

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RESILIENCE

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Introduction

Violent extremism has emerged as one of the most urgent threats to human security across Europe (European Security Strategy 2009). Extremism and political instability are exacerbated by populist narratives that risk undermining liberal democracy. Together, these challenges lead to growing demands for policies to counter threats to social and cultural well-being. The management of terrorism in particular has raised new questions about what makes people resistant to violence (Jore 2020a). The global ‘War on Terror’ is predicated upon the idea that violent extremism and terrorism cannot be prevented through traditional policing or military force alone (Aly, Balbi and Jacques 2015). New approaches to preventing extreme forms of violence therefore focus on strengthening the psychological and social capacity and capability that may keep people resistant to violence.

It is in this context that the notion of ‘resilience’ has found traction, with the international discourse on preventing violent extremism adopting it as the favoured aim (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier 2021). This might partly be a response to criticism of policies to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) for their securitisation of the social domain: resilience-building involves seemingly less problematic preventative approaches (Amery 2019; Wimelius et al. 2018). As a response to violent extremism, resilience may have some merit because it focuses on strengths rather than deficiencies by asking what makes individuals resilient rather than who is vulnerable to extreme violence. Exploring dimensions, processes, and pathways of individual and collective resilience may thus be a far more promising approach than the hegemonic top-down agendas that have dominated security politics since the 9/11 attacks (Aly, Balbi and Jacques 2015; Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack 2016).

A variety of resilience policies and approaches targeting both individuals and communities, usually labelled as ‘preventing’ or ‘countering violent extremism’, have been developed across Europe. This policy field was pioneered in the United Kingdom, where it is now a statutory duty for several public sector services to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism (Home Office 2015). Research, however, has lagged practice on these matters, perhaps because of the way P/CVE approaches are being oriented by policy (Jore 2020b). Norway represents a particularly important case study of violent

extremism because of how much right-wing extremism it has suffered, alongside the relatively high number of Muslim foreign fighters who travelled from Norway to the Middle East (Lia and Nesser 2016).

Seeking to synthesise developments over recent decades, this chapter provides an overview of the emergence of violent extremist milieus in Norway and societal responses. We also explore challenges and different agendas in P/CVE approaches that aim to build resilience. Taking the example of the increased securitisation of P/CVE, we find a certain discrepancy between how resilience appears in security discourse versus P/CVE practice. We argue for deemphasising security-oriented P/CVE strategies that rely on intelligence and law enforcement actors in favour of facilitating social transformation as part of a pro-social approach to resilience.

Being resilient to violent extremism

The concept of resilience is based on the recognition that it is possible to overcome, if not improve, social and psychological conditions after adversity. Despite its current popularity, the notion of resilience is rife with contradictions and ambiguities since it has been widely used in both the natural and social sciences for many years (Jore 2020b). According to Grossman (2021), close analysis reveals that the notion of resilience varies greatly in content and meaning; Jore (2020c, p. 352) goes as far as to claim that resilience has been used to cover all psychosocial, physical, and technical factors related to violent extremism and terrorism and therefore explains very little. In short, critical scrutiny must be exercised in deciding the analytical precision of this all-encompassing conceptualisation of resilience.

A central tenet across much of the literature is that approaches to resilience focus on what makes people resistant to violence rather than on what makes them vulnerable to it. Psychological traits such as critical thinking and moral traits such as empathy and democratic values are often considered essential elements of resilience against violence (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2021). Resilience can thus be seen as a variety of strengths and resources enabling core functioning to be maintained when there are challenges arising from radicalisation and violent extremism. Resilience tends to be portrayed as an individual capacity – which means there is a need to focus on socio-ecological approaches to resilience. This ‘pro-social’ resilience involves the assumption that it is more reasonable to explore social contexts in which resilience can be demonstrated rather than seeking resilient individuals (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020). Empirical research in the Nordic countries give credence to the notion of pro-social resilience to be seen in the key roles played by social agents such as family (Ellefsen and Sandberg 2022; Mohamed and Sandberg 2019), local communities (Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack 2016), and other civil society actors like religious groups (Haugstvedt and Sjøen 2021).

