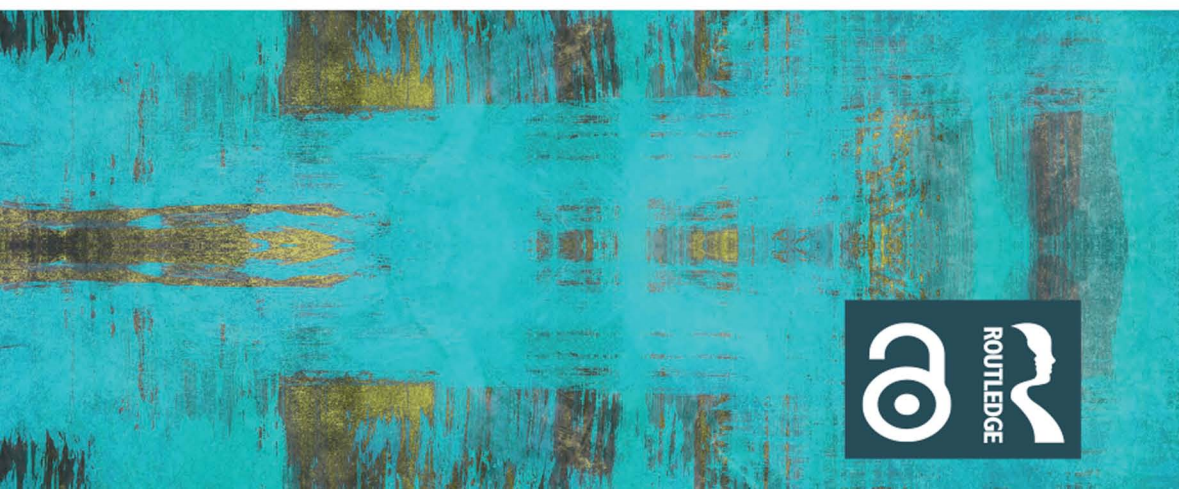
Routledge Studies in Countering Violent Extremism

VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

AN ACTOR-CENTRIC APPROACH

Edited by
Juline Beaujouan, Véronique Dudouet,
Maja Halilovic-Pastuovic, Johanna-Maria Hülzer,
Marie Kortam, and Amjed Rasheed



ROUTLEDGE

Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism

This book examines the actors that shape societal dynamics leading to, or preventing, violent extremism from taking root in their communities, including state representatives, religious institutions, and civil society actors.

The volume contributes to an emerging stream of research focusing on intra- and inter-group dynamics to explain the emergence and persistence of, or resilience against, violent extremism. It utilises an actor-centric approach, uncovering the landscape of actors that play relevant roles in shaping societal dynamics leading to, or preventing, violent extremism affecting their communities. The analysis builds on new empirical evidence collected in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Tunisia. This allows for an innovative comparative perspective on two regions in the European neighbourhood that are rarely studied together, even though they seem to share common patterns of (de-)radicalisation and violent extremism despite their distinct historical, political, and cultural trajectories and relations with the EU. In both regions, the book analyses the roles of and interactions between state, political, religious, and civil society actors in shaping community vulnerability to and/or resilience against violent extremism. Different types of community leaders are equipped with varying levels of authority, trust, legitimacy, and influence over community members. As such, the categories of actors analysed can play either detrimental or beneficial roles, which makes vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism two sides of the same coin.

This volume will be of much interest to students of countering violent extremism, terrorism, political violence, security studies, and International Relations generally.

Juline Beaujouan is a post-doctoral research fellow with the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) based at the University of Edinburgh, as well as a senior researcher with Open Think Tank in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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This book series sets out to become the first interdisciplinary platform for the study of issues pertaining to countering violent extremism, such as deradicalization and disengagement programs and individuals as well as collective processes of leaving terrorism and violent extremism behind. Additional focus points will be the impact of programs, different cultural notions of CVE, results of large-scale CVE-related research projects, specific guidance for practitioners and policymakers in building and maintaining CVE programs, mechanisms to evaluate initiatives, as well as innovative techniques to design new ones. The series aims to help establish a new field of "deradicalization studies" and to build a bridge across the disconnect between experts from different fields, countries and specialities.

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An Actor-Centric Approach

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Contents

Abbreviations

ABC (model)	Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence
ARP	*Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple* (Assembly of the People's Representatives)
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
BPRG	Balkans Policy Research Group
CDI	Community Development Initiative
CID	Centre for Intercultural Dialogue
CoE	Council of Europe
CPN	Community Prevention Network
CRRCG	Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTRET	*Centre Tunisien de Recherche et d'Études sur le Terrorisme* (Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism)
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DB	State Security Service
DSS	Democratic Party of Serbia
DW	Deutsche Welle
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement
FTDES	*Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux* (Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights)
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilient Fund
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICCT	International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
ICP	Iraqi Communist Party
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IHECO	Independent High Electoral Commission
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRC	Interreligious Council
IS	Islamic State

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
IZS	Islamic Community of Serbia
IZuS	Islamic Community in Serbia
JSO	Special Operations Unit
KCSS	Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LF	Lebanese Forces Party
LLMS	Lebanese League of Muslim Scholars
LPN	Local Prevention Network
MP	Member of Parliament
MUP	Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCCVECT	National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSI	New Social Initiative
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PM	Prime Minister
PMF	Popular Mobilisation Forces
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
POKS	Kingdom of Serbia Renewal Movement
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
R&R	Rehabilitation and Reintegration
RS	Republika Srpska
RSK	Republika Srpska Krajina
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SCN	Strong Cities Network
SDA	Party of Democratic Action
SDP	Sandžak Democratic Party
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SNO	Serbian National Renewal
SNP 1389	Serbian People's Movement 1389
SNS	Serbian Progressive Party
SPO	*Vuk Drašković* (Serbian Renewal Movement)
SPP	Justice and Reconciliation Party
SPVERLT	Strategy on Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation That Lead to Terrorism
SRS	Serbian Radical Party
UN	United Nations

UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSCOL	United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar

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1 Introduction

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In light of the commonly acknowledged failure of two decades of securitised responses to violent extremism since the post-9/11 "war on terror", the need for greater understanding of the complex societal embeddedness of violence connected to extremist ideologies came to the fore. In 2014, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 established a new policy agenda by introducing a "soft-power" approach to the prevention of violent extremism, emphasising dialogue and inclusion, as well as engagement with civil society and marginalised social groups.

Since then, the scholarship on (de-)radicalisation and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has advanced significantly, enriched by multidisciplinary perspectives. Some studies point to structural patterns of deprivation and marginalisation as pull factors driving marginalised social groups towards violent extremism, while others focus on individual radicalisation trajectories through a socio-psychological lens or from a criminological perspective. However, neither macro- nor micro-level explanations are sufficient to provide a satisfactory account for the varying forms and levels of vulnerability to violent extremism across different contexts. While structural factors on their own fail to explain variation within certain population groups, micro-level explanations fall short of taking into account social and political environments that play crucial roles as breeding grounds for extremist groups and the spread and persistence of violent extremist ideologies.

Born out of the recognition of these shortcomings, the purpose of this book is to contribute to an emerging stream of research focusing on the meso-level of intra- and inter-group dynamics to explain the emergence and persistence of, or resilience against, violent extremism at the community level. Its uniqueness lies in its actor-centric approach, by uncovering the landscape of actors that play relevant roles in shaping societal dynamics leading to, or preventing, violent extremism affecting their communities.

The analysis builds on new empirical evidence collected in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Tunisia in the context of the European Union (EU)-funded research project "Preventing and addressing violent extremism through community resilience" (PAVE). Since 2020, the PAVE consortium made up of 13 partner organisations has

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conducted multidisciplinary and collaborative research across the Western Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa (MENA).[1] This allows for an innovative comparative perspective on two regions in the European neighbourhood that are rarely studied together, even though they seem to share common patterns of (de-)radicalisation and violent extremism despite their distinct historical, political, and cultural trajectories and relations with the EU. In both regions, this book analyses the roles of and interactions between state, political, religious, and civil society actors in shaping community vulnerability to and/or resilience against violent extremism. The overall research question guiding the empirical chapters is the following: How do various community leaders contribute to the rise and persistence of violent extremist discourses and actions in affected communities, or inversely, to the strengthening of resilience against violent extremism in unaffected communities?

An actor-centric approach to community resilience

Community leadership – our main unity of analysis in this volume – can take many forms. A community, in its broad sense, will be understood here as individuals and social groups sharing a common sense of belongingness, either due to their geographic proximity (e.g., spatially delineated unit such as a municipality) or based on shared characteristics (e.g., religion, ethnicity, or nationality). The relational dimension of community allows for the recognition of the agency played by different actors in shaping intra-group (social bonding), inter-group (social bridging), and society-state (social linking) dynamics (Ellis and Abdi 2017). Given its over-reliance upon a Global North perspective that often carries a uniform understanding of the state, most scholarship on P/CVE fails to consider state actors as drivers or contributors to patterns of violent extremism. Outside of the EU, including in its close neighbourhood, the current nation-state systems are often marred by legacies of recent political violence. This needs to be taken into account when analysing intra- and inter-community dynamics.

Moreover, while recent policy and scholarly studies on PVE have come to pay closer attention to community-level dynamics (Briggs 2010; Rogers 2008; Jackson et al. 2019; Gunaratna et al. 2013), there is still an insufficient understanding of the specific roles played by various local stakeholders and the complex networks of relationships between them. At the local level, these may include public officials and civil servants (such as mayors, police officers, or teachers), religious figures (both formal and informal), and civil society actors (including social and traditional media).

To shed light on all these dimensions, the book dedicates separate sections to state, religious, and civil society actors, examining their respective roles and relational dynamics in shaping vulnerability or resilience to religious, sectarian, or ethnopolitical expressions of violent extremism. The term resilience – a political buzzword – has often been criticised as de-politicising, disempowering, and over-emphasising individual responsibility to "cope"

with an adverse environment while keeping the structural status quo in place (Keelan and Browne 2020; Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020; Torrekens and De La Vigne 2020). In this book, we locate resilience in the capacity of a community to prevent or react to the threat of violent extremism and to (pro)actively resist its root causes or manifestations. We also recognise that resilience is not inherently positive, and look into how different forms of resilience interact and possibly compete.

Our collected data shows that community leaders are identified by their ability to influence beliefs, discourses, actions, and social interactions among their peers. While they all play a part in influencing their communities, they differ in their level of formalisation and their closeness to state institutions. These differences result in diverse opportunities for shaping intra- and inter-community dynamics and state-society relations across the Western Balkans and MENA. Our findings show that due to their authority, trust, legitimacy, and influence on community members, the analysed categories of actors can play either detrimental or beneficial roles as a result of their actions or inactions, depending on the degree of cooperation and coordination between them. This makes vulnerability and resilience two sides of the same coin. Finally, we acknowledge that the term community leadership is a sensitive term as it can be ridden by gender power dynamics. This volume relies on a nuanced understanding of leadership that goes beyond local elites in power positions. Through this understanding, we can grasp the importance of "social role models", especially women, who are often restricted to informal leadership roles due to prevailing patriarchal structures that do not allow for the recognition and appreciation of the role of women.

An inter-regional enquiry

As a global phenomenon, violent extremism has been analysed as an object of study both through case-specific and comparative research. However, to date, there are very few studies looking more specifically at the Western Balkans and MENA region, both in the geographic vicinity of the EU. In 2015, the European Agenda for Security highlighted Turkey, MENA, and the Western Balkans as three priority countries/regions in the EU neighbourhood for P/CVE policies.[2] As a follow-up, the European Commission launched a call for research projects to explore drivers of violent extremism and resilience in the MENA and Western Balkans, from which the PAVE project is derived. Our field studies and data analysis have found some merit in such an inter-regional scope of inquiry.

Many countries across the Western Balkans and MENA share similar historical and socio-political features as post-war zones, upholding comparable processes of state formation/consolidation (appearing to be "stuck in transition"), combining elements of fragility and resilience, and where religion plays a role both in everyday life and in influencing ethnic or sectarian politics. Despite these similarities, the seven countries covered by this volume

exhibit a large variance in the types and factors of violent extremism and in the interplay between ideology, politics, religion, ethnicity, and identity. This diversity allows for a new, comprehensive, and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism. The book does not strictly follow a comparative design; its purpose is to shed light on similar types of actors and their roles in fuelling or preventing violent extremism across differentiated geographic, political, and cultural spaces. We also hope that it will elicit a cross-regional knowledge exchange and inspire further discussions among scholars from both regions.

In the Western Balkans, this volume covers four countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia. These were selected due to the relevance of (various forms of) violent extremism but also in view of their close interconnections, which makes it extremely difficult to study them separately. Since all four countries used to be part of the former Yugoslavia until just over two decades ago, any social developments, such as the dynamics of violent extremism in one country, cannot be understood in isolation from the neighbouring countries. This is of particular importance in relation to nationalist and ethnopolitical extremism. Across the region, political volatility and dysfunctional state infrastructures are common obstacles to developing effective P/CVE policies. In addition, the legacy of political and ethnic divisions makes the question of religious sentiment and extremism very political and potentially something to be exploited and misused rather than a source for unifying policymaking processes. Hence, in order to fully understand the enablers of violent extremism in the Western Balkans, complex regional dynamics need to be taken into account. This also speaks to the very nature of violent extremism as a global challenge that goes beyond geographical and identity borders.

In the MENA region, we selected three country cases based on their wide geographic spread but also their particular traits. On the one hand, Lebanon and Iraq are prominent examples of conflicts where religious and sectarian/ethnic divides intersect, where societies are ideologically polarised, and marred by the legacy of civil war or widespread violence. On the other hand, Tunisia is a country with a recent history of acute political and social upheavals. Since the 2011 revolution, multiple changes have taken place in Tunisian society, including in the roles of and relations between the state and religion.

Structure of the book

Following a theoretical chapter (Chapter 2) reviewing scientific developments and policy debates around key terms and concepts underpinning the book and situating our approach within these debates, the remainder of the book is structured around three empirical parts, which analyse the aforementioned categories of actors across the Western Balkans and MENA regions. Each chapter presents a country case study that investigates the relevance of

the given actor(s) for better understanding the patterns of vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism.

The first part (Chapters 3–5) investigates the role of state institutions in fostering conducive environments for violent extremism to take root or in supporting regulatory mechanisms to promote societal resilience. Findings from Lebanon and Iraq show how the legacies of war and resulting power-sharing arrangements freeze and institutionalise conflictual set-ups between social groups and government institutions that allow for violent extremism to emerge and persist. In addition, the case of Serbia shows how state entanglement with extremist groups and clientelist networks can contribute to both vulnerability and resilience.

The second part (Chapters 6–8) examines the intertwinement of politics and religion through the prism of local community leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The case study chapters analyse the implications of these complex relationships for the interactions between state and religious institutions and their ramifications for resilience or vulnerability to violent extremism at the community level.

The third part (Chapters 9–11) focuses on civil society organisations (including media outlets) in PVE and their roles in providing a space for constructive engagement between the state and individuals, social groups, and communities in Lebanon, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. The three case studies highlight multiple forms of horizontal and vertical interactions between government and civil society actors at the local and national levels.

Finally, the concluding chapter (Chapter 12) unpacks the major trends and patterns identified in both regions, both in terms of cross-regional similarities and differences identified throughout the empirical chapters and the avenues for policy engagement and further research.

Notes

1 The contributors to this volume recognise the numerous challenges behind the use of the term 'Middle East and North Africa (MENA)'. Most notably, it reflects the domination of Eurocentric forms of knowledge that omit the importance of cultural relativism. However, due to its adoption by the vast majority of scholars and journals in Europe and the wider MENA region and the need to deliver a coherent argument, we chose to use the term throughout the volume.
2 Available at www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/125863/EU%20agenda%20on%20security.pdf.

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2 Understanding radicalisation, extremism, and resilience

An integrative approach to existing knowledge

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The Jihadist terrorist attacks on European soil in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), or the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh (2004), pushed the European Union (EU) Council to adopt the EU strategy for combating radicalisation and terrorist recruitment on 30 November 2005. Fifteen years later, in November 2020, and following a series of attacks in France, Germany, and Austria, the interior ministers of the EU member states made a joint statement recognising that the prevention of radicalisation is of major concern, a common priority, and a matter of urgency, and reaffirming their unity and solidarity in the fight against all forms of "Radicalisation, Terrorism and Violent Extremism" (European Commission 2020). A month later, the new European Counter-Terrorism Agenda initially planned for 2021 was pushed forward.[1] Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), as part of the fight against terrorism, has been and continues to be a main priority for the EU and its member states.

Throughout these years, P/CVE has received significant public and private resources (Moreras 2018). However, many authors point out that these prevention efforts were ineffective and did not have the intended impact (Neumann 2013; Koehler 2017; Wensink et al. 2017; Ruiz Díaz 2017; Ruipérez 2019; Maniscalco and Rosato 2019; Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021; Marrero and Ruipérez 2022; Ruipérez 2023). Instead, the past decade has seen a continued rise in polarisation, hate speech, and right-wing violent extremism (Koehler 2016; Abbas 2017, 2020; Minkenberg 2017; Reed et al. 2017; McNeil-Willson et al. 2019; Borbáth and Gessler 2021; Farinelli 2021), growing support for extremist groups (Lobato 2019), continuing terrorist attacks at the global and European levels (Europol 2019), a wave of foreign terrorist fighters who travelled to Syria to join ISIS (Marrero 2015a, 2015b, 2020), and a growing number of arrests for terrorism-related crimes (Europol 2022).[2] Additionally, some of the effects of prevention measures have been criticised on various grounds, linked to the securitisation of social policies and even of educational spaces, the stigmatisation and discrimination of certain groups, the tendency towards individualisation and

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depoliticisation, or the limitation of criticism, proposals for transformation, and the capacity for dissent, among others.[3]

Research on violent extremism has also been given a strong push by donors and policymakers, aimed particularly at understanding individual pathways towards extremism, as this knowledge will be useful when designing prevention measures (Neumann 2013). However, there is little consensus yet about why and how individuals engage with extremist groups or even commit violent acts. At the same time, radicalisation has become a trendy concept with an abundance of articles, studies, and research dealing with radicalisation and violent extremism that a substantial review of this literature is an almost unmanageable task. According to Schmid (2020), in March 2019, there were more than 12,000 scholarly articles that could be downloaded from Academia.edu mentioning the term "preventing violent extremism". Harpviken (2020) came across 11,430 articles while trying to evaluate the vulnerability of youth to radicalisation and extremism, while Irina Jugl et al. (2021) screened over 14,000 studies for their meta-analysis on evaluating the outcomes of prevention programmes. Wolfowicz et al. (2021a) identified 22,000 potential articles while researching risk and protective factors for radicalisation. It is therefore worth asking what we really know about radicalisation and how we can use this knowledge to improve prevention efforts.

This chapter reviews the current state of knowledge about radicalisation and violent extremism in order to find potential lines of convergence to better focus prevention efforts. First, we briefly explore the conceptualisation of radicalisation and violent extremism and how some research has contributed to creating certain perceptions of radicalisation and its prevention. Second, the main questions guiding current research on radicalisation are presented, and the approach to the identification of risk factors at different analytical levels is presented. The third section reviews the integrative models that address the possible relationships and combinations between risk factors in an attempt to provide explanations for the processes of radicalisation to violent extremism. In the fourth section, we pay attention to the knowledge about P/CVE, especially through the lens of resilience, to finally draw conclusions on how all this knowledge can improve prevention.

Radicalisation and violent extremism as a societal problem

The term radicalisation became prominent in the context of the so-called War on Terror, motivated by the terrorist attacks that took place in Europe (Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Sedgwick 2010; Schmid 2013; Neumann 2013, 2017; Silke and Brown 2016; Abay Gaspar et al. 2020; Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2021).[4] Formerly, the term radicalisation was used to refer to what was considered radical or extreme in opposition to moderation, without being automatically assimilated to any kind of threat (Sedgwick 2010).[5] In fact, the term radicalisation was commonly associated with social movements linked to social progress, and hence had a positive connotation (Della Porta

and LaFree 2012; Reidy 2018; Schlegel 2020). However, despite keeping the essential meaning of radicalisation as the opposite of moderation, the process of reconceptualisation has situated it almost exclusively in the realm of security and intensified its use with specific connotations (Abbas 2012; Dzhekova et al. 2016; Moreras 2018; Abay Gaspar et al. 2020). Western societies began to see that terrorism was not a phenomenon originating in distant countries (Dzhekova et al. 2016), while the praxis and language of counter-terrorism guided this complete re-signification of the term (Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Hörnqvist and Flyghed 2012). Radicalisation, understood as "the phenomenon whereby individuals come to perpetrate acts of terrorism after engaging with different ideologies or beliefs in strands that use such actions", has become a core concept of counter-terrorism (Schmid 2013). As a result, radicalisation is a concept that appears closely linked to other social problems, including the increase of Islamophobia, far-right narratives, and polarisation (Bazian 2014; Ranstorp 2019; Fielitz et al. 2018; Moreras 2018; McNeil-Willson et al. 2019; Abbas 2019; 2020; Bazaga and Tamayo 2021).

On the one hand, terrorism is seen as the only possible outcome of the radicalisation process (Reidy 2018), to the point where the concepts of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism have become unambiguously and mutually linked (Borum 2011; Abay Gaspar et al. 2020). On the other hand, the discourse and practice of prevention focus almost exclusively on "Islamic extremism" (Veldhuis and Staun 2009). In this way, the process of reconceptualising and the rapid intensification of its use was linked directly, unequivocally, and practically to Jihadist extremism and terrorism, which in turn had a stigmatising effect on Muslim communities (Abbas 2007, 2012, 2020; Hussain and Bagguley 2012; Bazian 2014; Fielitz et al. 2018; Moreras 2017). In a similar way, the term violent extremism gained strength in substituting radicalisation (Neumann 2013). The concept of violent extremism was extended to broaden the discussion to include other political attitudes and beliefs (Neumann 2016), but also as a response to hyper-militaristic views of the War on Terror (Bak et al. 2019) and the securitisation of broad social sectors attributed to preventive practice (Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2021; Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021).

Despite their interchangeable use, radicalisation and violent extremism are distinct concepts (Mandel 2009; Neumann 2013; Lobato et al. 2018; Abay Gaspar et al. 2020; Schmid 2020; Beelmann 2020). The term radicalisation refers to a process that refers to the opposition to the basic values of society by which people can revert to extremism (Borum 2011; Neumann 2017: 17, Bazaga and Tamayo 2021: 53). However, both concepts are ambiguous and relative since they depend on what is considered normal or acceptable in the values of certain societies and within the social, cultural, and normative framework of each context (Neumann 2013, 2016; Schmid 2013; Kruglanski et al. 2014; Crone 2016; Walter 2017; Moyano et al. 2020). Thus, the lack of conceptual clarity in the use of the terms radicalisation and violent extremism impedes the application of preventive measures due to the prevalence of

a confusing and ambiguous vocabulary that mixes social and security aspects (Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021). Beyond these conceptual problems about finding a concrete definition, what seems important is that radicalisation refers to a process, while extremism evokes a limit that the process could reach (or not). Mandel (2009) reflected on this idea when he expressed that radicalisation is to extremism what speed is to position, a change in the degree of extremism by an individual or group (Mandel 2009: 111). This means that radicalisation is not a problem per se, and this makes the concept even more controversial.

These conceptual debates have had a decisive influence on the development of research and on how we understand and approach P/CVE (Beelmann 2020). Within the context of the War on Terror, research on radicalisation initially focused on the personal and individual processes that would lead someone to terrorism (Moreras 2018), based on the individual's rationality or irrationality (Victoroff 2005; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010). From a reductionist approach, initial efforts explored the personal profile and life trajectory of terrorists, trying to identify traits that differentiated them from the rest of the population (Emmelkamp et al. 2020). The possible pathologies and mental problems associated with radicalisation were also explored, as it was understood that it could be caused by a psychological disorder or possible mental imbalances (Moreras 2018: 59). Both terrorist-profiling studies and psychopathological approaches do not offer satisfactory explanations; rather, they shift attention towards individual aspects over societal or structural ones.

It soon became apparent that reductionist approaches failed to encompass the complexity of radicalisation, as there are multiple factors involved with many interrelationships and possible combinations considering different contexts, dimensions, and levels (Ranstorp 2016; Dzhekova et al. 2016). This will give way to approaches considering the importance of exploring relations and combinations of factors at different analytical levels. Among those, Schmid (2013) identified a series of causal factors at three levels that focus on social and relational aspects. This study will lay the foundations on which the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis are generally conceived in subsequent studies. The meso-level plays a mediating role between the various factors at the other two analytical levels (Schmid 2013).

At the same time, a series of simple descriptive models[6] were created to reflect this idea of the radicalisation process, frequently resorting to the use of metaphors to simplify the complexity of radicalisation (Bazaga and Tamayo 2021). The main problem with these models has to do with a biased methodology (Abbas 2012). They have also been widely criticised for their stigmatising effect, reinforcing the association between radicalisation, Islam, and terrorism (Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Dawson 2017; Beelmann 2020). All those controversial aspects have had an important impact on the way in which a particular perception of radicalisation and prevention has spread (Emmelkamp et al. 2020). It is therefore essential to be cautious in the design of studies and research to avoid unintended effects. In the next section, we

will explore the main research questions and how these guide the development of risk factors at different analytical levels.

The "why" and the risk factors

The questions that lead the development of research on radicalisation, which also helps us contextualise and understand its evolution, are "why" or "how" individuals become radicalised. In attempts to answer these two questions, it is the "why" that has given rise to causal approaches, first from a reductionist perspective that tries to investigate the features of perpetrator profiles and their life histories or explore their possible mental problems and mental illnesses, and then, trying to find the "root" causes that led them to terrorism (Ranstorp 2016). Later, such causal approaches adopted a more nuanced perspective, broadening the analytical levels to explore the set of factors involved and address their complex interactions (Dzhekova et al. 2016; Beelmann 2020). On its part, the question of "how" gave rise to situational approaches such as the pathways of radicalisation, which link the causes (the "why") with the possible consequences or outcomes of the radicalisation process (extremism, terrorism) through a relatively complex mechanism.

Both the "why" and "how" questions led to the development of those simple, linear sequential models mentioned earlier, and are then extended by more specific questions that complete the framework of situational approaches (Reidy 2018): "What enables the radicalisation process?",[7] a question that focuses on the role of ideologies and extremism within contextual conditions, and "Who participates in the radicalisation process?" explores the relational factors of radicalisation as a socialisation process in which friends, peers, family, communities, groups, or recruiters are involved. As a result, those models have greater depth and explanatory power. Based on the generated knowledge and the development of empirical studies, new questions continue to arise in attempts to answer even more specific issues from a discriminative approach. According to Wolfowicz et al. (2021a), current research is trying to answer two new questions besides the previous ones. The first one is: "why do some individuals radicalise while most of the people of the same groups or of similar conditions do not?" The second one is: "why do some radicalised individuals resort to violence, while the majority do not?" However, and from a preventive perspective, the question of "why individuals (or communities) do not radicalise" is yet unexplored and could better contribute to develop an effective prevention (Moreras 2018).

All attempts to answer these research questions have conditioned the way we understand radicalisation, and the way we approach it (Beelmann 2020). The many different contributions, including the criminological, psychological, psycho-social, or sociological approaches, have led to a vast nomenclature that includes personal factors, external factors and internal factors, supply and demand factors, drivers and catalysts, accelerating factors, push and pull factors, precipitating factors, or triggering events.[8] Currently,

analyses on radicalisation factors are no longer following a causal perspective but are subjected to a mixed approach that analyses the risk and protective factors (Lösel et al. 2018; Lobato and Garcia Coll 2022; Lobato et al. 2022a, 2022b). The aim is to identify the factors that imply potential vulnerability or have an impact on the risk of radicalisation. These risk factors are those structural, social, relational, as well as individual characteristics that are causally associated with radical and extreme attitudes and actions (Beelmann 2020). Knowledge about risk factors is based on longitudinal or cross-sectional empirical studies that explore the potential relationship and influence of different determinants on the radicalisation process. The recent increase in this type of study has given rise to systematic reviews that attempt to quantify and systematise the results of empirical research, and to produce meta-analyses that also attempt to quantify the effects of various factors resulting from multiple experimental studies.[9] Most risk factors can have universal effects (Wolfowicz et al. 2021a). Indeed, the existing empirical evidence shows that radicalisation is the result of natural psychological mechanisms (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018; Wolfowicz et al. 2021a), which points to the universal human features that direct the processes of stimulation and reaction to circumstances, events, and conditions. Therefore, we can assume that processes of radicalisation are the result of completely normal and universal actions and reactions to some situations in a given context and under certain social conditions. In that vein, the strong focus of research on individual factors has limitations, and more integrative approaches taking meso-level and social dynamics are key to understanding the process and how to prevent it.

The study of these factors has allowed us to know empirically that different traumatic experiences, problems of socialisation, discrimination, and problems of social capital can have a decisive influence (Naterstad 2020). There are some factors like the (real or perceived) distance or separation from other people, negative peer influence, discrimination, injustice, perceived illegitimacy of authorities, gender, or poverty that may be part of a process that is reinforced by identification with and perceived superiority of an extremist group (Emmelkamp et al. 2020). Also, unemployment and the pressures of masculinity and manhood make this process more likely (Wolfowicz et al. 2021a). Examining risk factors allows us to highlight a specific context, considering the relative and subjective factors of radicalisation that are based on the cultural values and societal conditions of each context.[10] For example, according to a meta-analysis comparing risk and protective factors resulting from studies in different regions, unemployment appears to have a higher effect as a risk in the European context than outside, whereas factors such as institutional trust, integration, or moral neutralisation are more important in other regions (Wolfowicz et al. 2021b).[11]

Empirical research shows that meso- and macro-level factors act as underlying drivers for violent extremism that intersect with the microlevel circumstances of the individual. According to Schmid (2013), the meso-level

encompasses a wider socio-relational environment that supports the radicalisation process and mediates between the micro and macro levels. The macro level includes factors such as the role of government, the radicalisation of public opinion, tensions between the majority and the minority, or the lack of socio-economic opportunities in certain sectors of society, which can lead to the radicalisation of the most disadvantaged (Schmid 2013: 221–224). In the non-EU context, especially dire socio-economic conditions, economic grievances and lack of employment opportunities, unequal distribution of wealth, legacies of violence and failed post-conflict reconciliation, politicisation of religious and ethnic identities, state inaction and neglect, and government repression form an enabling environment for violent extremism to grow (Koomen and Van Der Pligt 2016; Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2021; Svensson and Nilsson 2022). It is clear that many of the factors are situated at the interface between individual situations, social and societal conditions, and structural problems that are projected into everyday lives. Therefore, we should consider the social conditions in which radicalisation happens and how individual and societal dynamics interact. In addition, we need to consider that violent extremist groups also exploit social conditions and individual vulnerabilities to gain new members. The empirical knowledge on the recruitment and indoctrination processes (Taarnby 2005; Victoroff 2005; Trujillo 2019) has also identified certain factors on the psycho-social level that make a person particularly vulnerable (Trujillo et al. 2018; Trujillo and Moyano 2019; Trujillo 2019). A careful and empathetic reading of those factors reflects the shocking reality and the potential suffering of someone who, among others, may go through any of the following: their basic needs are not fully covered; suffering from high levels of relative deprivation; having experienced and continues to experience social exclusion; being oppressed and humiliated; having lost the personal meaning and significance of their existence; seeing themselves as alone; feeling unable to deal effectively with the demands of daily life, leaving them in a constant state of perceived stress; suffering from emotional discomfort, frequent states of sadness, fear, anger, hatred; their social relations take place in very limited environments or who have no real social support networks (Trujillo 2019). Thus, the evidence on factors seems to point to vulnerability as a result of navigating difficult social conditions and life situations that are hard to endure.

However, examining risk factors does not provide any explanation for why people are radicalised, how they do so, or how radicalisation leads to violence (Beelmann 2020). In order to focus on the factor studies towards an explanatory or descriptive framework that allows us to understand the radicalisation process, it is necessary to delve into the complex interactions between various factors, taking into account the variables, dimensions, domains, and levels of analysis in which these factors operate (Horgan 2008; Dzhekova et al. 2016). This is done through radicalisation models, and in the following section, we will examine some of the most relevant aspects of these models.

The "how": a complex and dynamic process

The development of models that attempt to explain and describe radicalisation is based on the analysis of the dynamic relationships between factors at different analytical levels. Some studies (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018; Beelmann 2020) point out that there are current models that have a direct and indirect theoretical and empirical background, although sometimes they may be partial. However, these models should not be understood as theoretical alternatives that are mutually exclusive but should be analysed from the perspective of complementarity, which is not frequent. In order to understand the radicalisation process, we need to analyse the contributions of the different models and go deeper into their integration so we can develop applicability-oriented knowledge (Beelmann 2020).[12]

From this integrative perspective, we can note that explanatory models of the process through which an individual can move towards violent extremism put their attention on aspects like the relationships between cognitive and behavioural aspects of radicalisation processes, what leads a person towards extremism, or the analysis of the process once there is a relation with an extremist group. In regards to the relationships between cognitive and behavioural aspects, we find the Two Pyramids model (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, 2017) that distinguishes two forms of extremism: one based on ideology through the hierarchy of narrative and another on violence through the hierarchy of action. The relationship between one pyramid and another is not direct or causal, but probabilistic, so that the extremes of one do not necessarily mean the extremes of the other. According to the model, the reaction to perceptions of injustice and grievances is more important, meaning that a threat produces cognitive openness, emotional responses, and motivations that tend to seek balance, certainty, or safety in uncertainty, which plays a fundamental role in the radicalisation of action (McCauley and Moskalenko 2014, 2017). An evolution of this model (Moyano et al. 2020) is seen in the ABC model[13] (Khalil et al. 2019), which addresses the difference and relationship between cognitive and behavioural aspects. The model also makes it possible to represent the radicalisation process through movements at two different levels or axes. The horizontal one represents the degree of sympathy for extremism, and its degree is a function of several enabling factors and structural drivers that cause greater sympathy for violent extremism. This type of structural factor varies depending on the context, namely aspects such as state repression, political exclusion, corruption, poverty, inequality, or discrimination. The vertical level represents the behaviour or degree of acceptance of violence, which is conditioned by individual enablers and incentives (Khalil et al. 2019). By examining the relationship between cognitive and behavioural dimensions in radicalisation processes, we discover some basic characteristics of these processes. According to some authors, radicalisation processes are characterised by having equifinality – meaning that the same outcome of violent extremism can be reached through different

combinations of factors, but also multifinality – meaning that a similar radicalisation process can also lead to different outcomes, such as benevolent radicalisation (Reidy 2018, 2019).[14] This is because, as noted earlier, the psychological mechanisms that produce the radicalisation process are normal and universal (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018). They are action-reaction mechanisms governing motivational processes and are inherent to humans. These types of mechanisms direct changes in attitudes and behaviours in the face of uncertainty, unstable equilibrium, discomfort, or suffering of people.

Some models develop the psychological and psycho-social aspects of radicalisation in greater depth and focus much of their explanatory power on the aspects that make it possible for a person to move forward in a radicalisation process towards violent extremist groups. The most influential and empirically supported model[15] is the 3N Model (Webber and Kruglanski 2017), which explains radicalisation through a combination of Needs, Narratives and Networks. For the 3N model, the process of radicalisation begins with a search for personal significance[16] that is activated until it becomes a strong motivation for the individual's actions. This quest for significance responds to a basic and empirically confirmed need of every human being. Personal significance includes the need to have meaning in life, to feel important for oneself and for others, to enjoy recognition, and to have positive self-esteem (Moyano and Trujillo 2018; Beelmann 2020).[17] The markers that assign meaning and its loss or gain are socially or culturally defined. They have structural roots related to achievement in those aspects that the culture considers important, worthy, valuable, worthwhile, and admirable. This process is further facilitated by the need for cognitive closure. This is also why the strict and absolute ideologies that extremist groups provide work in giving certainties and the means to obtain personal significance through a sense of belonging and integration and set answers and behaviours the group members must abide by (Kruglanski et al. 2014, 2021; Trujillo 2019). The ideological factor (narratives) will provide the justification for those behaviours. Group pressure and social influences (network) will provide social recognition and reward for the efforts that each member of the group makes (Lobato and García Coll 2022). Therefore, a combination of multi-level factors with strong social components results in the pathway to radicalisation. Again, social conditions become an important aspect of the three types of factors and the radicalisation process.

Other explanatory models elaborate on the interaction of the individual with the extremist group. Among them, we come across another model with sufficient theoretical and empirical support, as well as internal and external validity: the Devoted Actor Model (Atran et al. 2014). This model starts from the identity fusion theory, whereby both personal and social identities merge with such strength and in such a way that the in-group becomes an essential component of the personal self-concept (Gómez and Vázquez 2015; Swann and Buhrmester 2015; Gómez et al. 2016, 2017). Thus, the bonds with the members of the group become stronger, and this fusion is maintained over

time, provoking in the individual a strong tendency to develop behaviours in favour of the group with which they are fused. Added to this is the theory of sacred values, which establishes how certain ideas and values surpass the value of any material good until they become moral imperatives. These are so strong that they must be respected, fulfilled, and protected above everything and everyone (Tetlock 2003; Lobato 2019). Taken together, both theories describe a mechanism by which individuals come to merge their identity with that of the group, so that the values of the group can become sacred and cause someone to fight and die for the group. This is especially true when its members, ideas, and values are perceived to be threatened (Sheikh et al. 2013, 2016). Thus, converted into devoted actors, they put the group and its values above any other good or belief regardless of the personal cost that their defence may entail, and may even go as far as self-sacrifice (Moyano et al. 2020). Finally, the psycho-social model of recruitment and violent mobilisation (Trujillo 2019; Trujillo and Moyano 2019) focuses on the processes of drawing in and recruiting young people. The radicalisation process develops along several stages of subjugation and manipulation of the vulnerable person, which constitute three fundamental phases of the model. These are the phase of psychological subjugation, the phase of ideological indoctrination, and the phase of disinhibition and violent legitimisation (Trujillo and Moyano 2018, 2019; Trujillo 2019). But ultimately, the (extremist, violent) group would welcome discomfort and suffering as mentioned earlier. Providing belonging, purpose in life, meaning, identity, certainty, security, or defence, means providing solutions to needs and may establish a strong bond. This bond that could be called "therapeutic link" facilitates that the social identity of the group would be the reflection of the identity system of the person. In this way, the values of the group can become sacred values, and they can reach a phase of violent disinhibition to defend the group, its members, its identity, and its values.

Resilience as a form of prevention

One of the main difficulties in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism is, precisely, the predictive nature on which it is based. To a large extent, it consists of an exercise in predicting an inexistent future: conducting actions in the present based on a risk that may be real or perceived, and thus trying to avoid it (Peeters 2013: 27, Schmid 2020). This predictive character produces problems, for instance, with the nature of the risk and the possible imprecision of the assessment of that risk, and this may have undesired effects on individuals and communities (Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021). But it also renders the measurement and evaluation of the impact of preventive activities that involve measuring the absence of an event difficult (Koehler 2017). Moreover, P/CVE is not developed through a specific, evidence-based theory or model of prevention (Moyano et al. 2020), but it follows public health models such as Caplan (1964). These models, in an unspecified way, categorise different levels of intervention (primary,

secondary, and tertiary) depending on the risk or evolution (European Commission 2017; De Meere and Lensink 2017; Koehler 2017; Moyano et al. 2020; Schmid 2020; Lobato and García Coll 2022).[18] Different authors consider that the priority should be primary prevention, meaning preventing individuals in the community from becoming sympathetic to violent extremism and acting before they become immersed in radicalisation processes.

From a preventive orientation, the study of protective factors is aimed at identifying and knowing how certain aspects may function as a barrier or protective shield against radicalisation (Lösel et al. 2018, 2020; Sieckelinck and Gielden 2018; Wolfowicz et al. 2021a). The underlying logic is that if risk factors imply a greater vulnerability to a possible radicalisation process, protective factors are those that contribute to mitigating that risk precisely because they protect against it (Beelmann 2020). Promotional resources are those assets or resources that favour a protective effect against risks. These would be resources capable of mediating the interrelationships between the effects of risk factors and protective factors, enhancing the activity of protective factors on risk factors (Sieckelinck and Gielden 2018). The study of protective factors and promoting resources falls within the field of resilience, a concept that has gone hand in hand with other areas of application (Ungar 2011, 2013; Jugl et al. 2021). And perhaps because of this, a good number of authors place resilience building as the strongest, most supported, and the only element currently able to bring together approaches to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism (Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack 2016; Ellis and Abdi 2017; Grossman et al. 2017; 2020; Lösel et al. 2018, 2020; Sieckelinck and Gielden 2018; Stephens and Sieckelinck 2019, 2020, 2021; McNeil-Willson et al. 2019; Stephens et al. 2019; Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2021; Jugl et al. 2021). Resilience is a concept that stems from physics, specifically the properties of materials, in which it refers to their ability to return to their original state after being subjected to a load.[19] The use of the concept has spread to psychology and the field of radicalisation and violent extremism. A resilient individual or resilient society is regarded as being able to emerge from stress in a manner that is desirable (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020: 144). It means considering individual and social skills, capabilities, and resources for positive and healthy functioning in the face of some form of stress or adversity (van Breda 2018).

However, the concept of resilience is also subject to certain tensions regarding its use. For some authors, the resilience discourse blames the individual for his or her own lack of resilience (Christodoulou 2020), while others criticise that it assigns to the community the responsibility of coping with a difficult environment (Ungar 2011, 2012). From the point of view of cultural studies, resilience would respond to a Westernised, colonial approach to radicalisation prevention that states what constitutes a healthy response. Anything that departs from that as non-resilient limits the possible outcomes of coping with the stress of adversity (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2021). According to these perspectives, resilience would merely seek individualisation, depoliticisation, and adaptability of young people to the system (Boukalas 2019; Abbas

2019; Boukalas 2019; Christodoulou 2020; Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021). This can strongly limit proposals for social transformation and any questioning of the status quo (Abbas 2019; Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021). In this way, resilience would respond to a project that normativises, homogenises, and corrects non-liberal subjectivities, turning them into liberal ones (Abbas 2019; Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín 2021).

Resilience also has a number of problems. First, the idea of resilience as the ability to cope with adversity while maintaining the same situation as before, referred to as the rebound effect (Davidson et al. 2016; Stephens and Sieckelinck 2021), leads to a dilemma when the status quo ante is part of the problem. Second, it needs to be borne in mind that resilience may apply to any type of system and its capacity to cope with various adversities within its relative and subjective character (van Breda 2018). Then, a person, a community, or a system all be resilient, and this also includes a corrupt political system, a terrorist group, or a dictatorship, among others. The problem appears with the potential incompatibility between the resilience of different systems when the resilience of one is at the expense of the resilience of another. This is interconnected with a third problem: resilience (either as a process or as an outcome) can be applied from different approaches or perspectives and may have different results. According to an empirical study using q-test methodology with practitioners and policymakers in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, conducted by Stephens and Sieckelinck (2021), it was observed that there are at least four possible perspectives or approaches to resilience in the field of P/CVE. These result from locating the approach in two main dimensions that, in turn, allow the establishment of a visualisation system. The first dimension, on the horizontal axis, assesses whether resilience approaches focus on the traits and characteristics of individuals (on the left, individual approach) or on the conditions of the environment and social setting (on the right, social approach). The second dimension, on the vertical axis, assesses whether the resilience approach is understood with the idea of maintaining the existing status quo (lower part, maintaining the status quo) or whether resilience implies a critique and transformation of the system (upper part, critique and transformation approach). Depending on the perspective or approach we adopt in strengthening resilience, we could obtain different results in prevention interventions. It is therefore useful to try to identify the approaches that would be most appropriate in each of the dimensions.

We should bear in mind that individual resilience involves personal development, which occurs primarily at the psychological and psycho-social level and should provide protection (or resistance) against radicalisation and violent extremism (Lösel and Bender 2003; McNeil-Willson et al. 2019; Lösel et al. 2020; Stephens and Sieckelinck 2021). Individual resilience would involve developing the capacities, skills, or characteristics in individuals that enable them to be psychologically robust, strong, sufficiently critical, flexible, and self-efficacious. On the meso-level, resilience underscores the structural and agency-based capacity of a community to protect itself from

radicalisation by reacting to the threat of violent extremism (Carpenter 2006; Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2021). Strengthening community resilience involves a form of coping with radicalisation, a form that may even involve open defiance to those espousing violent extremist ideologies (Ellis and Abdi 2017; Grossman et al. 2020). Importantly, individual and community resilience can be described as mutually reinforcing because individual resilience can be socialised, and a resilient society facilitates the resilience of its members (Ungar 2011). Therefore, individuals play a key role in community resilience, while communities can play a key role in protecting young people from radical influences (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2019). It implies looking at all the different levels and their connections together for creating positive ways of functioning, enabling individuals, communities, and society to cope with the stress of adverse circumstances (Rutter 2012; Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2021). Some forms of social capital, social cultural identity, social connections, and belonging constitute central factors for community resilience, namely, social bonding (social connection within communities), social bridging (social connections between communities), and social linking (social connection between communities and institutions or governing bodies) (Ellis and Abdi 2017; Grossman et al. 2017, 2020).

