, a study of Muslims' interaction with the police in Australia illustrates stigmatisation they experienced.[52] Concerns respondents brought up included feeling 'othered', vilified and treated with a degree of suspicion and distrust by the police. Respondents also noted that as part of community-based CT efforts police were usually more preoccupied with gathering intelligence on people, instead of working with them. Community members felt that the police had the power to do 'whatever they wanted' in the name of CT.[53] This experience was particularly stark for young Muslim men, who are perceived as the group that is most vulnerable to radicalisation and therefore put under the greatest scrutiny.[54]

> To garner support, violent extremist groups identify and prey on people with a shared identity

Similarly, the United Kingdom (UK)'s countering violent extremism (CVE) programme, Prevent, has garnered considerable criticism due to its impact on Muslims and on wider democratic principles. Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, it becomes a function of the state to identify 'terrorist-related activity', which includes a broad variety of non-violent activities. A number of students and professors in the UK were questioned and some even arrested for possession of 'radicalisation materials' – terrorist organisations' pamphlets, magazines and training manuals – that were used for academic purposes, and could be easily obtained from libraries and open sources online.[55] In one study, a number of female Muslim students indicated that they did not take part in public activism or could no longer publicly voice their opinions out of fear of being labelled 'terrorist' or being seen as 'risky'.[56]

Beside the difference in police interactions, minority groups can also be subject to special counter-

terrorism laws that – although drafted for the purpose of prosecution and law enforcement – are often applied preventively against 'risk groups' and individuals deemed a 'potential national threat'. In the US, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Prisons were criticised by civil society for disruptive counter-terrorism 'sting operations' carried out against suspected terrorists. The suspects in question were groomed and guided by undercover FBI agents, encouraged to commit violent acts and supplied with weapons, only to be apprehended for plotting a terrorist attack. While some suspects were in fact plotting terrorist attacks before coming in contact with the FBI, others were not and had no such intentions before.[57] An FBI agent described Rezwan Ferdaus, who was found guilty and sentenced to 17 years in prison for terrorism and possession of explosives charges, as having mental health problems.[58] In another case, commonly known as the Fort Dix Five case, the FBI used an informant to groom potential terrorists and instigate 'extremist' behaviour, then used the willingness of suspects to follow the informant's requests as a proof of intent. The FBI supplied the informant with weapons to sell to the 'co-conspirators' and the suspects' purchase of the weapons was then used as evidence during the trial.[59]

> While some suspects were in fact plotting terrorist attacks before coming in contact with the FBI, others were not and had no such intentions before

Inevitably, the 'othering' of Muslims by law enforcement and security agencies in the context of their potential involvement in terrorist organisations has had a negative effect on their overall perception within larger societies. This, in turn, contributes to greater societal pressure on them. A study by the Institut Montaigne in France found that Catholic Christians were almost 60% more likely than other members of society to receive an invitation to a follow-up job interview. The study also found that Muslim men who presented themselves as secular did not suffer from discrimination during a job interview.[60] Part of the problem, the report notes, relates to the negative public image that associates Islam with jihadism, extremism and terrorism.[61]

An interesting case can be made about the way Muslim immigrants react to 'othering' by isolating themselves, rejecting the national identity of their 'host' country, and building a new identity around ethnicity and religion. A study from the Netherlands argues that societal pressure after terrorist attacks in Madrid, London and other Europeans cities has resulted in Muslims isolating themselves by forming closed neighbourhoods.[62]

Such pressure from society and the government, according to head of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College London Prof. Peter Neumann, could compel Muslims to reject a state's identity, and redefine themselves in terms of their Muslim identity.[63] In Australia, a Muslim

COMMUNAL TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IS THE CORNERSTONE OF EFFECTIVE DISRUPTIVE CT MEASURES

woman noted that the suspicion and attention that she received for wearing a hijab reinforced her decision to dress differently to emphasise her belonging to the Muslim community.[64] Another noted, 'I think in a way this is actually forcing people to think, that if they're going to target us, we might as well give them something to target [us for].'[65]

Another negative impact concerns communal trust in government and law enforcement agencies – the cornerstone of effective disruptive CT measures. The study in Australia revealed that Muslims distrusted police officers because the police treated them with suspicion and because of surveillance of community members and mosques as part of CT efforts. Muslims declared their initial openness to cooperation, but voiced frustration and anger with the way security forces handled the initiative. This also resulted in members of the Muslim community reporting distrust of community leaders who voiced their readiness to cooperate with police on CT matters, breeding distrust and conflict within the community. Community members perceived the police as a force of oppression and an opposing side in the conflict, and any form of cooperation was seen as a reinforcement of the 'suspect' narrative.[66] Finally, the study indicated that community members felt 'under siege', reporting beliefs that the government had a covert agenda against Islam and Muslims in Australia.[67] A similar phenomenon has been observed in the US[68] and UK.[69]

Communities tend to be ready to cooperate with police and other security agencies