In relation to pro-social resilience, Stephens and Sieckelinck (2020) explicate the need to focus on how social factors can block or mitigate the threat of violent extremism. They use the phrase ‘resilience as connection’, a conceptualisation that echoes an *a priori* idea that sees the main locus of resilience as being in social environments. All definitions of resilience concern social entities – be they individuals, organisations, or local communities – and their abilities to tolerate, absorb, cope with, and adjust to threats of various kinds (Keck and Sakdapolrak 2013, p. 8). Social approaches to resilience can also involve a form of democratisation, which may guide the process of societal and political transformation. Such transformation may provide an alternative to the individualised and vulnerability-oriented perspective on resilience that aligns with a performative post-modern society, where individuals who do not conform

to the ideal images of citizens can be made subject to control and surveillance. The notion of community resilience is, however, sometimes criticised for offering a depoliticised and decontextualised understanding of violent extremism by shifting the responsibility from structural challenges to individuals and communities (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2021). To meet this criticism, the prevention of violent extremism should entail building capacity not only to counter extremist ideas, but also to empower individuals and communities to take action to address their grievances. We therefore propose to differentiate between a security-oriented approach to resilience in which security actors become a ‘potent driver and shaper of contemporary resilience practices’ (Coaffee and Fussey 2015, p. 87) and a pro-social approach, which is less security-driven and acknowledges the importance of social transformation and the democratisation of communities for the purpose of P/CVE work.

Norway: shifting extremist trends and responses

There are great differences between extremist milieus and responses to them in the period from 1990¹ to 2009 and between 2010 and the time of this publication. We use this temporal division to point out key developments determining the characteristics of contemporary P/CVE.

In the first period (1990–2009), the far-right landscape largely centred on localised racist youth gangs, Neo-Nazi skinhead groups, anti-immigration organisations, and a few small ethno-nationalist parties (Bjørge 1999; Bjørge and Carlsson 1999; Fangen 2001). There were racist gangs and Neo-Nazi skinheads in several communities in eastern and southern Norway. These milieus triggered the mobilisation of militant antifascist activists and broader civic engagement across local communities. There were violent attacks by right-wing extremists, targeting mainly immigrants of colour and anti-racists (Bjørge and Gjelsvik 2018). The right-wing extremist milieu consisted largely of adolescents with troubled backgrounds and low socio-economic status. There were various responses to the phenomenon of right-wing extremism, which was usually depicted as a problem of youth gangs and youth crime (Bjørge and Gjelsvik 2018).

Serious violent attacks by right-wing extremists forced local communities and government to acknowledge the need to change their understanding of these events and their response to them. In 1991, attacks by anti-immigrant and neo-Nazi activists on anti-racist demonstrators in the city of Brummundal became the catalyst that led the municipality to initiate measures to be carried out by a network of parents, civil society organisations, municipal actors, and local police. These responses were part of ‘Action Plan Brummundal’, which later became a model for other local communities and municipal governments with similar challenges (Fangen and Carlsson 2013). In later years this model – which combined targeted efforts by preventive police with interventions by voluntary organisations, parents, and the district administration – also helped dissolve right-wing extremist milieus in Oslo, Vennesla, and Kristiansand (Carlsson 1995; Carlsson and Lippe 1997). Organisations established by concerned parents, mentoring projects, and initiatives by civil society organisations like the local church also played key roles. Experience gained from these community network responses led to the launch of the pioneering EXIT project in 1997 by Tore Bjørge² and other scholars (Carlsson and Haaland 2004; Bjørge, Donselaar and Grunenberg 2009). However, local communities often failed to provide support for those who fell victim to right-wing extremist attacks (Bjørge and Gjelsvik 2018, p. 58), and there has been little research into the role played by civic mobilisations against racism in dissolving right-wing extremist milieus and building community solidarity.

During the 1990s, right-wing extremist violence attracted much public attention and various counter-responses. The most violence-prone groups had their heyday from the late 1990s to the early 2000s when there was a series of serious violent attacks involving the use of firearms and bombs (Fangen 2001; Ravndal 2018). After three Neo-Nazis killed 15-year-old Benjamin Hermansen in Oslo in 2001, there was a massive counter-mobilisation against racism throughout the country. The youth's murder triggered a backlash that marked the demise of the form of right-wing extremism typical of this period.