A resilient community makes sense in the knowledge that exists on radicalisation and violent extremism. On the one hand, such a community would have a certain psychological robustness (Trujillo 2019), but above all, it would provide an environment and strong support networks capable of recognising and remedying discomfort and of offering help to prevent it from escalating and being embraced by a (violent) extremist group. In the face of developing distress, a resilient community would help to address it and would allow for the creation of alternative therapeutic links with pro-social groups. These groups would help to build community barriers against violent extremism. Taking identity theories as a reference, both individual and social resilience would foster healthy, balanced, and prosocial identities and harmony (Richards 2017). And such a community, able to cope with violent extremism and protect its members, will also cope with unrest. This brings us to the second dimension, to maintain the status quo or placate a critique oriented towards the transformation of the system. A resilient community will seek wellbeing and be critical of systems, policies, and structures that foster discomfort or do not act appropriately to solve it. In short, in the context of violent extremism and radicalisation and from a preventive orientation, community resilience would not only be the most appropriate but also inherently entail a social capacity for criticism and transformation to improve the system and its structures.

Conclusion

The study of radicalisation and violent extremism has not been void of controversy and criticism due to several reasons connected to a bias in methodology or the fostering of certain political agendas. Consequently, scientific

rigour and ethical precepts become crucial when conducting research related to these phenomena. As we have seen in the review of the recent history of research on the matter, the point of view we choose, the context we study, the sample of respondents, and the approach we take to deal with them and involve them in our study cannot but be the result of a very fine scrutiny of the current state of the art and also the possible consequences of our study.

With a number of conceptual problems and the different consequences of preventive actions and discourses, P/CVE needs to really look with attention to existing knowledge. As criticised as it has been, the research on radicalisation shows that radicalisation as a process is not something that springs from inside individuals, but there is also a socio-genesis in this process and individual motivations and reactions need to be framed within meso-level and social dynamics. Certain social and structural conditions are sources of dissatisfaction and generate complicated and damaged lives, which are at the root of radicalisation processes. This produces psycho-social dynamics that include discomforts and social suffering stemming from socioeconomic conditions, uncovered needs, political disenfranchisement, lack of meaning, existential uncertainty, or absence of purpose and sense in life. Considering radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism as major concerns and urgent priorities for governments, addressing the structural problems and societal conditions that foster those discomforts and suffering is then an urgency. And this is a matter related to social approaches to primary prevention that cannot be solved by securitised designs. If we do not offer alternative societal conditions and a liveable world for vulnerable people, there are other people and groups that will offer them an alternative to extremism. This requires prioritising social policies as a primary prevention tool and recognising that a resilient community may be incompatible with the resilience of certain systems as they are now, and therefore a transformative perspective is needed.

This book provides the results of research conducted in communities with respondents who have both suffered from and taken part in violent extremism. It therefore offers an uncommon opportunity to hear the complexities of a phenomenon from actors and bystanders. It also challenges some commonly assumed ideas about the phenomenon, like the validity of the risk-resilience approach, the focus on security or lack of it, or even the mere decision to conduct research on the roots of a problem mostly concerning European realities outside of the European realm. Furthermore, it explores the issue of violent extremism not only as a problem related to security, politics, or religion but also as an impact of these factors on the well-being of individuals and communities. Lastly, this book seeks to empirically reframe violent extremism not only as a source of human tragedy but also as a consequence of it.

Notes

1 This was initially planned for spring 2021 as part of the Union's Security Strategy.
2 See Europol Terrorism Situation and Trends TE-SAT; documents Available at www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report.

3 See, for example: Institute of Race Relations (2010), Pantucci (2010), Kundnani (2012), Neumann (2013), Richards (2015), Mythen et al. (2017, 2019), Richards (2017), Ruiz Díaz (2017), Wensink et al. (2017), Abbas (2019), Boukalas (2019), Maniscalco and Rosato (2019), Marrero (2020), Bazaga and Tamayo (2021), Benjamin et al. (2021a, 2021b), Martini and Fernandez de Mosteyrín (2021), Fernández Abad (2021, 2022).

4 According to Schmid (2020), earlier confidential reports from the Dutch intelligence services to the European Union were the first to include the meaning of radicalisation as a precursor to terrorism.

5 Its first uses with connotations similar to today's date back to the 1970s, as one more of the possible meanings of the term radicalisation that did not take precedence over the others and was associated with "the interactive (social movements/state) and procedural (gradual escalation) dynamics in the formation of violent, often clandestine groups" (Della Porta and LaFree 2012: 6).

6 Some of these theories and models are by: Sageman (2004), Wiktorowicz (2004), Moghaddam (2005), Taarnby (2005), Silber and Bhatt (2007), McCauley and Moskalenko (2008), and Feddes et al. (2015).

7 Research within this approach focuses largely on ideology and the conditions that enable ideological assimilation or extreme ideation in the form of environmental stimuli and conditions (Alimi et al. 2015: 7) and occurs largely under the assumption that ideology is a contributing or necessary factor.

8 A description of many of these terms can be found in Dzhekova et al. (2016) and Reidy (2018).

9 As an example, the meta-analysis of risk and protective factors by Wolfowicz and colleagues (2021a) is based on empirical studies in 20 OECD countries and draws on 127 studies with 206 samples that provided 1,302 effect sizes corresponding to more than 100 risk factors. The results include factors that are systematised into three categories according to whether their effect contributes to the risk or protection of radicalisation in attitudes, intentions, or behaviours.

10 A complete overview of some PAVE project publications (Available at www.pave-project.eu/publications) shows how general frames need to be examined in relation to the specific contexts. See for example the specificities of the context in the interplay between states and religious institutions in different MENA contexts in Al-Baalbaky et al. (2022), but also of those with the Western Balkans in Halilovic et al. (2022). This is illustrated in Halilovic et al. (2023).

11 This may also be due to a lack of empirical studies in those other regions in comparison with studies in the EU (Wolfowicz et al. 2021b).

12 Today we know that none of these perspectives were adequate, and not only because the complexity of human beings transcends the rational and irrational of their decisions and actions, but also because, according to current evidence, radicalisation is based on motivational processes rather than instrumental calculations (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018). However, the perspectives of absolute irrationality and rationality have left important insights that in turn built on earlier ones. Although psychopathological approaches were erratic and we now know that radicalisation is based on common psychological mechanisms (Gøtzsche-Astrup 2018), a person's low psychological robustness and a situation of strong psychological distress are important risk factors for recruitment (Trujillo 2019), so good mental health can be a key element of prevention.

13 The ABC model also pays attention to what makes it possible for a person to move forward in a radicalisation process towards violent extremist groups (see Khalil et al. 2019).

14 In that sense, there is preliminary empirical evidence of the processes of "benevolent radicalisation" that being similar to any radicalisation process, have a distinctly opposite outcome, and occur around values for example of a humanitarian nature (Reidy 2018).

15 According to the study of Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018) on the empirical support for some of the radicalisation models.
16 The theory can be consulted in depth in the works of Kruglanski et al. (2009, 2014).
17 The quest can be triggered by a loss of meaning through a feeling of alienation, humiliation, personal failure, events such as humiliation, job loss, or the impossibility of achieving personal achievements and aspirations (Lobato 2019). But it may also be due to a perceived threat to meaning, such as feeling rejected or pushed aside, or by the appearance of an opportunity to gain greater meaning, to gain importance to others (Kruglanski et al. 2009, 2013, 2014, 2018).
18 Although this is the most widespread nomenclature at the European level, there are other names such as universal, selective, and indicated prevention, or early, anticipatory, and direct prevention (Schmid 2020: 20–21). In any case, they all refer to the same three phases.
19 This property of returning to the state of origin is called the rebound effect.

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Part I

State actors

Introduction

The first part of the book focuses on the state and its relationship to violent extremism in the Western Balkans and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). As highlighted in Chapter 2, the existing knowledge related to radicalisation and violent extremism is vast, in constant expansion, and not short of controversies and ambiguities. Several approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have been developed in the past two decades that are inherently multidisciplinary and that involve complementary efforts of a large network of actors at the local, regional, national, and global levels. While all these approaches recommend engagement and do indeed engage with civil society organisations and other non-state actors, the impetus to implement the efforts most often falls under the remit of the nation-state. In this book, we understand the state to be a distinct set of institutions that have the authority to make rules that govern society. These institutions are largely comprised of the government, the administration (civil service), the judiciary, and parliamentary assemblies. State power lies within these institutions (Miliband 1969).

In the European context, state agencies have been the main actors in the fight against radicalisation and violent extremism. Here, we argue that this approach is problematic with regards to both regions under study. Indeed, the dysfunctionality of state systems across the Western Balkans and MENA needs to be taken into account when theories related to violent extremism, including both vulnerability and resilience, are being developed and P/CVE measures are being created.

In relation to the Western Balkans, we argue that states are paradoxically both "fragile" and "strong", often at the same time. We follow Mujkic (2007) and Howard (2012) in theorising the Western Balkans as ethnocracies, understood as parliamentary systems with proportional or semi-proportional representation according to ethnic classifications, where contrasting political platforms are of secondary importance to ethnic group membership, and where ethnic bases for political parties are often mandated by law. The biggest problem with such systems is that they lead the whole country into

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an ethnocracy trap where it is impossible to operate outside ethnopolitics (Howard 2012). Ethnocracy traps all the institutions within the system into functioning in its favour and for its reproduction. We argue that ethnopolitics, which persist to this day in Western Balkan states, create fertile ground for radicalisation and extremism. Relying predominantly on such states to implement P/CVE measures against ethnopolitical extremism that the states themselves institutionally and often constitutionally create is both ineffective and lacks in-depth understanding of these contexts. For example, in the case study of Serbia (Chapter 3), Goran Tepšić and Nemanja Džuverović argue that clientelist relations between the state and non-state actors represent a crucial factor in the radicalisation of society in this post-war state. This new dynamic needs to be taken into account when trying to understand extremism in the Western Balkans.

In relation to the MENA region, and notably through the case studies of Iraq and Lebanon, we argue the following: While Iraq has been one of the main "zones of concern" and targets of P/CVE measures since 2001, the country has also been considered an example of a failed state and a system crippled by sectarian politics, corruption, and extreme violence (Haken et al. 2022). The same depiction has been made of Lebanon, especially since the October 2019 protests and the August 2020 blast, which fuelled popular anger about the government's failure to remedy the country's political dysfunctions, economic turmoil, and increasing poverty (Robinson 2020; Betz 2021). Qualificatives such as "failed", "fragile", and "collapsed" have been used repeatedly by academics and practitioners to describe the disintegration of political institutions, the economic and social burden caused by the influx of thousands of Syrian refugees on national economies, and the military's incapacity to protect people against threats, especially against the spectre of violent extremism that has relentlessly shook the area since 2005 (Tripp 2007; Parker 2012; Ismael and Ismael 2015; O'Driscoll 2017; Cordesman 2018, 2019). Violent extremism as the leading cause, and also the consequence, of perceived state collapse in Iraq has been attributed to the marginalisation of the Arab Sunni community in the post-2003 political settlement, followed by the indirect penetration of the Iraqi political system by religion, mainly in the form of sectarian politics (Alaaldin 2015; Weiss and Hassan 2015). While incredibly complex, the Iraqi and Lebanese contexts came to be largely interpreted as textbook examples of violent extremism in the form of religious extremism (Helfont 2018). The forthcoming chapters reinject some complexity into the "fragile states" debates to argue that state structures in Iraq and Lebanon may be more resilient than they seem, and that this resilience directly hinders the capacity of communities to prevent the threat of violent extremism. Indeed, the sustainability of the power-sharing system in Iraq and Lebanon is self-evident from this premise, and there seems to be an inverse relationship between the resilience of the state and the resilience of society. Yet again, relying on such states to deliver comprehensive P/CVE

measures misunderstands the complexity of the political systems that operate in these contexts.

Looking at the case of Iraq (Chapter 4), Amjed Rasheed and Juline Beaujouan argue that the state can be a driver of violent extremism, either by failing to provide for citizens or when its efforts towards resilience indirectly hinder the capacity of communities to mitigate the threat of violent extremism. They conclude that P/CVE measures should create synergies between different forms of resilience and look at a given country/area as an ecosystem where all stakeholders are interdependent rather than offering P/CVE measures that serve a specific group at the expense of others. Looking at the case of Lebanon (Chapter 5), Rudayna Al-Baalbaky argues that "hybrid sovereignty" and "plural governance" currently operate in Lebanon, where the state is partaking in a "security assemblage", in combination with non-state actors like Hezbollah. Within this infrastructure, the religious state authority Dar el-Fatwa is constrained both structurally and functionally from delivering effective P/CVE actions.

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3 State, clientelism, and extremist groups in Serbia

Between vulnerability and resilience

Goran Tepšić and Nemanja Džuverović

Serbia was not officially involved in two major armed conflicts of the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) – in Croatia (1991–1995) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995). Nonetheless, this republic (as part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) played an important role in these wars, primarily through its support for and partial control of two Serb statelets – Republika Srpska Krajina (RSK) and Republika Srpska (RS) – but also through the deployment of various paramilitary formations (Vukušić 2023; Ferguson 2020). This was followed by the NATO intervention in 1999, thus moving violence from its borders to Serbia itself. After the cessation of all these hostilities, Serbia demonstrated some of the essential qualities of a post-war state, such as the collapse of institutions, the radicalisation of public discourse ('culture of extremism'), and the challenges of reintegration of ex-combatants and war-affected communities (Themnér and Utas 2016). The (post-)war years led to the blooming of clientelist networks comprising political parties, paramilitary formations, radical and extremist groups, and the criminal underground, which continue to dominate Serbian society until today.

Therefore, this chapter tries to explain a correlation between the clientelist network development and the radicalisation of Serbian society. Specifically, it tries to answer the question of whether clientelism serves solely as a factor of community vulnerability to radicalisation and extremism or as a resilience factor as well. It also examines the question of how radical and extremist groups that developed over the past three decades have once again become the political mainstream in Serbia.

In an attempt to answer these questions, the chapter argues that relevant contemporary literature on clientelism and radicalisation (extremism) failed to explain their correlation mainly because it largely ignored the Serbian post-war context and the role of non-state actors and war-affected groups in this informal network building. Therefore, we suggest bridging this gap by introducing the literature on clientelism and informality in other post-war settings, particularly the studies of warring parties' conciliation and reintegration into society and the concept of "governance through brokerage" (Themnér and Utas 2016).

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Besides building upon relevant contemporary literature on clientelism and informality (Themnér and Utas 2016; Podder 2014; Hicken 2011), radicalisation and extremism (Perry 2019; Halilović Pastuović et al. 2022; Tepšić 2023), and resilience (Chandler 2012; Menkhaus 2013), this chapter relies on the fieldwork conducted in Belgrade and Novi Pazar during 2021. The field research included 34 interviews with relevant political and religious leaders, state and local government officials, representatives of civil society organisations, and journalists, focusing primarily on far-right and Islamist extremism.[1]

This chapter consists of four main sections. It starts with a review of the most important debates on clientelism and informality, followed by a section on the development of the patron-client relationship between the state and Serbian radical and far-right organisations, from the 1990s to the 2020s. The third section analyses relations between the central Serbian government, local Sandžak authorities, and Islamist groups, as well as the integration of these groups into the clientelist networks and parastatal hierarchy. The last section discusses the role of clientelism in fostering and suppressing radicalisation and extremism in the country, revealing it as both a vulnerability and resilience factor.

Theoretical framework: clientelism and informality

Contemporary literature recognises three waves of debates on clientelism (Roniger 2004). The first wave, inspired by decolonisation, started in the late 1960s and early 1970s and included efforts to conceptualise the phenomenon of clientelism through ground-breaking analyses of diverse case studies (Lemarchand 1977; Graziano 1976; Scott 1976). These scholars largely misconceived clientelism as "an archaic phenomenon of traditional and agrarian societies" (Roniger 2004: 355). The second wave was mainly a consequence of raising awareness among researchers of the importance of communist policies during the 1980s and 1990s (Rigby 1990; Willerton 1992). It provided a more comprehensive understanding of clientelism and moved the topic from the periphery closer to the liberal centre (Chubb 1982). The last wave, starting in the 1990s and early 2000s (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2011; Klima 2020), led to many intensive discussions and reconceptualisation of clientelism as "an enduring feature of politics" in general (Roniger 2004: 357), and "highly adaptable to different . . . environments" (Hicken 2011: 290).

A plethora of different approaches and conceptualisations led the whole field into terminological confusion, which is why scholars still agree that clientelism lacks clarity and consensus on its definition (Hicken 2011; Stokes 2011). Nevertheless, Hicken (2011: 290) argues that it is possible to discern the critical elements of clientelist relations: "dyadic relationships, contingency, hierarchy, and iteration". This list implies that clientelism is based on reciprocal patron-client relations (*quid pro quo*), asymmetrical in social status and political power, and ongoing nature, that is, recursive.

What Hicken's characterisation of clientelism overlooks is the factor of informality, which represents the essence of clientelist relations, no matter how we define them – in terms of democratisation (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Hicken 2011), electoral politics (Stokes 2011; Klima 2020), economic activities (Hicken 2011), or corruption (Kotkin and Sajo 2002; Stefes 2006). Although clientelism often includes representatives of formal institutions, their relations with clients are always informal, seeking to circumvent or substitute for formal institutional mechanisms.

From the perspective of Western functionalist epistemology, informality appears to pose a grave danger to social cohesion and norms. It implies social disorder and anomy, and is often seen as "the worst enemy of the society" (Giordano 2013: 27). In contrast, informality in the Western Balkan is primarily manifested as the main "coping strategy" across various social domains (Džuverović and Tepšić 2020). The spread of informal networks correlates with an inability of post-communist and post-war states to perform their prescribed functions. Although it may seem "primitive, archaic, premodern, if not uncivilised, unacceptable, corrupt, amoral and possibly repugnant" to an external observer, informality should be seen as "neither good nor bad, neither positive nor negative and neither functional nor dysfunctional, but simply sensible in a given sociocultural context" (Giordano and Hayoz 2013: 13–14). After all, every type of governance includes both formality and informality – they coexist in mutual dependence. Besides, in situations of "failing statehoods", informal networks can be very functional and keep the social organisation together (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). In the context of radicalisation and extremism, informality can serve as both community vulnerability and resilience factors. Whether it will be interpreted positively or negatively depends on time, space, and actors, namely, the social context.

The contemporary literature on clientelism and informality in the Western Balkans completely omits the issues of radicalisation and extremism, focusing primarily on relations between clientelism and phenomena such as state capture (Bartlett 2009; Piacentini 2020; Beqiri 2020), political system (Hogić 2020; Cvetanovska 2020), EU integration process (Radeljić and Đorđević 2020; Richter and Wunsch 2020), media (Camaj 2016), and private security sector (Pešić and Milošević 2020); or between informality and international peacebuilding/statebuilding (Kostić 2017; Distler 2018), economic practices (Danielsson 2015, 2016; Pugh 2002, 2004; Divjak and Pugh 2008), and academia (Džuverović and Tepšić 2020).

Another critical gap in this literature is that it does not examine Serbia as a post-war country, situating it almost exclusively in the context of post-communist democratisation and EU integration. Although it is not considered a typical case of a post-war state, Serbia shares some of its critical qualities, such as "weak state structures, societal polarisation and lack of capital that can be used for reconstruction" (Themnér and Utas 2016: 255). Therefore, literature on clientelism and informal relations in other post-war settings seems particularly relevant for the case of Serbia, especially regarding the

integration of formerly warring parties (including paramilitaries and similar groups) into parastatal networks. Among various concepts – for example, big man politics (Utas 2012), rentier states (Kahler 2009), neo-patrimonial regimes (Zürcher et al. 2013), or shadow states (Hameiri 2011) – the mechanism of "governance through brokerage" (Themnér and Utas 2016) seems the most appropriate to bridge this gap in the literature on informal networks in Serbia and the Western Balkans.

This mechanism involves outsourcing central state functions to influential individuals, making them intermediaries between the government and war-affected communities (ethnic or religious minorities) and groups (ex-combatants, refugees, youth). Lack of state control over these non-state actors can lead to rebellion and other violent acts, which is why broker facilitation is necessary. Brokers serve as "social membranes" who – "thanks to the social capital that they possess and their ability to provide valuable services – can connect individuals and groups that share scant socio-economic space, ease mutual suspicions, as well as facilitate vertical transactions of resources and information" (Themnér and Utas 2016: 256–257). Brokerage is both a tool for integrating disloyal groups and a mechanism for empowering war-affected communities. However, brokers can also be spoilers, negatively influencing peace, democracy, and good governance norms. They can be utilised for war-making as much as state-making (Podder 2014: 1621).

Themnér and Utas (2016: 265) argue that elites in post-war societies have incentives to outsource governance functions to brokers in two situations: when they need to reintegrate non-state actors with much violent agency (ex-combatants/paramilitaries, refugees, youth) or when they lack presence or fail to provide basic services on some part of the territory (security, economic opportunities, participation in a political process). The former corresponds to the case of radical and far-right groups in Serbia, while the latter corresponds to the issue of Islamist radicalisation and extremism in the Sandžak region. We argue in this chapter that in both cases, Serbian elites employed the "governance through brokerage" strategy in an attempt to provide economic opportunities to members of these groups and to ensure the monopoly of violence (by preventing them from engaging in violence on their own or employing them as informal security providers).

State, informal networks, radical, and far-right groups

Radical and extremist groups have been present in Serbia since the late 1980s and the start of the democratisation and liberalisation of former Yugoslavia's political and economic system. The wars that followed during the 1990s shaped the Serbian radical/far right since they had put (extreme) nationalism high on the political agenda, making it socially acceptable. Another factor that brought about the normalisation of such ideology was Serbia's international position during the 1990s. Sanctions and isolation of the state, culminating in 1999 with the NATO bombing and subsequent secession

of Kosovo, increased xenophobia and reproduced strong anti-Western and anti-globalist sentiments among the population in Serbia. Consequently, the Serbian public considered Western policy unprincipled and unjust, which, combined with the country's economic failures, fostered national frustration (self-victimisation) and strengthened extreme nationalism. Furthermore, the radical and far-right scene had survived the end of the wars and the overthrow of Milošević's regime and further evolved during the 2000s to become part of the political mainstream again in the 2010s and 2020s (Tepšić 2023). For analytical purposes, the development of the radical and far-right sectors in Serbia can be divided into three phases: (I) the emergence phase, (II) the transformation phase, and (III) the mainstreaming phase.

The first half of the 1990s can be seen as the phase of the emergence of the radical and far-right movement in Serbia, its incorporation into the clientelist parastatal system, and its utilisation for paramilitary and criminal activities. It all started with the wars in Croatia (1991–1995) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995) when the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) and State Security Service (DB) organised paramilitary groups, which were used for various purposes, including ethnic cleansing of non-Serb populations, assassinations of opponents of the regime, resource extraction, drug and weapons trafficking, looting, and other criminal activities. Initially, the Serbian state organised paramilitary groups (as state proxies) to create plausible deniability while (indirectly) intervening in the conflicts on the territories of Croatia and Bosnia (recognised as independent states in 1992) and supporting the war efforts of RSK and RS (Vukušić 2023: 2–15, Ferguson 2020: 48).

Since the state wanted to avoid the responsibility for paramilitary violence and profit-driven criminality, it used three types of brokers to outsource these activities: (I) DB's assets, often from a criminal underground, such as Željko Ražnatović (Arkan) (leader of the Serbian Volunteer Guard (Tigers) and Red Star football fan group) and Dragan Vasiljković (founder of Knindže (Red Berets)); (II) ideologues of extreme Serbian nationalism and Greater Serbia project, for example, Vojislav Šešelj (leader of Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Serbian Chetnik Movement), Vuk Drašković (Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO)/Serbian Guard) or Dragoslav Bokan (Serbian National Renewal (SNO)/White Eagles); and (III) local Serb leaders from Bosnia and Croatia (Ferguson 2020: 44; Vivod 2015). Most of them were subordinated to the officials of DB and MUP (as their patrons), such as Jovica Stanišić, Franko Simatović and Radovan Stojičić, or military structures (Vukušić 2023; Ferguson 2020; Nikolić 2020: 446–469).

The 1990s wars resulted in state failure and opened a space for a parastatal (clientelist) system that replaced formal institutions and provided most of the Serbian population with basic social services. This clientelist system and its informal networks included paramilitary groups, organised crime, political parties, tycoons, football fan groups, and other actors that profited from such a system. It was a symbiosis of state and non-state actors that is often portrayed as a "criminalisation of the state institutions"

(Vivod 2015: 153; Vukušić 2023: 2) or "criminal state". The end of the wars in Bosnia and Croatia did not end this symbiosis. It simply transformed it (Vukušić 2023: 105).

The transformation phase started with the legalisation of former paramilitary groups, most of which were covered by the umbrella term "Red Berets" – as the Special Operations Unit (JSO), a formal part of DB and MUP (Ferguson 2020: 50; Vivod 2015: xix). This unit was employed to carry out assassinations of President Milošević's opponents and was also involved in trafficking, racketeering, and kidnapping. However, it was used again for its initial purposes during the war in Kosovo (1997–1999), where it participated in covert actions, some resulting in brutal war crimes. The new phase also brought new brokers to the fore, such as the commander of JSO, Milorad Luković Legija, a veteran of the 1990s wars and a former member of Arkan's Tigers. He brokered the relationship between the state, former paramilitaries, and organised criminal groups (such as the Zemun Clan drug cartel). This amalgam of state security, ex-combatants, and organised crime practically ruled the country, which is best portrayed by Vukušić's (2023: 115) conclusion that "Milošević could not have fallen without the Special Operations Unit (JSO) allowing it, by refusing orders to violently disperse hundreds of thousands of protesters, gathered from across the country".

During the 2000 colour revolution in Serbia, Legija supported the opposition, revealing Milošević as a "disposable good". He had made a "pact of non-aggression" with the opposition leader Zoran Đinđić, whose assassination he organised three years later. State security, JSO, and drug cartels created "a state within the state" whose political authority was unmatched by the formal state, causing constant clashes with the post-Milošević governments. In 2003, they even organised a *coup d'état* as a reaction to the government's anti-cartel policies that challenged their position in the political hierarchy. JSO even managed to assassinate prime minister Đinđić. However, the *coup* failed. The state responded with a special operation that led to more than 11,000 arrests (including Legija's) and the termination of JSO and the "Zemun Clan". Nonetheless, most JSO members were redeployed to other special police units (Vukušić 2023: 115–124; Ferguson 2020: 115).

A complete defeat of JSO and the "Zemun Clan", as well as the voluntary surrender of the "godfather" of Serbian nationalism, Vojislav Šešelj, to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, in 2003), where he was "to face charges of orchestrating brutal paramilitary campaigns in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia" (Sindelar 2014), left the radical/far-right scene in Serbia "beheaded". Consequently, Šešelj's political party (SRS) was taken over by his deputy Tomislav Nikolić and secretary-general Aleksandar Vučić, who started its transformation into a more moderate right-wing option, resulting in a split from SRS and the founding of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in 2008.[2] That opened a space for a new generation of radical and far-right actors who did not emerge directly from the 1990s war

context, although they inherited and reproduced its nationalistic ideologies and narratives with an important disclaimer: "The (1990s) wars were caused by former communists who at some point evolved into great nationalists without any meaningful rootedness in their respective nations and religions since they belonged to a completely different ideological perspective".[3] This new generation saw the 1990s actors as false nationalists who used nationalism solely for manipulation and personal gains. In contrast, they wanted to present themselves as true nationalists.

The post-2000 period saw the rise of many new radical and far-right organisations, namely, the Serbian People's Movement 1389 (SNP 1389), SNP Naši, Obraz, Nacionalni Stroj, Blood and Honour, Serbian Action (*Srbska akcija*), Dveri, etc. Some were founded as formal organisations (CSOs or political parties), while others operated as informal groups. Their ideology also represented the reaction to the post-2000 atmosphere of social and national frustration stemming from the new democratic government reforms. In particular, the fulfilment of Western demands on the path to EU membership (especially those related to ICTY) spurred a sense of national humiliation among these organisations and large parts of the population. Therefore, the ideology of the new generation of Serbian radical and far-right organisations ("nationalism for the 21st century" or "the Serbian paradigm") can be summed up as ethnonationalism, adoption of Orthodox Christianity as a civilisational identity, intolerance towards minorities (ethnic, religious, or sexual), anti-liberalism and anti-communism, pro-Russian attitudes, and hostility towards NATO and the EU, militarism, glorification of war leaders as national heroes (including former paramilitary leaders), Islamophobia, and reintegration of the "Serbian lands" (Tepšić 2023: 18).

In the specific context of Serbia, organisations such as Dveri or SNP 1389 are considered radical right since they declaratively reject fascism or the use of violence, while Obraz, Nacionalni stroj, and Blood and Honour are labelled as clerical-fascists or neo-Nazis (far right). One of the radical right activists explained that "we were victims (of fascism and Nazism) as a nation . . . and it would be completely illogical and abnormal for a Serb to belong to any pro-fascist or pro-Nazi form of existence because that would be a denial of their own identity".[4] On the other hand, far-right organisations often admit their adherence to these ideologies: "If you want, you can call me a fascist, but not Nazi . . . Hitler misused the great political idea for his crimes, murders, genocide. . . . We are a far, far-right organisation, but in a different manner. . . . We stood up for protecting our white race".[5]

During the 2000s, the Serbian state managed to control most of these organisations and suppress their activities, with a few exceptions. Events such as Kosovo's declaration of independence (2008) or the arrests of Bosnian Serb war leaders, Radovan Karadžić (2008) and Ratko Mladić (2011), and their transfer to the ICTY, sparked violent demonstrations involving some of these groups. The state even officially banned two far-right organisations in

this period – Obraz and Nacionalni stroj – as unconstitutional, although the Constitutional Court refused to prohibit the work of radical right organisations SNP Naši and SNP 1389 (Tepšić 2023: 19).

Notwithstanding these occasional incidents, radical and far-right groups remained politically marginal during this period. However, the situation changed with the electoral victory of SNS in 2012. The rise of Aleksandar Vučić (first vice president, then president of SNS) in the formal political hierarchy marked the start of the mainstreaming phase of radical and far-right development in Serbia. The new regime rejuvenated the clientelist parastatal system, reinstating some of the old actors (such as paramilitary leaders from the 1990s, Dragan Vasiljković and Dragoslav Bokan) while providing fertile ground for mushrooming of new organisations of the same or similar hue. For example, Zavetnici, Suverenisti, Živim za Srbiju, People's Patrols (*Narodne patrole*), Serbian Right, and Leviathan are organisations founded during this phase. They have been mainly focused on the topics of Kosovo, Srebrenica, illegal immigration, NATO-Russia rivalry, and LGBT rights. One of their leaders summarised this ideology very succinctly: "Ratko Mladić is a hero. There is no debate about that. It is clear as day. . . . There was no genocide in Srebrenica . . . Kosovo is Serbia. . . . If you agree with that, you are one of us".[6]

As a catch-all party originating from an extremist milieu, SNS has consistently played the nationalistic card while courting radical/far-right groups in Serbia. In the last ten years, especially since 2014, when Vučić became prime minister (he was later elected president in 2017 and 2021 again), SNS has been collaborating with several of these groups, both officially and unofficially. During this time, some of the most prominent far-right leaders, such as Miša Vacić (Serbian Right) or naturalised French Arnaud Goullion (Solidarité Kosovo), were utilised as brokers and even received official government positions. Furthermore, senior government officials did not shy away from supporting the work done by far-right organisations, such as Leviathan, that are openly hostile to immigrants and minority groups. It is suspected that the leader of this group, Pavle Bihali, was connected to the Serbian police, which is another indicator of state support for far-right groups and their penetration into the state security apparatus. Bihali publicly supported former Minister of Internal Affairs Vulin and President Vučić on various occasions. Leviathan also brokered various groups of uniformed hooligans (inspired by paramilitary groups from the 1990s), largely resembling the practices of 20th-century fascist organisations.[7]

Another intermediary on the rise is the leader of People's Patrols, Damnjan Knežević, who managed to develop an informal network of far-right activists, primarily for anti-immigrant activities but often used for providing services to other organisations with a similar ideological background.[8] His network provided logistics for pro-Russian demonstrations and Orthodox clerical protests during 2022, which involved thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people. The latter was an organised as the anti-Pride protest in

cooperation with the "United for Tradition and Family" association. This association includes more than 45 organisations, such as the Anti-globalists of Serbia, the Alliance of Orthodox Christian Women of Serbia (*Savez pravoslavnih žena Srbije*), and the Family Assembly (*Porodični sabor*) (Press centar UNS 2022). Moreover, Patrols have been linked with Serbian paramilitary groups in Ukraine and the Wagner Group (Slavija Info 2023). After the February 2023 protests against the EU-brokered agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, Damnjan Knežević was even arrested and charged with "calling for a violent change of the constitutional order", to be released two months later (Reuters 2023). Nevertheless, it seems that he as well was a part of the regime's clientelist network.

Furthermore, prominent members of the SNS and their political allies have been seen working with football fan groups that are not only nationalistic strongholds since the early 1990s but also powerful criminal enterprises, which raised many eyebrows about potential collaboration between the state and the mafia. In February 2021, the arrest of a gangster Veljko Belivuk exposed him as a broker between the state, drug cartels, and football fan groups. During his trial for "aggravated murder, kidnapping, illicit possession of weapons and explosives and drug trafficking", he claimed several times that he "served the needs of the state" and received orders from senior state officials, including the current chief of the state security service Aleksandar Vulin (former minister of internal affairs, and defence), and even president Vučić (Stojanović 2022). He added that his group was organised "for the needs and by the order of Aleksandar Vučić" (Worth 2023). Worth (2023) describes Belivuk as "the president's dark twin, a man who embodies the criminal underside of a state that has grown steadily more autocratic over the past decade".

This practice of Serbian regimes to outsource security services or to ensure the monopoly of violence through brokers probably prevented larger bloodshed in the post-war period. Nevertheless, it led to mainstreaming of brokers and their narratives. This process culminated during the previous ten years under the SNS regime. Although it tried to rebrand itself as a more moderate right-wing party, SNS completely opened public discourse to radical and extremist narratives. That led to the further normalisation of these ideologies and the establishment of new organisations of a similar political hue. Moreover, by integrating these organisations into its clientelist system, SNS provided them with resources for their political activism and further development. From 2012 onwards, the public discourse in Serbia shifted significantly towards the far-right of the political spectrum. The 2022 general elections confirmed this political trend with four radical right parties, besides SNS, entering the national parliament: Dveri, Zavetnici, Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), and Kingdom of Serbia Renewal Movement (POKS). However, far-right parties failed to attract enough votes to pass the 3% hurdle, which indicates that they do not enjoy as much support among voters as their radical-right counterparts (Tepšić 2023).

State, clientelism, and radicalisation in the Muslim community of Sandžak

The dissolution of SFRY in 1992 left Muslims in Sandžak separated from their ethnic motherland in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although this region was not directly affected by the 1990s armed conflicts, the war in Bosnia dominated and shaped relations between the Bosniak minority in Serbia and the central government in Belgrade. A spillover of paramilitary activities from Bosnia even caused some very violent incidents in Sjeverin (1992) and Štrpci (1993), leading to the abduction and execution of 36 civilians, mostly Bosniaks, who were citizens of Serbia. The perpetrator of these war crimes was a Serb paramilitary unit from Bosnia (Vukušić 2023: 144).

Emerging new circumstances swiftly sparked the conflict between the Serbian central government and Sandžak authorities. It began when local Bosniak leader Sulejman Ugljanin and his Party of Democratic Action (SDA) opted for the Sandžak's secession (and integration with Bosnia and Herzegovina), alternatively, for the status of an autonomous region in Serbia. They even proclaimed the Independent Government of Sandžak in 1991. The Serbian government rejected these demands as an attempt at a *coup*, which led to the complete isolation of Sandžak, both politically and economically. During the 1990s, this region was, in effect, under the special supervision of security forces, with Serbian police and armed forces ready to intervene at any moment. According to SDA, more than 17,000 Bosniaks experienced state terror and police torture during this period.[9] Due to its specific position, Sandžak became one of the most underdeveloped regions of Serbia, with very high unemployment and poverty rates. It also alienated the Bosniak population from the Serbian state, making them an ethnic group with the least trust in state institutions (Tepšić 2023: 20).

These divisions also affected the status of the Muslim religious community in Serbia. Since the Islamic community of Yugoslavia had dissolved together with the Yugoslav state, a new Islamic Community of Serbia (IZS) emerged in Belgrade (1992), led by Mufti Hamdija Jusufspahić. The idea behind the new Belgrade-based Islamic Community was to broker the relations between the central government and potentially disloyal religious groups. That is the reason why Hamdija Jusufspahić, a loyal subject of the regime in Belgrade, was chosen for this position. SDA rejected the new religious community as a political project of Milošević's regime and responded by establishing the Islamic Community in Sandžak with Mufti Muamer Zukorlić (one of the founders of SDA) as its head. These events have created intra-group division and rivalry between two Islamic communities, which are still ongoing (Tepšić 2023: 20–21; Perry 2019).

Religious and political polarisation in Sandžak provided the space for external fundamentalist influences, the crucial drivers of radicalisation and extremism in this region. Ideologies of radical and extreme Islamism came to Sandžak (where the moderate Hanafi school of Sunni Islam is dominant)

from Bosnia in 1997, mainly through mujahideen, foreign fighters from the Gulf countries, but also through students who had studied in the Middle East, where they had learned about different perspectives on Islam (Morrison 2008; Perry 2019; Ferguson 2020). Some of the Sandžak Muslims also attended fundamentalist camps in Bosnia, such as the one in Gornja Maoča, to learn the principles of Salafism. One of our interviewees had participated in one of the camp's programmes: "They took me to Maoča, a village in Bosnia. . . . They tried to educate me on how to cover myself and similar . . . there were no references to violence".[10] Initially, these radicalised groups were tolerated or even supported by Zukorlić's Islamic Community. However, the relations worsened over time, leading to conflicts, and even the arrest of Salafists on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks and assassinations of religious and political leaders in Sandžak (Tepšić 2023: 21). One member of the group explained that all this was a setup because Serbia wanted to participate in the post-9/11 Global War on Terror.[11]

The ghettoisation of this "conflictual" region continued until 2000 and the fall of Milošević's regime. Post-2000, the new democratic government put the reintegration of Sandžak high on its agenda. There was massive gap between the central government and this peripheral region, which encouraged the establishment of indirect forms of governance. During the 1990s, Sandžak saw a rise in new power configurations based on informal alliances of convenience (Podder 2014: 1619). The new government in Belgrade wanted to solve this problem by reintegrating disloyal groups and empowering the war-affected community of Sandžak. It adopted a brokerage strategy and started employing local leaders as intermediaries between the central government and the local population in their formal and informal capacities.

The first paradigmatic case of a broker was a local politician Rasim Ljajić, a former SDA official and a leader of the Sandžak Democratic Party (SDP) at that time (he later founded the Social Democratic Party of Serbia). He perfectly fits the definition of a broker as a "social membrane" with the "ability to provide valuable services . . . ease mutual suspicions, as well as facilitate vertical transactions of resources and information" (Themnér and Utas 2016: 256–257). His parties have participated in each Serbian government since 2000, always aligning with the ruling regime. He served as a minister for five terms. According to some of our respondents, Ljajić was in control of "the whole vertical of employment from the state to the local level", with alleged connections to the criminal underground and drug cartels.[12] From 2004 to 2014, Ugljanin also played the role of broker between the state and local groups. After the break with Mufti Zukorlić, he even sided with the Belgrade-based IZS and attempted to oust its Sandžak-based rival. The state backed Ugljanin by adopting a new Law on Churches and Religious Communities in 2006, which recognised IZS as the only legal representative of Muslims in Serbia. Nevertheless, Zukorlić managed to preserve the loyalty of the majority of mosques and believers (approximately 80%) in Sandžak and to integrate his community – as a Meshihat of the Islamic Community

in Serbia (IZuS) – into the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[13] As one of his associates explained: "The Islamic community has been divided since 2007. . . because the government of Serbia with its security system . . . supported the founding of the parallel community by a group of imams . . . but they have minimal influence in Sandžak".[14]

This sort of political management ended Sandžak's isolation and started its reintegration, but it also induced intra-group competition between the local Bosniak actors for the role of broker. Over the years, this struggle has intensified, leading to the radicalisation of the parties "left behind". For example, Zukorlić was considered the most radical critic of the central government until he was integrated into Vučić's regime. He left the position of Mufti in 2016 to stand in parliamentary elections as president of the Justice and Reconciliation Party (SPP), although he continued to have close links to the IZuS (as its informal leader). In the 2017 presidential elections, he supported Aleksandar Vučić, becoming one of his most important allies in Sandžak. The regime "rewarded" Zukorlić with formal recognition of IZuS and positions in the central government for him and his associates ("Belgrade swallowed him").[15] On the other side, SDA went back into opposition after 2014 to become one of the most aggressive opponents of Vučić's regime: "They are still radicals (SRS). It is the same ideology . . . they should be banned".[16]

Besides SPP and IZuS, the local informal network controlled by Zukorlić's family (Muamer passed away in 2021 and was succeeded by his son Usame) included a university, a TV station, private businesses, and various informal groups, including Salafists. After the arrest of one such group and a few public incidents during the 2000s, Salafists resurfaced briefly during the 2010s when some of their parajaamats allegedly recruited for ISIS, but in general, they remained marginal and invisible to the general population (Tepšić 2023: 23). Even members of the Serbian minority group in Novi Pazar did not recognise them as a threat or extremists at all: "They practise religion in their own way . . . which is quite common here . . . they did not do anything to deserve the label of extremist"[17]; "Their style of life is unconventional, like the life of monks and nuns, but not necessarily extremist".[18]

One of our interviewees, an expert on the issue of Islamist extremism, explained that Islamists could be roughly divided into three groups: takfirists (who reject all other interpretations of Islam and ostracise their followers as takfirs, "false Muslims", apostates), jihadists (who focus primarily on the importance of jihad in the interpretation of Islam), and puritans or Salafists (where the focus is on the social norms and values of early Islam). The first two groups are considered more extreme, as they often use violent means, while the third group is not openly violent. However, its teachings can lead to the radicalisation of the wider community. In the case of Sandžak, Salafism has been the dominant form of Islamism, with its followers orbiting mostly around Zukorlić and IZuS, and, to a lesser extent, around Lajić, Ugljanin, and IZS. Therefore, it seems that their integration into formal and informal

networks pacified and moderated them, but also made room for the possible radicalisation of the whole community from the inside.[19] "Salafism is not a short-term but may be a long-term threat.[20]

In contrast, some respondents underlined the positive influence of Salafism: "Those considered Salafists . . . Saudi Arabian students . . . have a very positive influence here. They proved to be the most diligent imams".[21] Representatives of Sandžak political parties in general dismissed the existence of Islamist extremism in any form or saw it as marginal.[22] Nonetheless, some of them acknowledged the presence of isolated groups and their masjids (informal mosques), including at least one in Novi Pazar – organised by eight families who reject the authority of both Islamic communities.[23]

The implementation of the "governance through brokerage" mechanism in Sandžak has produced some positive effects. It led to the region's partial (re) integration into the Belgrade regime's formal and informal networks, opening Sandžak to the rest of the country, ending its ghettoisation and improving its negative image. Through its brokers, it succeeded in re-establishing a presence at the local level as a provider of basic social services, such as security, or as a source of economic opportunities. The brokerage system also gave local actors the sense of being part of the political process. Then again, it made the local political scene more competitive and polarised. Over the years, this form of governance evolved into a mechanism of ethnic regulation with the potential to both radicalise and deradicalise the relations between Bosniak and Serbian communities and between different Bosniak parties in Sandžak. The conflict between two Islamic communities, in particular, leaves room for radicalisation. As one of the local leaders noted: "The unification of the Islamic community in Serbia is not just a Bosniak question . . . it is a security issue *par excellence* for the whole of society and the state".[24]

Discussion: clientelism – factor of vulnerability or resilience?

The state's benevolence towards radical and far-right groups, their empowerment, integration into the clientelist system, and the normalisation of their narratives and practices constitute a crucial factor of community vulnerability. The state utilises these groups for various purposes, usually against political opponents of the regime or competing criminal organisations. On top of that, recent history shows that these groups can break loose, take an independent position, or even turn against the government, causing outbursts of violence. Therefore, their correlation to community vulnerability is twofold – they can serve as state proxies or as independent agents of violence.

However, there is the other side of the coin. Paradoxically, patron-client relations between the state and these groups can also be a community resilience factor. The government can influence clients' course of action through brokerage and prevent them from committing violent acts (or localising their violence). This form of control is most visible in the relationship between the government and football fan groups, where there have been no significant

outbreaks of rioting and violence under the SNS regime. SNS has very good relations with football fan groups, which enabled it to integrate these groups into informal networks controlled by the current Serbian regime. Although the regime has utilised these groups (such as Belivuk's) for various political and criminal purposes, it has managed to reduce the violence on a local level.

There is a similar situation with the integration of Salafists into the formal and informal networks in Sandžak. Their incorporation into IZuS has pacified and moderated them. It made them clients and put them under the control of the local brokers and the patrons from Belgrade. That certainly represents a factor of community resilience. However, Salafists did not renounce their unconventional interpretations of Islam, which, in the long term, may lead to the suppression of the moderate Hanafi traditions and the radicalisation of the whole Muslim community in Sandžak.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from our empirical analysis is that the correlation between clientelism and community vulnerability/resilience is context-dependent. In particular, it depends on time (short term, medium term, long term) and the level of analysis (micro, meso, macro). For instance, the integration of Salafists could be a factor in resilience in the short term or even the medium term. However, it could convert to a factor of vulnerability in the long term. The same applies to the integration of radical and far-right groups. As for the level of analysis, the integration of local Sandžak actors into the Serbian regime's clientelist network of the Serbian regime builds community resilience on a macro (state) level. However, since it fosters polarisation and conflicts in a local community, it could be seen as a factor of vulnerability on micro (interpersonal) and meso (local community) levels. Integration of radical/far-right or Salafist groups could also be perceived diversely on different levels of analysis. The former is unquestionably a factor of vulnerability for the local Bosniak population in Sandžak (the threat of aggressive Serbian nationalism), while the latter could increase the isolation of Sandžak and therefore represents a factor of vulnerability on a state level (the threat of Islamist extremism).