On the one hand, states need to establish good relations and close cooperation with 'vulnerable communities' to effectively oppose the spread of terrorism and violent extremism. On the other, communities tend to be ready to cooperate with police and other security agencies, but dislike the sense of being a 'suspect community'. This deters community members from participating in CT efforts.[70] While matters of national security demand secrecy and intelligence, police and other security agencies need to address the concerns of communities in question, and

allow for open and transparent dialogue.[71] Civil society can help bridge the gap. However, engagement and cooperation between law enforcement and civil society organisations need to be managed with caution. Political intervention and any attempt to control the agenda of civil society organisations could backfire, and undermine the credibility and trust of such organisations within the community.[72]

Overall, it is evident that the 'othering' of Muslims is done at the same time as efforts by law enforcement to establish cooperation with them. This trend is damaging to any efforts directed against terrorism and violent extremism, as it may create a strong divide along identity lines between the minority groups and the government. It could also reinforce the propaganda message of violent extremist groups that states have a hidden agenda against Muslims and Islam. Furthermore, it might reduce the efficiency of preventive programmes. Together, these factors create conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism.

Human rights and democratic freedoms-related discrimination

Although not always mandated by governments, extrajudicial activities of law enforcement and security agencies create a strong sense of injustice and hatred, and destroy social cohesion, trust in government and the rule of law. Furthermore, they strengthen the narrative of violent extremist organisations and create a powerful incentive for people to seek membership in, and extend their support for, these organisations. Evidence from Nigeria and Egypt illustrates this, indicating a strong link between abuse sustained at the hands of security services and recruitment into violent extremist organisations. In Egypt, a harsh security crackdown against members of Muslim Brotherhood allegedly played a significant role in the spread of violent extremist ideology and related violent extremist incidents.[73] Political pressure exerted on members of the organisation, who held strong and radical but ultimately non-violent views, may backfire, and significantly increase instability in the country and the region.[74]

Similarly, a study conducted in Nigeria on push and pull factors for joining Boko Haram found that around 30% of respondents perceived the response of Nigerian security forces to have increased the number of Nigerians joining

Boko Haram. Furthermore, around 57% of respondents indicated revenge as a powerful factor for joining the extremist group, while around 18% more believed that revenge was one among many factors that affected recruitment.[75]

The impact of violence and abuse on the spread of violent extremist ideologies is overall well documented. Over the years, al-Qaeda has used the torture and inhumane treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib in Iraq in their propaganda to 'expose[sic] the West for what it really is', and to show 'the world the American understanding of human rights.'[76] Furthermore, it is alleged that abuse and torture in US-run prisons in Iraq played a significant role in radicalising prisoners who would later create ISIS.[77]

> By employing ruthless and unlawful actions against suspected terrorists and innocent individuals, states risk worsening their security situation

Overall, sweeping discriminatory actions against members of a particular ethnic or religious group are often employed under the guise of fighting the 'evil' of terrorism and supporting national security, and are justified by the horrors of terrorist acts. However, by employing ruthless, harsh and unlawful actions and tactics against suspected terrorists and innocent individuals, states risk worsening their security situation, far from improving it. Current literature draws strong parallels between abuse and humiliation on the one hand, and a strong push-back by ethnic and religious groups against perpetrators of the abuse on the other. Such actions by states are damaging to the integrity of democratic governments, and their image as lawful and fair, and could undermine the credibility of the rule of law. The matter can be made worse as humiliation, torture and abuse at the hands of security services in the name of CT tend to feed into violent extremist groups' conspiracy propaganda narratives. They erode the trust of communities in undermining the prospect of a fair and lawful judgement, and creating a sense that the government is using counter-terrorism as a pretext for abuse and humiliation of members of a particular community. It is therefore an established fact that humiliation, abuse and violation of human and constitutional rights of people, based on their identity, is certain to create favourable dynamics for the spread of violent extremist ideology.

Selected good practices

Research suggests that the unjust treatment, discrimination and abuse of minority groups are higher in the hierarchy of factors that trigger violent extremist acts than economic factors, such as poverty or inequality in some contexts.[78] Many discriminatory practices stem from PVE and CT approaches that take wide-ranging measures against the whole 'risk community'. Blanket approaches create grievances between the community and law enforcement agencies, and decrease the effectiveness of community-driven PVE.

AL-QAEDA HAS USED THE TORTURE AND INHUMANE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS AT GUANTANAMO BAY AND ABU GHRAIB IN IRAQ IN THEIR PROPAGANDA

The emerging literature tends to suggest that many recent terrorism suspects, especially in the West, are often new converts to Islam. The factors that drive them towards participation in violent extremist organisations seem to have less to do with religion, and more to do with individual problems and frustrations.[79] In such instances, the perpetrators of terrorist acts had scant knowledge of Islam, and were likely to be 'radical' before converting to Islam.[80] These frustrations could also relate to societal pressure and 'othering', as highlighted in section 2. Similarly, research from Africa confirms that a variety of socio-economic and political drivers are responsible for engagement in violent extremism, with religion playing only a minor role.[81] Therefore, religion or ethnicity alone are not adequate for effective risk assessment against radicalisation and recruitment, as they may overshadow other possible underlying factors, such as mental health problems,[82] or a history of criminal, antisocial or violent behaviour.[83] Governments need to be wary of ethnic and religious biases while dealing with the issue of terrorism.[84]