There is extensive research on the years from 1991 to 2001, which is the period of greatest right-wing extremist activity between 1991 and 2009 (Bjørge and Gjelsvik 2018; Fangen 2001). The period from 2005 to 2009, however, attracted much less public and scholarly attention (Bjørge and Gjelsvik 2018) despite the emergence of new milieus with different characteristics from their subcultural Neo-Nazi predecessors.

At the beginning of our second period (2010–2021), it was primarily militant Islamist milieus that attracted the attention of scholars, security services, municipalities, and local communities as objects of concern. In 2010, the government introduced the first national Action Plan to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism.

The country's attention abruptly turned towards right-wing extremism and radical anti-Islamic milieus in 2011, following the 22 July terrorist attacks near government offices in Oslo and on the Labour Party's youth camp at Utøya that killed 77 people – the worst carnage in Norway's modern history. This was a turning point in policy, triggering a wave of changes in the national security apparatus and the introduction of laws to increase the ability of the security services, police, and correctional services to monitor, prosecute, and punish terrorist acts, including their planning and preparation (Sandvik, Ikdahl and Lohne 2021). It was Norway's first major lone-actor terrorist attack; the perpetrator published a manifesto citing widespread anti-Muslim conspiracy theories that motivated the attack and led to his selection of targets (Hemmingby and Bjørge 2015). This lone-actor attack subsequently inspired similar incidents in other countries including the 2016 Munich shooting in Germany and the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shootings in New Zealand (Berntzen and Ravndal 2021).

National attention shifted back towards militant Islamists when they began to be more active in 2012 and 2013. Security concerns grew when people started travelling to Syria and recruiting others to go too. The rising numbers of travellers to Syria to become foreign fighters (at least one hundred) was high, considering Norway's relatively small Muslim population (Lia and Nesser 2016), which led to great national security concern about militant Islamist activist milieus. This resulted in another substantial wave of counter-responses by the Norwegian government.

In 2014, the second national Action Plan against violent extremism was launched with a much greater impact than the first. It was more specific about the course of action that should be taken and required greater emphasis on implementing multi-agency measures and cross-sectoral collaborations as well as efforts to educate frontline personnel and practitioners about radicalisation and violent extremism (Ellefsen 2021). Between 2012 and 2015, the emergent policy arena of radicalisation and violent extremism prevention was rapidly marked out as the police, regional agencies, and municipalities established designated positions to work on P/CVE and contact points where possible radicalisation and extremism could be reported. Those tasked with engaging in P/CVE work would now include municipal agencies like schools, childcare services, social services, outreach workers, and the local police together with civil society actors and religious communities as well as regional and national agencies.

Even after ISIS collapsed in 2016, militant Islamism remained a core issue for law enforcement agencies and municipalities primarily because of concern over returnees from Syria. By 2019, however, the militant Islamist milieu in Norway was greatly reduced due to more cohesive security policies and stricter legal frameworks at the national level, and the security services were starting to express concern about a rise in right-wing extremism in Norway and Europe (Bjørge and Ravndal 2019). That same year, a right-wing lone-actor terrorist killed one person before unsuccessfully attacking a mosque on Oslo's outskirts as worshippers managed to overpower and disarm the terrorist. This attack, and similar ones in other countries by persons expressing right-wing extremist views, drew greater attention to this type of threat and the potential for single individuals to become radicalised and plan attacks with the internet as their main source of inspiration, without being physically engaged in an extremist milieu (PST 2020).

Despite militant Islamists taking up much attention in this second period spanning 2010 to the present day, important developments have occurred in the broader right-wing extremist milieu, which differs substantially from what it was like before 2010. The Neo-Nazi Norwegian Resistance Movement, for instance, re-emerged in 2011 and became the Norwegian chapter of the Nordic Resistance Movement (Bjørge and Gjelsvik 2018), with greater visibility and presence online and offline after 2015 (Ravndal 2021). The right-wing extremist landscape of this period has some ideological similarities to that of the earlier period (Wilhelmsen 2021), but certain changes are important for understanding the groups, platforms used for mobilisation, and individuals involved (Ravndal 2020). This period is marked by stronger anti-Islamic ideology and more frequent actions targeting Muslims, although anti-Semitism is still recorded as being widespread (Berntzen 2019; Fangen and Nilsen 2020).