All of this points to another conclusion – that community vulnerability and resilience should not be perceived as a dichotomy but as a complex continuum (Chandler 2012: 217), where particular factors can have both qualities of vulnerability and resilience in a specific ratio, no matter how paradoxical that may seem. That is to say that clientelism in contemporary Serbia has a (slightly) prevalent quality of resilience since the country did not witness any larger outbursts of violence in the 2000s. However, this sort of clientelism could produce more vulnerability in the long term.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that clientelist relations between the state and non-state actors represent a crucial factor in the radicalisation of society, particularly in post-war states. Originating in war, non-state actors, in the

form of paramilitary or extremist political groups, play a decisive role in both the development of clientelism and the radicalisation of society. Because of the state's weakness, they acquire positions as intermediaries, which allows them to appropriate certain state functions related to the provision of basic social services (security, economic opportunities, participation in the political process), control of territory, and use of violence. Although they can have a positive role in the process of statebuilding, these actors also reproduce constant conflict between their informal networks and formal state institutions, potentially leading to the submission or criminalisation of the state.

We tried to demonstrate this line of argument with the example of Serbia, where the state utilised paramilitary leaders and radical/far-right politicians – first, for war efforts, and then for the reintegration of ex-combatants and war-affected groups, that is, state reconstruction. After the political changes in 2000, new democratic governments even tried to suppress this parastate, which backlashed, opening the space for a new authoritarian regime that, from 2012, started reintroducing many political practices of the 1990s, including the empowerment of radical/far-right organisations and their normalisation in the public discourse. Since the 2000s, the state has been simultaneously developing the clientelist network in Sandžak as a tool for the reintegration and control of this "disloyal" region. It employed a number of local actors as brokers between the central government and various Sandžak groups, which led to the pacification of this region. However, it also incorporated some radical groups, such as Salafists, into clientelist networks.

In both cases, the "governance through brokerage" mechanism managed to develop community capacities to positively adapt to external threats (resilience) while simultaneously opening space for even greater threats (vulnerability). That makes Serbia a good example of this "resilience paradox".

Notes

1 Our research findings showed that, besides these two concepts, it is necessary to introduce a third category of 'not-yet-extremism', that is, radical right. While the far-right groups in Serbia are mainly related to fascism, neo-Nazism, racism, and/or white nationalism and the use of violent political means, the radical right is anti-fascist and rejects the use of violence (at least declaratively). Radical right ideology is mainly based on ideas of superiority (cultural and/or moral) over its own identity, relativisation/denial of other identities, and self-victimisation. For instance, one of the radical right leaders stated that he absolutely denies the concept of the Bosniak nation but acknowledges the right of the people to identify themselves as they please (Interview #12, May 2021, Belgrade).
2 Interview #8, May 2021, Belgrade.
3 Interview #12, May 2021, Belgrade.
4 Interview #12, May 2021, Belgrade.
5 Interview #14, June 2021, Belgrade.
6 Interview #14, June 2021, Belgrade.
7 Interview #14, June 2021, Belgrade.
8 Interview #10, May 2021, Belgrade.

9 Interview #21, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
10 Interview #26, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
11 Interview #29, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
12 Interview #5, May 2021, Belgrade.
13 Interview #17, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
14 Interview #20, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
15 Interview #19, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
16 Interview #28, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
17 Interview #18, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
18 Interview #25, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
19 Interview #5, May 2021, Belgrade.
20 Interview #20, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
21 Interview #23, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
22 Interview #28, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
23 Interview #29, July 2021, Novi Pazar.
24 Interview #17, July 2021, Novi Pazar.

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4 State resilience, communities' vulnerability, and violent extremism in Iraq

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Since the Bush administration launched the War on Terror following the 9\11 attacks, preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) approaches have been predominately securitised and implemented in the form of counterterrorism strategies aimed at combatting groups labelled as "terrorist" (Hoffman 2006; Laqueur 1999). Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) were the two first military targets of these strategies. Under the Obama administration (2009–2017), the paradigm gradually shifted towards approaches to understanding violent extremism, together with the realisation that P/CVE should focus on "the various societal factors and drivers that lead individuals and small groups to embrace or otherwise support militant ideologies" (Holmer 2013). P/CVE lexicon and strategies entered the international realm in 2015 following the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, and a few months later, President Obama called for global partners to unite against extremism in his address to the United Nations General Assembly. His appeal triggered debates all around the world as well as the adoption of national and regional agendas to prevent radicalisation and extremist violence (Mandaville and Nozell 2017). Despite tremendous momentum, P/CVE remains in its infancy and further efforts are needed to define the terms, challenges, and opportunities of such strategies to contribute to sustainable peace and development.

Since 2001, Iraq has been one of the main "zones of concern" and a target of P/CVE measures, while failing to coin its own national strategy. Indeed, since the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq has been considered an example of a failed state and a system crippled by sectarian politics, corruption, and extreme violence (Haken et al. 2022). Qualificatives such as "failed", "fragile", and "collapse" have been used repeatedly by academics and practitioners to describe the disintegration of political institutions and the military's incapacity to protect Iraqis against threats, especially the spectre of violent extremism that relentlessly shook the country between 2005 and 2017 (Tripp 2007; Parker 2012; Ismael and Ismael 2015; O'Driscoll 2017; Cordesman 2019). While the erosion of state power in the Middle East region gave room for non-state actors to emerge and compete with the legitimacy and authority of the state (Ehteshami et al. 2021), state

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failure as such is not necessarily the key driver of violent extremism (Allan et al. 2015).

Recent European history gives several examples of the emergence of violent extremism in states considered much stronger and more established than most countries in the Middle East. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom, the Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain, and the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany – to cite a few – shook well-established and functional political structures from the 1970s until the late 1990s (English 2006; Woodworth 2001; Gerhardt 2018). This suggests that violent extremist groups can emerge and operate in stable states despite the presence of effective institutions for security and justice. However, there is a common pattern between European and Middle Eastern cases of violent extremism, which is the exploitation by some groups of opportunities created by war, state collapse, internal turmoil, or political mistakes. In other words, uncertain times provide fertile soil for the rise of violent extremism. Based on these considerations, we argue in this chapter that violent extremism and the sustainability of the elite-based post-2003 political order, despite the overwhelming account of "state collapse" in Iraq, are part of a reinforcing loop. In other words, the Iraqi state – that is, the political system – is, in fact, very resilient, and this resilience hinders the capacity of Iraqi communities to prevent and face the threat of violent extremism. Our argument emphasises the significance of providing a more nuanced and critical account of the concept of resilience and the role of the state in the phenomenon of violent extremism.

In Iraq, violent extremism is the main cause, and consequence, of perceived state collapse and has been attributed to the marginalisation of the Arab Sunni community in the post-2003 political settlement, followed by the institutional penetration of the Iraqi state by religion, be it in the form of sectarian politics, or the official integration of faith-based militias in March 2018 (Alaaldin 2015; Weiss and Hassan 2015). While incredibly complex, the Iraqi context came to be interpreted as a textbook example of violent extremism in the form of religious extremism triggered by the rise of non-state, violent, Islamist actors (Helfont 2018).

In this chapter, we offer an alternative perspective to the dominant narrative. We bring attention to the dynamic relationship between the state and the phenomenon of violent extremism. We move away from the existing literature that focuses on the role of non-state actors in the rise of violent extremism (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013; Taylor et al. 2013; Feldman and Littler 2014). Following Carter's observation that the state as an element of analysis is often absent from studies on violent extremism (2017: 47), we use the case of Iraq to show that the state – or its absence, as we will develop later in this chapter – can be a driver of extremism. By focusing on resilience and vulnerability as key concepts, we argue that the state can be a passive driver of violent extremism when its inaction or failure to provide for citizens produces grievances. But it can also be an active driver of violent extremism

when its efforts towards resilience indirectly hinder the capacity of communities to mitigate the threat of violent extremism. As such, Iraqi communities not only face an external threat, that of non-state actors that were established outside national borders and benefit from a transnational network of fighters as in the case of the infamous Islamic State (IS) group, but they also face an internal threat fuelled by the state since its establishment in 1921.

The research was conducted in two districts located in the Nineveh province, namely Hamdaniyyah and Tal Afar. The two districts located in the west of Mosul, while having different socio-demographic landscapes and legacies of inclusion and grievances (Batatu 1978; Al-Sumer 2012), experienced IS rule between 2014 and 2017 and the devastating consequences of violent extremism (Gaston and Domisse 2019; Assyrian Policy Institute 2020). A total of 59 face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted in Hamdaniyyah (39 interviews in Qaraqosh and its surroundings) and Tal Afar (20 interviews in the city of Tal Afar and its surroundings) between June and November 2021. All participants were met in person in a space they considered safe after the Iraqi government loosened COVID-19 restrictions. Four categories of participants were identified for the purpose of the research: i) civil society (15 interviews), ii) political representatives at the local and central levels (14 interviews), iii) grassroots communities (20 interviews), and iv) religious representatives affiliated with formal and informal institutions (10 interviews). Besides gathering data on the impact of religious institutions on P/CVE initiatives, the authors collected socio-demographic indicators to ensure the representativeness of the sampled populations, including the representation of gender and ethno-religious groups in the Nineveh province.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first one offers a historical approach to the interaction between competing forms of resilience – state versus community resilience – in the context of the modern state of Iraq since its establishment in 1921 until the latest development of violent extremism after 2017. The second section focuses on the perception of Iraqi communities of the role of the state as a passive driver of violent extremism. The chapter concludes with a discussion around the consequences of the state's prioritisation of its own resilience to change over the protection of Iraqi people, which makes all communities particularly vulnerable to a number of grievances.

Interactive and competing forms of resilience

While important, the concept of resilience (as defined in Chapter 2 of this volume) remains vague, and its definition has sparked debates within academic and policy circles. Some look at resilience as an adaptation strategy that aims at keeping political systems and governance arrangements intact (Carpenter 2006: 6). Others argue that resilience lies in the capacity of communities to react to the threat of violent extremism (Masten et al. 1990: 426, USAID 2013: 3, Jeans et al. 2017). According to these interpretations,

resilience involves change, both from above (the state) and below (communities). Reversely, alternative analyses look at resilience as a survival strategy that favours order and stability to absorb the negative effects of external and internal shocks (McLoughlin 2012: 9).

In Iraq, our research showed that different forms of resilience interact. On the one hand, the state puts tremendous effort into securing the stability of its elite and political structures. The resilience of the state as a political system is manifested in its resistance to change and the prevalence of the status quo. In fact, the threat of violent extremism, and more generally disorder or *fitna* in Islamic terms, has often been used by the political elite as a pretext to counter social movements demanding socio-economic and political reforms and accountability. For example, the Sunni protests of 2012–2013 were labelled by Maliki's government as an act of mutiny against the state (Belfast Telegraph 2013). Upon the prime minister's demand, the supreme judicial council issued arrest warrants against prominent Sunni leaders under Article 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2005. Other non-Sunni protests are often associated with anarchism, separatism, and conspiracy from the outside. For example, the former Iraqi minister of transport and communications, a current member of the council of representatives, and the chief of the Shia Badr organisation, Hadi al-Amri, described the Tishreen protests as a conspiracy against the current political system and a threat to the security and stability of Iraq. Therefore, he called for the government's military intervention to deter what he depicted as chaos (Mawazin News 2021). In opposition to the state, Iraqi communities deploy adaptation and survival strategies when confronted with violent extremism. They constantly change physically – through displacement, for instance – and cognitively by becoming interactive or religious.

The question our findings in Iraq raise is the following: How do several forms of resilience interact? Can the resilience of one actor jeopardise the resilience of another? In Iraq, it can be argued that the resilience of the state or the political system undermines community resilience to violent extremism. This is not a new phenomenon and is linked to processes of state consolidation. Indeed, from the initial stages of the modern state of Iraq, the identity and shape of the state evolved and were shaped by the ruling leader and/or party. However, all those representing the state of Iraq through its modern history had one thing in common: they prioritised the resilience of the state structure over their adaptation to citizens' demands and used disproportionate violence in their endeavour to stay in power.

The First Republic of Iraq

During the Cold War, as a pro-Western monarchy clashed with the pan-Arab forces in the country, the 1958 coup hastened the establishment of the First Republic of Iraq. Much like his predecessors, the first prime minister of the Republic, and strongman in the country, Abdul Karim Qasem, was not attracted to the pan-Arab project. His position fuelled a revolt led by Colonel

Abdul Wahhad ash-Shawaf against the government in Mosul and Kirkuk in 1959. Ash-Shawaf resented Qasem's secular policies, his relations with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), and his policies that focused on building an Iraqi identity separate from Arab nationalism. With the support of the air forces and ICP militias, Prime Minister Qasem retaliated with an iron fist and foiled ash-Shawaf's revolt. While the political structures and the young Iraqi Republic remained intact, the revolt had great repercussions at the local level in the Nineveh province, especially in the Tal Afar district. Fearing that the Arab nationalists would strip them of their right over the land in case of victory, the Turkmen of Tal Afar supported Qasem; they killed and slaughtered hundreds of Arabs in the area (Al-Sumer 2012: 196). As shown by this episode, the national Iraqi identity was built up based on one dominant discourse of "Arabness", causing social discontent among non-Arab minorities, especially the Kurds and the Turkmen, and resulting in a negative state-society relation and mounting social violence. This was especially the case in Tal Afar.

When Qasem was eventually removed from power and executed during the 1963 Ramadan Revolution, the Iraqi state became "Arabised", especially under the leadership of the Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein between 1979 and 2003. In Tal Afar, the Arab tribes that had been slaughtered a few years earlier saw an opportunity to establish their presence and legally claimed the lands owned by the Turkmen, pleading for their farmer status and the use of these lands for hundreds of years. The Arab control over the area was reinforced by the "Arabisation" policy of northern Iraq during the 1970s and through the 1980s under Saddam Hussein. Indeed, the Sunni Arabs loyal to the Ba'ath Party were relocated to the area specifically to dilute the influence of the Turkmen and the Kurds, thereby reinforcing the local authority and power of the state (HRW 2004). This systematic process of Arabisation accrued grievances and tensions between the Arab and the non-Arab communities in Tal Afar.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Iraqi state became particularly resilient to any sort of internal and external shock that could have permanently countered the authoritarian leadership of Saddam Hussein's regime. In 1991, after the withdrawal from Kuwait, Hussein's rule was challenged by the Shia-led Sha'aban Intifada in the south of Iraq, and the Kurdish uprising (*serheldan* or triumph in English) in the north. Yet, far from faltering, the Iraqi leader tamed the revolutionary waves initiated by the minorities. More importantly, he embarked on a state-sponsored faith campaign (*al-hamla al-imaniyyah*), moving away from a traditionally secular and pan-Arab identity to an Islamic one to regain the state legitimacy he had lost in the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) and the Kuwait Crisis (1990–1991). Along with his new stance, he brandished Islam as the common ground of its enemies. While this policy helped Hussein stay in power and regain legitimacy for a decade, it also contributed to the emergence of a sectarian Salafist narrative, which was diffused in the society through mosques.

At that time, Tal Afar was for the majority Sunni, and Abu Ala' Abdula Rahman, who was a core Turkman Salafi-jihadist and would later become the second man of IS, became infamous for spreading not only a sectarian but also an anti-government and anti-state discourse. What was puzzling for the inhabitants of Tal Afar was the fact that the Ba'ath authorities, allegedly purposefully, failed to control the rise of violent extremism in the area. For instance, Rahman was arrested several times by the Iraqi authorities, but he was always released and allowed to resume his preaching activities. This was very unusual at that time because the security apparatus controlled by Hussein was known for its brutality and rarely released those who spread anti-government discourse. As a result, rumours emerged that Rahman worked for the state and was instructed to spread sectarian discourse in Tal Afar.

We met former residents of Tal Afar who witnessed the rise of violent extremism and explained how vulnerable they felt to confront the sectarian discourse of several preachers. This was especially the case for the Turkmen community, which had been alienated from the state for several decades and, unlike the Kurdish minority, did not have a historical political leadership to represent and protect them. In other words, during the First Republic of Iraq, the Turkmen – and all Iraqi communities more generally – did not have the option to voice their grievances peacefully through political channels, which were monopolised by the Ba'ath Party and the authoritarian leadership of Saddam Hussein. In Tal Afar, Turkmen tribal leaders attempted to resist sectarian strife and opened channels of discussion with Abu Ala' Abdula Rahman to convince him to stop spreading a radical narrative in their area. Their attempts were unsuccessful. In fact, former inhabitants of Tal Afar still believe that only the state could have acted against the preacher; the state being the only actor of resilience at that time. One of them recorded:

> Everyone – Kurds, Shia Turkmen, and even Sunnis Arabs –, especially the oldest ones, asked their kids not to attend the preach by radical imams. But they could not take further public action given the oppressive policing practices used in the area.[1]

Hence, radical preachers such as Rahman were given a free way to rally local populations to their cause and became attractive figures among the youth because of their courage to speak openly against the state and voice their grievances. As youth started conducting violent activities in the city, the Iraqi state under Saddam Hussein was kept intact for another 12 years.

The Second Republic of Iraq

Despite regime change in 2003, the story of state resilience and communities' vulnerability in Iraq repeated itself. The state of Iraq collapsed when the

statue of the historical ruler was removed by a crowd of Iraqi citizens and US Marines on Baghdad's Firdos Square on 9 April 2003. The Iraqis hoped that the new political order would address past grievances, promote political inclusion, and foster community resilience to potential internal or external shocks. Instead, the state-building process focused on establishing security and a new system that politicised sectarianism and froze ethnic and confessional divisions. The new constitution, adopted in 2005, introduced territorial and cultural autonomy along with proportionality arrangements among the different ethno-sectarian groups in Iraq. Moreover, elite-based negotiations made behind closed doors enshrined additional power-sharing agreements that distributed political power among the main ethnic or religious affiliations. Notably, the posts of president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament are systematically given to a Kurd, a Shia, and a Sunni politician, respectively. Reversely, some minorities have been erased from both the 2005 Constitution and the informal power-sharing system, such as the 200,000 Kakai in Iraq. These practices of informal political negotiation resulted in the establishment of an elite-based political system that was and remains highly resistant to change. In this sense, the resilience of the Iraqi state and the ruling elite became rooted in divisions and fragmentation and post-2003 policies only deepened the divide between the state and the society, and within the society itself. This fragmentation, in turn, prevented strong forms of community resilience from emerging to face violent extremism in the periods 2005–2007 and 2014–2017.

The US implication in the collapse of the Second Republic and the building of a new state unleashed a series of violent reactions across the country. Under US influence, the Coalition Provisional Authority dissolved the coercive arm of the Iraqi state and implemented the de-Ba'athification of the state. This policy quickly resulted in chaos and the institutional collapse of the state, which created an unprecedented power vacuum. What many Iraqis perceived as the "US occupation" of the country in 2003 triggered the proliferation of armed insurgents – although it is not clear whether those fighting under the banner of Islam eventually outnumbered the other elements. In the words of Desker and Milton-Edwards (2005: 62), those groups were an "amorphous mix of foreign Salafi, local jihad, and ex-Ba'athist Sunni elements mounting a serious assault on the Allied occupation". In January 2005, no less than 40,000 hardcore fighters were taking part in the insurgency, while a total of 200,000 were believed to sustain it by providing intelligence, logistics, and shelter (Ibid.). In that sense, it can be argued that violent extremism in 2007–2017 was cumulative as defined in the second chapter of this volume; it was fuelled by political, religious, and social grievances.

While the resilience of the Iraqi state during the First Republic negatively impacted communities, the immediate post-2003 period shows how the vulnerability of the state equally became a burden on communities. However, a notable difference between the two periods is the absence of security

structures in 2005, which prevented the young Second Republic from protecting Iraqi citizens against escalating violence. The same observation can be made about the 2014 events that saw the rise of the IS group and the capture of Mosul, the second largest city in the country, in less than a week. Abandoned by the state, Iraqi communities after 2003 had no choice but to arm themselves to confront the threat of violent extremism. During the 2007 US troop surge to protect Baghdad and the al-Anbar governorate, the tribal Awakening Councils in al-Anbar joined forces with US forces to rise against al-Qaeda and eventually reclaimed their areas from the jihadi organisation. From 2014 until 2017, the Kurdish Peshmerga military played an instrumental role in the survival of the state institutions after IS' military offensive. They not only managed to protect the physical integrity of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq throughout IS' campaign but also defended key state institutions in Baghdad and recaptured the IS' strongholds in the Nineveh Plain and Mosul in collaboration with the Iraqi army. In the face of the collapse of the Iraqi military in the city of Mosul and its incapacity to confront IS and stop the advance of the group towards Baghdad, the highest Shia religious authority – Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani – called all Iraqis to defend their country and its holy sites. While the call highlighted the need for national unity to confront a common threat, it was used by a number of "pre-existing paramilitary units with a concerning track record of human rights violations" and aligned with Iran to reactivate their struggle under the newly established Popular Mobilization Forces (Rudolf 2018: 5–6). As a reaction, the Shia authority commissioned the creation of additional units loyal to Sistani and Iraqi national interests.

The militarisation of Iraqi communities to face violent extremism was most visible in the Nineveh province, where military groups have clear ethnic, religious, and political affiliations (Assyrian Policy Institute 2020: 30–40). In 2014, residents of the Nineveh Plain and Assyrian Democratic Movement officials established the Nineveh Plain Protection Units in a joint effort to protect Christian Assyrians in Nineveh. The same year, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council created a similar group, the Nineveh Plain Guard Forces. In Tal Afar, the Shia Turkmen Forces or Brigades 16 and 53 – along with the Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah (Brigade 26)– were established as part of the PMF after the victory over IS. However, several brigades within the PMF have been accused of human rights abuses against the Sunni and Christian communities, especially in the Nineveh province, where the PMF has major influence on military and political affairs. Such brigades involved the so-called Christian Brigade or Babylon Brigade, the Shia Turkmen Forces or Brigades 16 and 53 – along with the Firqat al-Abbas al-Qitaliyah (Brigade 26) in Tal Afar, and Brigade 30 linked to the Shabak Democratic Assembly and the Badr Organization political parties in Hamdaniyyah (US Department of Treasury 2019; Gaston and Domisse 2019; Assyrian Policy Institute 2020).

Iraqi communities' views on the role of the state in violent extremism

The previous section demonstrated how the state can be an active driver of extremism when the capture and survival of the structures of power by the ruling elite are placed above the value of democracy and people's demands for change. This section offers additional analysis to clarify how the failure of the state to provide for citizens' grievances can reinforce its role as a passive driver of violent extremism. This section is based on 59 interviews conducted in Nineveh province.

Close to 60% of the participants interviewed across Hamdaniyyah and Tal Afar are critical of the political power-sharing system, which they argue creates an exclusionary state. Participants in Tal Afar were particularly critical – 70% of them considered the system a driver of exclusion – while over 40% of participants in Hamdaniyyah encouraged power-sharing. Across participant categories, religious representatives, followed by civil society and grassroots communities offered the harshest critiques against the power-sharing system in Iraq, which they believed was used by politicians to secure their own interests rather than to work for the benefit of citizens. A 60-year-old retired teacher in Tal Afar argued: "power-sharing promotes exclusion and the monopoly of power by some individuals based on their identity rather than on their skills or spirit of citizenship without the adoption of competence and citizenship".[2] His words were echoed by a 30-year-old man residing in Hamdaniyyah's biggest city: "The *muhasasa* system undermined the power of minorities and polarised diversity".[3] In other words, for most respondents in the Nineveh province, "power-sharing leads to people sharing". Reversely, over 60% of political representatives encouraged power-sharing, arguing that the system ensured the representation of minorities in the government and state apparatus and helped guarantee the rights of all Iraqi citizens. However, diversity, in Iraq in general and in the Nineveh province in particular, was identified as a factor of vulnerability to violent extremism rather than resilience. For instance, in the Nineveh province, the resilience of the Hamdaniyyah district to violent extremism[4] before it fell to IS in 2014 was attributed by several participants to the absence of the Sunni community and radical religious discourses. Such a reality, they argued, did not help IS to establish a presence – for example, by having sleeping cells or enjoying social sympathy – in the area. Conversely, the recovered stability of Tal Afar after its liberation from IS in 2017 was attributed to the homogenisation of the population following the departure of Sunni residents, while nearly all Turkmen residents returned (Lucent 2020). As a result, the presence of multiple ethno-sectarian groups in Iraq is not considered an element that could foster interactions and solidarity between communities.

Beyond the political system, several institutions were deemed responsible for communities' vulnerability to violent extremism in Iraq. Surprisingly, security institutions were never mentioned as key actors in the fight

against violent extremism, despite the obvious security threats recently posed by armed actors across the country. Yet, in practice, the ability to protect oneself and/or one's community is considered a key factor in resilience to violent extremism. These perceptions seem to confirm the concern raised by a professor at the University of Mosul: "Because we do not commemorate the liberation of Mosul, people began to forget the heroic role that the Iraqi Special Operations Forces played in the battle".[5] The professor hinted that much of the credit for Iraq's victory over IS is claimed by the PMF. The Iraqi Army's weakness when facing IS in 2014 might have contributed to this public perception, which resulted in the progressive securitisation of the Nineveh province through the presence of multiple armed groups. Moreover, the need for protection systems voiced by grassroots participants during the study might explain the social fragmentation in the Nineveh province along with affiliation with, and loyalty to, armed groups. In the long term, this military division could cause intra-community conflicts and add a layer of fragmentation in addition to ethnic and sectarian divides. This scenario is especially possible since the state security apparatus is weak in the area, as it lacks coordination and professionalism. According to a religious leader in Tal Afar, this lack of professionalism is a great challenge to the implementation of PVE initiatives in Iraq: "The security establishment lacks the qualifications to prevent violence and promote coexistence, especially the intelligence component. They fail to read events and act upon threats and take appropriate and effective measures".[6]

Like security institutions, the judiciary system, while independent according to Article 19 of the 2005 Constitution, repeatedly suffered from political interference by powerful political elites, especially at the time of the premiership of Nuri al-Maliki (2006–2014). In several cases, Maliki's government misused the judiciary and fostered violent extremism by issuing arrest warrants against Sunni political figures based on terrorism charges. While efforts were made to depoliticise the court after May 2020, the Iraqi judiciary system remains weak. In this regard, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has reported that "while trial proceedings were efficient and well-organised in IS-related hearings, basic fair trial criteria of terrorism-related cases were violated" (2020: iv–v). When it comes to violent extremism, respondents argued that the judicial system is biased and lacks authority:

> In some cases, if not many, if somebody commits a crime, s/he might get away from it easily, which means that the courts are not firm/decisive. Sometimes, people are charged in cases of false accusations and innocent people go to jail".[7]

Others mentioned the impunity of armed groups and security institutions due to the absence of security justice (*'adala imniyyah*). Finally, respondents regretted that the Iraqi judicial system is punitive and fails to repair the prejudice caused by violent extremism: "We still don't know who are the victims,

and who are the perpetrators of violence even after years of conflict and the liberation from Daesh".[8]

Finally, poor public policies that fail to address rising poverty and slow development are key drivers of violent extremism in Iraq. As noted by a grassroots participant from Tal Afar: "[P]overty has a major role in preventing violence; . . . if poverty is eliminated and services are provided, most of the problems will be solved".[9] More precisely, poor economic performance fuelled public distrust towards the state, which failed to provide a fair distribution of its giant oil revenue, job opportunities, and public services. According to a sociologist native to Tal Afar, providing job opportunities to the youth "will make them busy with their life instead of thinking of negative deeds that cause harm and negative consequences, for themselves and the society".[10] Many participants attributed the lack of public services to the power-sharing system in the country: "The spread of administrative and financial corruption as a result of the quotas system affects the economy of the country and there is no state to address grievances and oppression".[11] Indeed, the Iraqi private sector is traditionally weak, given the legacy of socialist governments, and monopolised by a small number of businesspeople and political elites. In other words, the state fails as a service provider, which leaves Iraqi citizens no other choice but to be self-dependent. In addition to the dysfunction of the state system, Iraq lacks post-conflict reconstruction and recovery programmes. Many of the areas liberated from IS have not been rebuilt, while the south of the country has been neglected by state policy for decades, with some villages lacking the most basic services such as water supply.

Political mistrust is a result of the inability of the Iraqi state to protect citizens and provide basic services. Political mistrust was reflected by the grassroots communities in Hamdaniyyah and Tal Afar, where 55% of participants said that they had no trust at all in political representatives and 35% only trusted them to some extent. Political mistrust was stronger in Tal Afar compared to Hamdaniyyah, where only 16.7% of grassroots inhabitants trusted local political representatives, while this amount of trust was absent from grassroots discourse in Tal Afar. An explanation for the high degree of political mistrust in the Nineveh province might be the state's lack of administrative capacity to implement development policies and address the grievances of citizens related to the lack of job opportunities and public services. Similar amounts of political mistrust are reported across Iraq (Arab Barometer 2022). Administrative recovery is unlikely, with widespread corruption, nepotism, and weak rule of law and public policies. As a result of this institutional crisis, the Iraqi public has lost faith in the political system and in political change. This fatigue is evident during election time. For example, the turnout for the legislative elections has been decreasing over the past decade, reaching new depths during the most recent October 2020 legislative elections (42% in the Nineveh province and 41% across Iraq) (IHECO 2021). Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic increased people's mistrust of the state, which was unable to cope with the emergency and deliver decent

protection to Iraqi citizens. By way of examples, hospitals were not equipped with oxygen or to provide treatment to fight the virus, and the price of hygiene products and masks increased drastically. The pandemic confirmed the perception that Iraqi citizens are alone in times of crisis. In the words of a university professor in Mosul: "State-Society relations are too weak and there are no messages from the state to the public to tell citizens that the state is here, and it will support them and will not leave them behind".[12] Political mistrust does not only affect grassroots communities in Nineveh province. In Hamdaniyyah and Tal Afar, 60% of civil society members and 40% of religious representatives who were interviewed by the authors argued that their relationship with political institutions and/or representatives is based on a low amount of trust, while respectively 20% and 40% of these two groups qualified the relationship as distrustful. Yet, the lack of trust seems to be reciprocal between the state and the actors that are instrumental in the prevention of violent extremism and the promotion of peace and stability. As explained by a civil society activist in Hamdaniyyah: "The political institutions always look at us as if we were working for foreign powers and have foreign agendas and work to destabilise the security of the region".[13]

In October 2019, Iraq witnessed its widest social movement against the political system. What became known as the "Tishreen movement"[14] were the first Shia-led protests that called for a change in the political system in the country. Although they were met with violence by the pro-status quo Shia militia and, to a lesser extent, the Iraqi army, the protests succeeded in their call for a change of government and the cabinet of Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned in December 2019. More importantly, the Tishreen protests revealed a social appetite for change across ethnic and confessional lines, genders and generations, even among the Shia community, which is politically the most powerful in the country. The sustainability of the social movement is subject to debate, especially as the most endurant demonstrators withdrew from the streets three years after the protests began. However, observers of the movements remain optimistic, as illustrated by Dr. Muhannad al-Janabi, a lecturer of Political Science at Cihan University in Erbil: "The October movement is going through a stage of maturity, and that a three-year-old social and political movement is very natural to suffer from some obstacles and problems. Therefore, I imagine that the October movement is still standing" (Al-Khazraji 2022).

As reflected in this section, the failure of the state system to protect Iraqi citizens against any forms of violence and its role in the emergence and development of grievances make it a weak actor of resilience against violent extremism. This raises the question: Is it possible to prevent violent extremism without the (functioning) state?

Conclusion

A few years ago, the late Iraqi sociologist Faleh Abdul Jabar (2019) developed the concept of the "state of no-state" (*al-ladawla*). In the words of the analyst

Sardar Aziz (2020), "[*ladaula*] refers neither to a deep state nor a parallel state, but rather a mixed constellation of actors inside and outside the state organisation whose operations include formal policy, extra-governmental violence, and polarising popular rhetoric". The actors mentioned by Aziz include the political elite, the clergy, the military commanders, and the tribal leaders. They are all immersed in corruption and divide the resources of the state among themselves. In this no-state, the armed groups, militias, and political parties are often controlled by one family or a group of families that behave like mafias by confiscating Iraq's sovereignty for their own benefit and that of their allies. In that sense, these groups are different from the (often armed) non-state actors that challenge the authority of the state and are often blamed for its failure, as we pointed out in the beginning of this chapter. As explained by Aziz (Ibid.), these groups "take from the institution of the state without giving and weaken without killing, making the boundaries of the no-state ambiguous and unclear". It follows that the no-state is an independent structure that operates, not based on coercive power outside of the state system, but with approval of the traditional and political classes. To conclude, it is not the resilience of a strong state that jeopardises the future of Iraqi communities, but the resilience of a system – the no-state – where a small group of people capture the state and use it as a "trojan horse" to serve their own interests.

This explains why the system is so resistant to change, even when initiated from inside. Before the Tishreen protests, in August 2015, widespread demonstrations supported by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani pressured then-Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to propose a series of measures to end the sectarian power-sharing system. Notably, al-Abadi suggested the attribution of the three most powerful political positions to ethno-sectarian communities. He also demanded the abolition of sectarian and party quotas for government jobs (Jansen 2015). Considered radical along the political spectrum, the reforms came to naught and al-Abadi failed to reform the political landscape due to the lack of support by the ruling elite.

It can therefore be argued that Iraq is stuck in transition and has never managed to move from one-man authoritarian rule to a democratic form of governance. When looking closely at the recruitment strategies of IS in the latest episode of violent extremism, we find that the group focused less on the ideological (religious) motives, and more on the social and political grievances of the Sunni community in post-2003 Iraq. As noted by an IS member,

> we did not simply focus on the intellectual and doctrinal dimension in recruiting followers, but rather on the social, political, and psychological dimension. Anyone who has a grievance or animosity against the regime is first recruited and then ideologically brainwashed afterwards.
> (Dagher 2022)

This means that even the southern part of the country, which is mostly inhabited by Shias and who have historically had few grievances against the

post-2003 state system that is dominated by representatives of their community, is prone to violent extremism. As suggested by Iraqi analyst Munqith Dagher (Ibid.), the "ISIS-ification" of southern Iraq could occur if social tensions are strong enough – and southern Iraq clearly has these characteristics. This is yet another example of the cumulative nature of violent extremism in Iraq, where religious and political motivations interweave and converge.

Given the role played by the state or the no-state in violent extremism in Iraq, one could wrongly conclude that the state should be excluded from P/CVE efforts. In contrast, we argue that the prevention of violent extremism is hard to achieve without the state. The failure of bottom-up and top-down strategies calls for an innovative, transversal, and inclusive approach to heal the scars left by two decades of rampant conflicts. This observation speaks to the need to look at resilience and vulnerability to violent extremism as two faces of one coin. Our findings also echo Jore's call for academic nuance and caution:

> Since the resilience concept currently is applied to so many different objects and scales, researchers should be aware that there is no such thing as a universal definition of resilience, if only it can be properly described. On the contrary, terrorist researchers should acknowledge that there are many forms of resilience; perhaps some of them are beneficial to contributing to a safer society, while others are not.
>
> (2020: 15)

To conclude, the Iraqi case illustrates how resilience is not necessarily normatively good (Coutu 2002), especially when a system favours a hierarchy over the interdependence of actors in resilience. Authoritarian practices, nepotism, and the capture of the state by corrupted elites may prove to be resilient systems in Iraq, but they undermine community resilience. The fact that these systems often deprive communities of leadership in the form of social or political representation is an impediment to the capacity of communities to mobilise common belonging to resist violent extremism. It suggests that P/CVE measures should create synergies between different forms of resilience and look at a given country/area as an ecosystem where all stakeholders are interdependent rather than offering P/CVE measures that serve a specific group at the expense of others. As such, a key challenge to the success of P/CVE strategies is the conciliation of this complex network of stakeholders with various backgrounds, objectives, and affiliations.

Notes

1 Interviews by authors in Dohuk, October 2021.
2 Interviews by authors in Tal Afar, August 2021.
3 Interviews by authors in Hamdaniyyah, August 2021.
4 While violent extremism in Hamdaniyyah is a new phenomenon and can be considered a spillover effect of the latest developments of Salafi-jihad in the Middle

East and Iraq, violent extremism in Tal Afar has its roots in the history of state-sponsored exclusion of the Turkmen minority since the early 1950s.
5 Interviews by authors in Mosul, October 2021.
6 Interviews by authors in Tal Afar, August 2021.
7 Interviews by authors in Tal Afar, August 2021.
8 Interviews by authors in Hamdaniyyah, September 2021.
9 Interviews by authors in Tal Afar, July 2021.
10 Interviews by authors in Mosul, October 2021.
11 Interviews by authors in Tal Afar, August 2021.
12 Interviews by authors in Mosul, October 2021.
13 Interviews by authors in Hamdaniyyah, September 2021.
14 'Tishreen' refers to the month of October (the tenth month) when the protests started.

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5 Preventing violent extremism in Lebanon

The role of hybrid state institutions

Rudayna Al-Baalbaky

Lebanon has experienced three main phases of political violence: the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990; then in the mid-2000s, characterised by political assassinations after Syria's withdrawal from the country; and finally, since the war in Syria from 2011 onwards. In recent years, and following the Syrian civil war's spillover into Lebanon, preventing violent extremism has become a top policy priority considering Lebanon's geographic location and its proliferation of violence.[1]

Since the Bush administration's launch of the War on Terror, counterterrorism has become the predominant strategy in dealing with violent extremism (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2022: 76–77). In the Obama administration, the strategy shifted to understanding the factors and drivers leading to violent extremism. The lexicon of preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) did not officially enter the global realm until 2015, when President Obama called for a unified front against extremism at the UN General Assembly. In response to the global call on P/CVE, the Lebanese government established a National Coordination Unit for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE unit) and developed a national PVE strategy. While the PVE unit intended to implement the action plan in 2019, it was severely delayed due to Lebanon's economic and financial crises, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut port explosion (see also Chapter 7). However, the PVE unit gradually resumed its work and engaged official religious institutions to establish local prevention networks (LPNs) in several municipalities, in order to prevent radicalisation at a grassroots level.

This study focuses solely on the Sunni community in Lebanon while also assessing the state's performance on P/CVE. This focus derives from the political consensus in the Lebanese government to tackle Sunni radical militancy (Saab 2023: 4). In addition to the concurrent P/CVE targets, the current priorities of the LPNs designed by the Strong Cities Network in Lebanon, which comprise Tripoli, Saida, and Majdal Anjar, specifically tailor to the Sunni community (Institute for Strategic Dialogue n.d.). Therefore, the chapter chooses to study Dar el-Fatwa, which is a state institution, and its P/CVE efforts in the country based on state policy.

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Over the past few years, academia has acknowledged the importance of involving religious institutions in P/CVE efforts (Mandaville and Nozell 2017: 5). There is a consensus that neither political nor religious institutions can deal with this issue alone. Collaboration between these two state actors is therefore instrumental for tackling violent extremism (Al-Sayed 2018: 68). The relationship between secular political institutions and religious establishments is not without friction. Often, the formalisation of religion into a state institution renders it political. This includes acting on responsibilities that are not always in line with the priorities of the community they are representing. In this situation, informal religious organisations can actively compete with the formal religious institutions since they generally do not have the same political constraints and represent views of the community that are not represented by the formal institution (Ibid.: 63). This competition for legitimacy can even concern informal organisations that endorse the violent extremism that P/CVE efforts aim to counter (Mandaville and Nozell 2017: 9). The cooperation between religious and political institutions often requires contentious adjustments. These include increasing government control over sermons or the use of religious language in P/CVE initiatives (Ibid.: 7). Indeed, this cooperation can impact the degree of legitimacy that formal religious institutions have in the eyes of their adherents, exacerbating the disconnect between the religious institution and its community (Abu-Nimer 2018: 9). This is one of the main reasons why the integration of religious institutions into the P/CVE programme in Iraq was largely unsuccessful (Beaujouan and Rasheed 2022: 102). Lebanon has seemingly learned from this and has programmes to create a common agenda in religious institutions as well as in the state (Strong Cities n.d.).

However, focusing on the cooperation between formal state institutions alone is not enough to fully understand how Lebanon's political and religious institutions can contribute to P/CVE efforts. Informal organisations do not arise simply out of competition for legitimacy. In Lebanon, this is an integral part of politics. The country's political system has its roots in the Lebanese Civil War, whereby state institutions collapsed and a "war system" took their place (Mouawad 2017: 5). The war system consisted of non-state actors who had taken on similar responsibilities to those of the state. They were then institutionalised in the post-war period, starting with the Ta'ef Accord, which ended the war (Mouawad 2017: 6). The current system is an institutionalised descendant of the war system.

Curiously, post-war Lebanon has been described as both "resilient" and "weak". Neither of these gives a conclusive view of how politics in Lebanon functions. Jamil Mouawad (2017) argues that Lebanon's resilience is misunderstood as the resilience of the state, instead of the resilience of a system. The current system relies on a network of patronage and clientelism, which has split the state and its resources among itself and "hollowed out state institutions" (Ibid.: 4). It does so in many ways, from the attribution of certain sectors to religious institutions, like education or the judiciary (Henley 2016).

The capacity of Lebanon's system to remain resilient is "at the expense of state institutions" (Mouawad 2017: 4).

Initially then, it makes sense to presume the state is "weak" given that it is hollowed out by the political system. However, again, this does not give a complete understanding of the situation. The state's structural weakness has allowed non-state actors to emerge (Mouawad and Baumann 2017: 67). Calling Lebanon a "weak state" hides the strength that these informal actors have. Instead, "hybridity" can be used to describe the situation whereby state and non-state actors cooperate and compete in order to operate (Ibid.: 70). In this system, the state takes part in a larger political space consisting of many non-state actors (Ibid.: 71). Hazbun (2016) adapts this concept to "hybrid sovereignty" and "plural governance" when talking about security. According to him, the state is one part of a "security assemblage", in combination with non-state actors like Hezbollah. The cooperation between these actors then serves as the basis for Lebanon's security. He attributes this system to the period of Syrian tutelage. As a part of hybrid sovereignty, Syria created an assemblage of state and non-state actors to maintain stability in Lebanon. However, at the end of Syrian tutelage in 2005, state and non-state actors vied to replace the Syrian government's primary control of the security apparatus. This has led to a "more plural form of governance over security" (Ibid.: 1057). On top of the state being co-opted by the political system, it also coexists with and competes with non-state actors. However, this is not to say that the state is necessarily rendered inefficient; rather, its activities are selective. The state can be manipulated to maintain the system's resilience but also be efficient in specific domains. For example, Bilal Saab (2023) mentions how the state has been efficient in its counter-terrorism programmes.

Majdal Anjar, the sister city of Anjar, became particularly relevant for this study given its hybridity. Located on the Syria-Lebanon border and along the Beirut-Damascus highway, these cities are at the centre of many cross-border interactions. Anjar hosted the Syrian intelligence headquarters in the Syrian tutelage period. In more recent times, its proximity to the border has made it a transit space for many Syrian refugees, with many remaining in the town. With a pre-war population of 22,000, Majdal Anjar population has more than doubled with 25,000 Syrian refugees settling in the city (Strong Cities n.d.). Exacerbated by the Syrian civil war, the border has become porous, with the Lebanese government's control limited to official border crossings. Even then, they are de facto controlled by Hezbollah. Reportedly, the Syrian state services cooperate directly with Hezbollah, who are known for their involvement in the illicit trade of the drug Captagon, which is mass produced in Syria (Khatib 2022).

In Lebanon, religious institutions and the state have a predetermined but ever-changing relationship. Sects are institutionalised in politics and representation and have broad powers over religious and civic affairs. These range from simple religious affairs to education and independent judicial institutions (Henley 2016). Religious leaders are often treated as if they are representatives of their sect; however, their appointment is generally

not representative of their constituency (Henley 2016). For example, Sunni politicians accounted for nearly a third of the electoral college that elected the Grand Mufti of Lebanon in 2014 (Lefèvre 2015). As these leaders are selected for political goals, they are rendered illegitimate in the eyes of their supposed adherents (Henley 2016). Furthermore, since they are bound to political narratives, these institutions are limited with regards to the political decisions they can make (Lefèvre 2015). When the adherents of a religious group are unhappy with the government-regulated religious institutions, rival religious actors are bound to appear. In Lebanon, this occurred around the mid-2010s, with two main rival actors to Dar el-Fatwa (the government-regulated Sunni institution) emerging: the League of Muslim Scholars and Jamaa' al-Islamiyya. The former was created out of frustrations with Dar el-Fatwa's inaction and religious grievances, while the latter was able to create a political network that provides services to the Sunnis, usually delivered by Dar el-Fatwa (Ibid.). Both challenged Dar el-Fatwa's influence, and therefore the state's ability to control religion. Its shortcomings created a vacuum in which non-state institutions have created a "hybrid" system of religious leadership between state and non-state institutions. This has led to some reforms; however, the influence and legitimacy of the non-state actors remain intact.

As Lefèvre (2015) argues: "the lack of Sunni leadership in public affairs helped lay the groundwork for the growth of Islamic radicalism in Lebanon". Put simply, this is because sectarian political leaders (who appoint the religious institutions) compete over decision-making in the state and lead certain sects to be allocated different parts of the state's resources (Mouawad 2017: 5). This can lead to certain religious leadership, and therefore their sect, being more politically excluded. This political segregation can result in political disenfranchisement and a tendency towards violent extremism if political grievances are not addressed.