> A variety of socio-economic and political drivers are responsible for engagement in violent extremism

Communities have an important role to play in the fight against terrorism and are often willing to support states' efforts in this area. From the role elders and community leaders could play in addressing violent ideology,[85] to the role of strong families in limiting the success of propaganda of violent extremism organisations,[86] to the wider community reporting suspicious individuals to security services.[87] In this case, civil society should play an important role in connecting communities and the government as a neutral player. But governments need to balance their aspirations for national security, and preoccupation with secrecy, with the need to uphold the neutrality and legitimacy of civil society organisations to maintain the credibility of such organisations within the community. Denmark presents a case of a successful government-civil society partnership. The Denmark Aarhus model relies on close cooperation between the government and leaders of mosques, and civil society to create dialogue with vulnerable communities and address

conditions in society that could be conducive to the spread of violent extremism.[88]

An important factor with regard to inclusivity and non-discrimination relates to the constitutional order and legal framework in place. Where discrimination at the hands of security services occurs, it is important to ensure speedy justice for the victims. Equality, non-discrimination, adherence to human rights and the rule of law all play a significant role in reducing societal tensions and firmly limiting and regulating societal interaction within the boundaries of the law. These also support state legitimacy and undermine recruitment narratives of violent extremist groups. Some democratic constitutions also have a bill of rights that aims to ensure inclusivity and limit racial, gender, ethnic and other identity-based discrimination. However, the application of legal frameworks might prove to be the biggest challenge, as an inclusive legal framework does not in itself guarantee adherence to these principles.

The Global Counterterrorism Forum's Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to CVE[89] offers a number of recommendations to states and civil society in their efforts on CVE. The document is instructive for states and reflects on the following practices by states on CVE clustered in five thematic areas: multi-agency approaches within the state; identifying the violent extremism problem; public-private partnerships; socio-economic approaches; and the role of law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

This report has explored how factors relating to identity have influenced efforts to address terrorism and violent extremism, and has highlighted the significant dangers of strategies associated with discrimination focused on religious beliefs or ethnic identity. Evidence suggests that injustice, discrimination and abuse at the hands of law enforcement agencies can create a strong incentive for individuals to develop attitudes that may lead to violence, or to extend their support to violent extremist groups. Measures that violate human rights, albeit taken in the name of national security, are narrow-sighted and do not consider the long-term negative impact on conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

It is important to note that there is no evidence to suggest that holding a religious belief or being a member
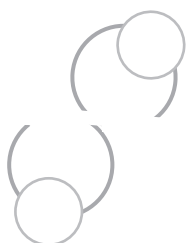
of a particular ethnic group puts one at risk of joining a violent extremist organisation. Furthermore, neither Islam nor any other religion should be equated with violent extremist organisations that base their hateful ideology on a deviant interpretation of religious texts. Therefore, perceiving a whole community as a risk group by merit of association creates an unnecessary tension within society, and is likely to hinder CT efforts – at least at community level. Moreover, abuse and discrimination at the hands of security agencies may prove counterproductive and contribute to the spread of violent ideologies among vulnerable people. Instead of adopting a blanket identity-driven approach to CT and preventing violent extremism, states should focus on and account for other factors that drive violent extremism, including socio-economic factors, absence of rule of law, injustice, and political grievances.

> Abuse at the hands of security agencies may prove counterproductive and contribute to the spread of violent ideologies among vulnerable people

Evidence also suggests that vulnerable communities are often open to cooperation with the government to prevent violent extremism. Therefore, the states need to approach this issue in a careful manner, to maintain communities' trust. Steps to address religious extremism also need to be taken carefully, within the boundaries of the rule of law, to avoid targeting and othering members of religious groups. It is also advisable for governments to encourage moderate voices and support the advancement of human rights and the rule of law.

Recommendations

1. States should guard against discriminatory and abusive practices by structuring the conduct of PVE efforts within the boundaries of international law and best practices, democratic principles and human rights.

2. Agencies with a mandate to formulate CT and PVE policy should promote dialogue within religious and ethnic communities and engage them in the process of formulating policy to ensure ownership and transparency. These agencies should also include members of civil society to ensure a broad, inclusive approach to PVE.

3. Relevant agencies should place more emphasis on factors that tend to be more prevalent in the process of developing attitudes that may lead to violence, such as politics, policy and socio-economic factors rather than identity factors.

4. Relevant criminal justice institutions must act quickly to curtail discrimination at the hands of law enforcement and security services, and to punish perpetrators of discrimination and abuse to demonstrate that such actions are neither acceptable nor condoned. This should prevent

VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES ARE OFTEN OPEN TO COOPERATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

further violations, promote adherence to human rights and strengthen the rule of law.

5. States must consider working with civil society to disseminate their message against violence more effectively and support civil society to increase their capacity for PVE activities.

Notes

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