With the Neo-Nazi skinhead subculture having dissolved in the wake of Benjamin Hermansen's murder in 2001, right-wing extremist activity shifted focus, with the internet providing a new and important arena for the growth of these milieus (Haanshuus and Jupskås 2017). Internet and social media platforms have provided easy access to these groups and opportunities for them to disseminate propaganda (Conway, Scrivens and McNair 2019). Responses such as police online patrols have thus been introduced, and increased attention is paid to the internet's role in radicalisation. A shift towards online activity by organised milieus also seems to be related to the lower number of violent attacks by right-wing extremist groups in this period. Nonetheless, the lone-actor attacks in 2001 and 2011 caused more deaths, serious injuries, and negative societal ramifications than any others in the post-war period.

Like those recently engaged in militant Islamism, people in right-wing extremist milieus are now older than their counterparts in the earlier period (PST 2016, 2019). They are not mainly adolescents, generally being in their mid- or late twenties (Dalgaard-Nielsen and Lund 2019). They are still, however, largely characterised by their low socio-economic status. Members of one far-right anti-Islamic organisation – 'Stop Islamisation of Norway' – are, however, distinctly more better-off than those linked directly to violent extremism, and 75 per cent of the group's members are over the age of 50 (Tranøy 2020).

The anti-Islamic propaganda of the current groups and of other non-violent groups of the far right seems to resonate with a more widespread hostility towards Muslims, and the public debate has seen a growing normalisation of far-right viewpoints. These tendencies reflect a growing polarisation between sections of the population that is causing broader societal concern. Today, violent extremism is also influenced more strongly and rapidly by

trends and influences from across the globe through easy access to the internet and globalisation (Grossman 2021).

These changing characteristics and the increased complexity of extremist milieus continue to be decisive for how P/CVE evolves. For example, the increased age of those engaging with extremist milieus reduce the available opportunities for responses; when individuals are over the age of legal adulthood (18 years) most non-coercive P/CVE initiatives require the voluntary consent of the target person. Consent is often challenging or impossible to attain, thus potentially leaving out many of the available soft types of intervention involving actors outside the criminal justice system. Also, the shift of much extremist activity from offline to online arenas – and the increased importance of online communities for individual radicalisation – calls for new types of P/CVE response. So far, a majority of P/CVE responses to these phenomena rely on increased online surveillance and content moderation, while efforts to build pro-social resilience in this area seems to be lagging behind and thus calls for innovative efforts. The changes of extremist milieus we have outlined trigger a simultaneous shift in what P/CVE responses are possible and appropriate. The rapid phase at which changes currently occur in extremist milieus, their online presence, and preferred tactics is thus a major challenge in itself.

Resilience in the Norwegian P/CVE policy discourse

Resilience-based P/CVE models have seemingly become more prominent in contemporary P/CVE policy in Norway, although existing societal crime prevention models lent themselves towards pro-social resilience approaches in the past. For instance, during the 1990s, counterterrorism policies were regarded as a controversial and unnecessary element in a democratic society, and Norwegian governments were reluctant to put them in place (Jore 2016). However, since 2008, following the surge in Islamist terrorism on the European continent that began in the mid-2000s, the idea of a Norwegian policy on preventing violent extremism started to gain traction and led to the 2010 Action Plan. As noted above, Norway had by then been severely affected by violent extremism, but the phenomenon was considered a local problem rather than a national security threat, and responses were tailored accordingly. In the last ten years, Norwegian governments have launched three national Action Plans for preventing violent extremism (in 2010, 2014, and 2020), while also encouraging the creation of at least 36 municipal P/CVE policies and guidelines (Jore 2020a).

According to Lid et al. (2016), the Norwegian P/CVE approach is based on a societal crime prevention model that is grounded in the ideals and values of a democratic welfare state. Like the other Scandinavian countries, Norway has a long-established system of community policing, along with a very liberal criminal justice system (Vindino and Branden 2012). Even the Norwegian police and criminal care system is said to differ from that of many other countries in its wide use of soft resilience measures, which include building trust, dialogue, and being present in the community and building close relations with it. Yet the concept of ‘resilience’ is not often invoked in the domain of Norwegian P/CVE policy and is rarely mentioned in political documents.

In the Action Plan of 2010, one of few mentions of ‘resilience’ can be found in the claim that P/CVE approaches should ‘increase the resilience of communities to violent extremism, and [...] address the grievances which ideologues are exploiting’ (p. 12). Resistance is also referred to here:

[A] strong democratic culture is an aim in itself for the whole of Norwegian society, but can also help strengthen the individual's resistance to violent extremist ideology and thereby have a preventive effect in this field.