While examining state responses to violent extremism, previous scholarship mainly assessed strategic work, meaning it focused on the effectiveness of public policy to counter or prevent violent extremism. However, this is not necessarily relevant to Lebanon. Mouawad and Baumann (2017) point out that the understanding of statehood is inappropriate in Lebanon, as it ignores the presence of powerful non-state actors. Indeed, "analyses of state weakness and absence hide more than they reveal" (Ibid.: 83–84). Little research has been conducted to examine the relations between state institutions and, especially, between formal religious and other institutions as is relevant to Lebanon. Additionally, little attention has been given to how the interactions between formal and informal institutions may prevent or counter violent extremism. Lebanon presents a case whereby P/CVE policies proposed by the National PVE Coordination Unit were comprehensive; however, formal and informal obstacles made their implementation inefficient and inadequate. Hence, this chapter focuses on the institutional implementers of P/CVE policies in order to trace the factors and drivers triggering such inefficiency and inadequacy. By analysing formal religious institutions' engagement at both the national and local levels, this study

attributes Dar el-Fatwa's inefficiency in preventing violent extremism to the following four factors: political actors' co-optation of Sunni formal religious institutions, the limitation of Dar el-Fatwa's role in P/CVE, Dar el-Fatwa's contested legitimacy and the rising competition with informal religious entities, and Dar el-Fatwa's role in the context of hybrid sovereignties.

This chapter relies on qualitative data collected at the national and local levels. The national scope looks at Dar el-Fatwa, the formal Sunni religious institution, while the local level scrutinises elements from fieldwork in Majdal Anjar. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with various formal and informal actors, including officials, affiliates, and experts from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (i.e., Prime Minister's Office), Internal Security Forces, the president of the Unions of Municipalities, mayors, Dar el-Fatwa, informal religious bodies, local civil society organisations, international dialogue initiatives, and academic institutions.

Dar el-Fatwa's structural limitations

Dar el-Fatwa is a good example of a state institution that is being co-opted by sectarian political elites and undermined to benefit the system. In fact, Dar el-Fatwa's position in the administrative structure of the Lebanese public administration renders it under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office. This results in financial subordination to the Prime Minister's Office and specific conditions that allow for the internal co-optation of religious institutions.

The interaction between the formal religious and political spheres

The origin of the Mufti's position dates back even before the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon in 1920. The position was called the Mufti of Beirut until the issue of Decree No. 291 in 1932, stating that the Mufti of Beirut would be called the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic (Dar el-Fatwa n.d.a). There is no ministry of *awqaf* (similar to Western endowments but specific to Islam) in Lebanon as in most Arab or Islamic countries. It is the Mufti who is the direct head of all Muslim religious scholars and the supreme reference for *awqaf* and Dar el-Fatwa in the regions (Dar el-Fatwa n.d.b). In fact, Dar el-Fatwa falls under the Prime Minister's Office and is headed by the Mufti of the Republic. The Sunni Sharia courts also fall within the Sharia and confessional courts that report to the Prime Minister's Office (Presidency of the Council of Ministers n.d.). Dar el-Fatwa considers that it has a "complementary relationship with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers" because it represents "the religious authority of Muslims and the Lebanese in general, while the Prime Minister's Office represents the political authority of Muslims in particular and the Lebanese in general".[2]

The relationship between the formal religious and political spheres was shaped by a series of political and historical incidents. Throughout modern history, both the formal religious institution and the political regime

mutually legitimised each other's projects, as Dar el-Fatwa endorsed a Sunni or national political project. For example, when former President Fouad Chehab supported Hassan Khaled in his nomination as the Mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Mufti Khaled returned the favour, legitimising Chehab's reformist agenda. Political projects emboldened the role of Dar el-Fatwa mainly through funding. Former Prime Minister Riad El Solh supported Mufti Muhammad Tawfiq Khalid in 1943 with funds to build the current headquarters of Dar el-Fatwa as a reward for his loyalty. However, the intersection between the two institutions is not always smooth. In 2012, Dar el-Fatwa witnessed deep internal polarisation when a dispute erupted between Mufti Mohammed Rashid Qabbani and the Future Movement (a major Sunni political party) over the Mufti's administrative powers. Consequently, the dispute severely weakened the Mufti's role in the Sunni and national arenas, leading to a recalibration of the previous mutually beneficial relationship.

Internal structure and dual hybridity of Dar el-Fatwa

The Grand Mufti is the supreme reference for all institutions and directorates affiliated with Dar el-Fatwa and is responsible for Islamic social, cultural, religious, educational, and judicial affairs. Each of the institutions is managed by a general manager and a board of trustees. The Grand Mufti is elected by the Supreme Islamic Sharia Council and the Sunni Election Council.

The first hybridity is due to the formation of Dar el-Fatwa by state officials, and the election of the Mufti implies a structural overlap between the formal religious and political actors. Despite being granted independence in managing its religious affairs in 1955, Dar el-Fatwa became politicised in 1996 due to a change in the electoral composition of the Islamic Election Council, and therefore in the election process of the Grand Mufti. According to Decree No. 50/1996, the Islamic Election Council consists of the serving prime minister, former prime ministers, working Sunni ministers and deputies, members of the Supreme Islamic Sharia Council,[3] local working muftis, Sharia judges (both active and retired), the secretary of the Fatwa in Beirut and Tripoli, and finally the director general of Islamic Endowments. Sunni politicians constituted nearly a third of the 109-member electoral authority that chose the current Mufti of the Republic, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, including the current prime minister, four former prime ministers, four ministers, and 27 members of parliament (Lefèvre 2015). The 1996 change meant that the Council became a tool in the hands of Sunni politicians, moving away from its recognised duty to represent the Sunni community. Informal religious leaders consider that Dar el-Fatwa's position vis-à-vis the state makes the Grand Mufti a "compromise candidate" between the various national and regional political parties. As a result of this compromising position and his perception, the Grand Mufti does not have much power to manoeuvre or take a decisive position that can claim to represent "the shifting political tendencies of the adherents to the sect".

In addition, Dar el-Fatwa represents a second hybridity because the organisational structure and practical operation of religious authorities in Lebanon create space for informal religious institutions. The Sunni institutional structure includes Dar el-Fatwa, the Islamic Sunni Court, and the Islamic Religious Endowments. Among them, the Islamic Sunni Court and Dar el-Fatwa fall under the Prime Minister's Office and all their staff are state employees. The Islamic Religious Endowments (*awqaf*) combine both public and private aspects because, although their fund is raised by non-private properties, their budget is not controlled by the government, and their head, the Islamic High Assembly, is independent. Hence, those mosques and imams that fall under the *awqaf* are not official religious institutions and figures. Despite the fact that the 1955 law stipulates that every local mufti should meet with the imams in his region once a month to report on local issues and plan future activities, the interviewee states that there hasn't been any formal meeting since 2011.[4] Therefore, the aforementioned organisational structure and practical operation create independent space for the development of informal religious leadership.

Financial subordination

Dar el-Fatwa's budget is part of the Prime Minister's Office' state budget, which includes the salaries and allocations of the Grand Mufti, the muftis of the regions, and the salaries of the Sharia judges. Consequently, there is no special budget for Dar el-Fatwa. Its employees receive their salaries through the Ministry of Finance, just like other government employees. The President of the Council of Ministers can, via their administration, suspend the salaries of official religious employees as a disciplinary measure, especially when Dar el-Fatwa has political disagreements with them. Additionally, this budget does not cover the religious education it provides to Sunni Muslims or the capacity building of the imams affiliated with it.[5] This creates a dependence on the Prime Minister's Office, which produces a set of constraints. Thus, the Mufti and the Supreme Islamic Sharia Council are hierarchically and financially subject to political authority. The structural dependence of this formal religious institution on a political institution creates a risky environment for the former. In the context of P/CVE, this could lead to inaction. Therefore, instead of reflecting Dar el-Fatwa's stable relationship with the constituencies it represents, it reflects its vulnerability and weakening role in the process of building community resilience against the discourse and actions of violent extremism.

Dar el-Fatwa's functional limitations

Lack of control over religious education

The next limitation is its inability to produce and promote religious discourse based on principles of citizenship, coexistence, and peace. This is expressed

primarily due to challenges to its religious education. A group of religious education institutions are affiliated with Dar el-Fatwa and the Mufti of the Republic, such as the College of Sharia at the Islamic University of Beirut. In addition, Al-Azhar institutes (Al-Azhar Al-Beqaa, Al-Azhar Akkar, and Al-Azhar branches in Mount Lebanon) are religious high schools from which students obtain a Sharia secondary certificate that qualifies them to enter any Sharia faculty in Lebanon. However, in contrast to informal religious institutions, none of the schools affiliated with Dar el-Fatwa offer primary or intermediate education.

The *awqaf* (Islamic religious endowments) bear the expenses of religious education in public schools. The General Directorate of Islamic Endowments in Dar el-Fatwa provides religious education in public schools with a Sunni majority and in private schools that are not affiliated with informal religious institutions. It performs the task as part of the activities of religious affairs, which accredits public schools and designates teaching delegates. Although the General Directorate of Islamic Endowments bears the expenses of religious education in 345 schools across Lebanon, it lacks the financial capacity to cover the needs of public schools located in Muslim-majority areas – unlike informal religious institutions.

Public schools in Lebanon devote one hour of religious instruction per week to each class in return for the Directorate of Endowments' appointment of a teacher from those who have obtained a Sharia secondary school or university degree, in addition to covering their salary.[6] Teachers of religious education in schools receive some minor allowances that depend on donations (a religion teacher is not considered a government employee like other teachers in the school). Some of these seconded teachers are not specialised in the education field. They mostly hold degrees from the faculties of Islamic studies, Sharia, or literature. They are hourly contracted due to their low wages and need to do additional work to secure a decent income.[7] While the Directorate of Endowments supervises the teaching of the subject, the administration of these schools does not monitor the activity of teachers of religious education since their administrative reference is beyond the Ministry of Education. Moreover, there is a lack of educational evaluation of subject results and oversight from the directorate due to its weak financial capabilities. The school curriculum provided by the *awqaf* is based on a book published in the early 1960s by Sheikh Muhammad Bakhsh. However, according to an interviewee, the book needs to be updated and requires a new methodology.[8] The interviewees describe the commitment of assigned teachers to the curriculum determined by the Endowment Directorate while arguing that there is an infiltration by some religious party groups and political organisations. "Some have become part of religious political organisations such as the Islamic Group, Al-Ahbash (the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects) and some other organisations, which contradict the essence of the advocacy that Dar el-Fatwa is carrying out".[9]

In addition to the lack of control over education activities, Dar el-Fatwa does not have the authority to ban any educational institutions that are affiliated with informal religious authorities. However, education ministers give licences according to their political leanings without referring to the Mufti, who "has no interest in establishing informal religious institutes and institutions, whether they are extremist or not". Therefore, Dar el-Fatwa is a vulnerable competitor in the matter of religious education, as various political and Islamic groups, especially those funded by countries or individuals abroad, establish their institutions, schools, and universities with the approval of the political system. This is evident in Majdal Anjar. There are around 500 students at the primary and intermediate levels of kindergarten at "Al-Manahil" school, which is affiliated with the Wahhabi-Salafi Sheikh Adnan Umama. They constitute approximately 11% of the 4,000 students distributed among seven schools in Majdal Anjar.[10] Dar el-Fatwa believes that the political parties' exploitation of the state's leniency to launch religious schools and institutes threatens the culture of citizenship that upholds sectarian and religious diversity. Therefore, it calls for limiting Islamic religious education to formal religious bodies.

The official religious authorities interviewed for this study do not agree with a distinct differentiation of educational institutions between formal and informal sectors because teachers and books can be utilised in both. What fuels the spread of extremist ideas in the educational sphere are private meetings, personal contacts, and certain imams' YouTube videos. He adds that

> those who have extremist ideas didn't receive them in the universities that are part of Dar el-Fatwa or the universities that are not part of Dar el-Fatwa. They received them from some extreme imams with whom they have personal relationship with.[11]

Regardless of their formal or informal status, the institutions that appear in the public sphere are indeed alike.

Inability to control sermons and channels of discourse

Another limitation of Dar el-Fatwa lies in its inability to control sermons and channels of discourse. Dar el-Fatwa recommends adhering to its written Friday sermons and broad guidelines; however, nothing obliges the preacher or even someone appointed from Dar el-Fatwa to preach this sermon specifically.[12] In addition, an official list showing the assigned imams for the Friday sermon indicates that there are 79 mosques in Beirut.[13] However, these 79 mosques are all Dar el-Fatwa-registered mosques. Nonetheless, there are large unregistered mosques that include invisible prayer rooms. The interviewee emphasises that it is usually the informal bodies that are more active, more influential, and are more grounded with more followers and funding.

Thus, one mosque with an extreme imam, substantial funding and followers can be more influential than 20 mosques in the same region.[14]

At the local level, there are more than 18 mosques in Majdal Anjar, most of which belong to the Directorate of Endowments. However, sheikhs who follow Salafi Sheikh Adnan Umama manage eight to 10 of the mosques. There is nothing to prevent preachers from addressing any political, social, economic, and security topics. Nevertheless, the matter remains related to the Friday preacher to approach these issues from his angle and to direct the worshippers. We note that the interaction and presence of worshippers are stronger in mosques that choose to engage in and take a position on political and security topics.[15] There are no mosques in Majdal Anjar outside the framework of *awqaf*. Nevertheless, the influence of Dar el-Fatwa or the Directorate of Endowments on discourse in mosques is negligible. Dar el-Fatwa has lost its ability to "control religious discourse" and its impact on all preachers affiliated with the *awqaf* because it does not give preachers and sheikhs any funds whatsoever,[16] nor does it provide any training workshops for imams. Thus, the influence of Dar el-Fatwa on religious discourse, including its quality and orientation, is almost nonexistent. Therefore, this is a source of vulnerability to counter violent extremism.

As a result, Dar el-Fatwa, through the General Directorate of Endowments, does not exercise actual or absolute authority over opening or closing mosques. For example, the followers of the Salafi-Wahhabi ideology in Majdal Anjar built their first mosque under the cover, protection, and pressure of representatives of the Syrian security regime in Lebanon in the early 1990s, even though Dar el-Fatwa did not support it. In addition, although it possesses the authority to request the police close a mosque as a result of hate speech, incitement to violent extremism, or hostility to the state, Dar el-Fatwa hardly utilises this power.[17]

Inability to launch effective initiatives and dialogues in terms of P/CVE

Dar el-Fatwa is constrained in its P/CVE role due to its inability to launch effective initiatives and dialogues with those accused of violent extremism. While Dar el-Fatwa has been granted authorisation by the general prosecutor and security forces to visit prisons, the interviewees stated that it did not take any initiative towards launching dialogues with Islamist detainees to discourage them from the practices and discourses of violent extremism, even though this has been effective in other countries. For example, Saudi Arabia's reconciliation dialogue succeeded in reintegrating 15,000 people into society. Meanwhile, the Islamic detainees constantly rejected Dar el-Fatwa's authority in prisons because they considered it not only a *kafir* [non-believer] but also a traitor.[18] This is because the institution is considered to be part of the state that is "hijacked" by sectarian political leaders, therefore, part of the political system, which is generally the target of detainees' political projects, and therefore violent extremism. Although Dar el-Fatwa distributes

food and goods to detainees, some interviewees from the Ministry of Justice believe that these efforts do not indicate any sort of positive input in preventing violent extremism. Regardless of the degree of contact between these two actors, Dar el-Fatwa regards many of these detainees as heroes rather than criminals. This means their approach does not meet the standards necessary for P/CVE projects. An interviewee emphasised Dar el-Fatwa's ineptness by indicating a "very low" rate of rehabilitation.[19] Nevertheless, Dar el-Fatwa has a different perception of the visiting permit for the prisons. The visiting permit received by Dar El-Fatwa does not provide it with the same accessibility or authority that official Christian groups also working inside the prisons enjoy. Dar el-Fatwa appears like an intruder from the outside, without real cooperation from the Ministry of Interior.[20] Moreover, some Islamic detainees consider Dar el-Fatwa to be part of the non-Muslim government and consequently do not trust their imams or even pray with them. In addition, Dar el-Fatwa is not involved in prisoner rehabilitation, nor does it play any role in P/CVE as it is neither qualified nor capable to apply any initiatives. Even though it has formed a league of experts, lawyers, and social workers to follow up with prisoners and their families, this league has proven to be a cemetery for all its plans and projects.[21] Also, there are political and security issues that complicate this situation, with no solution in sight.[22]

Dar el-Fatwa: an undermined actor in a "plural governance system" and in areas of "hybrid sovereignties"

Contested legitimacy and the rising competition by informal religious entities

Due to Dar el-Fatwa's political and financial dependence, they are bound to the political sway of the time. This is expressed in two ways: the concentration on one single narrative and, consequently the exclusion of opponents from that narrative. This is illustrated by various examples. Interviewees stated that this stance led to a series of problematic issues, including the dominant role played by Hezbollah in Lebanese political, judicial, and security institutions and agencies, the fight between Sunni groups and the Lebanese army in Sidon in 2013 and Tripoli in 2014, and the so-called "Islamic detainees" file.[23] Therefore, the formal institution seems to be bound by restrictions and a political ceiling set by the most prominent political factions in the Lebanese arena amid the settlements that guarantee the continuation of the "status quo", that is, the power-sharing system based on consensus between religious sects.

Dar el-Fatwa's close relationship with the political authority distances itself from large segments of the Sunni community. Within the context of Lebanon's power-sharing system, Dar el-Fatwa's exclusion of opposition voices and its inability to represent Sunni opponents diminish its legitimacy. The community groups in the Sunni sect that are not represented at the governmental level or do not benefit from the power-sharing system are predisposed

to be drawn to the discourse of informal religious institutions and leaders with a higher and more extreme ceiling.

One of the most prominent manifestations of this problem is the emergence of the League of Muslim Scholars in 2011, a hybrid informal institution and the strongest voice in challenging the authority of the Mufti and Dar el-Fatwa, even though a minority of its sheikhs follow Dar el-Fatwa. The League of Muslim Scholars includes religious leaders who follow the Wahhabi-Salafi ideology and who belong to or remain close to Jamaa' Islamiya (the Muslim Brotherhood branch in Lebanon), in addition to independent figures whose political positions match those of the League.

Some of the interviewees believe that this informal institution would be able, within a short period, to accumulate enough legitimacy through its defiant stances against the "hegemonic discourse" and to achieve steps towards a "peaceful balance" among the Lebanese parties on the crucial issues in the Sunni arena.[24] The interviewees attribute this thought to its liberation from the low political ceiling that has been imposed on Dar el-Fatwa due to its administrative and political dependency. Scholars believe that the leaders and scholars of the League of Muslim Scholars enjoy a "charismatic" command and a "revolutionary" approach that responds to those with grievances, or in other words, those excluded by the state institution. In contrast to traditional official religious leaders who derive their legitimacy from the bureaucracy, the League could quickly attract large segments of the Sunni community to adopt a discourse that responds more appropriately to people's feelings of victimisation, as the Sunni political sect appears to be experiencing a crisis of bold command and leadership (Kortam 2022: 29). The informal religious representatives in our study added that the matters of the Supreme Islamic Sharia Council should be left in the hands of "clerics" rather than political leaders or even businesspeople. Here, the rift between the informal religious leaders and the official religious establishment emerges due to the overlapping relationship between Dar el-Fatwa and official political actors.

Dar el-Fatwa's leadership is determined by regional consensus, putting its legitimacy in question and, therefore, its role in P/CVE, especially in times of regional polarisation. Dar el-Fatwa considers that it is "entrusted with the Islam and Arabism in Lebanon, and that its message, as much as it is a national message par excellence, is also an Islamic and Arab message par excellence".[25] However, this makes it vulnerable to regional influences. Scholars point out that Mufti Derian needed the support of Saudi Arabia and Egypt to be the consensual candidate for the position of Mufti of the Republic. These two countries have traditionally played a pivotal role in the process of electing the Mufti and more generally in the field of the Sunni sect. There has also been a customary consensus to seek the support of Syria. The process of electing the Mufti took place in 2014 amid severe regional polarisation between two opposing regional Sunni political alignments. The rivalry escalated between the Saudi-Emirati-Egyptian axis (which defines itself as the axis of moderation) and the Qatari-Turkish axis, against the backdrop of

the war in Syria and political developments in the region after 2011, reaching its climax in the so-called Gulf crisis. This rift was clearly reflected in the Sunni political and religious arena in Lebanon. An interviewee points out that "the more there is harmony between the strongest political forces in the sect with the religious references, the greater their activities will be and the more influential".[26] The political alignment between the head of the Sunni political authority and the head of the Sunni religious authority can act as a driver of resilience, except in the case of great rivalry among the Sunni regional powers. This leads to feelings of exclusion by Sunni political opposition components from the formal religious authority and the investment of regional forces in trying to project power beyond their borders.

Interactions with state institutions in P/CVE-related matters: the case of the "Islamic detainees"

Currently, there are around 700 prisoners charged as "Islamic detainees" in Lebanese prisons.[27] Although Dar el-Fatwa maintains a permanent relationship and communication with the judicial and security establishments to "solve the problems of Muslims in the country", it remains cautious in pressuring them to release or speed up the trials of Islamic detainees.[28] One interviewee from the Ministry of Justice indicates that Dar el-Fatwa did previously cooperate with the parliament and, together with detainees' families, lobbied for an amnesty order, although it had a negative impact and delayed the trial process. An interviewee from the religious authorities denies Dar el-Fatwa's proactive role in the trial. Instead, he suggests that prisoners' families intentionally took advantage of and distorted Dar el-Fatwa's consolatory attitude to rally for support on the streets.[29] Maintaining channels of communication between Dar el-Fatwa and the security and judicial institutions does not mean a change in the approach involved in these trials, such as mitigating sentences or adhering to human rights standards with prisoners. Therefore, Dar El-Fatwa's general ineffectiveness hurt its credibility and popularity among the Sunnis. The interviewees state that Dar el-Fatwa's approach is to function as a mediator with the security or judicial apparatus, encouraging it to investigate prisoner files with the aim of expediting trials or releasing prisoners, which occasionally succeeds. At the same time, the unofficial religious institutions were able to achieve partial gains in this context, especially in the matter of reaching a ceasefire in the town of Arsal in 2014 between members of IS (formerly known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra) on the one hand and between the Lebanese Army and the forces supporting it on the other.

Dar el-Fatwa is keen to maintain communication with the ministers of justice and interior, especially when Sunni ministers are appointed to these positions, because this communication has proven to be more effective than communication with the judicial authorities. It is also noticeable that some

security commanders respond better to negotiations conducted with them by informal religious institutions, specifically the League of Muslim Scholars. According to respondents, the security, military, political, and religious leaders occasionally exchanged services with Dar el-Fatwa by releasing detainees. They add that they believe that trust between Dar el-Fatwa and Sunni community members has been shaken due to the belief that some sheikhs affiliated with Dar el-Fatwa are cooperating with the security services by collecting personal information and sharing it with them.[30]

Challenging role in areas of "hybrid sovereignty": Majdal Anjar under Syrian tutelage

The Wahhabi-Salafi discourse, which began to spread in Majdal Anjar in the early 1990s, focused on "atonement and prohibition of joining the army or joining any state apparatus". In addition, a general context was formed that "this army and this authority do not rule by what God has revealed, and that only fighting for the cause of God is true jihad, and only in this case can the fighter who is killed be considered a martyr". Moreover, this speech states that "what is required is fighting for the sake of raising the word 'there is no god but God' and establishing the Caliphate state" exclusively.[31]

The interviewees from Majdal Anjar unanimously agreed that the emergence of Wahhabi-Salafi ideology came in parallel with the Syrian security presence in Lebanon. They considered that the Syrian security apparatus allowed or turned a blind eye to the emergence of these groups. The first mosque built by the Wahhabi-Salafis in Majdal Anjar was covered up and protected by the Syrian security apparatus after Dar el-Fatwa refused to build the mosque. Interviewees state that this role is evident in several events, for example, with the entry of US forces into Iraq in 2003, a group of Sheikh Adnan Umama's students gathered and believed that fighting the Americans and their allies in Iraq was an "individual obligation". Another central figure called "Abu Muhammad al-Libnani", a military figure who derived his ideas from the book *Millat Ibrahim* by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, advanced technological capabilities in relation to the era in which the events took place. Holding Danish citizenship, he has been involved in the community environment in Majdal Anjar through affinity. Both, perhaps intentionally, operated under the radar of the Syrian security apparatus.

The interviewees unanimously agree that this group, which can be considered the first generation of fighters from Majdal Anjar, had split from Sheikh Umama, rejecting his ideology after he established several institutions, including the "Al-Manahil" school and the "Ghiras al-Khair" foundation, with the aim of preserving his interests through the continuation of his institutions. Ismail al-Khatib, a figure from Majdal Anjar, played a pivotal role in recruiting these fighters and securing their transportation from Lebanon to fight in Iraq against US forces and their allies. The interviewees stated that "the illegal removal of fighters from Majdal to Al-Bukamal, passing through the

Syrian border, from Wadi Anjar in Lebanon to the Kafir area in Syria, and then from Al-Kafir area to Homs in Syria and then to the Syrian-Iraqi border in Al-Bukamal, cannot happen inside Iraq without the approval and facilitation, at least, of the Syrian security and military forces".[32]

Conclusion

In conclusion, Dar el-Fatwa is faced by a set of structural limitations when it comes to playing an assertive and effective role in terms of P/CVE. The formal Sunni institution serves as an example of how state institutions are "hallowed" by political actors to the benefit of the system. The co-optation of Dar el-Fatwa by political actors is intensified due to its internal structure and its dual hybridity: the strong presence and participation of politicians in its internal functioning, and the informality of its imams due to the decentralisation of financial decision-making and its lack of control of financial resources. Overall, Dar el-Fatwa remains financially subordinate to the central government and finds itself bound to adopt its political discourse. In addition, Dar el-Fatwa is subjected to functional limitations regarding its capability of playing a role in P/CVE: the lack of control over religious education, channels of religious discourse and of its weakness in responding in P/CVE-related areas such as engaging in dialogue with radical elements. As an undermined state institution, it is condemned to operate in a system of plural governance where state and non-state actors are in constant interaction. Dar el-Fatwa is also bound to exercise a role in areas that fall between "multiple sovereignties". Hence, its legitimacy is immensely challenged by informal religious entities that are more liberated from political and formal constraints, especially when it comes to interaction with other state institutions in P/CVE-related matters.

Notes

1 Here are various examples of violent episodes engulfing the country since the start of the Syria conflict. In 2014, the Islamic State (IS) captured Arsal, a Lebanese border town in Northeast Lebanon, triggering a battle between the Lebanese Armed Forces and IS in Fajr al Jouroud in 2017 (Saab 2023: 8). In addition, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian war intensified the sectarian tensions in Lebanon, which resulted in the 2013 clashes in Saida between Islamists, led by Salafist jihadist sheikh Ahmed al-Assir, and the Lebanese Army. Since 2014, at least 10% of the children and young adults in Roumieh, Lebanon's largest prison, have been charged with offences related to violent extremism (UNODC ROMENA 2023). In 2020, three police officers were killed in the Koura district, while in the same year, the disruption of planned militant attacks caused police and military casualties (GOV.UK n.d.). In Beddawi, in a series of counter-terrorism operations, the Lebanese army suffered several casualties. In 2021, the Lebanese army dismantled an IS-related cell that was responsible for the killing of a former intelligence officer and was planning future attacks (Ibid.). Meanwhile, deadly armed clashes erupted after a revenge shooting between Hezbollah and its rivals in Khalde, south of Beirut. In the same year, armed clashes also took place in the Tayouneh neighbourhood of Beirut between Hezbollah and the Amal movement on the one hand and the Lebanese

Forces on the other following a protest against judge Tarek Bitar's investigation into the Beirut port explosion. In 2022, a terrorist network that was planning attacks in the southern suburbs of Beirut was uncovered by the police (Ibid.).

2 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

3 The Supreme Islamic Shari'a Council is the legislative authority of the Sunni Ifta apparatus. The council consists of all classes of the Islamic community, as it includes Shari'a judges, civil judges, lawyers, businesspersons, specialists, economic practitioners, and others. It also includes former prime ministers and the current president. The term of the council's office is six years. Part of its members are "organic natural members'" (each prime minister is a natural member of the council), some of them are elected, and others are appointed by the mufti (he is entitled to appoint eight members of the council to ensure representation of all groups and regions). The Council holds its sessions under the presidency of the Mufti of the Republic. Its sessions and the sessions of the Islamic Election Council may be held with the aim of electing the Mufti under the Presidency of the Prime Minister in the event of the Mufti's death or reaching the legal age. After the meeting, decisions (for example, those related to personal status issues) are sent to the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, who gives the order to publish the decisions in the Official Gazette. They become effective after publication. The Council sometimes takes political positions, but those aren't the core of its work. Rather, it is dealing with Muslims' social, cultural, and personal affairs and supervising endowments (*awqaf*) in the Lebanese Republic and the social and educational institutions affiliated with Dar El-Fatwa (Interview conducted by the author in October 2021).

4 Interview conducted by a research assistant in April 2023.

5 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Interview conducted by a research assistant in April 2023.

12 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

13 Interview conducted by a research assistant in April 2023.

14 Ibid.

15 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Interview conducted by a research assistant in April 2023.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 The issue is later discussed in the course of the relationship between Dar el-Fatwa and the security service.

24 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

25 Ibid.

26 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

27 Interview conducted by a research assistant in April 2023.

28 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

29 Interview conducted by a research assistant in April 2023.

30 Interview conducted by the author in October 2021.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

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Part II
Religious actors

Introduction

Building on our actor-centric approach aimed at elucidating the dynamics of vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism, this second part of the book revisits the religion-violent extremism nexus. It draws on evidence-based analyses from three different countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, and Tunisia – on the role of religious leaders and institutions in promoting or impeding the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). Going further, the section analyses their interactions with the political system in countries where political and religious grievances often reinforce one another.

Doing so, it addresses a major gap in the literature that often depicts violent extremism as a purely religious phenomenon, thereby justifying the exclusion of religious actors in the implementation of P/CVE strategies around the world (Gopin 2000; Appleby 2000; Abu-Nimer 2003). Consequently, the scholarship offers largely reductionist accounts of P/CVE policies, without considering the different stakeholders involved in their implementation and the complex network of relationships among them. This section contributes to a current debate that recently arose after the progressive realisation that efficient P/CVE strategies must include religious figures (Karam 2016; Mandaville and Nozell 2017), which led to the well-spread, yet uneven engagement of religious stakeholders (Rabasa et al. 2010; Abu-Nimer 2018: 8).

In several of the case studies selected for this book, the emergence of a hybrid politico-legal system in the post-conflict era laid the ground for a shared space of governance and challenged "the old dichotomies of formal-informal and secular-religious" (al-Qarawee 2017). In other words, while a number of religious representatives are non-state actors, in practice, their constant interactions with and legitimation role of the political order progressively formalised their status and justified their inclusion in this volume.

Contributors to this part of the book offer critical discussions of this new involvement and the challenges it brought about, including the impact of different stakeholders on the legitimacy of religious leaders and institutions and the relationship between these institutions and the communities they claim to represent.

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Focusing on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muamer Hirkić, and Sead Turčalo (Chapter 6) argue that while religious institutions and figures are perceived as key players in P/CVE efforts, they encompass constructive and adversative influences alike. On the one hand, they are instrumental in fostering constructive outcomes in P/CVE efforts via the dissemination of information, collaboration, and cultivating local partnerships. On the other hand, they can be reluctant to engage with diverse communities and behaviours in isolation from others, especially in times of war.

Marie Kortam (Chapter 7) explores how sectarian politics led to a sense of deprivation across Sunni and Christian religious communities in Lebanon. Her work shows that religious institutions are crucial and effective actors in de-escalating conflicts during violent clashes. As a result, she recommends that their role should be strengthened and religious institutions should be granted independence from the state to better voice the grievances of Lebanese communities.

Fethi Rekik and Sadok Damak (Chapter 8) analyse the relationship between politics and religion in three marginalised governorates in Tunisia in the post-Arab uprising period. They conclude that while violent extremism takes on a religious character, it remains political in essence and is a response to social and regional injustice. They identify the importance of local actors to leverage alternative sources of pride, social engagement, and civil resistance to the injustice of the state's regionalist policies.

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6 Building resilience or increasing vulnerability to extremism in communities? Different perspectives on the role of religious actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Muamer Hirkić and Sead Turčalo

The Islamic Community, the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Jewish religious community are among the religious institutions recognised in Bosnia and Herzegovina's territory by the Law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Religious Communities and Churches (Tzvetkova and Mancheva 2019: 12). The Interreligious Council (IRC) was founded in 1997 as a non-governmental organisation and has since served as a hub for representatives from all previously mentioned institutions. Leaders of all religious groups worked to promote interreligious dialogue through various joint projects and initiatives, and the IRC began identifying extremist influences and designing preventive activities in 2019 (Counter Extremism Project 2022). Furthermore, interreligious dialogue is not limited to this mechanism but occurs through direct clerical interactions, academic partnerships, and the programmes of civil society organisations (Alibašić 2020: 358).

Although there is a wide range of extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a strong rise of the far right over the years, the Islamic Community has frequently been praised as the institution that organises the majority of individual countering/preventing violent extremism projects, owing to the phenomenon of foreign fighters and a number of departures to Syria and Iraq. During the period with the highest number of recorded departures (from 2012 to 2016), there were insinuations from neighbouring countries that were perceived by the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an attempt to generalise individual cases, which, as Preljević points out, was a wrong approach "taking into account that the Islamic Community together with the state institutions developed various strategies against radicalisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Preljević 2017: 9). At the same time, the Islamic Community, with the assistance of foreign partners such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), not only organised a significant number of activities, such as an online prevention course for imams and religion teachers (Dizdarević 2019), but also promoted the establishment of interreligious dialogue through the Interreligious Council (Mulalić and Kulanić 2017: 17).

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In addition to the challenges associated with the integration of *para-jamaats* or illegal congregations back into the official system of the Islamic Community, one of the new trends is the emergence of online Salafist preachers, who can be seen as challengers to the highest religious authority through their online outreach. However, the majority of such lecturers acknowledge the authority of the Islamic Community, indicating a shift in attitude towards the official institutional actor compared with previous periods. According to Hesová's research, the Salafist communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have undergone significant changes and transformations from the beginning (during the Bosnian war in 1992–1995) to the present, which reflects the "gradual normalisation of globalised Islamic activism within the Bosnian Islamic order" (Hesová 2021: 604). On the other hand, previous research has shown that the other two religious institutions that represent the two constitutive people in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church – have thus far not explicitly participated in prevention-related programmes, and their activities can be sub-sectioned as an indirect influence on these matters (Kapidžić 2021: 6).

According to Alibašić, "a marriage between religious and ethnic identities makes any form of interreligious dialogue difficult in times of heightened ethnic relationships in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Alibašić 2020: 359). In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, research conducted by Halilović and Veljan (2021: 20) confirmed the assumption that ethnic identities are aligned with religion, with 97% of respondents confirming the overall understanding that Bosniaks are predominantly Muslims, Serbs are Christian Orthodox, and Croats are Roman Catholics. For this reason, the current situation allows for the observation of a specific type of extremism – a cumulative one – that represents the mutual and individual interactions of political and religious extremism(s). For example, previous research has shown that populism is the dominant political discourse in the state, which leads to the manipulation of ethnopolitical and religious identities and the emphasis on the narrative "we against them" (Turčalo et al. 2022: 13). Furthermore, "religion is frequently used to promote political and other goals", which can be a significant challenge because "religious institutions enjoy a high level of trust and respect among their members" (Halilovic Pastuovic et al. 2022: 7).

This chapter looks at different perceptions of the role of religious institutions in building resilience as well as their increasing vulnerability to extremism in local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The data is drawn from 37 interviews carried out from June to September 2021 in four communities: Sarajevo, Mostar, Prijedor, and Brčko. Respondents came from various state institutions, civil society organisations, and religious institutions.

Insights gained from state institutions

Local state officials agree that religious institutions play an important role in building resilience to extremism, primarily because they gather a significant

number of citizens who trust religious leaders. One of the best examples is the presence of religious education[1] in schools, where the majority of students and parents opted for it, although they had the option of choosing between religious education and the general culture of religion.[2] However, as several interviewees pointed out, it is also evident that religious communities do not excessively deal with the problem of extremism, where "they mostly resort to diplomatic answers and condemnations".[3] Nevertheless, they added that religious communities only deal with these issues in a serious manner, either in individual cases or when international organisations are involved. One of the reasons for such involvement "could be financial benefits, which means that the real motives for cooperation are unknown".[4] One of the respondents from Brčko attempted to make a clear distinction between positive and negative actions and claimed that it is important to observe the role of religious institutions in a dual sense:

> Our experiences definitely show that there is a role for religious institutions in the matter of extremism. This can be viewed in two ways – sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. Sometimes the practices of religious institutions can even influence the emergence of extremism. The Islamic Community is nevertheless an example of the positive action of religious communities. There was a story that they were indirectly responsible for some phenomena, but they distanced themselves from things that were not part of religious practice. They also helped us hold some programmes and to learn things that we could not interpret, as was the case with certain literature. I know that they had a very difficult story here when it comes to negotiations with the illegal congregations. I am saying all this here in the context of a positive story. On the negative side, I see that there is also the influence of religious communities in terms of identity-building processes. With individuals, you could see that. What we did not see was a clear distancing from some of those things. In this area, it is good that the Interreligious Council still exists and works, and we hope that this could lead to a relaxing situation.[5]

Religious institutions have also become part of the multi-stakeholder approach and are mandatory partners in all state-led P/CVE initiatives. Primarily, there is cooperation with the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as with international partners such as the OSCE. However, it is also evident that instances of good practice are mostly related to the Islamic Community, which carried out preventive actions and managed to raise awareness, leading to concrete results. Indeed, more educated young imams and officials have appeared on the scene in the last few years, contributing to resilience-building processes through their speeches and local contacts. According to one of the interviewees, this is important because of "the actions of online *da'is*[6] who have conservative views and act outside the Islamic Community, but declaratively support this institution".[7]

Speaking about the efforts of the Islamic Community, a respondent from Sarajevo said:

> I can recognise the very good work of the Islamic Community. That community mostly makes people call for tolerance, reconciliation, and flexibility. That it is also done through religious ceremonies. On the other hand, it is interesting that *parajamaats* returned to the Islamic Community. I see a positive effect in that segment. I also see it through the Interreligious Council, at the state level. I have observed very good cooperation, for instance in Žepče, when we opened a mental health centre. That way of cooperation and showing togetherness is one of the very important things and their messages are very important.[8]

Another instance of good practice is cited by a respondent from a state institution in Mostar:

> When we do foster care, then we go towards religious communities, because of their role. It is very important to support that. It works best when one of the religious leaders speaks out. What I now recognise is the Islamic Community, which recently started working with young people, which is very good. It depends on who the religious leader is. They inspire young people with such an example. I heard the same about Caritas, that they visit the elderly and have joint meetings.[9]

On the other hand, there is a lack of systematic exchange between different institutions representing different ethnicities or identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and each of them is primarily focused on its own audience. These institutions, due to their size, are generally "the most important for implementing activities and changing the consciousness of ordinary citizens, but some religious communities avoid working in this field, and some consciously contribute to radicalisation".[10] Although it is possible to assume that there is a lack of honest communication on the subject of extremism between different religious actors, positive and preventive actions could be realised within individual communities through conversation, guidance, and counselling, where members of a certain religious group could listen and acquire knowledge. In the Western Balkans, religion is still a significant fragment of the lives of many people, which means that "there is a population that is interested in religious ceremonies and the messages that religious officials convey".[11] One of the interviewees from Brčko also mentioned his own experiences in communication with religious officials from this local community:

> When we spoke, we had an above-average dialogue. This is a topic which could produce a little scepticism about wanting to label someone as a member of an extremist nation, group, or community. Regardless of all the happenings, I think they have good communication with other

> institutions. They are also willing to have a quality dialogue. I remember when our local community had a sports event. We asked the religious officials to call on the citizens to refrain from any excesses.[12]

Also, one of the interviewees from Prijedor mentioned the way in which religious communities are involved in preventive actions:

> Groups were organised at the level of the city of Prijedor with representatives of various institutions, and action plans were made to develop tolerance towards other religious groups. The role of religious institutions has been used here, and through certain action plans, efforts are being made to reduce extremism in the community. Unfortunately, Prijedor is recognised as a city at risk of violent extremism due to the presence of various religious communities and groups.[13]

Despite the importance of partnerships between state and religious institutions for preventive actions, it is evident that there is a low level of trust among stakeholders, as seen in the consistent emphasis on shortcomings and lack of partnerships, rather than the results of preventive action. Accordingly, some respondents also raised the issue of possible interest cooperation, which exists only in situations where individuals or groups seek benefits. In addition, there is an evident link between politics and some religious authorities – where most respondents believe that political actors hold levers of power within all kinds of institutions. For instance, one of the interviewees stated that "when politicians enter politics, they see religious communities as entities that will seriously work for their victories, and that is why they use them in political campaigns".[14] In the same lines, an interviewee from Mostar said that "certain communities and groups might favour certain policies in order to stay in power",[15] and "if there is an understanding that some topics target exclusively one nation or group, then it becomes difficult to make a consensus among the decision-makers".[16] For this reason, it is undeniable that there is a lack of common attitudes and joint actions, where the majority of actors work individually without mutual synergy.

On the other hand, one of the interviewees emphasised that some forms of cooperation are not promoted for justifiable reasons, and that is why they are not even visible: It is not something that is publicly promoted for legitimate reasons. They are well-connected with the police and other competent institutions, but they are not emphasising it too much. They are available there. The work on de-radicalisation and everything else should go through religious institutions.[17]

When thinking about the ways in which religious institutions could contribute to strengthening the community's resilience to cumulative extremism as well as to extremism in a general sense, interlocutors singled out dialogue and messages of equality through joint cooperation, "leading by example", taking a conciliatory tone, and establishing a sincere form of friendship,

cooperation, and transparency. They also highlighted the importance of giving "public condemnation and explanation of tolerance and coexistence, due to the fact that religious communities are someone to be followed – which means that in some way they represent the generators of identity".[18] Actions carried out by the Islamic Community, such as the establishment of the Youth Network, were pointed out as an instance of good practices that should be followed by all other religious communities, with openness to dialogue on controversial topics. In addition, "organising with the local city or municipal administration and other religious communities"[19] as well as "appearing in general events, sports events, and programmes"[20] could lead to a change in the current perception of isolation. However, it is important to note some of the limitations that, as one of the interviewees claims, are often forgotten – including the idea that religious communities are often given the task of dealing with things that they cannot address so much.

At the same time, in some instances, the participation and willingness to work come down to the enthusiasm of the individual, as noted by a respondent from Brčko:

> The participation of religious communities is based on the enthusiasm of the individual. At the same time, I did not notice that it was being done systematically. I am not so sure about the personal commitment of the leaders. Religious leaders are propagating the idea in the name of the institution, but I did not notice that they are condemning it either. There is also a personal understanding of those individuals and groups and cases where pride is also expressed for such groups. They need to influence more, especially in terms of awareness and resilience.[21]

In addition, the difficulty can also be the non-recognition of the problem within one's own ranks, which should be the starting point for any further action. In the words of a representative of a state institution from Brčko, the religious communities

> must admit to themselves that they have some problems inside their own institution. If they do not recognise that, then everything they do is for nothing. They must acknowledge the problem within their circles and structures, and then we will define the rest. The local community must empower them through financial support, working conditions and other material and technical matters.[22]

Insights gained from civil society organisations

According to civil society organisations, institutional religious actors play a pivotal role in building resilience to any form of extremism. However, it is also evident that general satisfaction with previous activities in the field of prevention is low. Primarily, this refers to the transformation of religious

institutions, which, according to one of the interviewees, have ceased to be centres of knowledge:

> [Religious institutions] were the centre of power, but they are no longer the centre of knowledge. That legacy lives on. We are in the illusion of a secular society. They all bear equal responsibility. In all these identity questions, people who do not belong anywhere will come forward and then express their desire to belong somewhere. And their policies are not so visible. You have some smaller examples where religious leaders at the local level are working and setting positive examples. However, society views it with a touch of cynicism and as a feminised act that unfortunately does not survive. Manifestation in the sense of concrete action is needed. Even the Interreligious Council has bought into that story.[23]

Religion in general has an important place in the lives of many citizens, and most members of religious communities listen to their leaders, but at the same time, interreligious cooperation takes place only in those communities where there is a significant majority against the minority".[24] Religious leaders have the respect of the audience and, therefore, can achieve significant results and gather young people around them. The majority of citizens trust religious communities because they are the only "constantly present speakers, who have the largest gatherings".[25] One of the respondents from Sarajevo believes that "religious communities can play a dual role – positive and negative – as can be seen in condemnations of certain negative behaviours and incidents, but also in narratives that protect convicted war criminals".[26] Additionally, interlocutors highlight an example of the Orthodox Church, where there is a perception that the church is not separated from the government – which means that it is more difficult to reach staff "because any statement requires the direct approval of the bishop".[27] The respondent from Mostar also highlighted important interlinkages:

> Those religious institutions potentially have a huge role to play. Their limitations should also be considered. There is a high degree of correspondence between religion and ethnicity, so some conflicts that are often interpreted as inter-religious actually have an inter-ethnic character. And then the key actors are the higher political parties or some informal groups or lobbies, not the religious communities themselves. Religious communities are not completely homogenous either, and each of them has its own unique teaching and structure, but of course, in the end, everything depends on individuals.[28]

The current cooperation between religious and state institutions on extremism-related issues is largely under the radar, meaning that the respondents characterised it as a declarative commitment that still produces empty space for various extremist activities. During the conversation with the interlocutors,

only two concrete instances of good practice were found: one concerning the visit of a member of the presidency of a different ethnic group to the opening of the church, and the other concerning the united position and joint signature of all prominent leaders during the integration of *parajamaats*. It is evident that the inseparability of politics and religion in the Bosnian context and the politicisation of religious communities further complicate the process of resilience-building. This link is especially visible before and during elections, when religious institutions and religious officials can provide subtle and open instructions for voting when addressing believers in religious services. Of all the religious communities, the Islamic Community's counter-narratives on the story with online influencers as well as the integration of *parajamaats* can be characterised as a 'good story', in the sense of "guarding against those who spread certain ideologies among citizens".[29] At the same time, it was pointed out that divisions also exist within the Islamic Community and between people who were educated in the Persian Gulf states and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regarding the efforts of the Islamic Community, one of the interviewees from Sarajevo noted: "I think that it came quite late, only after these terrorist incidents and the persistence of international organisations. I think these are things that have only been initiated recently and are under the pressure of the international actors".[30]

Respondents generally shared the potential contributions that religious officials could make in two spheres: first, within their own communities through live contact with people, and second, through cooperation with other religious leaders in the local communities. According to one of the interviewees, the priest and the imam "should organise common gatherings of young people, in order to hang out and understand that they can live with each other".[31] In addition, religious authorities should provide content for young people as well as conversations within the educational facilities of each religious community, so that they can adequately promote interreligious dialogue. The promotion of such dialogue should be supported by the media, which means that it is necessary to exchange views on various issues in an open and accessible manner in the interest of both the media and religious communities. Furthermore, religious communities are also important actors in the production of political attitudes among the population – as noted by one of the interviewees, who said that "religious officials are also politically very relevant, because often a part of the voters listens to their voice".[32] On the other hand, while talking about vulnerability, the interlocutors recognise actions that other ethnicities or identities may view as offensive – as in cases where one of the religious leaders went to a rally to celebrate the unconstitutional day of Republika Srpska, or to visit Russian volunteers.[33]

In a similar way, one of the interviewees from Mostar pointed out the importance of recognising the war victims of the "other side", as well as the influence of such a state of mutual denial on the increase of nationalism:

> They must become the initiators of these recognitions. It would help us if religious leaders started going around and acknowledging the victims.