Action Plan 2010, p. 32

These sentiments may reflect a form of pro-social resilience with the emphasis on strengthening democratic capacity and capability to prevent violent extremism. However, the document is characterised by a content in which vulnerable individuals should be protected, rather than exploring what is keeping people resistant to violence:

Whether a person ends up as a criminal with a substance abuse problem, or as a violent extremist, usually happens by chance and depends on 'who gets to you first'. The common denominator is vulnerability, and therefore good preventive measures will usually be general measures.

Action Plan 2010, p. 8

The vulnerability perspective is frequently criticised for its close association with a security-driven perspective on violent extremism (Kundnani 2014). This conceptualisation of vulnerability is, nevertheless, a consistent feature of the Norwegian P/CVE policy domain. However, a discursive change can be seen in the national Action Plans of 2014 and 2020, as the concepts of 'resilience' and 'resistance' against violent extremism are absent from what seems to be more security-oriented policies. It should be noted that these policy documents underline the importance of creating a safe and inclusive society for everyone, yet a re-configuration of the security rhetoric can be seen in the frequent use of the word 'combat' to describe P/CVE approaches in Norway (Action Plan 2014). There are, for instance, statements claiming that the 'Norwegian government wants to combat radicalisation and violent extremism more effectively' (p. 5). Furthermore, the 2014 Action Plan argues that it is of great importance to base P/CVE efforts 'to combat radicalisation and violent extremism on the same basic principles as the general prevention of crime' (p. 13). One could certainly question the merit of 'combat' in a policy that aims to prevent conflict, particularly as Norwegian police and the correctional service have been characterised by their soft rather than hard preventive approaches. This policy document even equates 'combat' and 'dialogue', as efforts to prevent extremism are said to require 'support of dialogue and preventative efforts to combat radicalisation' (p. 21).

Based on these observations and readings of other policy documents, it seems that the concept of resilience features indirectly in Norwegian policy discourse via claims about preventing violent extremism through democracy and social welfare. Thus, while P/CVE policy is a continuation of counterterrorism in Norway (Jore 2020a), prevention is still sometimes used in parts with a meaning that corresponds to how pro-social resilience is understood in the scholarly literature (cf. Grossman 2021). For instance, counterterrorism was once a centralised task of the state, but now we see it transferred from the state to all sectors of society, with a focus on early intervention and prevention of 'home-grown' radicalisation. There is increased attention to social resilience, as shown by the 2021 white paper on societal security in which there are 45 references to resilience; the government's stated aim, for example, is to 'further develop societal resilience through increased emphasis on preventive work' (White Paper 2021, p. 15, authors' translation). Democratic resilience to violent extremism has even found its way into the revised national curriculum (Sjøen and

Mattsson 2022). Contemporary P/CVE approaches in Norway are thus to a great extent embedded in localised prevention efforts where there are existing networks for collaborative work against various forms of crime (Ellefsen 2021).

While resilience seems to be neither precisely defined nor conceptualised in Norwegian P/CVE policy discourse, our analysis indicates there has been a change from top-down security-oriented measures towards more localised pro-social approaches to preventing violent extremism. However, other developments seem to be taking P/CVE in a more security-oriented direction, which we examine in the next section.

Resilience in Norwegian practice

Between the earlier (1990–2009) and later (2010–2021) periods, the phenomenon that was to be countered changed from being understood as a youth problem to being one associated with violent extremism. The public discourse about what amounted to violent extremism and terrorism has also changed substantially across the two periods (Husabø 2018). The dominant labelling of the phenomena in question also impacts our understanding of the appropriate and legitimate measures of response to it (Fangen and Kolås 2016). While terrorism and the societal attempts to prevent terrorism were once viewed as unnecessary and a threat to civil liberties, preventing extreme forms of violence is now perceived as a necessity and a societal obligation (Jore 2016).

Changes in criminal, administrative, and other areas of law have also extended the powers available to the police, security services, and state administration to intervene at earlier stages and to utilise a wider array of interventions, surveillance, and preventive intelligence-gathering. The changed societal responses to extremism since the 1990s raise important questions about contemporary P/CVE approaches; below, we look closely at examples of the increased securitisation to be observed in P/CVE practice and its implications.