> Our people must get that pain out of themselves. That pain is used to feed nationalism. We have the Interreligious Council that is satisfied with two or three closed meetings a year, which is a shame. The goal is just to maintain the status quo.[34]

Insights gained from religious institutions

The activities of religious institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina can generally be classified into two fields of activity – education and the upbringing of members. At the same time, religious authorities enjoy a significant reputation, and their behaviour in and with the community could produce significant results. However, in the last few years, religious communities have gained a greater administrative role, and accordingly, they serve more as an administrative filter than as a moral tool.[35] At the same time, there is an evident lack of dependence and autonomy in relation to the political elites and national matrices to which they belong. During events that can be characterised as a public display of extremism, their voices mostly remain silent – particularly in terms of the common reactions of the three large religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although there is a general opinion that it would be easier to achieve success among the general population through joint efforts, the strong interweaving with political polarisation suggests a complete identity demarcation among the groups, implying that for political officials, religious communities become a decoration when propagating their own agenda.[36] This also leads to attempts to avoid the responsibility of commenting or acting within one's own ranks, which, according to a respondent from the Catholic Church in Sarajevo, is an incorrect approach because a dose of self-criticism is also needed to distance oneself from any form of extremism.[37] The partnership of the Islamic Community and the Catholic and Orthodox churches has so far been the most prominent through the work of the Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there was an attempt to structure a platform for joint dialogue. However, there is an evident dose of disappointment with the overall project of the Interreligious Council, which, as one of the interviewees says, "represents a stimulating experience, but it did not produce anything, except that people were brought to the same table to talk".[38] One of the interviewees from the Catholic Church stated that before "the emergence of the pandemic, there was something through the work of the Interreligious Council, but during the pandemic, it was reduced. We had some joint actions like planting flowers. Sometimes in religious education, we learn about each other in order to get to know each other. Unfortunately, ignorance towards others is sometimes strong. There is nothing going on at the moment".[39]

On the other hand, the imam from Brčko added that the religious communities

> advocate peace and coexistence, and this is what imams and priests teach us. Religious communities can have a serious result here. Our

> influence in society is not negligible and there are many who want to listen to us, and that is why our attitudes and the way we behave are important. A lot of things are set up to lead people astray. Religious authority can contribute in this regard.[40]

An instance of good practice was mentioned by the respondent from Brčko:

> The Islamic Community has done a lot on that front, in terms of inclusive politics. This contributed to the improvement of the situation and the return of people who were part of certain movements. Those people realised that this exclusivity does not lead to anything, and society realised that they are not terrorists. I think that there has been a serious turn and that the Islamic Community has now clearly articulated the community's position on the issue. It has produced a number of good results over the past few years and is at a level that cannot be improved any more. The inclusive policy of the Islamic Community has resulted in most of these formal associations agreeing to be under the administration of the Islamic Community. Such an approach by the Islamic community has yielded good results. In my mosque, we have people who look like "Wahhabis", but they are wonderful people and wonderful neighbours.[41]

Primarily, through institutional cooperation with various partners, a significant number of activities were carried out with the aim of training imams in local communities – who could then further act as agents of resilience within their own congregations. The respondent from Prijedor, who was a participant in a significant number of educational programmes, pointed out accordingly: "The Islamic Community conducts activities and educates together with the OSCE and other institutions. There were seminars on the prevention of religious extremism in society. Efforts are being made to educate young imams. I am proud of what is being done on this front".[42]

Speaking about the cooperation of religious and state institutions in curbing political and religious extremism, respondents could not identify specific cases of cooperation. What stood out was the perception of the role of dialogue in prevention attempts, where interlocutors clearly pointed out that without dialogue, there is fertile ground for the development of undesirable forms of behaviour, even within religious institutions. It was also noted that the topic of extremism should be widely discussed because it is a common goal for everyone. What emerges as a significant step is that religious communities must find an independent way of communicating with political actors because it is necessary to work more on being closer to each other than to political actors.

In addition, one of the interviewees noted that the current relationship between political actors and religious institutions boils down to the "you scratch my back, and I will scratch yours" system, and added: "The question

is how much we, as religious representatives, attempt to raise political parties, and how much we are sometimes bought with some monetary contributions, services and the like".[43]

Respondents predominantly understood resilience in the context of education, upbringing, communication, inclusion of marginalised persons, and the public performances of religious officials at ceremonies. In addition, significant emphasis was placed on home education and family in general. In this way, the closeness of the family to the religious community could significantly determine children's access to religious education, which, as one of the interviewees said, "emphasises non-exclusion, which means that religion must not be a factor of exclusion".[44] The importance of continuous education was also mentioned, both for members of religious communities who previously did not have the opportunity to acquire sufficient knowledge and skills and for the employees themselves. However, one of the interviewees also noted that there is often a small circle of employees of religious institutions who are involved in external programmes. He added:

> Many seminars and projects are organised, and these will continue in the future. We have formal frameworks for how something should be done, but the effectiveness of those projects is not seen in the wider social community. It is a very small group of people who organise and participate in it. Those people certainly do not suffer the consequences of the anomalies we are talking about. The bottom line should be that people experience an inner change. The goal is not to implement projects just for the sake of order. Everyone should understand that and change themselves and their family in the first place.[45]

Conclusion

Different institutional actors offered various perspectives that provide a comprehensive understanding of the present-day complexities in the country, considering factors such as historical and war experiences, socio-political and global contexts, and religious ideologies present in the society. Overall, reflections on the role of religious actors in building resilience and/or increasing vulnerability to extremism revealed a high level of divergent opinions. First, regarding state institutions, there is an evident perception of the importance of these actors in the prevention of any form of extremism, but there is also a dose of reluctance when attempting to describe the positive actions of individuals and institutions as a whole. Therefore, religious institutions can have a dual role: positive – through outreach to the masses, knowledge sharing, guidance, counselling, dialogue, transparency, and the development of local partnerships, and negative – through a lack of cooperation with other communities, isolation, non-recognition of problems within their own institutions, and for-profit cooperation. The Islamic Community was highlighted as an example of good practice and openness to cooperation, which was seen

in its work with imams and youth, as well as through various programmes of international organisations.

Secondly, civil society organisations see religious communities as important agents for building resilience, but on the other hand, they are dissatisfied with the results achieved so far in this area. Religious authorities have the capacity to gather and come into direct contact with a significant number of followers and therefore can use that space or be used by individuals and groups for the promotion of their own goals – primarily political ones. Accordingly, religious officials can contribute to vulnerability through open cooperation with political actors who have extreme worldviews, primarily because a part of the electorate listens to the voices of religious authorities in the run-up to elections.

Third, the perception of religious actors of their own role in the field of preventive actions shows the importance of understanding the role of the institutions themselves, as well as their scope and limits. Namely, religious authorities recognise that there have been significant changes within the institutions, which have become administrative filters that still attempt to educate and raise members – where the moral component has been somewhat lost. In addition, there has been a more prolific connection with the political apparatus, with less autonomy for institutions and individuals, which, in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, represents an even more complex issue due to the ethno-religious nexus. What has been highlighted as a primary factor for better results in building the resilience of local communities in the future is a form of dialogue within which one could conclude that all parties involved have the same common goal, as well as general education, communication, and more considerate public performances during religious ceremonies.

In conclusion, the influence of religious institutions extends beyond spiritual matters and permeates various spheres of society, including political decision-making processes and ethnic dynamics. In certain instances, religious establishments align themselves with specific political ideologies or parties, thereby exerting an impact on political conversations and decision-making processes. This becomes particularly notable in societies where religious identity closely intertwines with ethnic identity, such as in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, religious actors and institutions function as platforms for promoting and safeguarding ethno-national traditions, values, and narratives. Understanding and analysing the interplay between religious institutions, politics, and ethnicity is pivotal for institutional actors, practitioners, and scholars seeking to address challenges related to extremism and community resilience.

Notes

1 Depending on their religious affiliation, students can attend classes in Islamic, Catholic, or Orthodox religious education.
2 A school subject where all religions and cultures are studied.
3 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Mostar.

4 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
5 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
6 Online Salafi preachers or *da'is*.
7 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Sarajevo.
8 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Sarajevo.
9 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Mostar.
10 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Sarajevo.
11 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Sarajevo.
12 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
13 Online interview with a representative of a state institution from Prijedor.
14 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Sarajevo.
15 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Mostar.
16 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
17 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Sarajevo.
18 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
19 Online interview with a representative of a state institution from Prijedor.
20 Online interview with a representative of a state institution from Prijedor.
21 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
22 In-person interview with a representative of a state institution from Brčko.
23 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Sarajevo.
24 Online interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Prijedor.
25 Online interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Prijedor.
26 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Sarajevo.
27 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Sarajevo.
28 Online interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Mostar.
29 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Sarajevo.
30 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Sarajevo.
31 Online interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Prijedor.
32 Online interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Mostar.
33 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Sarajevo.
34 In-person interview with a representative of a civil society organisation from Mostar.
35 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Prijedor.
36 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Brčko.
37 In-person interview with a representative of a religious institution from Sarajevo.
38 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Brčko.
39 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Brčko.
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42 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Prijedor.
43 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Brčko.
44 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Brčko.
45 Online interview with a representative of a religious institution from Prijedor.

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7 Vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in Sunni and Maronite political communities in Lebanon

Marie Kortam

In Lebanon, the root causes of violent extremism are fundamentally related, on the one hand, to the weakness of the state and, on the other, to its sectarian system (Henley 2016). In this case, violent extremism is not an unprecedented socio-political phenomenon. The Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, has already shown the fragility of the Lebanese sectarian system, as it was unable to pacify the relations between the Lebanese national components. Rather, it strengthened a sense of belonging to one's community at the expense of the Lebanese state and its civil institutions (Traboulsi 2007).

The sectarian regime prevented the Lebanese communities from agreeing on one national narrative. On the contrary, each community produced its own version of the Lebanese national narrative. Thus, since the end of the civil war, the sectarian tensions have continued unabated, and many of these conflicts have been projected onto the Lebanese political scene. Starting from the Taif Agreement in 1990 to the present day, nearly all political leaders warn of a new civil war to come. As a consequence, Lebanese society is still ideologically and politically polarised and suffers from the legacies of the civil war, which continue to fuel sectarian division through divergent interpretations of history and the national narrative, selective forms of remembrance, and contested notions of victimhood (Bahous et al. 2013; Abouchedid and Nasser 2000; Bashshur 2005). Impoverished citizens are fed narratives of victimisation of their own religious group through the media – often controlled by the community's elites. Additionally, Lebanese face sectarian barriers to employment and civic involvement and suffer from the lack of economic opportunity, clientelism, nepotism, and corruption that dominate the political system. These multiple factors and drivers fuel violent extremism in Lebanon at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.

This chapter analyses violent extremism at the meso (community) level. It investigates the role that political and religious leaders play in defusing animosity and the spread of violent extremism, on the one hand, and in preventing and countering violent extremism, on the other. More specifically, the chapter analyses how Sunni and Christian political and religious leaders try to limit or fuel tensions around sectarian lines for legitimate political power. Considering that Sunnis are not the only community where one can

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observe violent extremism manifestations or drivers, the chapter shows how belonging to the Maronite community is also used as a push factor for violent extremism.

The research method is qualitative, based on 30 semi-structured interviews. These included 15 interviews conducted in Saida with formal and informal religious leaders, and representatives of municipalities and civil society organisations (CSOs); 10 interviews carried out with different Christian parties and the Maronite Patriarch; and 5 interviews collected in Majdal Anjar in the Bekaa by PAVE project partners at the Issam Fares Institute (see Chapter 5). Interviews were complemented by archival research, documentary analysis, and media content. The data was analysed using discourse analysis and thematic analysis on vulnerability and resilience factors. Accordingly, this chapter is organised into two main sections, focusing respectively on state and religious institutions and leaders as drivers of vulnerability, and on resilience factors for each community.

Sectarianism in state and religious institutions as drivers of vulnerability

Instead of reducing violent extremism to either a political or a religious phenomenon, this study considers that violent extremism in the Lebanese context is sectarian. In other words, it includes both a political and a religious dimension. As it will be developed in the following, religion or national belonging can legitimise extremist acts, including violence (Mandaville and Nozell 2017).

Lebanese society has been shaped by its sectarian citizenship ever since the modern Lebanese state was created in the 1920s (Salibi 1966). Formal and informal religious institutions and leaders dispute their area of influence within their sectarian group (Kortam 2020a, 2020b). Formal religious leaders or institutions are controlled by the government and use official political-religious narratives. They are based on modern institutional legitimacy, within a normative framework and are supported by the state structure (Ansart 1999). However, in the religious sphere, informal religious leaders and institutions seem to influence more individuals and groups in search of more excessive narratives. They are based on traditional or charismatic legitimacy (Ibid.). Their different influences may also shape the nature of the relationships between Lebanese communities. When these influences are compatible, peace occurs. However, when these influences are contradictory, conflict occurs.

Lebanon's sectarian system

Since its independence in 1943, the Lebanese state has been designed as a multi-faith state. It has 18 recognised religious groups. Most of them derive from Christianity and Islam and are mainly represented by Maronite

Christians, Shia, and Sunni Muslims. These groups are allocated the three most important political positions in the country: the President is Maronite, the Prime Minister is Sunni, and the Speaker of Parliament belongs to the Shia community. Apart from these main groups, other minority communities are present in Lebanon but have less political power, such as the Druze and the Orthodox. Religion is the main factor in shaping the Lebanese constitution. Article 95 of the Constitution provides for equal representation of religious communities in the public sector and the composition of the government. The Lebanese Parliament counts 128 members, 64 Christians and 64 Muslims, elected for four-year terms. Shia and Sunni representations within parliament are also equal with 27 members each. Articles 9 and 10 guarantee freedoms of speech and teaching, provided that sectarian harmony is not violated. Therefore, the Lebanese political system is often defined as sectarian.

Lebanon's religious communities have their own formal institutions and are officially represented. Article 19 of the Constitution states in specific terms: "The officially recognised heads of religious communities have the right to refer to this Council laws relating to personal status, the freedom of belief and religious practice, and the freedom of religious education".[1] Religious institutions enjoy tax exemption, in addition to receiving grants for their institutions and personnel. The general annual budget is divided according to sectarian lines, which exceeded 28 billion Lebanese pounds in 2012[2] (Al-Haddad 2020). It is allocated in the form of salaries, wages, management, supplies, support, family benefits, social protection, equipment, and office building maintenance. The beneficiaries are the Fatwa and the Sharia courts, the Supreme Islamic Sharia Council, the Supreme Islamic Shia Council, the Ja'fari Sharia courts, Sheikh Aql of the Unitarian Druze Community, the Druze religious courts, and the Druze Council of the Unitarian Druze Community. Finally, religious institutions enjoy special treatment in terms of austerity policies. They are not subjected to any reduction in their allocations, nor are they monitored. In addition to being exempt from paying taxes, their health, social, and cultural care budgets are discounted from the ministries of health, education, and culture budgets. These main features showcase the importance of the religious institutions in everyday life and how they manage to play an essential role in the Lebanese cultural and political life.

The recognition by the Lebanese constitution of 18 Lebanese sects gives them an official status, which allows them to have their own formal religious leaders. This official status gives religious groups the power to act as governmental entities, from their prerogative to appeal before the constitutional council, to their financial expenses, whether as a regular fund or for tax exemption. Their internal regulations are ratified by the parliament, to the extent that the Islamic religious council, Dar Al-Fatwa, and religious courts are placed under the mandate of the presidency of the Council of Ministers (see Chapter 5).[3] Consequently, the formalisation of structures and electoral and legislative councils of the religious leadership within the Lebanese state was largely shaped by political interests. As an example, the electoral

councils of Islamic institutions are occupied by current and former Islamic parliamentarians and ministers. Even though the religious leaders are not appointed directly by the government, their selection is highly affiliated with the political elite of their respective communities.

Dar Al-Fatwa, along with the Supreme Islamic Shia Council, Druze Council, and Maronite Church, is one of the most influential formal religious institutions in Lebanon. Dar Al-Fatwa is the Islamic religious authority, a government institution established in 1922 that sponsors, directs, and manages religious and endowment affairs in Lebanon (Lebanese University – LIC 1955). Due to its national position and role, it participates with other Islamic and Christian authorities to preserve national unity. Four categories of institutions are affiliated with Dar Al-Fatwa: health, social, educational, and media institutions. Dar Al-Fatwa registers, employs, and pays the salaries of its sheikhs, who are considered officials.

The relationship between the Lebanese state and the Maronite Church is considered organic. In fact, the Maronite Patriarchate played a key role in the creation of the state (Articles 9, 10, and 19 of the Lebanese Constitution). The Patriarch is elected by the Maronite bishops and is recognised as the head of the Maronite community. As with other religious institutions, the Maronite Church has its own health, social, and educational institutions.

There were no informal Christian groups created after the Lebanese civil war, because the Christian militias were normalised and transformed into political parties with elected municipal and parliamentary representatives.

The causes of violent extremism are fundamentally related, on the one hand, to the sectarian system and, on the other, to the weakness of the Lebanese state. However, the civil war and other clashes between different Lebanese sects throughout its modern history show that violent extremism is a social phenomenon that has repeatedly punctuated Lebanese political life since the establishment of modern Lebanon in 1932 – if not before – until the present day. The construction of the sectarian regime, ever since the Lebanese republic became independent in 1943, participated in strengthening the sense of belonging to a particular community rather than to the Lebanese nation. As a result, this political system failed to pacify relations between the Lebanese national components, better known as sectarian communities.

The distribution of power and influence of the President, Prime Minister, and Parliament speaker changed after the Taif Agreement in 1990: the powers of the Prime Minister and the speaker of the Parliament increased at the expense of the President's power. Indeed, one of the most important causes animating the political debate in Lebanon since the Taif Agreement is the political share reserved to the Maronite community, and more specifically to the President of the Republic, who lost his prerogatives and thus power. As a result, the main challenge for the Maronite parties is to reconquer these privileges. This is what Maronite political leaders claim they want to recover: what they call "the rights of Christians".

Shia and Sunni extremism in Lebanon

Sectarian violent extremism in Lebanon emerged after 2005 and was fuelled by previous (geo)political tensions among communities.[4] Several events have facilitated the shift from radicalisation to violent extremism between Sunnis and Shias since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik El-Hariri in 2005. One example is the 7 May 2008 clash between pro-government and opposition forces.[5] Sheikh Maher Hammoud,[6] a well-known Sunni sheikh and an important ally of Hezbollah within the Sunni community, justifies the violent reaction of Hezbollah against members of the pro-government (so-called "14 March") bloc by admitting that the party defended itself, but he also regrets the lack of dialogue and comprehension that led to the events of 7 May:

> It could have been remedied by some dialogue, with some communication, with a little more awareness, because at a certain stage you do not understand, I mean, they [Sunnis] do not understand what Hezbollah did, except that it is from a sectarian standpoint, and I am certain that it is not, but I want the public to understand. . . . Hezbollah is definitely defending itself against a conspiracy that was prepared by the Cabinet on the issue of internal communications and airport security, and so on. Hezbollah's reaction was a logical and a limited reaction, and there were no human losses except in some rare cases. . . . But the media are mostly owned by the parties that want insurrection in Lebanon.[7]

As a result, he concludes: "The majority of the public understood that this was an attack on the Sunni. . . . It was self-defence and the result was better for the country and the nation as a whole".[8]

Within two days of fighting, Hezbollah took control of many neighbourhoods in Beirut, inclosing West Beirut. The fighting between both sides, in overlapping Sunni and Shia neighbourhoods of Beirut, spread to other parts of the country, especially to the north. On 15 May, the Arab League intervened and called on both sides to end the fighting. On 21 May, the two belligerent parties were invited to meet in Doha to negotiate a ceasefire and put an end to the political crisis. According to a United Nations report published in June 2008 (UNSC 2008), the fighting left nearly 70 dead, including civilians, and more than 180 injured.

Interestingly, the Lebanese army decided not to intervene during the events of May 2008. As in the civil war and other post-Taif conflicts between two different communities, the army's disinvolvement aimed to prevent the division of the army along sectarian lines. However, the army's "laissez-faire" attitude during the conflict prompted the resignation of 120 Sunni officers. All these officers subsequently reneged on their resignations, except for Colonel Amid Hammoud. In an interview, he presented

his narrative on the events of 7 May 2008, and how officers left the army when Hezbollah entered Beirut and the army decided not to intervene. According to him,

> At the time, more than 120 officers resigned, and Michel Suleiman [Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces at that time] was afraid because he was preparing to become President of the Republic. He would become President because of his silence on the blood that had been shed . . . he was silent and considered that we were sabotaging his plans.[9]

Following the 7 May events, the Sunni community found a new hero in the person of Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir. According to Sheikh Amoura: "Sheikh Ahmed al-Assir was brought up in an Islamic group and was with the Tablighi Front and with the Tablighi Jamaat [a group of quietistic Islam] and it was a marvellous experience on the active religious diplomatic scale".[10] Sheikh Amoura added that he witnessed the transformation of Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir. According to the latter, it was not the 2011 Syrian crisis but the 7 May events that transformed him.

These events also culminated in the creation of the Lebanese League of Muslim Scholars (LLMS) in 2013. According to Sheikh Amoura, who took part in its creation, the League aimed to prevent the 7 May events in Beirut from spreading to Saida. He added that the engagement of Hezbollah in the Syrian crisis in 2013 alongside the Syrian army proved them right. Saida is a strategic city, it is the "entry" to south Lebanon and a crossroads between the south and the capital. It is also a conservative Sunni city, but equally important for Shia Amal and Hezbollah members since they are established in certain areas of the city (Haret Saida, Ghaziyyeh). Besides, a Christian minority is present in Saida and certain neighbourhoods (mainly Maghdousheh, Mieh Mieh, and Majdelyoun). Finally, Saida is the birthplace of many Jihadist movements, and hosts Ein el-Helwe, the biggest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon.

Sheikh Maher Hammoud agreed with the fact that the events of 7 May 2008 led Sheikh al-Assir towards extremism. According to Hammoud, when al-Assir started to meddle in Lebanese political affairs, he started to give the 7 May events a sectarian interpretation as a confrontation between Sunni and Shia. However, al-Assir excluded Maronites and Christians from his sectarian rhetoric and focused only on Shia, and on Hezbollah specifically. Many young, enthusiastic Sunnis sympathised with al-Assir and joined him. According to Hammoud, most of these young men were illiterate, which facilitated their recruitment. He adds that foreign intelligence services also contributed to the rise of al-Assir's group, notably Qatar and some wealthy supporters of fanaticism. Hammoud blames the sectarian political system for allowing sectarian interpretation and its extreme results, such as the acts of armed violence in the streets.

Informal religious institutions

In Lebanon, where the government is more flexible in controlling religious life, informal religious institutions emerge as political actors that negotiate directly with the state or create a porous environment in which religious, legal, and political organisations are difficult to differentiate. As a result, communities see these religious organisations as the only legitimate representation and source of guidance in navigating the sectarian turmoil. The religious representatives at the national level have no formal or official status, in the sense that they are not included in the state system.[11]

The restitution of religious institutions as political actors, representatives, and referents of the religious community places them in competition for legitimacy. Several factors are relevant in this struggle. On the one hand, government institutions seek a balance between maintaining contact with the religious needs of the population and controlling the emergence and spread of fringe movements. Often, however, religious government institutions are seen as political rather than religious. As a result, people engage with informal religious institutions because of their mistrust of the political system. Furthermore, the strict supervision and preventive security policies applied by the Lebanese government, align state religious institutions with a government agenda that is detached from the people. This, by default, delegitimises these institutions as religious referents and opens the door for the emergence and spread of alternative informal institutions – which often leads to extremism.

In Lebanon, the governmental subordination of Dar al-Fatwa (Lefèvre 2015) and the Mufti, in the context of the Syrian crisis, led to the emergence of the LLMS in 2013, which gathers members of the Jamaa' Islamiya,[12] Salafis, and some disillusioned clerics from Dar al-Fatwa. Although it is a hybrid informal institution with only a minority of sheikhs who follow Dar al-Fatwa as members, it has become the strongest voice to challenge the authority of the Mufti and Dar al-Fatwa. LLMS represents the most important informal institution among Sunni informal religious institutions. Its principal role is to fill the vacuum left by formal institutions and function as a Sunni authority. It should be stressed here that informal sheikhs are not necessarily affiliated with the LLMS. Thus, sheikhs could convey an even more radical discourse than the LLMS in their mosques because of the lack of regulations and monitoring.

The LLMS includes religious leaders who follow the Wahhabi-Salafi ideology or the Salafi ideology, or who belong to or are close to the Jamaa' Islamiya, as well as independent personalities whose political positions correspond to its approach. Some interviewees believe that the League has been able, in a short period of time, to accumulate a balance of legitimacy through its provocative attitudes against the "dominant discourse" and to take steps towards a "peaceful balance" (Baroudi 2006) between the Lebanese political parties in the crucial issues of the Sunni arena.[13] Participants attribute this to the League's liberation from the low political ceiling imposed on Dar

al-Fatwa due to its administrative and political realities. Interviewees believe that the LLMS, through its leaders and scholars, who employ charismatic leadership and a revolutionary approach, responds to a sense of grievance as an oppressed group. This contrasts with the case of traditional official religious leaders, who derive their legitimacy from the bureaucracy to which they belong. LLMS members have quickly attracted large segments of the Sunni community by adopting a discourse that claims to respond to their sense of victimisation, at a time when the Sunni political sect was experiencing a crisis of command and bold leadership. The informal religious representatives who took part in this study added that the affairs of the Supreme Council of Islamic Sharia should be left in the hands of the "clerics" and not managed by political leaders or businesspeople. Here, the divide between informal religious leaders and the official religious establishment emerges in the context of the overlapping relationship between Dar al-Fatwa and official political actors.

As a result, trust in official religious institutions and leaders has collapsed in favour of the LLMS and its leaders. The League started to fill the political vacuum left by Dar al-Fatwa by opposing the Syrian regime and its allies in Lebanon, namely Hezbollah and the Amal movement. The Lebanese government has adopted a neutral position towards the Syrian crisis. Dar al-Fatwa as a governmental religious institution has followed the government's decision. For example, the LLMS issued a press release on 5 November 2021 calling for an end to the indictment issued by the military court against dozens of young men from Sunni Arab tribes in the town of Khalde, including minors.[14] The statement accuses the court of issuing sectarian and political judgements as it turns a blind eye and covers up crimes committed by members of other communities (the statement did not name them). It accuses the military court of being a tool in the service of Hezbollah, without explicitly stating it, and of being responsible for the production of extremism because it adopts double standards and goes as far as to question the legitimacy of the court and its patriotism.

Sheikh Khalil al-Solh,[15] an imam who preaches in one of the mosques in Saida, Dar al-Arqam Mosque, took part in the revolts of 17 October 2019.[16] He argued that

> LLMS was established as a result of the injustice that the Sunni community is subjected to in this country, Lebanon, and it rose to defend their rights and to be the voice of the oppressed among them, especially, in brackets, most of the oppressed, imprisoned, accused of extremism and accused of terrorism.[17]

Although he was disillusioned with Dar al-Fatwa, he stated that the "picture has to be corrected. We have always announced that we are not against Dar al-Fatwa. We are not taking its role".[18]

For some religious scholars, the question of financing informal Sunni institutions is crucial to holding a credible voice and being a legitimate actor in

defending the Sunni community. Hassan Qotb, one of these religious scholars, questions the role of the League, especially its funding from Qatar. He noted: "It has been a while since they last showed up, why? Because Qatar asked them to stay quiet?".[19] For him, as for many other Sunni leaders, be they formal or informal, the question of funding is crucial in creating informal Islamist institutions that claim that their principal concern is to be the voice of the oppressed Sunnis in Lebanon. As he attested that the League is controlled by Qatar and its political interests in the region, he, and other Sunni scholars, cannot put their trust in the League. According to Qotb, these conflicting interests contribute to the creation of Sunni extremism, which the informal leaders will use politically in a country divided along sectarian affiliations.

On the other hand, Sheikh Ahmad Amoura, general secretary of the LLMS, argues that it was Hezbollah's support for the Syrian regime that led some Sunni leaders to create the League: "With the entry of Hezbollah into Syria, we organised a meeting in support of the Syrian revolution in Beirut. It was called the "Meeting of Scholars". The LLMS was not yet an institution".[20] Then a conference in support of the Syrian revolution was held in Turkey, and the Lebanese sheikhs said: "When we return to Lebanon, we have to do something".[21]

This political discourse attracts members of the Sunni community, as it is perceived as bold and frank and thus meets collective expectations. The legitimacy of the League is built on this strategy. According to Sheikh Khalil al-Solh, the League is mainly interested in public affairs. During our interview, he mentioned the political and economic crises Lebanon has been facing since 2019:

> When people are in crisis like today . . . the Patriarch [al-Rai] spoke a lot about the crisis we are facing today. Many people started asking: "Where is our Mufti, why is he not speaking?" So, the League has derived its legitimacy from its popular presence and its identification with the popular mood, unlike Dar al-Fatwa.[22]

Due to poor governance and the failure of the rule of law, these informal leaders or institutions can transmit messages that do not correspond to the interests of the state and thus contribute to the production of radicalisation. The conflicting political climate based on the permanent sectarian and ideological divide does not help deradicalisation and instead facilitates the recruitment of extremists into proxy wars at home and abroad.

Hate speech: Maronite political parties in Lebanon

In the sectarian system, the Maronite political parties conduct a discourse in which they present the Maronite community, and on a larger scale, Christians, as a minority in a Middle East dominated by a Muslim

majority. They constantly pretend that the Christian minority is in a permanent danger of persecution, if not disappearance, and that political parties would defend the community against national and foreign enemies. These enemies also represent a constant threat of disrupting the Lebanese demographic balance in favour of the Muslims, and thus the balance of power-sharing between the three most important Lebanese communities. To support Christian victimisation, the Maronite political parties often mobilise the Maronite community against their designated enemies and propose themselves as their defenders and the most capable to reconquer the Christians' political rights.

The Maronite Church shares responsibility in maintaining this narrative since the Maronite Patriarch, Bshara al-Rai, keeps referring to the centrality of the role played by the Maronite Church in the founding of the Lebanese republic. His religious position allows him to participate in the political debate and to give a sectarian legitimacy to the cause of political reconquest. When he intervenes in political affairs, the Patriarch addresses the Maronite parties and calls upon them to defend the community and its interests. Thus, rather than imposing his political vision on the Christian political scene, he offers his legitimacy to the party that adopts his political vision.

There has been no official census of Lebanon's population since 1932. By not conducting any sectarian affiliation census today, it helps avoid the subject and thus sectarian tensions. In addition, it helps avoid the question of elite-based power sharing and thus the balance of power between them, rather than transmitting a community share to another more important group. As long as the balance of power between the main groups is "stable", then their political relations will remain stable as well. However, since the 1989 Taif Agreement, the Maronite community has been more vocal concerning "the rights of Christians" which are embodied in the prerogatives of the President, the Maronite shares in parliament and the ministries, and the monopoly over the selection of Maronite ministers.

Since the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) became the first Christian party in Lebanon and its founder, General Michel Aoun, became President of Lebanon on 31 October 2016, it adopted a strategy of *rapprochement* with Syria, while its FPM supporters adopted the same rhetoric as other right-wing parties. The FPM, and its new leader, Gebran Bassil, Aoun's son-in-law, participate in the polarisation of the Christian electoral base. When Bassil succeeded President Aoun at the head of the FPM in 2016, he started adopting a radical and sometimes racist rhetoric for electoral ends towards the Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

For instance, in January 2019, he tweeted that the presence of Syrians in Lebanon is exhausting the Lebanese economy. In February 2019, he accused Syrian refugees of threatening the existence of Lebanon and that their continued presence would increase the danger of terrorism in Europe. On 5 May 2019, in another striking tweet, he wrote that more than 600 Syrian children were born in al-Bora Hospital compared to only 30 Lebanese births.

In a tweet dated 8 May 2019, he said that Lebanon is the "land of prophets and saints, cannot be the land of refugees, the displaced and the corrupt". Bassil continues to call for the return of Syrian refugees to their country and accuses them of being responsible for the multiple Lebanese crises. In 2019, when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs, he claimed that Lebanese should be prioritised for employment opportunities over other nationalities. FPM members seized this occasion and protested in front of Syrian-owned stores, singing the Lebanese anthem and demanding priority of employment for the Lebanese (Twitter 2019).

These claims did not stop at the level of party members; they also reached the media. For instance, on the occasion of the start of the school year in September 2019, OTV, the TV channel of the FPM, published a cartoon in one of its programmes that showed Lebanese schoolchildren being unable to enter their saturated schools due to the presence of refugees and foreigners' children. The cartoon asked the reader: "Have you ever seen a Lebanese more generous than that?" The channel apologised for broadcasting this cartoon and removed it from its website (Sky News 2019).

Bassil's populist strategy was clear to his Muslim political counterparts, but also to his direct Maronite adversary, the Lebanese Forces Party (LF), which accused him of adopting a right-wing rhetoric for electoral purposes. This populist rhetoric reminds us of the rhetoric of the Maronite militias during the civil war, known for their hostility towards Muslims and Palestinians at the time. In the political and media spheres, Bassil has become a subject of mockery for his counterparts who consider that he is using this rhetoric to succeed his father-in-law as the head of state.

By adopting the discourse on Christian rights, the FPM strategy is the same as the Christian opposition parties. It demands the sharing of political power as a popular demand. Christian communities are afraid to lose their political advantages vis-à-vis Lebanese Muslims, Palestinian refugees or more recently Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2014), but mostly Muslims. The presence of these communities challenges the Christian advantage and overturns the demographic balance and thus the Lebanese political game. By adopting such a strategy, the FPM, like the other parties, makes sectarianism a route of access to citizenship in Lebanon and confuses Christian and Lebanese interests in its discourse. Michel Abou Nejem is a senior FPM activist, but comes from a family that belonged to the Phalanges Party, especially the "Bashir Gemayel current" as he says. He told the researcher that he joined the FPM because of its

> new ideas and the nationalist dimension and the reparation of the faults that occurred during the war . . . for example, the issue of the relationship between the Christians and Israel. It [FPM] is a Lebanese party which is against the Syrian occupation but does not ask for help from Israel and, in the meantime, it is in favour of historical reparations and secularism and citizenship.[23]

Today, Abou Nejem is a journalist and an FPM member, responsible for the political relations at the office of the Vice President for political affairs, May Khreish. He explained the importance of these claims for the political strategy of the FPM. He said,

> the nature of the political regime in Lebanon . . . and the marginalisation of the Christian component between 1990 and 2005 imposed that we ask for equality in the system. If you want to reach the government, you need to talk about these matters.[24]

The relationship between the Maronite parties and the Maronite Patriarch, and its impact on the radicalisation of the political discourse and the legitimisation of this discourse in the Maronite street, is mainly based on the issue of restoring Christians' rights. Marie Najem, a FPM member and currently the vice president for administrative affairs within the party, defended this speech and justified it by saying that it was a question of rebalancing power-sharing between the Lebanese sects, after the imbalance created by the Taif Agreement:

> In the meantime, other Christian parties and personalities agreed on the Taif Agreement that states that the Christians are represented in the government, that they do not elect their MPs, and that foreign powers, like Syria or whatever, will name their ministers or directors . . . even if you find some of them who are Christians, they did not come with the will of the Christians . . . This is how the country is made. We did not do it this way but the political system is like this. We are only applying it so we are now in a position that obliges us to defend the Christians . . . But we agreed to take this colour [position] because we could take some rights back through it. We reached a real fifty-fifty representation in the government, we reached an elective law giving us a better representation, and sure the price to pay was the loss in the secular street.[25]

She added: "We, as a political component, have a duty to advocate for the restoration of [our] rights".[26] She admitted that the rhetoric used by her party is sometimes radical but explains that it is meant to attract the Christian electorate. She also admitted that this rhetoric does not resemble the credo of the FPM and the principles that militants have been raised on. In addition, she explains that this rhetoric used by the FPM is strategic because it prevents the Maronite social base from falling into the arms of the LF which she accused of wanting to bring the country back to the civil war days (Baroudi 2006).

Lebanese parties often choose partisan celebrations as the best time to spread their political messages against their opponents. For example, in the commemoration of 13 October 1990 (when Aoun, under fire from the Syrian army, was forced to take refuge in the French embassy), the FPM used images of the battles against the Syrian army and the LF at the end of the civil

war and kept recalling the bloody past of the LF leader in order to discredit him within the Maronite community. It also draws the parallel between this past and his incompetence to recover the rights of Christians today. This discourse helps to maintain this memory in the minds of FPM members.

Synergy between state and religious institutions and leaders as drivers of resilience

The importance of political state institutions is reflected in the possibility of preventive actions or synergic relations. This change in action and relation between the same state and religious institutions, which were supposed to be vulnerability drivers, became resilience drivers, depending on the regional political context. To explain this idea, two examples are given: one for the Sunni community and another for the Maronites' political and religious groups. This section explores, firstly, the Sunni initiative for interreligious dialogue and moderate Islam, and secondly, the rhetoric of resilience of the Maronite Church and political parties.

Sunni initiative for interreligious dialogue and moderate Islam

The condition for Dar al-Fatwa's support to the Prime Minister's policies – either escalation or conciliation – is that the Prime Minister – through his parliamentary bloc, for instance – leads the most representative stream of Sunnis in Lebanon. Therefore, the relationship between Dar al-Fatwa and the Prime Minister can be a resilience factor at the national level when the Sunni Prime Minister decides to follow a conciliatory policy with the other sects and the political parties. Three resilience factors emerge in the roles of Dar al-Fatwa and Sunni religious leaders: interreligious dialogue, networking and mediation, and building moderate religious institutions.

Firstly, in his inaugural speech, Mufti Derian pledged to fight "extremism and terrorism" (Lefèvre 2015). In that aim, he actively promoted interreligious dialogue by organising an Islamic-Christian summit on Syria, in Beirut on 27 September 2011, and by participating in a high-level conference on counterterrorism in Cairo in December 2014. In Majdal Anjar, a Lebanese Sunni city, sheikhs have participated since 2017 in many workshops countering violent extremism. These workshops involved non-governmental organisations, the municipality and religious institutions. Majdal Anjar preachers participated in some courses that promote the discourse of countering violent extremism, organised by civil society associations, universities, and experts (interaction between religious figures and civil society). Sheikh Adnan Umama is one of the most prominent sheikhs in the city. Since he headed the LLMS in a previous period, he has supporters of Islamic ideology. Moreover, being an inhabitant of the city, he contributed – in collaboration with other sheikhs and the city council with its chairperson Sami Ibrahim al-Ajmi – to activities to temper religious extremism, especially in 2012–2013. In another instance,

a committee was formed to follow up on the files of the city's wanted youth. The committee was composed of activists, retired Major General Hussein Abdel-Khaleq, the city's mayor, and religious figures such as Sheikh Mohammed Abdel-Rahman and Sheikh Adnan Umama. This committee handed over a number of wanted young men, not engaged in any criminal activities, and they were tried and released. This mitigated the tension that existed in the city and clarified the true image of Majdal Anjar and its open-minded youth, which is why Sheikh Adnan was among the supporters.[27]

Secondly, Sunnis leaders and sheikhs invest in networking and mediation by playing a role at the security level and by building moderate institutions, such as in Azhar al-Bekaa. On the networking level, the municipality of Majdal Anjar is headed by Saeed Yassin. The mayor has extensive relations with many security officers, but these relations do not cover serious security issues. Before 2016, there was no communication with the security services, sheikhs, municipalities and mayors, or with Dar al-Fatwa. Since 2016, the security services have opened up communication with local actors, which allows local authorities (the municipal council and mayors) to play a leading role.[28] Furthermore, the achievements of Sheikh Khalil al-Mays (died 29 July 2021), a Lebanese Muslim scholar who held the position of Mufti of the Bekaa governorate were highlighted by his success in building large institutions such as the al-Azhar Foundation in Bekaa. His leadership and communication skills helped give these institutions a strong presence and legitimacy and engage with unofficial religious leaders, such as Sheikh Adnan Umama.[29]

Participants in this study were unanimous in saying that, in critical security moments in Majdal Anjar, all official and unofficial religious institutions, in addition to the local official authorities of the municipality and the mayor, were united in favour of preventing the situation from deteriorating into violent extremism targeting security services. This collaboration owes much to the fact that all these actors are inhabitants of Majdal Anjar.

Finally, one possible element of resilience observed during this study is the ability of informal, grassroots religious institutions to mediate between armed groups and the government to defuse violence, in addition to the trust of inhabitants in informal religious leaders. The unrest in Lebanon's border towns in 2014 is a good example. Interaction between the LLMS, the Prime Minister and the army command in 2014 led to a ceasefire in the border town of Arsal in northern Bekaa. The ceasefire was struck between members of the "Islamic State" (IS) and Tahrir al-Sham (formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra) on the one hand, and the Lebanese army and the forces supporting it on the other. The head of the LLMS at the time, Salem al-Rafi', visited Prime Minister Tammam Salam and convinced him of the importance of the army not fighting Jabhat al-Nusra and IS members who infiltrated Arsal. He argued that the fighting would endanger around 120 Syrian refugees. Salam managed to persuade the army chief to give the LLMS commission 24 hours to conduct negotiations to convince the armed fighters to withdraw

from the Lebanese territory and therefore provide protection to the refugees. The LLMS considers these negotiations as among its most significant achievements.[30]

The rhetoric of resilience of the Maronite Church and Maronite political parties in the face of violent extremism

Today, as long as the FPM – which had the majority of seats in parliament until the 2022 elections – gets along with Hezbollah and together forms the majoritarian bloc in parliament, it is probable that the question of "the rights of Christians" will remain silenced in parliament. However, this question is still tackled in the partisan discourse, that is, at the community level, in order to federate members of the Maronite community and to remain the main Maronite party. In their relationship with the two other main communities – Sunni and Shia – competing Maronite parties must come to a political agreement on issues that bring them together and put aside issues that could fuel conflict.

In the context of the political, societal, and economic crises that Lebanon is facing today, the demonstrations against the system in 2019, known as the Revolution of 17 October, raised the issue of the separation between the religious and political fields, a major claim of the revolution. This could improve relations between sectarian communities and would also compromise the power of the sect's *zo'ama* (leaders), who have been using this sectarian rhetoric since the Lebanese state was founded. This would also help to decrease the "us" versus "them" rhetoric and replace it with a rhetoric based on national belonging. Political leaders, the media, and the religious authorities must also agree to reduce the sectarian preference and incitement within and between each group in their rhetoric and to replace sectarianism with belonging to the Lebanese nation. In other words, they need to break the sectarian canal towards Lebanese citizenship. This is one of the toughest tasks for political parties that have made sectarianism their stock-in-trade. For instance, Sejaan Quazi,[31] a member of the strategic commission of the Maronite Patriarchy, for instance, says that the state has been created as a sectarian state, rather than a civil state with citizens.

Although the Maronite Church effectively plays a political role, Monsignor Mazloum nevertheless denies it and says that the Church aims to stay at an equal distance from all the parties:

> The church's role is not to play politics. Its role is a national role which is interested in big matters. If it sees that in politics there is something for example threatening liberties, it will say stop. Or if things are threatening the independence of the country, OK. But it is not our role to enter the Lebanese politics, in terms of mayors, elections, MPs, etc. Today I am 86, and I have never voted. I want to be able to be at the same distance from everyone and have the same relationship with everyone

> so I can have my own freedom to say what is right if I see something wrong, to say what is permitted and what is not . . . this is the role of the responsible of the church.[32]

While his speech leans towards neutrality (L'Orient-Le Jour 2021), it is clear that the Church is present in the political arena, on both local and national levels. He also showed that he understands and could cleverly use the Maronite wording either to excite or to calm the Maronite community.