In the 1990s, local initiatives to disengage people from extremist milieus developed into the first EXIT project in Europe. What seems unique to that period was the new model of local community collaboration between private, civil, local municipal actors, and the police in using a variety of largely soft preventive and pro-social measures against extremism. This model seemingly inspired today's P/CVE policy and is still reflected in it. In 2012, a comparison of Norway with other European countries found that 'more weight has so far been put on preventive measures than on repressive measures' in Norway's P/CVE approach (Vindino and Branden 2012). Scholars have also argued that the strategies implemented most successfully in many Norwegian municipalities are precisely the soft forms of social intervention that aim to disengage right-wing extremists and reintegrate them into their local communities (Fangen and Carlsson 2013).

It remains to be assessed whether the soft measures and social interventions identified as core traits of Norway's P/CVE approach – which overlaps with what we term a pro-social approach to resilience – are changing, and whether the predominance of such measures is being reduced in favour of harder ones, that is, more control and closer surveillance. Based on empirical research by ourselves and others, we argue that Norwegian P/CVE practice has in some ways moved away from being mainly soft and pro-social oriented.

For instance, the first P/CVE Action Plan (2010, p. 5) stressed the importance of preventing violent extremism mainly through the winning of 'hearts and minds' – in recognition of the role of democratic values as a bulwark against violent extremism. However, in the most recent addition to policy in this area, we see indications of an emphasis on societal vigilant surveillance: there are frequent mentions of the need for the public to report

suspicious activity to law enforcement agencies (Action Plan 2020, p. 5). This would suggest that pro-social P/CVE strategies are being challenged by the expansion of security-based social control measures to prevent extremism, which as mentioned has been a dominant characteristic of the War on Terror (Kundnani 2014).

After the 22 July 2011 terrorist attacks, and in the wake of extraordinary security threats related to global jihadism between 2013 and 2016, the local P/CVE approach seemed to be accompanied by a parallel increase in security-oriented efforts and harder measures. In contrast to the soft measures we described as characteristic of early preventive strategies, the white paper published after the 22 July attacks declared the need for new initiatives that were more focused on control and surveillance than on integration and education (Fangen and Carlsson 2013, p. 347; White Paper 2012). Scholars and civil society actors in European countries with more developed P/CVE arenas have already pointed to many of the issues that arise from an excessively security-driven approach to building resilience (Kundnani 2014).

Since 2014, P/CVE policy has featured a related specialisation within the police, with new positions designated in each police district ('radicalisation contacts') to gather intelligence as well as monitor and handle concerns reported by the general public and public services about individuals who may be becoming radicalised. An earlier investigation of P/CVE collaborations across Norwegian municipalities reported concerns about this specialisation and the ever-greater and more central role this gave the police in preventive networks where they collaborated with other municipal actors outside the criminal justice field (Lid et al. 2016). The specialised role of the police was seen to influence its relationship with the municipality in a way that led more of the preventative work to be channelled to the police or security services, taking it away from other more socially oriented agencies. This also led the police to take on a more extensive role in following up with people linked to radicalisation or extremist milieus than might be desirable (*ibid.*, pp. 233–234; Nybø 2020). As such, there has been a securitisation of community-based approaches towards the prevention of violence.

Increased specialisation and the building of competence across other municipal actors has the potential for reversing this trend and making P/CVE practice less security-driven and less reliant upon police and law enforcement agencies. Even if municipal actors outside the criminal justice system take on a more prominent role in P/CVE, close involvement with the police and security service, including exchanges of intelligence, might lead to these municipal actors being less trusted if they were perceived as an extension of state security (Lid et al. 2016; Kruse 2019). Such challenges manifest, for example, when law enforcement and intelligence actors seek to become directly involved with the families of radicalised individuals or with peers that have strong social ties with them. When state security agencies seek to 'engage with the family and peers close to a target person, they risk undermining that person's trusting relation' to them – which effective informal intervention depends on – if they are seen as collaborating closely with the police or secret service (Ellefsen and Sandberg 2022).