When the Patriarch claimed his neutrality, this provoked reactions within the Maronite elite. Opinions varied between favourable and sceptical. For instance, Marie Najem[33] defended the neutrality of her party, saying that the FPM was the first to raise this claim: "We were the first to support this demand, but we put conditions to implement it. But we did not say that we are against neutrality and that it is not good for Lebanon, on the contrary".

The question of dividing Lebanon along sectarian lines has been raised lately. In fact, it is a project that right-wing Lebanese Maronite parties raised during the civil war. Mazloum gave us the position of the patriarchy regarding this issue: "The patriarchy is absolutely against the partition. And this was part of the conflict between the patriarchy and the Lebanese Front during the civil war because some parties of the Lebanese Front were for partition".[34]

For his part, Quazi regretted the sectarian system:

> We should find a way to live with each other as Muslims and Christians and to make a secular system that relies on the value of the individual, not on the sect of the individual, but we are far away from seeing it happen. After these events [the Lebanese civil war], extreme Islamist currents started to flourish such as IS and al-Qaida. And so, we went far away from secularism. How can you make this country become secular with Hezbollah? This is a religious party. It is not only a religious party, but also a political party composed of religious people. How could you make it secular with Salafi Sunnis? And with extremists, and IS and Hamas and others?.[35]

However, as this quote shows, he holds the Islamist movements responsible for today's sectarianism, removing responsibility from Christian parties which, therefore, must defend their community. He also pledged for a secular state because there "will no longer be a majority and a minority".[36]

As shown earlier, the rhetoric of the Patriarch and Maronite parties tends to exacerbate the sense of sectarian belonging. However, they have both shown their capacity to calm the crowds and thus participate in the resilience of their followers when their political interests are met. Raising claims of neutrality or secularism also serves as a political project that does not necessarily lead to peaceful relations between Lebanese sects, since other political actors, in particular Muslims, would translate these claims into sectarian terms.

The identity anxieties, which in reality are political anxieties, are linked to the way in which Lebanon was built informally and not officially, since the constitution does not distribute political powers between sects. Rather, it is a political custom, since the country's independence, which dictates the division of powers between Maronites, Sunnis, and Shiites.

By playing on the tightrope of sectarianism, the Maronite political parties resort to rhetoric referring to their annihilation to stir up fear but also sectarian hatred among their popular and militant bases. This utilisation of Christian identity anxieties results in either the migration of Maronite youth or their organisation's defence of their community, which does not necessarily result in improving the relations between sects and therefore in their resilience to violent extremism.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the porosity of the interaction between state and religious institutions, which leads to a sense of relative deprivation for different religious communities. Based on these findings, we recommend that religious institutions should be granted independence from the state and democratic internal approaches so that dissenting voices can be included. Finally, the role of religious institutions is crucial and effective in de-escalating conflicts during violent clashes. Strengthening this role and its potential can act as a major resilience factor and help prevent violent extremism within religious communities.

Notes

1 For more information, see The Lebanese Constitution. Presidency.gov.lb. (1926) Available at http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/LebaneseSystem/Documents/ [accessed on 9 July 2020].
2 Since the economic crisis in Lebanon, the exchange rate has been changing rapidly. For instance, in February 2023, $1 was valued at 83,000 Lebanese pounds.
3 Republic of Lebanon Official Website, Institutions, and Departments. Available at http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=4211.
4 For more details, read Kortam (2015, 2017, 2020).
5 After a political crisis that lasted for 18 months, a conflict between pro-government, mainly led by Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party, and the Lebanese Forces Party (14 March bloc), on the one hand, and Hezbollah and Amal Movement and their allies (8 March bloc) on the other, took place in Beirut on 7 May 2008.
6 He is also the brother of the leader of the Future Movement in Saida and the president of the International Federation of Resistance Scholars.
7 Interview with Sheikh Maher Hammoud, Saida, March 2021.
8 Ibid.
9 Interview with Colonel Hammoud, Tripoli, March 2021.
10 Interview with Sheikh Amoura, Saida, March 2021.
11 There are exceptions when individuals hold two mandates – one religious and one political – simultaneously.

12 Branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon.
13 Interviews done by our project partner, Issam Fares Institute, with lawyer Mohammed Sablouh and Sheikh Adnan Umama, October 2021.
14 On 1 August, armed clashes broke out between Hezbollah supporters and a rival group in Khalde, south of Beirut. The clashes took place during the funeral of a member of Hezbollah, Ali Chebli, who was killed on the night of 31 July, during a wedding, by a member of the Sunni Arab tribes of Khalde. The shooter was the brother of an individual who was killed during an episode of sectarian violence in the city in 2020. During the funeral march the next day, at least five people, including three Hezbollah supporters, were killed, and an unknown number of people were injured. The Lebanese security forces were deployed to the area to restore order and warned that they would open fire on any armed individuals in the area.
15 He is also known as a humanitarian activist through the mosque. He is affiliated with the LLMS and the Islamic Group. He is not registered with Dar al-Fatwa.
16 On 17 October 2019, the Lebanese cabinet announced new tax measures to address an economic crisis. In response, tens of thousands of peaceful protesters took to the streets across the country calling for their social and economic rights, accountability, an end to corruption, and the resignation of all political representatives.
17 Interview with Sheikh Khalil al-Solh, Saida, March 2021.
18 Ibid.
19 Interview with Hassan Qotob, Saida, March 2021.
20 Interview with Sheikh Amoura, Saida, March 2021.
21 Ibid.
22 Interview with Sheikh Khalil al-Solh, Saida, March 2021.
23 Interview with Michel Abou Nejem, Beirut, July 2021.
24 Ibid.
25 Interview, Marie Najem, Beirut, July 2021.
26 Ibid.
27 Interview conducted by our partner, Issam Fares Institute, with lawyer Mohammad Khaled al-Ajmi, Beirut, October 2021.
28 Interview conducted by our partner, Issam Fares Institute, with lawyer Mohammad Sablouh, Beirut; interview with a security source in the Ministry of Interior, October 2021.
29 Interview conducted by our partner, Issam Fares Institute, with Nidal Khaled, Majdel Anjar, October 2021.
30 Interviews conducted by our partners, Issam Fares Institute, with Adnan Umama, Majdel Anjar, October 2021.
31 Interview with Sejaan Quazi, Beirut, July 2021. He passed away in May 2023.
32 Interview with Monsignor Mazloum, Beirut, July 2021.
33 Interview with Marie Najem, Beirut, July 2021.
34 Interview with Monsignor Mazloum, Beirut, July 2021.
35 Interview with Sejaan Quazi, Beirut, July 2021.
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8 Influential actors, religiosity, and political power in Tunisia

Fethi Rekik and Sadok Damak

This chapter addresses the relationship between politics and religion, which has been manifesting itself in the public sphere since the fall of Ben Ali's regime in January 2011. There are several reasons for questioning the role of religion in the functioning of political institutions. First, an Islamic party (Ennahda) has been a key component of ruling coalitions. Second, the reign of Islamic politics has resuscitated an old schism between supporters of an Islamic identity for Tunisia, and therefore an inevitable adherence to the *Sharia*, and fierce defenders of an allegiance to the civil nation-state. Third, the persistence of this identity schism and the institutional dysfunction it causes have not only jeopardised the security of citizens due to an unprecedented level of religious violence, but they have also driven the country into an economic and social abyss it has never seen since its independence in 1956.

However, beyond this political deadlock and socio-economic failure, we must ask ourselves: Does their common origin not date back to a time long before the accession of Islamists to power following the Tunisian revolution? Did the revolution not erupt due to the wide development gap between the country's coastal and inland regions? Is the radicalised youth not part of the thousands of peers who have been rejected from and/or disillusioned with public school, which is the ultimate social promotion channel accessible to members of the middle and working classes and/or inland regions?

Over time, the inability, or even amateurism (Lissir 2016), of Islamist government coalitions to achieve the "objectives of the revolution" has come to light. There have been widespread incidents of self-immolation by desperate young people in public spaces,[1] and the waves of illegal sea crossings have increased,[2] causing large numbers of people to drown at sea. Besides, due to the porous borders, the risk of "sleeper cells" remains high. Yet, simultaneously, there are many factors that increase the hope of resilience to oppose invasive ideological influence and foreign interference.

The first section includes an extensive review of the literature related to (de) radicalisation in Tunisia and the Arab world. We draw on notions that will help us better understand the issue of religious radicalisation, which has been a worldwide concern for decades, and explore how the relationship between external and internal actors operates in the propagation or deflection of this

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phenomenon. In the second section, in light of the particularity of the Tunisian context, we adopt an empirical approach based on qualitative fieldwork in two regions that enables us to engage with influential actors and identify the institutional dysfunctions at the origin of youth vulnerability and radicalisation, but also to understand how this radicalisation manifests itself in the communities targeted in the study. In the third section, we demonstrate how the factors of resilience, put forward by institutional and civil society actors, manifest differently, according to local cultural specificities, in response to the forms of injustice and exclusion endured by radicalised individuals and communities.

Moderate versus radicalised religiosity

Moderate religiosity: an ancestral heritage rooted in local customs

Even before the fall of Ben Ali's regime, Tunisians were familiar with the meaning of "religious radicalisation", sometimes referred to as "religious extremism" for the sake of neutrality, and as *ikhwanjiya* in people's common, direct, and stigmatising jargon. However, it remained vague and not particularly concerning, even after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. At the time, before the advent of satellite television, the limited information and images broadcasted by official media outlets caught the attention of the Islamist movement, which had just separated itself from the mainly left-wing Tunisian student movement.

It is therefore understandable why radical religiosity that promotes a lifestyle inspired exclusively by the *Sharia*, as in some Arab countries, could not take root in Tunisia. Admittedly, the first constitution of the nascent republic ratified in 1959 established a secular state based on the sovereignty of the people embodied in civic political institutions, such as the Constitutional Liberal Party (*destour*), the main organisation of the national liberation movement, and the Communist Party. However, despite the civil character of the state, Tunisian legislation has largely been inspired by the *Sharia*, particularly in terms of inheritance rights and men's guardianship over women.

At first, this compromise seems to reflect a rather lopsided balance of power in favour of "secular" politics, but the reality is much different. The popular uprising that occurred in Kairouan in 1961 due to a minor incident (Kerrou 2009) calls into question this snap judgement known as "*Allahu Akbar, ma yemshish*!" (God is Great, He will not leave!). This uprising aimed to correct this misconception and restore balance to a political sphere which, while being secular, is wary of encroaching on religion. The oldest Islamic *madrasa* (school) housed in the Great Mosque of Kairouan, whose teachings have been disseminated by Ez-Zitouna University in Tunisia since the 8th century, have benefited from a symbolic capital of loyalty amongst Tunisians.

This flexibility demonstrated by religious institutions had firm roots that date back centuries, marked by individualistic tendencies specific to the

Tunisian religious atmosphere. Around the end of the 13th century, Arwa al Himarriya (also known as Arwa Al Kayrawania) married, Abu Ja'afar Al-Mansur, the future Abbasid caliph (Largueche 2011: 76). Arwa only accepted to marry him after imposing an atypical contract. Since then, it has been called "Kairouan dowry" or "contract with clauses" under which a woman could demand that she be the sole wife. By virtue of this contract, a woman holds the marital power and has the right to demand a divorce.

What is noteworthy is the fact that this custom, which later became a law, is certainly not an isolated case that is inherent to the aristocratic status of Arwa. By examining 30 records covering the period from 1875 to 1917, Largueche found that "out of 975 marriage contracts signed by the notaries [of Kairouan], 756 include the prohibitive clause" (2011: 139).[3] After conducting a deeper analysis of the situations of those young brides, the researcher stated that this was not a privilege reserved for the *beldi* families (aristocrats of the city) of Kairouan or other urban communities in Tunisia; rather, it was also that of "native Kairouanese, notables, artisans, the common people (*'amma*), or populations newly established in the city, who came from some cities of the Regency. . ., or even from tribal areas of Kairouan".[4] She concludes that "it was a social phenomenon" or a way to "convert within one's own culture", to borrow the expression of Olivier Roy (2012: 72).

Radicalised religiosity: globalisation of Wahhabism

Despite having incorporated so many different cultures throughout its history, Tunisia generates the highest number of young jihadists in the world. It has provided more than "3,000 fighters to the Islamic State between 2013 and 2016, while its population is estimated at 11 million inhabitants" (Guidère 2017: 83). Did Wahhabi sub-imperialism, driven by the Arab Spring, finally win over "moderate Tunisian Islam" – after many failed attempts in the 19th century?

It is apparent that the scope of this form of Islam is spreading both in a radicalised and globalised way. Radicalised, as it takes the form of a "sacred violence that is not specific to Islam" (Ibid.: 10); and globalised, especially after 11 September 2001, when two American airliners, taken over by hijackers, crashed into the twin towers of Manhattan, killing more than three thousand people. According to Kepel (2017), this disaster is part of the process of the globalisation of Islam, driven by the competition between two regional powers: Shi'ite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia.

The success of Islamism in Arab countries during the 1980s encouraged these two Islamist protagonists in several fields. After the victory against the Soviet Union and communism in Afghanistan in 1989, the mujahedeen coming from different Arab and/or Islamic countries were not discharged. As such, this victory exported radicalised or even terrorist Islamism to many Arab countries, including Tunisia. Could this radical tendency have mutated into terrorism if the doctrine on which Jihadists are trained did not support

the killing of others because of their beliefs? This question is legitimate because Islam, just like all other religions, has resorted to holy war to Islamise populations who do not want to change their religion. Moreover, there is no shortage of texts in the Quran and the *Hadiths* (collection of the acts and words of Prophet Muhammad that complete the Quran) calling for Jihad against impious people: "Prepare against them [impious people] what you 'believers' can of 'military' power and cavalry to deter Allah's enemies and your enemies" [Surah Al-Anfal (The Spoils), verse 60] (Kepel 2017: 120).

There are also many *muhajreen* (migrants) who have been active in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq and who responded to the call for Jihadist Salafism and formed armed groups to infiltrate Tunisia after the fall of the old regime, such as Ansar al-Sharia, popularised by its leader Abou Iadh. The latter harangued a crowd during a spectacular meeting organised in the emblematic city of Kairouan in 2012, calling for the implementation, by force, of the *Sharia*.

Institutions, injustice, and radicalisation

The qualitative approach we adopted while interviewing 44 institutional actors, civil society members, and ordinary citizens between 2021 and 2022, provided us with valuable insights. This investigation targeted two regions in Tunisia: the northwest of the country (El Kef) and the western central region (Kairouan and Sidi Bouzid). The statements collected through this study do not reflect a well-structured scholarly discourse, but rather the ability of each person to share their ways of understanding, explaining, and justifying, depending on their professional status, the genealogy of radicalised religiosity (if any), and how they face it. We will discuss this in more detail in the third section.

Therefore, we will classify the results of this year-long exchange, carried out across three stages, into two parts: The first one refers to institutional dysfunctions, and the second one reveals at least three major aspects inherent in radicalisation. These aspects are not dissimilar to the new categories of the analysis of moral economies of injustice (Melliti 2022), namely *hogra*, exclusion and injustice.

Institutional dysfunctions: the blurring of functions

The highly mediatised snowball effect, generated by the issue of the Quranic school of Regueb, a small city in the Sidi Bouzid governorate, was not a "perverse effect" without reason. Because of the age group targeted by Quranic schools, they are legally subject to the control of the Childhood Delegate (regional or national, if necessary), who answers to the minister of women, family, children, and seniors. Due to their educational function, their programs are regulated, developed and supervised by inspectors at the ministry of education. However, according to the minister of religious affairs, the schools in Sidi Bouzid "are under the authority of the Ministry of Religious

Affairs. After being limited and hosted in some mosques before the revolution, they have exponentially multiplied since 2011. Worse still, besides the fact that they are private entities, they do not usually have authorisations, which explains the abuses revealed by the incident of the school of Regueb, including the religious radicalisation of children".[5]

The dysfunction is too deep to be reduced to a simple isolated incident resulting from the privatisation and "informalisation" of one educational sector. The arrest of the school director in 2020 only reactivated the same identity schism that has occurred many times before: by imams campaigning for Ennahda candidates during Friday sermons, as well as by politicians of the same party warmly welcoming radicalised *daa'iyas* (preachers) from the Middle East (Tuniscope 2018).

Deficiency in education and indefinite postponement of reform

Failures at the level of religious institutions have had repercussions on education, according to a teacher of civic education in a high school in Kairouan who is also a member of the regional office of the Tunisian League of Human Rights:

> Imagine that it has been more than 10 years since teachers of this subject received a professional development training. The long-awaited reform of national education has been slow. In light of this reality, how can one expect adequate guidance by teachers to immunise students against all abuses, including suicide, drugs and, most importantly, religious violence? . . . The reintegration of thousands of Islamist prisoners in their previous jobs in the public sector has certainly given them justice, but it has also caused many disasters. The lack of any professional rehabilitation program is coupled with an irrational distribution of these employees: Rather than meet the needs and capacities of reintegration institutions, this process gave priority to the old victims' preferences.[6]

While the trials and errors can justify this carelessness in the reparation of old injustices committed against Islamists following each revolution, the reform of the educational sector remains weak. In response to the draft white paper aimed at reforming the educational system, announced by the minister of education (who is affiliated with the modernist party Nidaa Tounes), Ennahda, the second party in the government following the 2014 legislative elections, proposed its own white paper that required the consideration of "identity" in the content of curricula.

A source of pride for Tunisia for more than three decades following independence, the educational system is now a source of youth vulnerability, "with an annual average of more than 100,000 school dropouts", according to the member of the regional office of the Tunisian League of Human

Rights in Kairouan. It is hardly surprising that young Tunisians are, according to him, at the top of the list of illegal "migrants" to the northern shores, and "terrorists" moving across different Arab and Islamic countries, where civil wars are triggered by the *fatwas* of radicalised *ulema*,[7] on behalf of the Salafists, whether subscribing to Wahhabism or the Muslim Brotherhood.

The attraction of Europe for some, and that of the "Paradise of Allah" for others, is related to the system of unshakable privileges acquired over decades.

Corporatism versus exclusion

In Tunisia, the geographical divide largely reflects the glaring disparity between, on the one hand, those who are included – except for certain enclaves on the peripheries – populating a portion of the coastal region and, on the other, those who are excluded. In the first, the bulk of wage labour, protected by the Tunisian General Labour Union, is centred in the public and private sectors, liberal professions organised under professional orders, which are high-earning and pay their taxes "at a flat rate", and businessmen who are under the aegis of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts and the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fisheries, each of whom benefits from the infrastructure financed by national taxpayers. In contrast, the majority of people living in the "inland" regions and the peripheries around the centre are excluded from these organisations and institutions.

It is not surprising, therefore, that one of these two segments would become radicalised. This is especially true given that it is in the peripheries of large coastal cities, and particularly in inland governorates, such as those located in the northwest (represented by El Kef) and in Western central regions (Sidi Bouzid and Kairouan) that violent extremism finds refuge, going hand in hand with the religious radicalisation of the local population.

Those who are "out" are aware of their exclusion, and the factors fuelling their fascination with one of the two "paradises" (that of Europe or *Allah*) are intertwined. If the informal economy enabled economic survival and dignity for the older generation, who have been excluded from the current development model, today's generation finds its solace somewhere else. "So how can one be surprised that young people would be so violent and receptive to any radical ideology?" asks a teacher of national education in El Kef.

Drivers of radical religiosity

The imported radicalised religiosity observed in Tunisia post-revolution, and particularly in the two regions chosen for our study, falls within the Islamist ideology – of all variants – and carries different meanings according to the specific nature of each region and even within the same region, which is the case in Kairouan and Sidi Bouzid. Therefore, beyond the common denominator of socio-economic marginalisation, the echo created by the latter

manifests itself uniquely in each of the three cities, namely El Kef, Kairouan, and Sidi Bouzid.

***Moral inequality:** hogra*

The feeling of *hogra*, stemming from words and/or acts that show contempt or denigration of others, does not necessarily originate from poverty as some believe. In his analysis of the psychic economy (affirmation of regional social and moral imperatives) of the bourgeoisie during the economic boom in the 19th century, Norbert Elias (1991) identified a paradoxical feeling of discomfort, that is, a feeling of contempt caused by the persistence of the system of aristocratic values, which remains alive and vivid in traditions, language, and appearance. The bourgeoisie tried in vain to accumulate money and show signs of wealth. However, they lacked the "style" of high society. Thus, just like an aristocrat commenting that the dress or language (*un mien ami*) of a bourgeois "has a bourgeois character" (Elias 1991: 281), a *beldi* (Tunisian aristocrat) or an established *sahli* (a civil servant from a coastal region) do the same by marking someone from an inland region with the stigma of zero-eight (08), referring to the telephone code specific to the north-western region. More generally, all regions located outside the "competitive triangle" (Belhédi 2019: 7–61; Daoud 2021) are scoffed at as those "from beyond the signposts". Similarly, an imam in Sidi Bouzid states:

> There are not only poor people, but there are also rich people, farmers, breeders, as well as affluent people working in the informal sector. The simple informal sector is limited to the trade of food and petrol due to the laxity of Tunisian and Algerian customs officers; while the heavy informal sector (currency, drugs, arms, etc.) presupposes either an unprecedented complicity of the same officers, or new illegal mechanisms without the knowledge or control of the two neighbouring countries.[8]

Another interviewee, a sociologist also based in Sidi Bouzid, acknowledges that

> it is the residents of the city, not those of its rural hinterland, who feel that being relatively well-off, they have recently made a habit of visiting major coastal cities such as Sfax as traders, or Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia, and Hammamet as tourists".

He added that "when comparing the infrastructure of these cities to their own infrastructures, especially in terms of health, education, and leisure facilities", these residents become aware of the extent of the injustice practised against inland cities.[9]

Unlike the inhabitants of El Kef and Kairouan, who have an ancestral sense of urbanity and pride in their symbolic capital, both cultural and religious, the people of Sidi Bouzid, the H'mamas, from local tribes with pastoral traditions, are enduring injustices due to their low status as small farmers and/or shepherds, in contrast to the newly independent state's fascination with industry and beachside tourism.

Exclusion of religious actors

While young people in Sidi Bouzid, many of whom are radicalised and active members of "sleeper cells", engage in terrorist attacks committed in Tunisia or abroad,[10] it is in Kairouan that vocal radicalised religiosity is the most present. In many ways, the choice of the first iconic capital of Islam in the Maghreb by Ansar al-Sharia is not accidental. First, since it is not a tourist destination, this city and its rural hinterland have seen their water resources "unfairly diverted by the state to other touristic cities on the coastline" as highlighted by a member of the regional office of the Tunisian League of Human Rights in Kairouan.[11] This resulted in the economic marginalisation of the city and accelerated the migration of its human resources towards coastal cities, particularly Sousse, despite its significant arable land and artisanal potential. History then came into play: the "*Allahu Akbar ma yemshish*" movement of the early 1960s, which opposed the central power, has had significant consequences. The Governorate of Kairouan suffers from poor scores in human development, similar to other inland regions. However, does this explain the excesses of religious radicalisation, which has taken a hold of this city once named as the minaret of moderate Tunisian Islam? According to many institutional actors in the city, this is not the case. When asked about the bad reputation of Kairouan, the director of the Center for Islamic Studies recognised that "the situation is regrettable and unacceptable", adding that "this form of religiosity is alien to the city and its traditions. Those who promote this radicalism lack knowledge, are manipulated by external forces, and hail from other regions".[12]

While he avoided specifying what he meant by "other regions", one could still detect two meaningful elements that he alluded to in his answer. By people who are "alien" to the city, he was referring to the immigrants who came from the outskirts of the city as well as from other governorates and who are poorly educated and destitute. He also believes that the abuses committed by these radicalised actors and their influence on mosques are due to the exclusion of moderate religious institutions by the state since the reign of Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia's first president.

But beyond the suppression of the city's religious character, there are other grievances related to the exclusion of the symbolic capital of certain "notables and esteemed families in Kairouan". Bourguiba's secular statism was too proactive and obviously underestimated "the traditional

compromise [between religious forces and] the political power, which is accompanied by privileges in terms of rights and financial subsidies" (Weber 2018: 304). It should be noted that the Imam of the Great Mosque, Abderrahman Khelif, whose dismissal ignited the revolution of Kairouan against Bourguiba, was elected to a parliament controlled by the Destourian party of Bourguiba himself, which shows, once again, the non-radicalised nature of religiosity in Tunisia.

In summary, is radicalised religiosity only a perverted effect of inadequate governance of public affairs by an interventionist state? This could be true to some extent, but by limiting our analysis to the inadequate governance of public affairs, we would be overlooking the unfair development model that has produced many forms of radicalised outcries against the marginalisation of young people in Kairouan and other governorates excluded from development. The demand for equality appears whenever inequalities are perceived as a result of scandals, arbitrariness, and injustice. In this context, it is not so much the economic gaps between the rich and poor that are problematic, but rather the potential excesses of "arrogant wealth that would fundamentally alter relations between people" (Melliti 2022). One of the neglected young people, interviewed by Melliti, expressed this same view:

> Yes, injustice, this is real injustice. Our products only benefit others. . . . Local youth are treated with contempt (*ma'hgûrîn*). Only people from other regions work here (*barrâniya*). When a young person from the region is hired, it is to entrust them with a simple task" (Ibid.).

Regional injustice

Feelings of injustice manifest themselves across different communal and religious affiliations in El Kef. Without denying the benefits of Bourguiba's era, especially in terms of health and education policies, another interviewee – a suspended MP and civil society activist in El Kef – put forward two paradoxes in Tunisia's asynchronous development model (Germani 1972; Rekik 2022). The first is related to the false "rationalisation" of the asynchronous nature of the development model,[13] which has been in place for five decades. The country's north-western region, where El Kef is located, is believed to have significant natural resources but has been deprived of public investment in infrastructure; as a result, the region could not attract private investments, despite its fertile soil and its high levels of rainfall. In addition to these advantages, which are common among all north-western regions, the El Kef governorate has a rich archaeological heritage and pioneering artistic elite, which provides it with more opportunities than other coastal regions to enjoy prosperity and development. However, the "rationality" of the development model denied the region this opportunity as demonstrated by high levels of migration from El Kef towards the capital (Belhédi 2019). This decades-old trend is proof of the blatant marginalisation of the region, similar to the

situation in Sidi Bouzid or Kairouan. Therefore, it is not surprising that El Kef has since then undergone a tragic shift, particularly among the youth, towards an unnatural intolerance that can be felt in the city's cultural atmosphere and that is – albeit oddly – manifesting itself against women in the region.

One interviewee, a political and civil society activist, vividly recalls the esteemed status and favourable conditions that women belonging to previous generations enjoyed. Therefore, she feels astonished and outraged by the conservative and misogynistic trends affecting her and other women in her city:

> My father is originally from Gabès. He is a man of letters who worked in France. As for my mother, she is from El Kef, and I am envious of the life she lived. She was an active member of the National Union of Tunisian Women at the time, attended the festivities organised for Bourguiba's anniversary in El Kef, and benefitted from the dynamics of the cultural centres in Tunis and the theatre troupes of El Kef and Gafsa, which have now disappeared. In fact, the dramaturgy centre in El Kef had to suspend its activities and close down thirty years ago. . . . Thankfully, as a Member of Parliament, and with the help of the Ministry of Culture, I managed to secure 200,000 dinars of funding to reopen it.[14]

Another interviewee, with politically leftist tendencies, also acknowledged the advantages of Bourguiba's era in terms of "cultural, educational, and public health policies, in addition to the fact that he built an educated and open-minded society that values equality between men and women". That said, she also criticised Bourguiba for his unfair and regionalist economic choices:

> These choices are tightly related to the exacerbation of sexist prejudices of a radical Islamic nature, as well as those expressed by revived traditionalist forces and even by elites that are supposed to be progressive. For example, I was forced to leave my leftist party in 2016 after my colleague and I endured gender-based violence and discrimination by the party's General Secretary.[15]

This feminist statement is underpinned by indirect allusions to the link between gender-based grievances and regional inequalities. While some women managed to survive despite the failures of the adopted development model, there are other, invisible women who suffer from two simultaneous forms of dominance: patriarchal dominance and the economic dominance that we have identified in El Kef. This double dominance to which rural women are subjected is even more severe in Kairouan and Sidi Bouzid, where the lack of cultural traditions has played a significant role in their abysmal working conditions in the agricultural sector and their vulnerability to religious indoctrination and radicalisation.

Reintegration of religion within its cultural environment

Since the dissolution of parliament and the paralysis of existing political parties in March 2022, the Tunisian president has monopolised all powers and has simultaneously relaunched three processes, although perhaps unintentionally. First, he has exposed the political – rather than identity-based – nature of radical Islamic movements. By doing so, he restored the authority of official institutions protected by the state and, at the same time, initiated the reintegration of religion within culture (Roy 2016). Second, civil society associations have gained widespread trust at the expense of discredited parties – including Ennahda – which had been accused of corruption long before 25 July 2021. Third, inland regions have benefited from a form of symbolic compensation, after suffering from both economic marginalisation and religious radicalisation, even if this process has not yet matured into a development model that could offer tangible reparations.

Religious institutions as a pathway for socio-economic integration?

The reintegration of religion within its cultural environment requires primarily the recognition of the errors committed by the post-independence political elites – elites that were "imbued with western modernity", according to the director of the Kairouan Center for Islamic Studies:

> These elites excluded and launched a smear campaign against religious institutions that preached a "moderate, Tunisian Islam" according to the *Zitounian* tradition. By doing so, they facilitated the subsequent infiltration and influence of preachers from the east who promoted a radicalised interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah via satellite TV channels and, recently, via social media networks. . . . What matters most now is the need to shield society from the danger that these outsiders pose, as they are capable of mobilising vulnerable young people who lack knowledge and who can be easily indoctrinated to engage in violent acts.[16]

To avoid such abuses, the centre managed by our interviewee "seeks to reconcile the city of Kairouan and the country in general with its moderate, *Maliki* Islam". While he deplored the "instrumentalisation" of this research institute for political goals before the revolution, he is also proud of the fact that it has since been placed under the umbrella of Ez-Zaitouna University – that is, under the aegis of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The imam of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, or Sidi El Sheikh as he is referred to by the participants in the focus group, which included local officials from different ministries and associations in Kairouan and Sidi Bouzid, shares the same view as the director of the Kairouan Center for Islamic

Studies. He also believes in the same approach of reviving the *Maliki* religious institutions to reject this "alien version of Islam opposed to our moderate traditions".[17] The term "alien" – which was used often by interviewees in Kairouan and, to a lesser degree, in El Kef – refers not only to the foreign nature of this Islam but also to Tunisian nationals who adopt these radicalised religious beliefs. In addition, the adjective "alien" (*barrani* in the Tunisian dialect) has significant cultural connotations and is reminiscent of the famous conflictual relationship and contrast (still very much alive in the collective Tunisian memory) between the *beldi* (urban, civilised) and the *arbi* (Arab, Bedouin, uncivilised).

The adjective *barrani*, often used by these institutional actors, not only stigmatises a segment of the population but is also counterproductive. While it is true that this highly pejorative expression has not only made its appearance in Kairouan but practically in all Tunisian cities where the "native" population feels that immigrants pose a threat to its employment opportunities and privileges, it is also synonymous with the term *hogra*, which refers either to a dialect or to dreadful occupations (pre-capitalist sharecropping, pastoral activities, etc.). Still, its resurgence in the case of Kairouan is not without reason, as these outsiders have taken control of many religious institutions – particularly mosques – and have imposed a form of religiosity incompatible with the temperament of the "native" residents of Kairouan. However, there is also a second, more implicit reason: According to Max Weber (2018), the spiritual dimension of religion can in no way substitute its profane dimension, which manifests itself in the religious institutions that hold power, which in turn grants them privileges.

However, according to one interviewee, who is a member of the Tunisian Human Rights League, the acknowledgement of the material interests asserted by these institutionally empowered religious actors is incompatible with the need to respect other people's "humanity" and material interests. Rather than dehumanise them by describing them as *barrani*, it would be better to include them by reintegrating religious silos into the city's economic life:

> The decision to once again organise the *Mawlid* festival (the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, prohibited by *Ansar al-Sharia*) by the Mawlid Association in 2021 under the slogan of "Kairouan Recovers" (in the health sense after the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as in the socioeconomic sense) is a testament to this return to the natural Islam of the city of Kairouan. These religious festivals celebrate the qualities of the Prophet (which is prohibited by radical Islamists), both cultural (as in *Rabih Al Founoun* [Spring of Arts] Festival) and economic.[18]

The people behind the initiative to relaunch the Mawlid Festival agreed that the festivities should last for an entire week, given the annual increase in the

number of visitors to the festival from Arab countries. They expect the festival to attract more than one million visitors, which would turn Kairouan into a top religious tourism destination, thereby revitalising the artisanal and hospitality sectors and incentivising unemployed young people.

Civil society actors as drivers of resilience through culture

The view that this "imported" religiosity has resonated with the frustrated youth in the working-class neighbourhoods of El Kef and the immigrants who came to the city in search of jobs and better living conditions also applies to the situation in Kairouan. In fact, according to a university professor from El Kef, this has affected the entire country:

> The international context favourable for the rise of political Islam, as well as the manipulation and funding by foreign organisations, are factors that have played a crucial role when coupled with the lack of knowledge and the widespread unemployment among the youth of the city's popular neighbourhoods.[19]

In light of this reality, one cannot be surprised by the participation of young people from El Kef in acts of violence following their religious radicalisation, especially during the period of the Troika that ruled the country between 2011 and 2013.[20] However, in contrast with Kairouan, El Kef's youth did not resort to religion to find resilience. The president of a micro-credit organisation proudly talks about the city's historical heritage and civility in her testimony and shares what is protecting the lively residents of El Kef from the "people in black clothes and the proponents of death". According to her,

> while it is true that poverty is one factor leading to extremism, there are many others. A good culture promotes tolerance, values diversity and protects people against all excesses and abuses. For example, my mother, like many older women and honest Muslims in El Kef, never rebuked me for wanting to study abroad or live alone, far from my family.[21]

Despite the renewed interest since 2015 by the Nidaa Tounes government and its local institutions in culture as a driver of resilience, there is no doubt that it is the profile and character of the people heading local organisations or government institutions that make all the difference. A local official at the Ministry of Youth and Sports stated that, as in Jendouba or Sidi Bouzid, "all delegations in El Kef have operational youth clubs, but are their directors aware of the dangers associated with the void caused by the lack of job and self-actualisation opportunities in the region?" According to him, this makes all the difference, because "proposing cultural and artistic activities or preventing extremism cannot be achieved without activism".[22]

This activism is most often encountered in civil society circles imbued with culture, as is the case in El Kef, and it even seems to outstrip political activism: Isn't that the same reason why the MP and civil society activist from El Kef quoted earlier resigned from her supposedly progressive party to show solidarity with her colleague who was the victim of patriarchal violence?

Curbing regional injustice by addressing women's vulnerability

We asked the interviewees from various institutions and civil society organisations in Sidi Bouzid about the more obvious tendency towards religious radicalisation, causing the city and its surroundings to be described as a "breeding ground" and/or a "haven" for terrorism. We also asked them about the tribal conservatism that inhibits women's potential due to the patriarchal dominance they are subjected to at home and their overexploitation by landowners, which is the main reason behind their vulnerability to indoctrination by radical Islam, as the president of the feminist organisation Salima clearly demonstrated. Many interviewees were keen to confront these stereotypes. When asked about the situation of women in her city, the president of the feminist organisation confirmed that:

> Women's vulnerability is primarily due to economic reasons, which means that it is of the same nature in Sidi Bouzid, in the capital Tunis, or elsewhere in Tunisia. However, in Sidi Bouzid, this vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that the number of female workers who are the victims of traffic accidents is not decreasing from year to year.[23]

She also explains the reasons for the radicalisation of youth in Sidi Bouzid:

> What alternatives are we offering for the children who dropped out of school after the death of their mothers in the roll-over of the van overloaded with women headed to the fields at dawn? What are we offering to children whose parents cannot afford to buy them a backpack and deprive them of their right to education?[24]

This emphasis on the poor living conditions of women in Sidi Bouzid (such as lack of public transport and child support) is no doubt justifiable, but its frequent mention by our interviewees, particularly the men, is not accidental. Rather, it is their automatic response to what they call "armchair feminism" – that is, urban feminist organisations that give little thought to the hardships of rural women and even less so to the "commodification" of the female body in the media and instead focus solely on male dominance.

This resilience perspective (if we can call it such) urges us to reconsider the development model and to revisit the watchwords of the revolutionary dynamic in Sidi Bouzid: "No to marginalisation, yes to positive discrimination" in favour of marginalised regions. The President of the Republic no

doubt made this wager barely two months after dissolving the Assembly of the People's Representatives, when Kais Saied delivered a speech amid a frantic crowd in the same place where a street vendor set himself alight on 17 December 2010, igniting the Tunisian revolution. In his speech, the president mentioned that incident several times, in an attempt to show his appreciation for the local population in desperate need for recognition, and barely mentioned 14 January 2011, the date of the fall of Ben Ali's regime, which he views as the day when the revolutionary process was aborted or subdued.[25]

Conclusion

The qualitative study that we conducted in 2021 and 2022 in three marginalised governorates in Tunisia enabled us to demonstrate that the religiosity of Tunisians has clearly been influenced by globalisation and especially by the Arab Spring. The study also shows that this influence varies depending on the susceptibility of each region to adopt such forms of religiosity and on the role of local actors at the institutional, civil society, or even individual levels. Therefore, while the two regions examined in the study suffer from similar levels of marginalisation, their susceptibility to being influenced by religious radicalisation differs between the two regions and even within the same region. While injustice is the main issue in the country's northwest, represented by the city of El Kef, in Kairouan, it is the disregard for the symbolic capital of institutional religious actors that has taken the spotlight and, consequently, exacerbated the tendency of the local population to be influenced by the radical Wahhabi ideology. Meanwhile, since Sidi Bouzid lacks the rich cultural heritage of El Kef and the religious symbolic capital of Kairouan, the city is most prone to violent radicalisation and becomes a breeding ground for potential terrorists.

The survey of the potential for resilience also revealed specific characteristics that give each region a certain level of immunity, as well as weaknesses that have left them vulnerable to radical discourse. The artistic traditions of El Kef, which contribute to the city's moderate customs and are promoted by civil society actors, are sources of pride and civil resistance to the injustice of the state's regionalist policies. In Kairouan, the preferred option to ward off radical forms of Islam is to enable *Zitounian* religious institutions to regain their power and their local influence. As for Sidi Bouzid, which is also part of the second region examined by the study, it lacks such an artistic or religious heritage and is therefore the most prone to religious radicalisation. Sidi Bouzid finds its resilience by re-exploring its own symbolic capital as the cradle of the revolution. Kais Saied has used this very symbolic capital to lay the groundwork for the third republic, where Saied intends that the underprivileged population will be given the reins of power.

In the end, radicalisation is simply a political response to political choices. Even if it takes on a religious character, it remains political in essence and is a response to social and regional injustice. And while some regions have the

cultural or symbolic means to resist this radicalisation, others are less fortunate and remain engulfed in a spiral of mindless violence.

Notes

1 The Tunisian Social Observatory, part of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, released its annual report on suicide and suicide attempts in 2015. The report shows an estimated increase of 170.4% in the number of suicides and suicide attempts compared to 2014. The year 2015 saw 45 suicides and suicide attempts every month (FTDES Publications 2015).
2 According to the Italian Ministry of Interior, the number of Tunisian migrants arriving in Italy has been steadily increasing from 2,592 in 2019, to 11,212 in 2020, then 14,342 in 2021, and 16,292 in 2022. Among them, there were 595, 1,607, 2,492, and 3,430 minors, respectively (FTDES Publication, Migration Statistics of 2022).
3 All direct quotes in this chapter are translated from French.
4 Ibid.
5 Interview with the academic inspector of national education, May 2021.
6 Interview with a member of the regional office of the Tunisian League of Human Rights, May 2022.
7 *Fatwas* are decrees resulting from legal consultations, which are issued in Islam by *ulema* who act as religious authorities, arbitrate controversial cases, and issue religious verdicts on new developments.
8 Interview with an imam and leader of a charitable association, October 2021.
9 Interview with a Tunisian university professor, September 2022.
10 In a study entitled "Terrorism in Tunisia through Judicial Records" conducted in 2015, which "is based on the records of cases registered between 2011 and late 2015, whose material became publishable since their mention in a public hearing, it was possible to learn about 384 of these cases, which involved more than 2,224 accused persons". Those accused of terrorism were spread across regions, placing "Sidi Bouzid in the second place with 14.8%, just after Tunis (18.79%), and ahead of Kairouan (10th place with 4.05%) and El Kef (13th place with 2.8%)". (Report of the Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, created by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, FTDES Publications 2015).
11 Interview with a member of the regional office of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, May 2022.
12 Interview with a university professor and director of an Islamic studies centre, November 2021.
13 Shortly before the publication of Germani's work, in which he developed the concept of asynchronous development, the Tunisian state abandoned the comprehensive development model, which is based on the idea of development hubs. These hubs, spread across the country, were intended to serve as drivers of development in all regions in a synchronous manner and to ensure national integration at the same time. In 1970, the state replaced this model with the asynchronous development model, freeing private initiative and, by doing so, giving preference to coastal regions in terms of public investment in infrastructure. The ruling party justified and tried to rationalise this new approach by arguing that only the concentration of production means and natural resources in a certain region could optimise the process and generate the maximum amount of wealth. This, in turn, would have a ripple effect across inland regions. However, we know that beachside tourism in coastal areas has not generated cultural (or religious) tourism in inland regions and that coastal areas themselves are reduced to a "competitive triangle" (Belhédi 2019). In his PhD thesis defence in 1990, Fethi Rekik (1990)

demonstrated that the economic exclusion of the Medenine governorate in the country's south caused the local community to become withdrawn and confined, which no doubt created a favourable environment for the emergence of an informal economy based on illegal immigrants. This also nourished the conservative tendencies of reactionary political Islam movements.

14 Interview with a former MP and political and civil society activist, May 2022.
15 Ibid.
16 Interview with a university professor and director of an Islamic studies centre, November 2021.
17 Interview with the imam of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, May 2022.
18 Interview with a member of the regional bureau of the Tunisian League of Human Rights, May 2022.
19 Interview with a professor at the University of Jendouba, October 2021.
20 In the post-revolutionary context in Tunisia, the Troika refers to the coalition between three political parties, including the Islamist Ennahda Movement, with the aim of securing a stable majority in the Constituent Assembly in charge of drafting a new constitution for the country.
21 Interview with the president of a civil society organisation, October 2021.
22 Interview with a local official at the Ministry of Youth and Sport, November 2021.
23 Interview with a feminist activist and president of an association, November 2021.
24 Ibid.
25 Tunisian President Kaïs Saïed's TV declaration on 20 September 2021 (*AFP* – Fethi Belaid), made public on 21 September 2021.

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Part III
Civil society actors

Introduction

This last part of the book focuses on the interaction between government and civil society actors in the context of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), with three chapters on Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Lebanon. This interaction involves horizontal coordination among government actors and public institutions (such as the police, the ministries of health, justice and education, and the social services) on the one hand, and vertical coordination between governmental institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs) on the other.

We define civil society as a diverse body of civil actors and formal or informal structures who engage in public life seeking to advance shared values and objectives. They operate in an intermediary arena that lies outside the family, market, and state (VanDyke 2017). Civil society actors typically include individuals such as community leaders and a wide variety of CSOs, such as international, local, and grassroots non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, online groups and social media communities, labour unions and professional associations, charitable and philanthropic foundations, academic and research institutions, and recreational community groups (Bolu 2021). These institutions and groupings interpose themselves between individuals and the state, and assume a function of intermediation, partnership, counterweight, or/and counter-power. Among the constituent elements of this definition, autonomy is considered by Gellner (1994) to be an essential feature of civil society. We have chosen to focus this final part of the book on the role of civil society in P/CVE to analyse how CSOs provide a space for constructive engagement between the state and individuals, groups, or collectivities.

Civil society entities benefit from political and institutional support, which is reflected in the financial contributions of international donors to national NGOs in fragile and conflict-affected states and in the integration of these NGOs as a critical component of a participatory approach to development. This support for the democratisation and liberalisation of political and economic life in partner countries has thus become a key element of Western

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governments foreign policy (Gellner 1991). International institutions and agencies are giving civil society an increasingly significant role in the definition and implementation of a development policy in which the state is no longer the only hegemonic actor. The role of NGOs is increasingly recognised by international organisations, as evidenced by the growing number of NGOs with observer status in United Nations (UN) bodies (Willetts 2000). In the field of P/CVE, governments have the responsibility to ensure security and respect for human rights when implementing a P/CVE strategy. Nevertheless, some grievances that are exploited by violent extremist groups lie beyond governmental reach. Indeed, it is the lack of government accountability, and social and political exclusion that sometimes fuels violent extremism. Civil society actors are often better placed, and more credible, knowledgeable, and experienced in working with specific groups to help identify and address the grievances that make individuals more vulnerable to violent extremism, as reflected in our three case studies. More specifically, our analyses show that CSOs have been strongly encouraged to work across sectors and with other community actors within P/CVE government strategies. From a gender perspective, there is broad international consensus among policymakers and practitioners that efforts to engage women in P/CVE is critical and should be intensified. Their centrality in international peace and security efforts was highlighted by the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2000, and more specifically, with respect to P/CVE, through the development of UN Security Council Resolution 2242 in 2015.