The above examples demonstrate some of the challenges of the Norwegian P/CVE approach that has become perhaps too oriented towards tackling risk and where criminal justice actors are too dominant in cross-sectoral preventive networks. There has been little public debate about these issues or scholarly attention to them in Norway, perhaps because of the short history of national P/CVE practice and the relatively low level of imminent threats of large-scale terrorist attacks. Scholars have also suggested that when Norwegian counterterrorism evolved into a policy to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism, critical investigation seemed absent. This is presumably because the discourse on preventing

violent extremism ‘fits the values of the welfare state that Norwegian society is based on’ and because P/CVE practice is ‘portrayed as a form of caregiving and safeguarding of vulnerable individuals’, which aligns with how many local municipal agencies and civil society organisations understand their role in the Norwegian welfare state (Jore 2020a, p. 194). In 2020, the aim of preventing terrorism through education was even made part of the core curriculum in Norway, with surprisingly little criticism or debate among educational scholars and practitioners (Sjøen and Mattsson 2022). Although the curricular description extends from how democratic citizenship is seen as a protective factor against terrorism, accompanying the securitisation of curricular activities are political expectations on educators to use their classrooms to detect future terrorists and report potential violent crimes that have not yet been committed. Hence, the education–security nexus is characterised by a discursive struggle where pro-social logics and security-oriented logics are co-existing, competing, and mixed in educational policy documents.

A pro-social approach to resilience

While the work of the police and security services is clearly necessary in P/CVE and counterterrorism, we have identified some of the challenges their involvement might create, particularly in cross-sectoral preventive efforts. The challenges of securitised P/CVE approaches make it worthwhile to further explore what a pro-social approach to resilience might entail, with its somewhat different agenda. Grossman (2021, p. 310) argues that a core feature of such an approach is that it recognises the relevance of ‘aspects of resilient systems drawn from outside an immediate concern with social or political violence’, which might include social capital and connectedness, as well as ‘the strength of social support and development systems such as the education, health, social welfare, and human rights sectors’. The strand of literature that emphasises social capital as key for community resilience has also influenced the perception of resilience in the context of P/CVE – not only by taking a less securitised, more pro-social approach to preventing violent extremism, but also by inspiring an agenda that diverges from the security-driven resilience approaches seen abroad that have been criticised for targeting entire communities as suspect, vulnerable, or deficient (Grossman 2021; Kundnani 2014).

Pro-social P/CVE initiatives have, for example, included youth mentoring programmes designed to develop resilience by using team sports to address issues of identity, belonging, and cultural isolation amongst young Muslim men (Johns, Grossman and McDonald 2014). A Norwegian study demonstrated the decisive role of friends and parents in disrupting radicalisation of close friends or relatives without the need of involving the police (Ellefsen and Sandberg 2022), and thus underlining the importance of trusting relations as a basis for pro-social efforts by civil society actors. Another example from Norway is the ‘deep debate’ initiative developed by the municipality of Fredrikstad that provides middle and high school students a platform for discussing controversial societal issues. The initiative is a cooperation between local and regional education services, the municipality, and Fredrikstad Literature House, and it confronts complicated issues such as extremism, ethics, and foreign policy (Nordic Safe Cities 2021).

Norwegian schools have the task of educating students in values like democracy and assisting them to develop multicultural understanding, with the underlying assumption that such education ‘in citizenship itself’ helps make pupils resistant to radicalisation (Fangen and Carlsson 2013, p. 340). Education about diverse religious and non-religious values in schools may assist in ‘addressing religious vilification, discrimination and interreligious tensions’ and

even help build ‘religious literacy and social inclusion’ among adolescents, and thereby provide pupils with resources that strengthen individual and collective resilience (Halafoff, Lam and Bouma 2019, p. 381). Scholars have pointed out the risks of undermining the positive influence of such democratic spaces for debate, dialogue, and learning in schools and universities. If teachers are required to report any sign of radicalisation or expression of radical viewpoints to the police, this security-driven obligation may disrupt teachers’ efforts to build trusting relations with their pupils (Sjøen and Mattsson 2022). Important pro-social efforts for building community resilience may thus be undermined.