In the three following case studies, CSOs emerged in post-war environments, after ethnopolitical, inter-community, or sectarian armed conflicts. As a result of the war, a weak state emerged, and community entities have consolidated at the expense of national governmental structures. The fragility of the state, compounded by the legacy of sectarianism and ethnicism exacerbated by the conflict, contributed to the weakening of national consciousness. In parallel, religious and ethnic institutions have asserted themselves on the political scene by providing social services, especially within their respective communities. Some of these have also extended their intervention to the fields of education, health, and social assistance.

The three forthcoming chapters focus on the broad landscape of civil society actors involved in P/CVE. Due to the diversity of factors conducive to violent extremism or contributing to its mitigation in each context, civil society actors operate through a vast range of strategies, both online and offline. For this reason, the chapters delve into the roles of traditional and social media within the civil society sector, in addition to other types of community leaders and CSOs.

In Chapter 9, Ardit Orana, Dorjeta Rukiqi, and Ramadan Ilazi analyse media narratives and the role of social media in the rise of ethnopolitical radicalisation, before looking into how civil society actors can contribute to P/CVE. They conclude that despite the important work that NGOs already

do on the topic, an overemphasis on religious extremism and heavy reliance on foreign donors create the need for improvement in this field.

Ioannis Armakolas and Bledar Feta (Chapter 10) examine two municipalities in North Macedonia in order to explore the role, contribution, and context in which civil society actors should operate, as these can act as bridges between the local communities and the government. The chapter emphasises that coordination and cooperation among all actors involved are vital for successful P/CVE programmes.

Finally, in Chapter 11, Marie Kortam traces the involvement of civil society in the development and implementation of the national PVE strategy in Lebanon, focusing in particular on one concrete example of state-civil society partnership: the Strong Cities Network.

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9 Ethnopolitical radicalisation in Kosovo

Media narratives and civil society response

Ramadan Ilazi, Ardit Orana, and Dorjeta Rukiqi

Following the destructive wars of the 1990s, the Western Balkans focused on democratisation and European integration. At the Zagreb Summit of November 2000 and at the European Union (EU)-Western Balkans Summit held in Thessaloniki in 2003, all EU member states agreed that the region belonged in the EU. In this context, democratisation, rule of law, and regional cooperation became priorities, and most leaders in the Western Balkans seemed to be in agreement with the EU on these issues. However, progress has been limited in the two decades that have passed since the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, and a future in the EU is as distant today for the six Western Balkans countries as it was back then. In this context, in recent years the region has seen an increase in ethnic tensions and potential for violence, as well as efforts to normalise nationalism, which in practice is often manifested with doses of fascism (Ilazi et al. 2022). While the lack of progress in the EU accession process is one potential factor that can explain these developments, the lack of a truth and reconciliation process about the wars of the 1990s represents another important factor that has created vulnerability and an enabling environment for political extremism and nationalism in the Western Balkans. Accordingly, this chapter investigates the relations between this gap in reconciliation efforts and patterns of radicalisation towards violent extremism. It also examines the role of online and offline media in propagating hate speech and, in turn, the contributions of civil society in countering these dynamics and fostering more resilient communities.

Interethnic relations in Kosovo remain fragile, particularly between the Albanian and Serbian communities. As a result of inherited war memories from their families, close circles, and school lessons, young generations in Kosovo are becoming more vulnerable towards ethnopolitical radicalisation: "We simply have divided narratives that shape our consciousness and our ways of thinking, our perspectives. We just do not have the same picture of reality".[1] Online and offline media often amplify political hate speech and deepen ethnic divisions, by promoting or echoing competing narratives about the past, and facilitating revisionist efforts in the past. The goal of the chapter is to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that fuel vulnerability

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towards ethnopolitical radicalisation, which can lead to heightened tensions and potential violence, and therefore undermine peace and security in the country.

For the purpose of this chapter, ethnopolitical radicalisation denotes the process through which individuals become less tolerant towards other ethnic groups in the society, and utilise the perceived historical injustices to promote hate against particular ethnic groups. Ethnopolitical radicalisation is also understood as a synonym for radical nationalism, which refers to efforts to promote the country as political or cultural unit belonging to one ethnic group, with other ethnicities being seen as a threat. In addition, ethnopolitical radicalisation is politically motivated by leaders to promote particular nationalistic agendas and purposefully divide the society in order to gain or keep power.

This chapter argues that international actors, including the research community, have focused most of their attention on religious radicalisation in the Western Balkans, specifically on radical Islam, while other forms of radicalisation, such as far-right and ethno-political radicalisation, have received less attention, leading to scattered and unorganised knowledge about these risks (Buljubašić 2022). Furthermore, the chapter argues that ethnopolitical radicalisation is the most serious threat to regional stability in the Western Balkans, causing a decline in democratisation and European integration.

The analysis builds on semi-structured key informant interviews and two focus group discussions, involving a total of over 20 participants. These interviews were conducted as part of the PAVE project's field research at two selected field sites in Kosovo: the municipality of North Mitrovica and the municipality of South Mitrovica. These were chosen because they share similar socio-economic factors but have experienced different levels of radicalisation. It is worth noting that Mitrovica, located in the northern part of Kosovo, is recognised as a divided city and a focal point for ethnic tensions.

Following a short description of the context of this study, the chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section analyses the narratives that empower nationalism and ethnopolitical radicalisation. It also discusses how social media have empowered radical individuals by allowing them to define what a "good" Serb or a "good" Albanian means. The second section examines the agency and actorness of the civil society in the context of the ethnopolitical radicalisation process in Kosovo. Ethnopolitical radicalisation in the Western Balkans is also manifested as a protest towards liberal-democratic norms and political pluralism. Because civil society is seen as the main promoter of liberal-democracy, it is often a target in the ethnopolitical radicalisation process, particularly in Kosovo, where non-government organisations (NGOs) are the main actors promoting ethnic and cultural diversity, which are an anathema to radical nationalists. In this sense, civil society can be perceived as an actor that undermines efforts to promote nationalistic ideas and values in the society. In this sense, because of the work of the civil society in Kosovo to promote interethnic cooperation and reconciliation,

it is an important actor to examine in the overall context of ethnopolitical radicalisation.

Context

The brutal wars during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s deepened ethnic divisions in the Western Balkans, and nationalism is widely accepted as the main cause of these wars. The actions of Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević to strengthen control over Kosovo were manifested through repressive policies against the ethnic Albanian population. In 1989, Kosovo's autonomy was stripped as part of a new constitution implemented by President Milošević, marking his nationalistic campaign to create a "Greater Serbia" (Nelsson 2019). These actions and escalating tensions led to a war that involved ethnic cleansing campaigns and widespread human rights abuses committed by Serbian forces against Albanian civilians (Human Rights Watch 2001).

In 1999, NATO intervened militarily against Yugoslav and Serbian targets, resulting in the withdrawal of police and military forces from Kosovo and the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (Bellamy 2002). Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, in accordance with the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the future status process for Kosovo, former President of Finland Mr. Martti Ahtisaari. While Kosovo's independence was supported by major Western countries including the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, it was fiercely opposed by Serbia, Russia, and China. Additionally, the Serbian population in Kosovo rejected independence and refused to cooperate with the new public institutions, particularly in the northern part of Kosovo.

Since 2011, the EU has been facilitating a dialogue for the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, aiming to reach a comprehensive and legally binding agreement. However, the process has encountered challenges, and the issue of recognising Kosovo's independence from Serbia remains unresolved. As both Kosovo and Serbia seek membership in the EU and are part of the accession process, the normalisation of relations between the two parties is a requirement for membership. In 2013, Kosovo and Serbia signed the "First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations", leading to Serbia opening accession talks with the EU, and Kosovo receiving the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). Most recently, in 2023, Kosovo and Serbia have accepted the "Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations", but neither side has signed the agreement. Kosovo is expected to provide for the right of self-management for the Serbian community and establish an Association of Serb-majority municipalities, while Serbia is expected to recognise Kosovo. Despite the progress made, interethnic relations in Kosovo remain fragile, especially in the north, which is a hotspot of tensions. NATO maintains a military presence in Kosovo, and

the EU has a police mission called EULEX. Both entities serve as guarantees for peace and stability, and their presence has deterred violence and conflict.

Factors and narratives that contribute to ethnopolitical radicalisation in Kosovo

Research on the topic of radicalisation in Kosovo has found a strong causal link between the proliferation of online platforms and trends of radicalisation (Ilazi et al. 2022; Balaj and Kelmendi 2017). Considering the region's accentuated ethnopolitical grievances as the result of the wars stemming from the breakup of former Yugoslavia, examining the effects of these narratives on contemporary ethnic relations is of utmost importance. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of Kosovo, a country whose independence is both contested by Serbia and is host to an ethnic Serbian population with a great degree of institutionalised rights guaranteed by the constitution. A recent study on radicalisation trends in Kosovo has found that online platforms remain the most effective dissemination tool for groups and citizens to circulate radical narratives (Ilazi et al. 2022). Additionally, the research suggests that while Kosovo has experienced a significant move away from radical religious-based online content, ethnopolitical narratives have seen a significant increase (Ilazi et al. 2022). Subject to the very high number of internet and social media users, the threat of increasing citizen engagement with radical ethnopolitical narratives in Kosovo warrants necessary concern. As of 2021, there are an estimated 1.76 million internet users in Kosovo, with the number increasing by 156,000 (+9.7%) between 2020 and 2021 (Kemp 2021). While Kosovo's demographics highlight an equal dispersion between urban and rural communities, the considerable number of social media users highlights the importance of online information dissemination in a country with a population of close to two million.

Subject to continued consolidation, radical online ethnopolitical communities have directly impacted the level of heightened ethnic tensions between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. Unlike the case of online religious-based radicalisation in Kosovo, radical ethnopolitical communities are much more decentralised, and their hierarchy and linkages are less apparent. Additionally, these narratives are mostly perpetuated by citizens rather than consolidated networks of groups. While Kosovo institutions undertook security operations following the proliferation of religious-based radical online content in 2014, which led to the identification and termination of numerous online platforms, no concrete actions have been taken against users perpetuating radical ethnopolitical narratives (Ilazi et al. 2022). Kosovo's recently expired Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism that leads to Terrorism 2015–2020 (SPVERLT) recognised the threat of right-wing extremism, but it fails to integrate institutional responses beyond surveillance and oversight (Buljubašić 2022). In 2023, the government finalised a new strategy to replace SPVERLT, called State Strategy for Preventing and Fighting of

Terrorism 2023–2028. The new strategy will integrate both terrorism and violent extremism.

As previously stated, the legacy of the war between Kosovo and Serbia is a major source of legitimisation of radical ethnopolitical narratives. This, compounded by a lack of tackling the past and ineffective transitional justice mechanisms, has allowed groups and individuals to exploit historical interpretations to provoke radical narratives against differing ethnic communities (Visoka and Lumi 2020). Citizen perceptions in Kosovo support these claims. In Mitrovica specifically, a city which was divided into two municipalities – South Mitrovica with a majority ethnic Albanian population, and North Mitrovica with a majority ethnic Serb population – due to post-war legacies, citizens have recognised the influence of online platforms and their effects on inter-community relations. Asked about the effects of online platforms on radicalisation processes in Kosovo, a Kosovo Serb citizen argued that "there are no print media that really address issues about the Albanian and Serb community, [and as such], online platforms are a tool to educate and inform people".[2] Another Kosovo Serb citizen suggested that the "radical narratives are primarily focused on nationalism, as it remains the factor of greatest focus and importance [in Kosovo]".[3] This is an important aspect that relates to the citizen's recognition of traditional security threats to ethnic communities, much like how they were viewed in the 1990s. With respect to the extent of possible security and physical threats, a citizen highlighted that "in 2021, a [physical] attack is old fashioned, but indirect placement of information, which provokes some ethnic intolerance and leads to radicalism, is present".[4] Among citizens, there is a clear indication that online ethnopolitical radicalisation poses significant challenges to Kosovo's inter-ethnic relations. While there is a significant decrease in cases of physical attacks based on an individual's ethnic background, online radicalisation stemming from ethnic-based disinformation is an overlooked, yet equally alarming threat.

Online ethnopolitical radical narratives are not only limited to historical grievances. While the unresolved injustices dating back to the wars in Kosovo in the late 1990s are among the primary drivers of ethnopolitical radicalisation, isolated contemporary events are similarly used to sustain radical ethnopolitical narratives. The overarching factor that gives rise to these events is the EU-facilitated dialogue for the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. A recent year-long row between Kosovo and Serbia over a license plate agreement sparked increased levels of online discussion and radical responses by ethnic Albanians and Serbs (DW 2022). While Kosovo undertook steps to limit what was perceived to be illegal license plates issued by Serbia to Kosovo Serb citizens residing in Kosovo, opponents of this move utilised social media platforms, most notably Facebook and Twitter, to highlight the risks to the Serb community residing in Kosovo. One online individual, Vladislav Dajković, was found to be a proponent of a radical nationalism, using Facebook to incite tensions among local protesters in the north of Kosovo. With a considerable following on Facebook, Dajković's

account featured several posts containing disinformation regarding NATO's intervention in Serbia and the threats to Serbs in Kosovo (Ilazi et al. 2022). As such, radical ethnopolitical narratives are not only featured in relation to historical interpretations of the war in Kosovo, but they are also present in contemporary developments related to the Kosovo Serbia dialogue process. Given the lack of transparency of the process and scarce information available, many Kosovo Serbs are inclined to believe the disinformation available online.

The Albanian and Serbian ethnopolitical narratives, perpetuated through social media platforms, are largely centred on the brutal wars of the 1990s and have to do with revisionist discourse. Among the Serbian community in Kosovo there is limited acknowledgment of the war crimes committed by the regime of the former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, who was indicted in 1999 for crimes against humanity in Kosovo by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, but died in detention in 2006 before a verdict could be reached (HRW 2001). Among the Albanian community in Kosovo, there is also limited acknowledgement of the Serbian civilian victims of the war. Civil society organisations (CSOs) in Kosovo and Serbia have often organised activities to commemorate the victims of the wars, such as a march to the Serbian parliament in 2019 by activists from the Humanitarian Law Centre, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and the Women in Black to commemorate Kosovo Albanians (Rudic 2019). However, CSOs represent a minority in the margins of both societies, with respect to recognition of the war victims. The lack of normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and continued disputes between the two countries have hindered efforts by civil society to facilitate a reconciliation and truth process (Ilazi and Hasani 2023; Orana and Ilazi 2022).

Conflicting views among Kosovo Albanians and Serbs are exacerbated by a perceived "dual reality", whereby the Serbian community, especially in the north, have since 1999 lived in a reality detached from the rest of the country, with a very limited presence of public institutions, besides the institutions of the Serbian government and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (Ilazi et al. 2022). Among some Kosovo Serbs the discussions about the past and the war crimes that were committed are about humiliating Serbia:

> Serbs would be accused of being provocateurs, instigators, and they are to blame for the wars of the 1990s and for as much global blame as possible, for which some who committed genocide was not globally demonised. For example, the Turks committed genocide against the Armenians and there is no world demonisation of the Turks, there is even no world demonisation of the Nazis for genocides. Therefore, Serbs should be the greatest possible criminals who have ever set foot on this country in the eyes of the world public.[5]

On the other hand, Kosovo Albanians view Serbia as an existential threat, and as such, these perceptions also determine views about fellow Serbian citizens in Kosovo.[6] A recent Radicalisation Awareness Network report on violent right-wing extremism in the Western Balkans clearly distinguishes between the narratives and the basis for their perpetuation. The report finds that radical right-wing sentiments by the Albanian population in Kosovo are characterised by Kosovo independence sentiments and is regionally connected with ethnic Albanians in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia (Buljubašić 2022). Evidence from discussions with Kosovo citizens support this view, although from a much more radical perspective. In a focus group discussion in the predominantly Serb-populated North Mitrovica, one participant stated that "[Albanians] want an ethnically pure Kosovo, and they would want to annul any relic of Serbian existence in [Kosovo]".[7] Discussing the extent of perceived Albanian hegemony in the region, another participant argued that "the Albanian national policy (including Kosovo), is such as to destabilise the region and this can be seen with their long-term plans regarding Macedonia, Greece and Montenegro" (Ibid.). Buljubašić however, argues that while the ideological basis for uniting "Albanian territories has emotional appeal, it is fringed and does not enjoy a wide popular support" (2022: 6).

Radical Serbian nationalist sentiment, on the other hand, views Kosovo as a "small enclave within Serbia: a so-called historical heartland" (Buljubašić 2022: 6). Furthermore, Buljubašić goes on to argue that "most of the right-wing extremist Serbs have internalised the stance that Albanians are "dangerous subversives" seeking to create Greater Albania and consider Albanians as intruders" (Ibid.). A specific example of this narrative relates to perceptions of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its role in Kosovo. A Kosovo Serb interviewee established that Albanian attacks on Serb identity are "twofold, on the one hand, the Serbian Church is demonised, its role in the war is exaggerated, and on the other hand, the Orthodox identity of [important] religious sites are denied".[8] The implication of the wars that led to the breakup of Yugoslavia consistently comes up as a key factor in driving radical narratives in Kosovo. When asked about the legacy of the wars in the Balkans, a focus group participant highlighted that "the myth is the crimes, Serbs [are consistently] accused of being provocateurs, instigators, and the ones to be blamed for the wars of the 90s, however, those who committed the [actual] genocides are not globally demonized".[9] On Kosovo specifically, and its historical significance to Serbs, a participant added that "Kosovo is the foundation of Serbian identity, and Albanians use every opportunity to artificially demonise Serbs" (Ibid.). In both cases, narratives underpinning Albanian and Serbian radical ethnopolitical discourse are centred on diverging interpretations of historical claims. As Buljubašić (2022) notes, however, while Albanian national sentiment is not supported by the majority of the population, Serbian views disregarding Kosovo's statehood find strong grassroots support.

Several factors contribute to the citizen's appeal in perpetuating radical ethnopolitical narratives. PAVE research on contributing factors highlights the importance of storytelling as a key driver in generational crossover of radical ethnopolitical narratives. Storytelling, in the form of maintenance and consolidation of narratives that seek to sustain specific "collective memories", provides for significant vulnerability to radicalisation (Ilazi et al. 2022). Insights drawn from citizen perspectives support the claims that stories which "maintain a collective memory of victimhood and vilify the other" are central to the perpetuation of competing ethnopolitical narratives (Ilazi et al. 2022: 13). The lack of good governance principles provides another factor that exposes vulnerability to ethnopolitical radicalisation. According to PAVE research, "lack of good governance and accountability creates a vacuum in services at the community level, leaving space for other actors to fill" (Ilazi et al. 2022: 13). Similarly, the lack of quality education limits the ability of citizens to develop critical thinking, and as such, creates conditions for the radicalisation of citizens.

The underlying cause for the proliferation of these factors and their effects of ethnopolitical radicalisation relate to the continuation of illegitimate parallel Serb institutions in Kosovo. Although the political system in Kosovo has integrated Serb-majority municipalities into its governance system, the Serbian government continues to operate parallel institutions across sectors (Prelec and Rashiti 2015). While the EU sponsored the 2013 agreement between Kosovo and Serbia titled "the first agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations",[10] which to some degree managed to facilitate the integration of police and judicial structures in the north of Kosovo, integration of other sectors in the Kosovo system such as education and healthcare has been conditioned on the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb Majority Municipalities. Despite the agreement's ratification in the Kosovo Assembly, the Kosovo government has failed to implement provisions on the establishment of the Association due to perceived effects and threats on the overall functionality of the country (Andric and Ilazi 2020). As such, Serbia has continued its financial and administrative support to parallel institutions. In education specifically, the maintenance of parallel structures directly coincides with the continuation of historical revisionist narratives. A recent inquiry on the parallel education systems in Kosovo found that communities use different textbooks "that give differing versions of history – and sometimes perpetuate ethnic prejudice and nationalist ideas" (Haxhiaj 2019). Similar accounts are evident in other sectors regulated by Serb parallel systems. In the absence of comprehensive Kosovo Serb integration across Kosovo's public institutions, the delivery of services by parallel institutions continues to perpetuate radical nationalist discourse.

Kosovo has received significant attention from researchers and media with respect to radicalisation and violent extremism, to the extent that it disproportionally portrayed the seriousness of the challenge for the country. There

was a certain sensationalism in the media reporting about Kosovo's relation with religion and violent extremism, such as a 2016 article by the *New York Times* titled "Making Kosovo Fertile Ground for ISIS", which led to fierce reactions by local scholars and policymakers (New York Times 2016). The international media's exaggeration of Kosovo's issue with religious radicalisation and violent extremism was also confirmed by reports of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (Limani 2017). International media coverage of religion and violent extremism in Kosovo has shaped an image of the country that is incompatible with the reality on the ground. One reason why Kosovo was targeted might be related to it having a Muslim-majority population; however, Islam is practiced in a way that is unique and to some degree liberal, which has enabled cohabitation between different religions in Kosovo (Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Protestants, among others). It also showed that democracy and Islam are not inherently incompatible as some scholars would argue. In other words, a liberal Muslim country that is constitutionally secular, like Kosovo, could be potentially difficult to reconcile with preconceived notions about the country or how a Muslim-majority country should look like from a Western perspective. Kosovo's civil society could have done a better job to actively work on radicalisation and violent extremism issues, while at the same time countering prejudices and other ramifications, particularly in how the country is presented to the world. Kosovo can be a good case study of positive aspects of the relations between state, society and religion.

The role of civil society in countering radicalisation and community perceptions

This section argues that civil society in Kosovo has been a fundamental pillar of community resilience towards radicalisation by addressing factors of vulnerability and the main drivers of radicalisation. One of the reasons for the success of CSOs in fostering community resilience, is that it does not take a securitised approach in dealing with factors of community vulnerability towards radicalisation. However, this section holds that the civil society efforts and activities lack the necessary sustainable impact in society. On the one hand, this is caused by the failure of the government to build on civil society achievements; on the other, government and civil society do not share the same understanding and assessment of the community vulnerabilities towards radicalisation. Accordingly, this section provides an analysis of this tension between civil society and government in dealing with the radicalisation process, as well as how the community sees the role of the civil society.

The proliferation of radical ethnopolitical narratives has severely impacted the prospects of improved interethnic relations in Kosovo. At its core, the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has played a prominent role in driving competing narratives between Kosovo Albanian and Serb citizens. Since its formal conception in 2011, subject to technical deliberation on issues such

as civil registry books, cadastral records, freedom of movement and others, the dialogue has developed into an arena for zero-sum bargaining. Political representatives from Kosovo and Serbia have used outcomes during dialogue phases to offer their citizens competing views on concessions. To a large extent, this has been exacerbated by the EU's facilitation methodology of constructive ambiguity. While the approach has prioritised the continuous engagement of sides in reaching incremental consensus, its basis was rooted in ambiguity (Beysoylu 2018). At the expense of practical clarity, agreements were marred in ambiguity on the scope of their implementation to ensure political commitment from both sides. As such, political representatives were in an optimal position to drive national narratives on the bargaining process. Given the lack of transparency of the process, the main sources of information for the citizens are the narratives perpetuated internally by their political representatives. A civil society report on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue highlights that the "significance of potential losses and gains between Kosovo and Serbia have far outweighed citizens' needs" (Orana and Ilazi 2022). While the integration of Kosovo Serbs has been among the primary goals of the dialogue, it has nonetheless led to a heightened level of polarisation between Kosovo Serbs and Albanians (Orana and Ilazi 2021).

The implications related to the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other associations in perpetuating radical narratives have become ever more apparent in the Balkans. A recent Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) mapping of organisations perpetuating right-wing narratives found eight active organisations in Kosovo. Six of them were Serbian, which were found to perpetuate narratives centred on undermining Kosovo's sovereignty and independence (Bami and Stojanovic 2022). Citizens in Kosovo, however, continue to recognise the potential for enhancing the impact of NGOs in de-radicalisation processes. A key impediment to achieving their impact, according to citizens, is the NGOs' lack of effective scoping in identifying underlying factors for radicalisation. According to an interviewee, "the only problem with NGOs is that they do not work effectively in examining the terrain and in identifying the needs of local communities, and as such, they resort to implementing activities based on already established schemes that have worked in other communities but not in Kosovo".[11]

There is a slight dichotomy in the community approach towards CSOs with respect to radicalisation. On the one hand, local community members – especially those that are more religious – tend to see CSOs as an extended arm of the West, and therefore they view them with suspicion, while, on the other hand, they often prefer to deal with CSOs than with the government. Civil society in general is not seen as a normative actor in the Kosovar society. However, it is accepted as an important institution that supports community resilience towards radicalisation. There are two key factors that hinder civil society relations with the community: lack of transparency and elitism. The field research conducted in Kosovo highlights this tension. For instance,

a local civil servant from the municipality of North Mitrovica, while accepting the important role NGOs play, maintains that the community is not well informed about what such organisations do:

> I think they are important, although, again, a large part of the community does not know what those organisations do and how they do it. It seems to me that there is more understanding in youth groups and that they are more familiar, but in general, the population is not so well informed. They know that these non-governmental organisations are doing something, but who knows what they are really doing.[12]

In addition, CSOs are often seen by the community as elitist, and such criticism is echoed by journalists: "The civil sector is important, but this sector must be close to the communities that need their support and the causes they have, if they have any".[13] However, this perception of elitism among civil society mainly refers to think tanks that are well funded and mainly operate from the capital of the country.

The main area of impact for CSOs in dealing with violent extremism is raising awareness about the phenomenon. However, this impact is also considered a result of the significant support for the NGOs by the international community in Kosovo. The impact of civil society on the policymaking process has been limited, albeit with some results, especially in the framework of the development of Kosovo's national strategy to counter violent extremism, which included consultations by the government with some NGOs. In addition, the government in Kosovo established a dedicated unit for dealing with radicalisation in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, called the Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalised Persons,[14] which actively cooperates with the civil society. Also, some NGOs run projects that provide direct support to the repatriated citizens from Syria and Iraq. For instance, the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies tackled the issue of marginalisation of children of families repatriated from Syria and Iraq and worked on their rehabilitation and resocialisation,[15] as well as prepared a manual for journalists on how to report on radicalisation and violent extremism. Other NGOs implemented projects that focused on youth employment, which was seen as one of the main push factors towards violent extremism,[16] or supported citizen participation in decision-making processes.[17]

Another major contribution of the civil society in Kosovo in the framework of raising awareness has been understanding the narratives aimed at recruiting Kosovars into violent extremism. Such research by Kosovar civil society has not only provided important insight into the policymaking process of public institutions, but it has also shaped priorities of the donor community for Kosovo. For instance, a 2017 study found that Islamic State (IS) propaganda focused on the local challenges or issues to appeal to the Kosovars, and in particular the grievances of the past (Kraja 2017). It inspired a debate in Kosovo society about the extent of the impact of the unresolved issues stemming

from the brutal war of the 1990s. Our research also showed that competing narratives about the past created significant vulnerability in society towards nationalism and political extremism. However, the awareness-raising role of civil society is a controversial notion, as NGOs are often perceived as actors that have intentionally hyped the issue of violent extremism, driven by the available funding from the donor community.

Despite citizens recognising the potential of NGOs in de-radicalisation processes, local communities remain distrustful of their impact. Our research suggests that NGOs fulfilled an important role in developing counter-narratives in support of Kosovo's P/CVE initiatives (Ilazi et al. 2022). The role of NGOs and Kosovo's civil society sector has also been highlighted in the context of rehabilitation and reintegration of the foreign terrorist fighters (Orana and Perteshi 2022). While substantial research exists examining the role of NGOs in religious-based de-radicalisation in Kosovo, there has been little to no emphasis on ethnopolitical de-radicalisation. The post-war period in Kosovo was marked by notable reconciliation initiatives facilitated by both local and international organisations.

CSOs are seen as one of the actors, alongside the international community in Kosovo, which have forced the issue of religious violent extremism to the Kosovo public and the government or hyped the problem disproportionately to the extent it posed a concern for societal peace. While this argument or perception of civil society is prevalent among the religious community in the country, it is also shared by some civil society representatives, as illustrated by this quote by a civil society activist from South Mitrovica when asked what civil society can do to counter violent extremism:

> I expect no good actions from those who themselves encouraged radicalisation the most. It is enough for the institutions to deal with the improvement of the welfare of the people, which is their obligation, rather than inflate this phenomenon, and for the international community to lower the "war" tones against extremism and start promoting peace. If there is a will to improve the situation, which I doubt based on the past, then let the institutions support the improvement of the welfare of the people.[18]

This suggests that the government and the international community prioritised violent extremism and ignored other community problems, such as social welfare. This argument also represents part of the debate in the Kosovar society about the push factors and if those who joined IS or became radicalised did so because of poverty or unemployment. Such an assumption fails to recognise the complexity of the process of radicalisation, and the diversity of the factors that created vulnerability in the society towards radicalisation, such as a lack of engagement opportunities for the youth and the poor quality of the education system, as outlined by South Mitrovica's municipal strategy to counter violent extremism.[19]

The vital role of NGOs in facilitating reconciliation processes has been noted throughout the focus group discussions and interviews conducted for this study. In North Mitrovica in particular, citizens have emphasised the impact of a "dynamic civil sector" in leading efforts to resist and counter radicalisation.[20] The work of NGOs in the delivery of non-formal education programmes is seen as central to strengthening a community's resilience towards the exposure to radical narratives. In cases where state-sponsored formal education fails to offer communities with relevant support in countering narratives perpetuating nationalist discourse, NGOs have been viewed as principal interlocutors in doing so.[21] These views, however, are not necessarily reflected across discussions with Kosovo citizens. In some cases, the NGOs' work is considered as complementary to the perpetuation of ethnic divisions. In outlining this disruptive role, a Kosovo Serb citizen raised the issue of Dragica Gasič, who became the first Serb returnee to the Albanian-majority city of Gjakova in western Kosovo. Gasič's return was questioned by the Gjakova-based NGO Mothers' Calls, an association composed of women whose husbands and children were still under the official missing persons lists following the war in Kosovo. The association insisted that they were against the potential resettling of Serbs in Gjakova since they have so far not received any reparations following the crimes committed by Serb forces (Bislimi et al. 2021). According to a Kosovo Serb citizen, "[NGOs] are the ones who also perpetuate hate speech, and this was specifically evident in the case of Gjakova and demands to have the only Serb returnee, Dragica Gasič, move out of the city".[22]

Conclusion

Civil society in Kosovo is a vital conduit between the government and the community in matters of radicalisation and violent extremism. While Kosovo's public institutions have made important progress, both in a policy framework as well as in capacities, NGOs and grassroots initiatives have been actively engaged at the community level, both as researchers as well as service providers. Although so-called "radicalised individuals" tend to be sceptical of both the Kosovo government and NGOs (because they are seen as having a very close connection and partnership with the West), many have cooperated with different NGOs and their projects, which are aimed at facilitating rehabilitation and reintegration into society, particularly the repatriated foreign fighters and other Kosovar citizens from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. However, the heavy reliance of civil society on foreign donors and the lack of financial support from public institutions undermine the sustainability of some important work that the NGOs do concerning radicalisation and violent extremism. In addition, the lack of local financial support also weakens local ownership of the research agenda concerning radicalisation and violent extremism. Civil society in Kosovo has played an important role in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism; however,

their efforts were primarily focused on religiously inspired radicalisation and violent extremism, mainly because the donor community made this issue a priority. In other words, the work of civil society has significant positive aspects but also shortcomings, as discussed in this chapter. The agency of civil society in Kosovo is often undermined due to the continual pursuit of donor agendas and the inability to promote a genuine local understanding or approach to the radicalisation process.

Online radicalisation processes present a serious challenge to Kosovo and other countries due to the limited capacities (know-how) and inadequate policy framework for dealing with the issue. In terms of capacities, the government relies on the expertise of a poorly resourced division within the Department for Public Safety in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is mandated to work on (de-)radicalisation. This division's capacity, or that of other government units, to deal with radicalisation processes online is very limited. Also, civil society in Kosovo does not have enough capacity in this context. The online radicalisation process in Kosovo involves an intersectional strategy that seems to be closely connected with disinformation or fake news, cyber security, and foreign influence by state and non-state actors. Accordingly, a partnership between civil society and public institutions is a must.

Notes

1 Focus group discussion in South Mitrovica, May 2021.
2 In-person interview with a civil society activist in North Mitrovica, October 2021.
3 In-person interview with a municipal government official in North Mitrovica, September 2021.
4 In-person interview with a civil society activist in North Mitrovica, October 2021.
5 Focus group discussion in North Mitrovica, August 2021.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 In-person interview with a municipal government official in North Mitrovica, September 2021.
9 Focus group discussion in North Mitrovica, August 2021.
10 The 2013 agreement, commonly referred to as the Brussels Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, is considered historic: it paved the road for the European integration of both countries and facilitated interethnic integration of the Serbian community in Kosovo.
11 In-person interview with a civil society activist in North Mitrovica, October 2021.
12 In-person interview with a municipal government official in North Mitrovica, September 2021.
13 In-person interview with a journalist from Podujeva, September 2021.
14 For more information on the government's division about radicalisation, see: Available at https://mpb.rks-gov.net/f/78/Divizioni-per-Parandalim-dhe-Riintegrim-te-Personave-te-Radikalizuar.
15 For more information about the project, see: Available at https://qkss.org/en/projektet/projekti/te-rinjte-per-te-rinjte-rritja-e-qendrueshmerise-per-grupet-e-margjinalizuara-ne-kosove/.
16 See for instance the PREX project: Available at https://fiq-fci.org/en/prex/.

17 For more information about the ATRC project, see: Available at https://advocacy-center.org/programs_post/with-democracy-participating-for-a-kosovo-without-radicalization/.
18 In-person interview with a civil society activist from South Mitrovica, September 2021.
19 In-person interview with a NGO worker from South Mitrovica, September 2021
20 Focus group discussion in North Mitrovica, August 2021.
21 In-person interview with a municipal government official in North Mitrovica, September 2021.
22 In-person interview with a civil society activist in North Mitrovica, October 2021.

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10 Understanding the prevention of radicalisation in North Macedonia

A study of two localities

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Violent extremism remains a key challenge for North Macedonia, where various forms of extremism are present across communities but manifest themselves with different intensities. This chapter examines the phenomenon of radicalisation that leads to violent extremism in two specific localities, namely the municipalities of Tetovo and Kumanovo. In this chapter, radicalisation is understood as a process that involves a cognitive trajectory and is influenced by different dynamics and factors through which, incrementally, an individual adopts extremist ideas, views, or interpretations (Hafez and Mullins 2015). The chapter discusses the factors that work against community-level prevention and resilience-building in both communities under investigation.

Ethno-nationalist and political extremism, religiously inspired radicalisation and the return of former foreign fighters, a rising threat of violent right-wing extremism, and sport violence are the main trends that practitioners who work on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in North Macedonia are facing (Feta et al. 2022). The establishment of a multi-actor P/CVE mechanism has made North Macedonia's authorities not only more responsive to the threat of violent extremism but also better prepared to deal with it. Still, there are significant shortcomings and gaps that undermine the effective implementation of P/CVE initiatives. At the local level, ethno-national divides, including segregation in social and educational settings, continue to fuel patterns of social exclusion, violent extremism, and reciprocal radicalisation across the country. Respective authorities have long favoured government-dominated, centralised security strategies and, until today, still struggle with gaining the trust of politically and ethnically marginalised communities. And as the legacy of ethnic, religious, and civil strife in North Macedonia continues to play a role in radicalisation, the work of different actors inside the multi-stakeholder P/CVE mechanism often takes place in a highly politicised and ethnically polarised context (Armakolas et al. 2021).

Due to the complex nature of these topical and multi-faceted challenges, the prevention of radicalisation requires a multi-agency mechanism and a well-coordinated response from all the actors involved in the process. There is currently a set of governmental and non-governmental actors, including

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civil society and religious practitioners, as well as international organisations, which have become involved in P/CVE initiatives in North Macedonia. The civic sector has established itself as an important factor in North Macedonia's P/CVE mechanism, implementing projects across the spectrum of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can address conditions conducive to violent extremism. This is because the sector acts as a facilitator between the local population and the government, especially in areas where communities lack trust in state institutions. Despite the recognised role of civil society in the P/CVE process, civic actors across the country continue to face diverse challenges while engaging in multi-stakeholder initiatives, which limits whole-of-society approaches (Armakolas et al. 2021). One of the main challenges to P/CVE mechanisms functioning properly is the lack of well-coordinated responses among the actors involved in the process. The single most powerful explanation to account for this lack of coordination, which is one of the main factors that hinder prevention and community resilience, is the lack of consensus among the actors on how to deal with this sensitive issue. The alignment of the actors' intentions with the community needs and the specificity of each locality is key for multi-actor partnerships to function properly. The chapter elaborates on the role that civil society plays in the prevention of violent extremism as well as in the de-radicalisation process in the two municipalities and, more broadly, in North Macedonia. The aim is not to evaluate the effectiveness of every initiative implemented by CSOs, but rather to provide a clearer image of their role and contribution and to identify the context in which civil society actors should operate. We argue that coordination and cooperation among all the actors involved in the P/CVE mechanism are key to making North Macedonia's national plan for the prevention of violent extremism more responsive to the needs of society.

For the analysis, we have adopted a comparative research method of cross-municipal trends, relying on both desk research and field-collected data. This approach was chosen to identify, analyse, and explain similarities and differences across the two local contexts. The analysis draws on data collected from four focus groups and 29 semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Tetovo and Kumanovo in July 2021. The two research field sites were selected on the basis of sharing sufficient similarities to enable a comparative analysis, such as similar socio-economic indicators, while exhibiting diverse levels of radicalisation. For example, based on the levels of manifestation of radicalisation, Tetovo was considered as more resilient, whereas Kumanovo was more vulnerable to ethnopolitical and religious radicalisation. Accordingly, the research examines the factors that make one area more resilient and the other more vulnerable to radicalisation, with the comparative insights being integrated throughout the chapter.

This chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section provides an analysis of the role that different actors and situations play in making communities in Tetovo and Kumanovo more vulnerable or resilient to

radicalisation. The second section discusses the role of CSOs in strengthening prevention and the resilience of local communities to violent extremism.

Factors that work against community-level prevention and resilience-building in North Macedonia: a stakeholders' perspective

The main purpose of this section is to outline key findings with respect to prevention and resilience, discussing the failures as well as the factors that hinder prevention or limit the effectiveness of programmes and actors that could contribute to resilience.

The role of state institutions and the government

Like other countries in the region, North Macedonia has adopted a multi-stakeholder P/CVE approach with the involvement of national and municipal governments, law enforcement agencies and criminal justice, CSOs, schools, and religious institutions (Feta et al. 2023). At the centre of the country's P/CVE mechanism stands the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVECT) (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2018). With the support of international donors, the NCCVECT has trained youth, parents, educators, teachers, police and law enforcement officers to recognise the early signs of radicalisation in their communities. As such, the NCCVECT has established itself as a key factor in the prevention process through the implementation of actions that promote community engagement, community policing, and early prevention in general.

North Macedonia has made some progress in its P/CVE strategy, but its main mechanisms, tools, and programmes lack funds, materials, and human resources, as well as coordination with other actors. Ensuring cooperation and coordination between state actors at the national and local levels, civil society practitioners, faith-based practitioners, and leaders is a key challenge (Shabani et al. 2019). The lack of multi-stakeholder coordination is seen by many interviewees as one of the main factors hindering community-level prevention and resilience-building against radicalisation. Many of interviewees were highly sceptical of the government's response to the problem of extremism and raised concerns about the state's actual motivations as well as the ability of state institutions to implement an efficient P/CVE strategy.

In this context, interviewees repeatedly raised the issue of the state authorities' sluggish and inefficient response, given that local communities had pointed out early on the risk posed by the increasing influence of radical personalities in their communities. They claimed that the official state institutions only mobilised when the issue was raised by international actors such as the United Nations, the United States and the European Union, and/or in the context of the European integration process. In other words, local-level

stakeholders exhibited higher levels of awareness and resilience and mobilised early on, while the state was slow, inefficient and only mobilised when pressured into doing so by international actors.

The government and state institutions are also criticised for not taking the necessary measures to eradicate the different factors that make some community members in both Tetovo and Kumanovo vulnerable to extremist narratives.[1] Socio-economic conditions constitute the main factor for pushing people towards extremism. Limited access to employment opportunities, irrespective of the educational background of individuals, especially in the rural and remote areas of both municipalities, has created a sense of relative deprivation and frustrated expectations that could serve as a potential driver for radicalisation.[2] The deprivation of socio-economic opportunities is accompanied by the sense of exclusion and discrimination, with many individuals, especially among ethnic Albanians, believing that their communities are not sufficiently represented in the public and political sphere.

The Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed in 2001, ended the brief, low-intensity conflict in North Macedonia.[3] It became a central pillar of regulating inter-ethnic relations in the country and was specifically designed to give ethnic Albanians greater access to political power (Ilazi and Orana 2022). But despite the power-sharing provisions, many ethnic Albanians still feel marginalised. Interestingly, they attribute their social exclusion not only to the ethnic Macedonian political class but also, and primarily, to political representatives of their own community. According to this view, the Albanian political class has created a political system based on inter-ethnic elite bargaining that guarantees excessive privileges to the few members of its inner circle. Everyone outside this circle feels unprotected and misrepresented. These feelings of social and political exclusion offer the potential for marginalised citizens to turn to extremist groups for their protection.[4]

This narrative also applies to the ethnic Macedonians in Tetovo, where they constitute a minority community. Their inclusion in extremist groups aiming to protect ethnic Macedonian interests is seen as an effort to deal with the Albanian dominance in the city. The Macedonian nationalist groups portray the Ohrid Agreement as a humiliating settlement that enables Albanian dominance and the dissolution of the state of North Macedonia. In contrast, the Albanian nationalist groups are responding with a victimhood narrative which attributes the economic deprivation and political marginalisation of their nation to ethnic Macedonians. These groups advocate the unification of all lands inhabited by Albanians into one state as the only way to salvage the Albanian nation.

Within the complex web of various dimensions of radicalisation, ethnic differences, and inter-ethnic relations are identified as one area of concern in the narratives of many interviewees. The complex inter-ethnic reality on the ground has resulted in the country's two main ethnic communities having different stances on the issue of radicalisation; this, in turn, hampers community resilience.

Socio-economic malaise alone is not a sufficient explanatory factor for an individual's entry into violent groups. Political conditions also serve as a catalyst for individuals seeking membership in or remaining in extremist groups (Anzil et al. 2022). Interviewees in Tetovo, especially among members of civil society, argued that government and state actors in North Macedonia have lost credibility in the eyes of local citizens as a result of persistent problems, such as corruption, political polarisation, weak administrative capacity, inefficiency and incompetence, and inability to provide basic state services.[5] Unresponsive political systems have gradually made the idea of violence as a legitimate instrument for effecting change more palatable.

In that context, self-proclaimed radical imams and priests who endorse radical views and personalities, as well as extremist groups, have found fertile ground to increase their presence and influence. They have gradually become more credible than the political officials, at least in the eyes of some locals, because they are more familiar with people's daily needs and problems.[6] Local imams engage much more directly with and remain much closer to citizens in comparison to the political leadership and the elected local representatives. Such long-term lack of attention by state institutions to different groups of society, especially the youth, has led many among the younger generation to seek support and advice from self-proclaimed imams, who appear to be the reference point and problem solver for many. In addition, the more corrupt the political environment, the easier it is for violent extremist groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to portray local or state-level governing elites as immoral, corrupt, and inadequate. In that context, state actors are more part of the problem than part of the solution.

The role of local actors

Local communities are responsible for contributing to the system of institutional measures in P/CVE, playing a central role in resilience-building efforts. At the local level, municipal authorities can effectively coordinate the work of a variety of stakeholders dealing with P/CVE. Both Tetovo and Kumanovo have established their own local prevention councils with the participation of various stakeholders, such as the municipal authorities, the police, schools, and social services. Both municipalities have also established, in the context of the local prevention councils, special committees that deal with P/CVE.[7]

However, the functionality of these local structures is often a challenge, due to the different views that stakeholders have on the topic, and issues related to violent extremism are usually not on the agenda. At the local level, police stations and law enforcement units are carrying out preventive activities, but community police officers lack the capacity to deal with the online space, especially with chat rooms, gaming platforms and other open and dark spaces online.[8] This, in turn, negatively affects the development of community resilience towards online extremist narratives.

The field work revealed that preventions and community resilience against radicalisation is strongly connected to local politics and the willingness of local politicians to tackle the issue. The single most powerful cluster of explanations offered by interviewees for the weak response to the challenge posed by extremism centres on factors and failures at the level of local politics. This cluster of explanations points to weaknesses in the capabilities of official institutions, but more often to a lack of political will and to inadequate and/or misplaced priorities. A number of examples and political features can be offered here[9]: lack of political will to counter extremism, despite the persistent calls by local communities, until the international actors decided to put the issue on the agenda; institutions turning a blind eye on the activities of radicals, simply because not enough incentives were there for them to act until the problem blew out of proportion; biased policies that tend to discriminate against entire communities or to identify entire communities with the criminal deeds of certain individuals; politicisation of everything that has to do with the problem of extremism in order to score political points in inter-party or inter-ethnic competition; politics rather than security or social policy driving priorities in response to the challenge of extremism.

This complex political reality, in combination with problematic inter-ethnic relations at the local level, is one of the key factors that make communities in both Tetovo and Kumanovo vulnerable to ethnopolitical radicalisation. This issue is closely linked with the failure to deal effectively with the past and the legacy of conflict in North Macedonia, a situation exploited by many individuals for political interests.