Local political participation and civic activism may also play important roles in a pro-social approach to building community resilience. When communities mobilise popular support for, and public expressions of, anti-racism they demonstrate that racism is unacceptable. For members of minority groups such bottom-up community mobilisation might counter potential alienation and even provide some protection from extremist milieus. This was seemingly the case in Brummundal, which racists and Neo-Nazis made a hostile place for immigrants; this hostility was then countered by local anti-racist mobilisation (Fangen and Carlsson 2013). Scholarship on anti-racist pro-social action has also pointed out the great policy potential of ‘bystander anti-racism’ – action taken by ordinary community members in response to racist incidents (Nelson, Dun and Paradies 2011).

Informal everyday initiatives are important components of a pro-social approach that uses trusting social relations to resist violent extremism and build resilience to it. Some studies of experiences of interventions against radicalisation revealed that young Norwegian Muslims found their peers and family to be most important for preventing radicalisation into violent extremism (Ellefsen and Sandberg 2022; Mohamed and Sandberg 2019). While Muslim communities have been the primary target of top-down measures to prevent violent extremism (Winsvold, Mjelde and Loga 2019), local people also mount their own bottom-up resistance to religious extremism, including religious counter-narratives to jihadism that might help fend off jihadist propaganda among Muslims (Sandberg and Colvin 2020; Haugstvedt and Sjøen 2021). Such bottom-up efforts, along with the others described above, are all important parts of a multi-level pro-social approach to resilience.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have explored developments in Norwegian extremist milieus between 1990 and 2021 and responses to them. Our aim has been to capture the changing characteristics of P/CVE policy and practice in Norway and relate them to a discussion about resilience and what makes people resistant to violence. The historical changes we describe in P/CVE policy and practice are related to different perceptions of resilience, where we show the difference between security-oriented and pro-social approaches. We found that the concept of resilience rarely figures in Norwegian P/CVE policy documents, although it often appears in recent policy documents on general societal security. The discourse on resilience in P/CVE policy, however, expresses certain logics that align with a pro-social approach to resilience, and the discourse emphasises the need to strengthen protective factors in communities to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. At the same time, the discourse also involves security-oriented aims and measures, and these have become more pronounced in recent years. Simultaneously, contemporary P/CVE practices have visibly become increasingly securitised during the last decade by a greater focus on surveillance and the establishment of society-wide structures for reporting signs of radicalisation and violent extremism to the authorities. We argue that this ‘softer’ form of surveillance in Norwegian P/CVE

approaches represents the social legitimisation of preventive actors being watchful observers for the central state.

While Norwegian P/CVE policy and practice seek to combine measures and actors across sectors in preventative efforts outside the realms of criminal justice and security, both of these seem to have become more influenced by security concerns. Law enforcement and intelligence actors increasingly have influence and brokerage roles in local multi-agency preventative practice, while security concerns and monitoring are becoming more prominent in policy. These developments have taken P/CVE in a more securitised direction than was the case in the 1990s, and we have outlined some of the dilemmas that result from this. The increased orientation towards security might, as we have demonstrated, be counter-productive for certain pro-social efforts to build community resilience. We have briefly described what a pro-social approach to resilience might entail, suggesting an agenda less dominated by security concerns and security actors.

Recognising the social factors in resilience, we emphasise the need to build individual and collective ability to reject extremist narratives to reduce mobilisation into extremist movements. However, Norwegian communities could also be empowered to build resilience by encouraging criticism of oppressive ideologies and social grievances. Until recently, this approach has scarcely been explored, as the focus on vulnerability in the security-oriented discourse on resilience tends to divert attention from structural reasons for people joining extremist groups. If structural explanations are not addressed properly, however, involvement in extremist movements will persist, while pro-social resilience may make it possible to explore political and structural reasons that create space and opportunity for democratic transformation (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020).

Because a securitised approach to resilience and P/CVE has become more dominant in Norway, it is important to avoid disrupting local community-led, pro-social efforts that have existed and been developed since the 1990s. Particularly, the strong emphasis of central government on an early warning system based on extensive surveillance and reporting of perceived radicalisation risks creating barriers for building trust and social networks across social, political, and religious groups in communities. This is one of the reasons we suggest deemphasising securitised P/CVE approaches in favour of developing pro-social forms of resilience to violent extremism in Norway.

Notes

- 1 There were also right-wing extremist milieus before the 1990s but because of space limitations we start our description in 1990. Some of the tendencies and groups of the 1990s were, however, established in the 1980s or were continuations of what started then (see Bjørgo 1997; Fangen 1999).
- 2 Bjørgo is currently the director of the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX) in Norway.

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