Moreover, differing viewpoints over the 2001 insurgence are also expressed in the antagonism that exists between the sports clubs of the ethnic Macedonian and the ethnic Albanian communities (Georgieva et al. 2022). The resulting hostility is present in the city of Tetovo, fuelling violence between the Vojvodi, the ultras of the Macedonian football club Teteks, and Ballistët, the ultras of the Albanian football club Shkëndija.[10] Ethnicity and the memories of the war are divisive issues for North Macedonia's ultras. Slogans and songs with ethnic insults and hatred are present not only during football matches but also outside stadiums through the graffiti vandalism of public facilities.

Slogans such as "Macedonia is for Macedonians" and "Macedonia is Albania" have echoed across the public squares. These slogans have been repeated at rallies organised by politicians and public figures who support far-right ideologies as an effort to style themselves as untainted patriots. These slogans also divide ethnicities themselves between the patriots and the "traitors" who are allegedly selling out their language, nationality, and history. The provocative rhetoric used by these groups against one or the other ethnicity is giving way to street-fighting, with ultras being at the frontline. Tetovo has experienced a number of such incidents. In this context, most respondents in the field work in Tetovo articulated that football violence is the most dangerous form of nationalist extremism, undermining the peaceful

coexistence between the city's two main ethnic groups. They also argued that football-related violence, which generates nationalist hysteria in the community, is neglected by the state institutions and the political class, which is protecting the football ultras for political goals.

The role of the international community

The P/CVE mechanism in North Macedonia would not be able to function without the financial support of international donors and organisations. The "Community Policing and Prevention of Radicalisation" project, implemented by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, helps communities develop P/CVE tools with the aim of early detection of radicalisation. The International Organisation for Migration is present in several municipalities with youth-led initiatives, community dialogues, parents, religious practitioners, and teacher trainings. The Council of Europe is active in countering violent extremism and radicalisation in prisons through the appropriate training of prison staff.

The involvement of international actors raised the stakes and mobilised state authorities. But the flip side of that influence has been that these actors shaped or even imposed the agenda in ways that suited their own concerns and preconceptions, overly highlighting the religious narrative as an explanation for extremism and making religious extremism the main domain of their interventions. Their agenda was not necessarily in line with the true nature of the problem, as was understood by local stakeholders and as manifested in the localities. For example, local stakeholders insist that the problem of extremism in the locality is multifaceted and multi-causal and that religion is only one of several interlinked dimensions. Accordingly, international solutions and interventions were not primarily tailored to the local needs; that is despite the best intentions by international stakeholders. For example, state and international actors have continued to emphasise Islamist extremism and have paid little attention to other forms of extremism, such as right-wing nationalist extremism and football hooliganism, which are on the rise in the country. The non-alignment of the international actors' intentions with the community needs is a factor hindering both prevention and resilience.

In the same context, the interviewees emphasise the international preoccupation, or even obsession, with the question of foreign fighters.[11] While indeed a serious problem, the interviewees criticised the single-handed focus on this question, which clouds a much more complicated local picture of policy challenges and needs. Similarly, P/CVE programmes initiated and funded by international actors have often tended to offer delayed and untimely interventions. Some of the interviewees gave the example of international programmes aimed at countering the problem of North Macedonians travelling to the Middle East to join the Islamic State, when that was already a problem of the past and the local communities were facing the challenge of dealing with the return of foreign fighters without adequate international support

for the necessary responding policies and programmes. In addition, international projects tend to be bureaucratic and slow in their implementation, thus failing to address the immediate concerns and policy problems pertaining to extremism and resilience. Overall, the international community is shown to have plentiful resources, but is also sluggish in orchestrating adequate responses to community resilience challenges.

The role of religious communities

The religiously motivated radicalisation is found to be strong among both Orthodox Macedonians and Muslim Albanians and is primarily associated with the spreading of violent extremist ideologies and inciting hate by radical imams and priests, as well as with the foreign fighters phenomenon.[12] Islamist radicalisation of ethnic Albanians is associated with the globally oriented jihadi ideology that is based on the tenets of Islamic fundamentalism and helped by the social, political and cultural conditions of the respective countries. The religiously inspired radicalisation is strongly connected with internal and external efforts to control the meaning and interpretation of religious doctrine. In North Macedonia, the interpretation and practice of religion have been significantly challenged by the emerging cadre of young religious scholars educated in the Middle East. Religious radicalisation is used to strengthen "othering" practices (Ilazi et al. 2022). The process through which an extremist group recruits followers is largely driven underground with local self-proclaimed imams being the key figures in the recruitment process. In local communities, there are also peer group leaders who recruit on their own initiative among family, friends, and members of social networks.

The Islamic Religious Community, the official organisational structure of the Islamic faith in the country, practices community prevention and resilience (Selimi and Stojkovski 2016). Their local official institutions have tried to raise the awareness of relevant state authorities, such as the intelligence agency and the security apparatus. They also pressured them to act in response to efforts by marginal radical elements to infiltrate the local community and create bases of local support, but the state authorities lagged in their response.[13] In terms of approach, the Islamic Religious Community in Kumanovo intervened effectively following the emergence of a religiously tinted insurgency and a top-down attempt to cultivate inter-ethnic tension. The mobilisation of civic and religious organisations in the locality prevented the escalation of tensions.

There is no doubt that religious communities can play a significant role as part of the multi-agency system for the prevention of religiously motivated radicalisation and violent extremism in North Macedonia. However, the inclusion of religious communities in the process remains a challenge due to the lack of a unified approach among its practitioners (Kambovski et al. 2020). There is a competition for the "hearts and minds" of local Muslims

between radical Islamists and the official institutions of the Islamic Religious Community. In that context, the educational opportunities provided by the Islamic Religious Community (e.g., theological faculty for local imams) is a contributing factor to resilience against radicalisation (Mishkova et al. 2021). However, despite its extensive resources and well-organised structures, the Islamic Religious Community reacts slowly to radical challengers.

Many interviewees also criticised the Islamic Religious Community for its inability to control certain mosques with radical tendencies, especially in the Kumanovo region. The Muslim religious community in Kumanovo has less control over the religious life and the operation of self-proclaimed imams, or imams who endorse radical views, compared to the religious community in Tetovo. This makes part of the local population in Kumanovo vulnerable to extremist narratives and propaganda. Interviewees noted that this has created space for extremist narratives to flourish. The refusal of the Islamic Religious Community to officially recognise the Bektashi community in Tetovo is met with disbelief as it tends to work against inter-religious cooperation. The stance of the state towards the Bektashi community is considered problematic. For example, the Bektashi community's application for state recognition remains pending. The recent state approval to establish separate Islamic community structures for Salafist groups is viewed by some interviewees as a move that will likely consolidate the position of radicals in the country and further weaken the authority of the official, moderate Islamic religious community; others see it as an effort by the state authorities to keep the radicals under control.

In any case, the peaceful coexistence between the different religious groups and the healthy relationship between the state and religious communities are considered as preconditions for building community resilience against radicalisation. The country's Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups can help in this direction, even though this institution did not play an effective role in North Macedonia's P/CVE mechanism.

The Islamic Religious Community is not the only religious institution which received heavy criticism from interviewees. The Orthodox Church's official stance of remaining silent when it comes to issues relating to radicalisation and violent extremism is also viewed negatively, especially when local priests are simultaneously engaged in spreading nationalist propaganda. The general impression gleaned from the fieldwork is that the Orthodox Church has hardly been involved in P/CVE, and lacks awareness of the role it could play. Some local and international non-governmental organisations are working to engage the Orthodox Church in P/CVE activities and initiatives, so far with little success.

Based on the fieldwork, it is clear that consolidated community institutions of faith are the primary driver of resilience. No other institution, including the state, has such a decentralised approach, since every neighbourhood has an imam and/or a priest. Official religious communities play a key role, as they represent an authoritative alternative to radicals and their narratives;

conversely, when these official religious communities are inactive, space opens up for radical actors.

The role of education

The fieldwork in North Macedonia identified education as a significant pillar for strengthening community resilience and preventing young people from being attracted to radical ideologies and organisations.[14] The main line of argument is that the education system has certain attributes that make it unequally placed for building individual, community, and systemic resilience. Especially in ethnically divided countries, education retains higher public value because it reaches both populations, serving as a critical hub for information sharing and critical thinking.[15] In North Macedonia also, despite the problems clearly expressed in the interviews with the quality of the educational services offered, education is recognised as being key in fighting radical ideas and influences.

Especially in the case of Tetovo, the presence of two universities in the city is seen as a factor that increases community resilience.[16] The general perception is that Tetovo's tradition in education, which has led to higher levels of educational attainment, has helped develop critical thinking among its citizens making them less vulnerable to the narratives of extremist groups. This is one of the key factors that differentiate Tetovo from Kumanovo. The population in Kumanovo is more susceptible to manipulation and recruitment into extremist groups.

Despite the widely recognised importance of education, almost all interviewees agree that shortcomings in the educational system have hampered efforts at building resilience towards radicalisation in North Macedonia.[17] One of the key issues raised is the lack of meaningful means for education professionals to recognise and flag signs of extremism as well as to monitor cases when young people are "exposed" to radical material. The most problematic aspect is the failure of the P/CVE mechanism in North Macedonia to provide these frontline practitioners with relevant information about violent extremism, even though their central role in prevention is well recognised. Teachers and school psychologists are not well informed about radicalisation, violent extremism, and resilience. Local teachers in both Tetovo and Kumanovo do not have sufficient training to fully comprehend these phenomena and, thus, they fail to provide their students with the adequate information and advice.

One other disconcerting fact is that the programmes that are implemented by the state and the civil society to increase teachers' capacities to deal with radicalisation lack inclusivity, complicating any multi-actor approach that aims to increase resilience in schools. These projects are not reaching all the educational staff of the country and, especially, those teaching in schools located in remote areas. The low level of knowledge about radicalisation among the country's educational professionals has left young people unprotected. This, in combination with the lack of meaningful engagement and

communication between school staff and parents, has undermined primary prevention, and as a result, preventive efforts need to be implemented at the second level, that is, after young people have been exposed to radical material. At this phase, the mission of the educational system to convince young people to disengage with radicals is more difficult.

Another problem related to education, is the segregation in schools of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. The phenomenon of segregation in the educational system has grown deeper with time, with students belonging to different ethnic groups rarely interacting, if at all. As a result, a new generation of Albanians barely speak the Macedonian language and their interaction with ethnic Macedonians is rudimentary. Even when communication does exist, it is often done in English.[18] Therefore, the educational system in North Macedonia has emerged as one of the major contributors to the de facto segregation of the ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians (Petroska-Beska and Najcevska 2004). This system has locked both the educational staff and the students into a narrow-minded perspective with negative stereotypes and prejudices shaping their outlooks about the others.

Inevitably, this clear sense of "us" and "them" that prevails in North Macedonia's schools creates fertile ground for extremist and radical ideas. Overall, segregated education is identified by participants in our study as a permissive factor for radicalisation trends at early stages.[19] The Achilles heel of the educational system is believed to be its inability to promote viable and sustainable connections between different ethnic communities (Feta and Armakolas 2023). These weaknesses in the educational system are harming community resilience.

Moreover, participants in our study also identified the problem of the educational system not providing enough knowledge and critical thinking.[20] The high levels of functional illiteracy among young people have left them without critical skills to resist extremist ideas.[21] In addition, the school curricula and especially the teaching of history is done in a way that serves the nationalist purposes of one or the other ethnic group (Popovikj 2021). Students are not sufficiently informed about values such as ethnic coexistence, tolerance, multiculturalism, and respect for others' opinions. This notable gap in the education system, in turn, enables radical religious and nationalist groups to solidify and spread their narratives among younger people. The sense of separate and segregated histories, which the education system produces, generates conflicting interpretations of social and political reality, and undermines common understandings of community resilience. The diverse ways of understanding the notion of community resilience are hindering the building of protective mechanisms for local communities. The fieldwork revealed that a more organised and structured intervention within the framework of primary education is necessary. The transformation of schools into social laboratories that will allow students to develop critical thinking and express themselves freely irrespective of their ethnic or religious status is an essential component of any resilience-building strategy at the community level.

The role of prisons

Prisons are also offering avenues for extremist groups to operate and recruit sympathisers. Relatedly, prisons have often functioned as incubators for radicalisation in North Macedonia. Moreover, in-prison cohabitation of different categories of offenders, such as prisoners charged with extremist actions of either religious or ethno-nationalist nature or both, is obstructing efforts to prevent the recruitment of ordinary criminal offenders by terrorist groups. Prisons in North Macedonia, especially wing 6 in Idrizovo prison, continue to be a breeding ground for extremism. In 2021, there were five returnees who share working areas with around 100 other prisoners in Idrizovo prison.[22] According to prison sources, around 80–85% of them have already accepted radical Islam as their religion, despite initially belonging to another faith.[23] Due to an alleged lack of interest by the Islamic Religious Community as well as the lack of consensus among their religious practitioners on how to deal with the issue, it is usually the foreign fighters who claim to know Islam best and become self-proclaimed imams in the prisons, teaching convicts and leading the prayers. It is believed that Imam Rexhep Memishi, who was sentenced to seven years in prison for taking part in a paramilitary organisation and recruiting fighters, has continued radicalisation efforts, together with his network, from the confines of his prison cell. The inhuman and degrading treatment in prison facilities also makes prisoners more vulnerable to the narratives of extremist groups.[24]

These ordinary criminals, who have been radicalised in prisons, are considered to be the most dangerous because they are ready to fight, not only abroad but also against the institutions and governments in the countries where they live, if they perceive them to be against their rights, faith and beliefs. They believe that the political system in their countries is unfair and must change, by violent means if necessary. Such radical tendencies are not necessarily connected to the practice of religion. In fact, many radicalised convicts have only superficially been introduced to Islam, in the sense that they do not actually practice their new (or newly found) religion. This is why, aside of the religious context, special attention should also be paid to other forms of extremism that could coexist in prisons. The so-called prison infection is highly likely to be converted to "community infection" when these people are released from internment and return to their local communities.[25]

The role of civil society organisations

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing awareness among national and international stakeholders in the Western Balkans that governments alone cannot prevent radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. One of the steps considered effective in overcoming radicalisation has been the inclusion of CSOs in the P/CVE process (Turčalo et al. 2022). As a result, an increasingly diverse set of governmental and non-governmental actors,

including civil society practitioners and organisations, have become involved in specific P/CVE initiatives in North Macedonia.

Like North Macedonia, most countries in the Western Balkans have long favoured government-dominated, centralised security strategies and, as a result, have had difficulties in gaining the trust of politically marginalised communities. A rough division of labour has thus emerged. Governments have focused on the repressive side through police actions and prosecutions, while civil society actors have taken the leading role in prevention, especially through publicising and addressing grievances in society, improving societal inclusion, and facilitating government–citizen relations (Shutarov 2021). In recent years, there is an improvement in the relations between the government and the civil society actors, expressed through the involvement of civil society in the preparation of radicalisation-related national strategic documents and action plans.

In that context, the civil society has functioned as a facilitator between the local population and the government, especially in areas where communities lack trust in state institutions. People trust civil society actors more than the state or political actors, especially when it comes to their protection from malicious networks and extremist voices inside their communities. Civil society actors are considered more suitable for implementing P/CVE initiatives since they are more familiar with the communities' daily problems. There are numerous examples of contributions by local CSOs to P/CVE. The Mother Schools, a project carried out in Çair municipality in Skopje since 2016 by Women without Borders, aims to raise awareness about how to counter extremism within families and through community-based programmes for prevention. Similarly, the Educate2Prevent programme implemented by Nexus Civil Concept and its partners seeks to enable parents and frontline school workers to identify and prevent violent extremism among youth (Stojkovski and Selimi 2018).

The lack of meaningful inter-ethnic interactions and intercultural activities between the country's two main groups is also addressed by the civil society sector. There are numerous examples of contributions by local CSOs to community engagement. The Centre for Intercultural Dialogue (CID) is one prominent example which aims to promote intercultural tolerance and active citizenship through capacity-building processes, education and youth work in the region of Kumanovo. The MultiKulti Youth Centre created by CID is working with young people from both ethnic groups for strengthening their resilience to violent extremism. Community centres like MultiKulti are promoting the idea of peaceful cohabitation and jointly confronting current and future threats, including violent extremism.

Centres where young people meet and engage in joint activities, such as sports and cultural events, are seen as significant preventive tools in the locality, and having the capacity to deliver results in building community resilience against any kind of radicalisation. Similarly, the Multikultura, the Community Development Institute (CDI) and the Centre for Balkan Cooperation

LOJA, all Tetovo-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are working on youth activism and inter-ethnic relations promoting tolerance and cooperation as two key preconditions for building community resilience. In Gostivar, CSOs such as the Youth and Community Centre have been implementing various projects to build resilience within the local community, including digital skills training for marginalised youth and the opening of a youth centre, as well as other initiatives which focus on bringing together youth from diverse backgrounds.

The inclusion of civil society in the Rehabilitation & Reintegration (R&R) programmes for returnees from conflict zones and their families, which are a significant part of the P/CVE mechanism, are seen by almost all interviewees as a necessity. Previously, the space for cooperation was particularly limited in the areas of disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration work. The implementation of R&R programmes for ex-foreign fighters became the apple of discord between the government and CSOs, with civil society members accusing state authorities of trying to leave CSOs with experience on the issue outside the process, in an effort to dominate the management of the funds provided by the Global Community Engagement and Resilient Fund (GCERF).[26] The government rejected the accusations, arguing that dealing with former foreign fighters is a security issue and the state should have the upper hand. It was obvious that the state was not keen on any strong involvement by civil society. However, the state soon realised that the reintegration of former foreign fighters is an overly complex issue and treating it with only security-centred approach could backfire.

State actors are not always the best suited to conduct R&R programmes as they are often less trusted than CSOs or religious leaders. In addition, government actors are not well suited to act as rehabilitation agents. They tend to lack credibility as effective actors with relevant target audiences. Currently, a number of NGOs such as the Horizon Civitas and the Pleiades Organisation are cooperating with the government on the reintegration, resocialisation, and rehabilitation of North Macedonian returnees from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.

The inclusion of civil society actors in the R&R process in order to function as a bridge between the authorities and the radicalised individuals is seen as a local necessity (bottom-up) and somehow it functions as a convincing factor for ex-foreign fighters to become part of the country's R&R programmes. In any case, the role of CSOs in strengthening the resilience of local communities to violent extremism is recognised by all interviewees, with many of them making specific references to youth centres, established by local NGOs.[27] These centres have become important places for building resilience among young people.

Overall, civil society plays a central role in building community resilience. International NGOs, through their funding schemes, are playing a central role in building community resilience in North Macedonia. An increasingly important role is played by project networks of international and regional

CSOs that link community-based initiatives in the Western Balkans or provide funds and grants to local projects – beyond existing government and international organisational funds. This has promoted a positive trend towards facilitating the involvement of community-based organisations in P/CVE efforts through direct funding (Armakolas et al. 2021).

In North Macedonia, and especially in the municipality of Kumanovo, the Strong City Network (SCN)[28] engages in monitoring the implementation of local action plans on P/CVE by the so-called Community Action Teams (Merkel and Hulse 2022). Women are vital agents of change in P/CVE in North Macedonia. The vital role that women can play in community resilience is already recognised by CSOs in projects like the Çair-based "MotherSchools", which has expanded to other municipalities (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski 2018). The programme aims "to both heighten concerned mothers' awareness of the threat posed by radicalisation and building their capacity to safeguard their families and communities against this threat".[29] The programme has helped mothers identify early warning signs of radicalisation in their children and promote counter narratives to violence.

However, women are still underrepresented in the public/government sphere on the security sector, particularly in leadership positions. The non-inclusion of women in these sectors does not allow them to have a say in key decision-making processes related to P/CVE. The role of women in successfully countering violent extremism and building resilience is acknowledged, but it is not fully understood by all community leaders. Our research has revealed the need for more gender P/CVE approaches for the simple fact that through their work in community organisations, schools, CSOs and families, women tend to be the first to identify the initial symptoms of radicalisation, and as such should be appropriately trained in order to provide solutions before it is too late.

While all Western Balkan states have set up P/CVE coordination offices, government-CSO cooperation in P/CVE still mostly appears to take place on an ad hoc basis – with little opportunities to develop sustainable mechanisms.[30] Even though the P/CVE office in North Macedonia has made provisions for the inclusion of civil society in the design phase of national action plans, only a small number of CSOs have actually access to it. Consequently, national P/CVE programmes often do not reflect the needs, insights and prevention resources of broader society (Morina et al. 2019). For instance, most do not include provisions for financial resources for implementation or capacity building, which increases reliance on international funds.

The scarcity of national resources allocated to P/CVE efforts has contributed to a lack of local ownership and sustained engagement. Consequently, CSOs working in P/CVE are over-reliant on international funds. While such funding can play an important function in supporting local-led initiatives, it has in many cases contributed to a proliferation of P/CVE projects that are hardly evaluated, have many overlaps, or target the same beneficiaries. Additionally, only a few organisations have the resources and capacity to apply

for international funds. As a result, initiatives by local practitioners that could have actual grassroots impact have fewer opportunities to gain traction than projects that are tailored to the agenda of international donors. Efforts by GCERF and SCN to provide smaller and more accessible grants directly to local actors can be an effective way to mitigate these shortcomings.

The financial dependence of CSOs affects the agenda of civil society actions and shapes it in line with the priorities of donors, without always taking into consideration the local concerns. Therefore, not only are many of the interventions from the civil society not responding to the needs of the society, but at the same time, since they are project-focused actions, they lack sustainability and continuation. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult to evaluate or to measure the impact of these actions, which prevents building on what has already been achieved and avoids duplications. When it comes to the civil sector, there is a need to transition successful projects into policymaking initiatives that can perform with local ownership and without the tutelage from foreign donors and actors. The local CSOs should take ownership of the P/CVE projects and develop capacities needed for that endeavour. This will enable them to influence donors to adjust their calls to the community's actual needs, ensuring greater sustainability and long-term viability for their actions.

There are numerous examples of contributions by local CSOs to P/CVE. While ambitious in their scope, there is a lack of evidence-based or systematic evaluation of such efforts and initiatives to determine the effectiveness of P/CVE initiatives and tools implemented by the CSOs. Most of the P/CVE efforts in North Macedonia lack evidence-based monitoring and evaluations of their P/CVE initiative to address challenges, such as the duplication of projects. Overall, when it comes to the involvement of CSOs in P/CVE, there is a need to strengthen the formats of cooperation with state and public institutions in both quantity and quality. Increasing the breadth of collaboration and coordination in this way would generate the critical mass necessary to enable the networked governance of P/CVE activities (Armakolas and Feta 2022).

Conclusion

Radicalisation and violent extremism in several forms remain challenges for North Macedonia. The state has managed to avert some of the more acute threats, for instance, when it comes to the threat of internal attacks posed by foreign fighters and radical personalities who have been released from prison. Yet, these and other phenomena, such as a growing trend of violent right-wing extremism, ethno-nationalism, and sport hooliganism, appear as challenges at the macro (societal) and micro (individual) levels throughout the country, and in specific municipalities, among them Tetovo and Kumanovo. All forms of extremism exist in both communities, but they manifest themselves with different intensities. Religious radicalisation is much more prevalent in Kumanovo, while radicalisation in Tetovo takes the form of ethnic

Albanian and Macedonian nationalism. Ethno-nationalism and right-wing populism overlap with political extremism based on ethnic affiliation, leading to occasional tensions and violence between the country's two main ethnic groups.

Community-level prevention and resilience building against any form of violent extremism is a coordinated, multifaceted effort that requires the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, both official and unofficial, government and non-governmental, and local and national. Local communities demonstrate resilience and often manage to identify extremism early on, but often the national-level authorities fail to recognise the problem identified at the communal level and react accordingly.

The contribution of civil society actors to building resilience among young populations is also significant. Civil society has established itself as an essential actor in North Macedonia's P/CVE mechanism through involvement in prevention and intervention efforts as well as disengagement and reintegration processes. At the local level, where radicalisation most likely occurs, CSOs are often uniquely positioned to foster intersectoral cooperation. Among the non-state actors involved in prevention and de-radicalisation strategies, civil society is considered as one of the most crucial partners at the local level because it plays a significant role in dealing with ethnic polarisation. Especially in ethnically divided communities, CSO practitioners can more easily access, compared to state actors, the different ethnicities and the most vulnerable to radicalisation environments. However, despite the widely recognised role of civil society, in practice there are several limitations and shortcomings that hinder its full potential in countering violent extremism.

Overall, violent extremism and radicalisation are complex and multifaceted challenges. As such, their prevention requires a multi-agency mechanism and a well-coordinated response among all actors involved in the process. Civil society should be a constituent part of this mechanism since any P/CVE initiative isolated from this significant actor would hamper efforts to build community resilience against any form of violent extremism.

Notes

1 Conclusion from the focus group discussions organised in Tetovo and Kumanovo in July 2021.
2 Interview with a security expert conducted in Kumanovo in July 2021.
3 The 2001 insurgency in North Macedonia was an armed conflict between the ethnic Albanian insurgents and North Macedonia's security forces. The legacy of the 2001 insurgency, together with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which terminated the armed conflict, remain key sources of political controversy and often societal polarisation. The Ohrid Agreement, signed in August 2001, put an end to the conflict. It went on to be incorporated into the constitution, paving the way for power-sharing arrangements in the political system and increased acceptance of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity in society. However, in the years that followed, controversies over the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement also became a source of political bickering and polarisation.

4 Interview with a representative of a religious community in Tetovo, conducted in July 2021.
5 Interview with a representative of an international community, conducted in Skopje in July 2021.
6 Conclusion from the focus group discussion organised in Kumanovo in July 2021.
7 Interview with representatives of the municipalities of Tetovo and Kumanovo, conducted in July 2021.
8 Conclusion from the focus group discussion organised in Kumanovo in July 2021.
9 Conclusions from the four focus group discussions organised in both Tetovo and Kumanovo in July 2021.
10 Interview with a member of the civil society in Tetovo, conducted in July 2021.
11 Interviews conducted with different local stakeholders in North Macedonia in July 2021.
12 Conclusion from the focus group discussion organised in Tetovo in July 2021.
13 Interview with a representative of the religious community, conducted in Tetovo in July 2021.
14 Conclusions from the 29 interviews and the four focus group discussions conducted in North Macedonia in July 2021.
15 Conclusion from the focus group discussion organised in Kumanovo in July 2021.
16 Interview with a journalist, conducted in the city of Tetovo in July 2021.
17 Interviews with local stakeholders, including teachers, conducted in Tetovo in July 2021.
18 Interview with a member of the civil society in Skopje, conducted in July 2021.
19 Interview with a member of the civil society, municipality representatives, and teachers in Tetovo, conducted in July 2021.
20 Interview with a representative of the civil society, conducted in Skopje in 2021 as well as conclusions from the four focus group discussions held in Tetovo and Kumanovo.
21 Interview with a local teacher in Tetovo, conducted in July 2021.
22 Talk show about Radicalisation and Re-integration of Returned ISIS Foreign Fighters in North Macedonia, YouTube, October 2021. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIrL32EjF9M
23 Ibid.
24 Interview with a representative of the international community conducted in Skopje in July 2021.
25 Interview with a police officer conducted in Kumanovo in July 2021.
26 The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) is a nonprofit foundation based in Geneva, Switzerland. It supports local, community-level initiatives aimed at strengthening resilience against violent extremist agendas.
27 Conclusion from the 29 interviews and the four focus group discussions conducted in North Macedonia in July 2021.
28 The Strong Cities Network (SCN) was launched in 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly to mount city-led responses against hate, polarisation, and extremism in all their forms. Both Tetovo and Kumanovo are members of the Network.
29 See the official website of the *Women Without Borders* for more information on the project – Available at https://wwb.org/activity/motherschools-macedonia/.
30 Interview with a representative of civil society in Kumanovo in July 2021.

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11 Interactions among government actors and civil society organisations to prevent violent extremism in Lebanon

Marie Kortam

Lebanon is a deeply sectarian country with 18 religious groups officially recognised by the state. Beyond this fragmentation, the country is affected by high unemployment and poverty rates. The multidimensional poverty rate in Lebanon doubled from 42% in 2019 to 82% of the total population in 2021, with nearly 4 million people living in multidimensional poverty (UNESCWA 2021). Although there are no updated statistics, undoubtedly this figure has increased dramatically since the 2019 uprisings and the crises the country is currently going through. Coupled with the demographic pressure generated by the arrival of Syrian refugees, the combination of a fragmented society and poor economic prospects has led to ongoing political and social instability. Inequality in access to public services (e.g., education, healthcare, and transport) compounds the disparities in income. The private sector provides certain services that are not provided by the state, which exacerbates inequality (Chaaban and El-Khoury 2016). The youth face sectarian barriers to employment and civic involvement and suffer from a lack of economic opportunities, clientelism, nepotism, and corruption that dominate the political system.

These multiple factors and drivers fuel violent extremism in Lebanon at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. This phenomenon challenges, on the one hand, the weakness of the Lebanese state and institutions and, on the other, the compensation that individuals and groups may find in formal or informal religious discourses, practices, and institutions (Kortam 2020).

In response to these challenges, the Lebanese government has initiated a process to develop a national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). The Lebanese government felt that such action was particularly urgent in Lebanon, due not only to its strategic geographic location but also to its presence in a regional environment dominated by violent responses to internal conflicts (National PVE Strategy 2018). This demonstration of national political will is in line with the broader requirements of the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's call for member states to develop policies to prevent radicalisation (UNGA 2015).

This chapter explores the interaction between government actors, civil society organisations (CSOs), and international organisations in the development

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and implementation of Lebanon's PVE policy. It first describes the roles of various international and domestic actors in the development, and later implementation, of the national PVE strategy. It then focuses on one concrete example of state-civil society partnership, namely, the Strong Cities Network (SCN). Finally, it analyses the policy discourse and actors' perceptions of the role of women in politics and in PVE. The analysis is based on desk reviews as well as interviews with key stakeholders in the field of PVE in Lebanon, including state actors, members of national CSOs, representatives of international NGOs, UN staff, and international stakeholders.

Inter-actor cooperation in the development of a national PVE strategy

At the onset, it is important to note that various programmes are implemented by CSOs in Lebanon that have no explicit relation with the field of PVE, but help to promote a peaceful and inclusive society, and hence mitigate the structural conditions that are conducive to the spread of violent extremism. Some of these programmes focus on peacebuilding, reintegration of war-affected populations, good governance and rule of law, human rights, women's rights and gender issues, inter-community and interfaith dialogue, youth engagement, and crime and drug prevention. Civil society efforts are often locally rooted. CSOs have access to information, have a deep understanding of local dynamics, and present the best "early warning" mechanisms to detect emerging threats. They are thus able to provide timely interventions and context-specific responses. They often work with marginalised groups, promote political participation, and provide avenues for addressing demands and grievances. At the same time, CSOs are often connected regionally and internationally to a broader community of civil society actors and practitioners working in relevant disciplines. Their local rootedness as well as their interconnectedness allows them to share and refine good practices (OSCE 2018).

More specifically, in the field of violent extremism, CSOs in Lebanon have played an important bridging role between the government, international organisations, and citizens, especially since the initiation of a common UN approach to PVE by the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) in 2015. This approach is in line with the UN Secretary General's Global Action Plan and reiterates the need for a holistic approach to PVE.

UNSCOL engaged in an extensive consultation process involving various Lebanese government and security officials as well as international donors (United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, and the European Union). Given the need to consult with civil society actors and NGOs working in this field, UNSCOL contracted the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to assess non-governmental activities in the PVE field and to explore possibilities for joint programming; the approach included a mapping of existing projects and programmes,

coupled with the identification of new activities planned in the PVE field. These also encompassed programmes and initiatives which do not explicitly seek to address the drivers of violent extremism but are nonetheless likely to contribute to efforts to forestall its consequences.

The process of developing the national PVE strategy was launched by the Saad Hariri government on 2 December 2016, under the high patronage of former Prime Minister Tammam Salam. In order to address the threats and drivers of violent extremism from a government-wide perspective, and concomitantly with the development of the PVE plan, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) sent letters of request to 29 ministries on 3 February 2017, asking them to prepare a conceptual document that included the regulatory decrees of their offices, their policies, and the procedures envisioned to prevent violent extremism. Prime Minister Hariri was assisted in this task by the Hariri Foundation, its president, Bahia Hariri, and its director, Rubina Abu Zeinab. Following the analysis of the documents provided by each ministry, various links and points of convergence were identified, allowing for the identification of priority actions in the field of PVE. In July 2017, the PMO invited delegates from all the ministries to a workshop to discuss the submitted documents and reach a consensus on the definitions and pillars of the strategy to be adopted. Following this inter-ministerial process, the PMO then convened a high-level consultative meeting in the presence of all ministers and the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon to present, discuss, and adopt the document.

The support of UN agencies to the Lebanese state in developing a national PVE strategy was divided in three tracks. The first track was led by the government, and consisted of thematic workshops involving the PMO, line ministries, civil society, donors, the UN, PVE practitioners, and academia. Each workshop focused on a theme relevant to PVE (e.g., education, political marginalisation, and the role of prisons), by examining the specific problems that needed to be addressed, and the required interventions. The second track was led by CSOs, who undertook field-based research to identify which issues related to PVE were most relevant in the local Lebanese context. Managed by a local organisation, it facilitated 10 local-level focus group discussions in different regions to validate and inform the research. The themes identified were then summarised in briefing notes brought forward for discussion in the thematic workshops conducted as part of the first track. The third track consisted of a steering committee overseeing and guiding the overall process, with participation from the government, CSOs, donors, and UN.

The Lebanese government formally approved the national PVE strategy in a cabinet session on 27 March 2018, in cooperation with the Office of the Resident Representative, the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the Swiss government and other international institutions.

In April 2018, Prime Minister Hariri issued a decision on the establishment of an inter-ministerial working group in collaboration with the

minister of justice and the minister of state for women. In connection with the promulgation of the new PVE strategy, the director of the Hariri Foundation, Rubina Abu Zeinab, was appointed as the new national coordinator for the governmental unit for PVE. This appointment, however, caused some confusion, as Abu Zeinab held an official public role and a private role, as the director of Hariri Foundation. The PM then called on the ministers to appoint delegates from their ministries to form a coordination working group for PVE.

However, the work of successive governments since 2019 in implementing the strategy has been disrupted due to political divides and the Lebanese uprising, which erupted on 17 October 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic, Lebanon's economic and financial collapse, and the Port of Beirut explosion in 2020, led to the prioritisation of health and efforts to combat financial, economic, social, and security crises over the combating of violent extremism,[1] and to the transformation of international financing from development goals and preventive work to primarily financing crisis response.

These acute challenges bring to the fore the vital role that international organisations and donor countries should play in supporting the Lebanese government in implementing this strategy, including in terms of technical support, transfer of international expertise, and capacity building of national institutions. After the eruption of the protests in 2019, a deep mistrust emerged towards the political class, which increased the challenges of implementing the national PVE strategy based on cooperation between the state and citizens through the intermediation of CSOs.[2]

Implementation process: between inter-ministerial coordination and civil society involvement

Prior to responding to UNSCOL's initiative on PVE, the Lebanese government had set up an inter-ministerial working group to develop a national strategy to combat terrorism. In this light, the Lebanese government has been working on developing two national strategies, one for the prevention of violent extremism, which is a long-term development strategy aimed at strengthening social immunity against violent extremism and limiting its risks, and the other for countering and confronting extremism in case it results in terrorist acts as identified by legal and international standards.

The PVE strategy outlines a definition of violent extremism applicable to the Lebanese context and reflects on plausible ways to prevent it. In this framework, violent extremism is defined as "the spread of individual and collective hatred", "the rejection of diversity", "the use of violence as a means of expression and influence", as well as "behaviour that threatens the values of society, which ensure social stability" (National Strategy 2018: 14).

Based on these identified challenges, the overarching objective of the PVE strategy is to reduce the susceptibility to radicalisation leading to violent extremism in society, as well as to mitigate the divisions and segregation

related to the rejection of diversity and the non-acceptance of the other. It is based on the belief that violence prevention is first and foremost a mission requiring an inclusive partnership between government and key actors in society. Accordingly, four key objectives are spelt out: to regain social trust; to promote citizenship; to achieve social justice; and to monitor social transformations. These objectives relate to the country's structural inequalities that feed spatial segregation and political marginalisation.

The PVE strategy is based on two levels of commitment: political and institutional. The political commitment translates into a high-level engagement of the Lebanese political scene and international partners. The strategy calls on political leaders in Lebanon to capitalise on their influence and ensure their commitment to preventing violent extremism, and on international actors to build support for the programme. On the institutional level, the strategy commits to integrating the overall PVE approach into existing institutional mechanisms and to ensure compatibility with ongoing reforms by focusing on governance reforms towards greater equality for all.

While the overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring the strategy rests with the national coordinator for the PVE under the PMO, all 29 ministries have a role to play and are developing new programmes to achieve the strategy's stated objectives. This departmental implementation of the PVE strategy has resulted in a need for ongoing coordination among the ministries due to shared roles and functions and the need to consult with NGOs in the economic, social, and cultural sectors in implementing and evaluating the strategy.

While the implementation of the PVE strategy is based on a significant mobilisation of the ministries, CSOs were involved in the process of developing the PVE National Action Plan (NAP) after October 2018. This process brought together the ministries, CSOs, universities, the private sector, and other relevant actors, along the nine pillars of the national strategy.[3] The call for participation by CSOs was launched by the national coordinator in partnership with UNDP, through the website of "*Daleel madani*" (the civil guide). In 2019, a national consultation took place over two days, with the participation of 120 to 200 stakeholders for each pillar. This was accompanied by a series of nine workshops (one for each pillar) organised throughout 2019 with support from national and international experts. Following these consultations, the plan was to launch the NAP in January 2020. Unfortunately, the last series of workshops were disrupted by the October uprising and the resignation of the government. Eventually, the NAP was finalised and published in March 2021.

Altogether, 300 institutions (such as representative councils, trade unions, private sector, banking sector, and international organisations), 850 individuals, 145 NGOs, and all ministries, participated in the consultation process. According to the PVE coordinator, the work has been very successful,[4] as well as the way it has been formulated, in a long-term development approach to address the root causes of violent extremism.

After the NAP, the next step was to develop the national PVE network, constituted by the 850 participants in the national consultation in addition to the stakeholders who make up the existing platforms around the national strategy. Additional platforms were set up, one each for the banking sector, religious leaders, and academic institutions. This wide array of spaces and platforms altogether formed the national PVE network. Subsequent objectives included the development of a monitoring and evaluation system, the establishment of an early warning system, the maintenance of public consultations as a confidence-building tool, and the development of training materials and courses to raise awareness on PVE.

Currently, the national PVE network consists of almost 850 individuals in addition to the exchange platform. The latter is a virtual space, not yet fully functional, which allows the interaction and dialogue initiated during the public consultation to continue. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many events were organised through this space. For instance, the last four events focused on young people, on their awareness of PVE and their relationship with specific issues such as safety, empowerment, and support.

Overall, the development and implementation of the PVE strategy, despite their shortcomings, have succeeded in bringing together security, judicial, academic, and civil society actors through various workshops and consultation spaces, even though engaging formal and informal religious leaders has been a challenge.

The Strong Cities Network: an illustrative case of local–national partnership

At the sub-national level, the role of the Strong Cities Network (SCN) is also worth highlighting for its successful promotion of a localised approach to PVE efforts.[5] This initiative illustrates the role of state-civil society collaboration in PVE efforts within municipalities (Vidino et al. 2017), in line with the meso-level community focus in this volume. The UN Secretary-General's 2015 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism highlights the role of local actors, including municipal government bodies and CSOs, in the implementation of effective prevention programmes (UNGA 2015).

Launched by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue at the UN General Assembly in 2015, the SCN was established to place cities at the forefront of prevention efforts and to support them to coordinate, sustain, and integrate prevention activities (Crone and Nasser 2018). The SCN and the National PVE Unit have been consolidating their partnership through a series of activities since 2017. This partnership illustrates the objectives and challenges of the national strategy and is reflected simultaneously in the action plans of the PVE Unit and the local prevention networks (LPNs).

Discussions for potential collaboration and eventual partnership between the SCN team and the PVE Unit were launched in 2017. The discussions aimed at involving the PVE strategy team in the work of the SCN, specifically

with LPNs, to further align local and national efforts in PVE. The Ministry of Interior actively supported the SCN project and a key position paper outlining the PVE strategy highlighted the significant role of cities and municipalities. The next steps involved the development of a strategic framework document and an action plan. With its focus on municipalities and local communities, the SCN project was well positioned to underpin the implementation of a national policy. In May 2018, the SCN launched the "Local PVE Guides". At the policy level, the SCN team explored various ways of collaboration with the National PVE Unit in Lebanon, including but not limited to organising stakeholder consultations and workshops with local experts and LPN members to feed into the National PVE Action Plan, which was being developed by the Unit, in collaboration with the British Council. Continuous work was being exerted to engage and align with the PVE strategy objectives and pillars and institutionalise the LPNs under the national strategy. In September 2018, work on developing the national teachers' PVE manual was initiated. One consultation meeting was held with LPN and schoolteacher representatives and another with INGO representatives and experts, in the presence of the Lebanese PVE coordinator and PVE Unit representatives. In November 2018, the SCN team and the PVE coordinator organised a consultation meeting on the national strategy with Lebanese mayors and LPNs of Saida, Tripoli, and Majdal Anjar to emphasise the importance of integrating the strategy into the framework of all local authorities' actors, stakeholders, practitioners, and communities.

This network in Saida, the first municipality to become part of the SCN, includes several state and international actors and institutions in the field alongside civil society actors, NGOs, and religious leaders. Sheikh Abu Zeid, an important actor in the network, contributed mainly through his expertise and his own network. In coordination with Dar-al-Fatwa, he launched an annual programme to unify the preaching of Friday prayers in mosques by drawing on *hadiths* and Quranic texts urging moderation and the rejection of violence. These speeches were tested during a workshop bringing together sheikhs from Saida. The workshops were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The network also organises workshops for teachers of Islamic education in local schools.

The network, therefore, focuses on the religious sector and works with youth, starting with the school network in the city and in the Palestinian refugee camp Ein El-Helwe, where schools are run by UNRWA. It also targets post-school youth, up to the age of 20.[6] One of the most important achievements of the network is the establishment of a city guide for Saida on PVE in schools.[7] Additionally, the municipality of Saida organised open dialogue tables with young people who participated in the 2019 uprisings through the student movement. Thus, the network and the municipality have been actively engaged in violence prevention. The next step will be to integrate the police into the network to train them on how they should treat people.

In October 2019, the SCN and the PVE Unit signed a memorandum of understanding to partner on the fourth pillar of the national strategy, which focuses on "engaging local communities" with an emphasis on the role of PVE for municipalities. A call for proposals seeking to fund between five and eight municipalities to carry out community initiatives on PVE were designed to be launched by the end of 2019. Unfortunately, the process was halted by the 17 October uprising, and the launch was cancelled on short notice due to roadblocks. Since then, the SCN team has been conducting several online and physical meetings with the PVE coordinator to assess the emerging situation and adjust activities to the new dynamics and priorities. A digital national exchange was launched on 4 March 2021, as an online platform listing resources and experts on PVE and virtual dialogue and exchange rooms.

Women's roles in the PVE strategy

This final section analyses the role of women in the PVE strategy and other PVE-related activities. Research has shown that terrorism and violent extremism are highly gendered issues (Fink et al. 2016). The UN Secretary General's Plan of Action dedicates significant attention to women and the importance of gender considerations when developing PVE strategies (Ndung'u and Shadung 2017). Within Lebanon's PVE strategy, there is a clear understanding of the importance of gender-sensitive PVE programming. It paid special attention to women, and in particular, its fifth pillar is exclusively dedicated to "gender equality and the empowerment of women". Eight ministries participate in the objectives of this pillar. As the PVE coordinator Rubina Abu Zeinab puts it in our interview:

> Women have their own pillar in the PVE strategy, under the heading "Women, peace and security". . . . Women can be victims of violent extremism but they can also be contributors to PVE. Women are also one of the main target groups of the PVE National Action Plan, along with young people, prisoners and vulnerable communities. And those who attended the national consultation were around 50/50 [men and women], so women were major contributors to the development of the NAP and the National Strategy.[8]

Another interviewee from Saida demonstrates a social and political commitment aligned with the PVE Unit's vision towards women:

> We are part of an association; its name is "Association for Social Salvation". We also went out into the field. I mean, we came down [to the streets] like the rest of the people, not in the name of an association or in the name of anything specific. No, because when the revolution [of 17 October 2019] started, something inside motivated us to come down. We didn't wait for someone to tell us to come down or participate or work. It's our duty.[9]

However, she acknowledges that the participation of women was lower than that of men. Regarding her association, she argues: "It's more at the level of advocacy. It gives classes in religion, education in *Sharia*, in addition to being social, humanitarian . . . Now, in the crisis, we distribute food, sometimes clothing"[10] However, she is lucid on the place left to women when it comes to participation in politics. She blames men for not taking women's political experiences seriously. She also blames women for not being interested enough in politics and argues that although women demonstrate alongside men, they still lack political awareness. Sheikh Ossama Amin Shihabi puts it in a more direct way: "A woman's mission is to be a mother and a housewife, and this must be preserved".[11] Most interviewees remain silent when asked about the role of women in preventing or fuelling violent extremism. This shows the ineffectiveness of the various CSO initiatives and actions mentioned earlier regarding gender equality.

In Lebanon, women actively advocate for strengthening women's rights along the fifth pillar "Gender Equality and Empowering Women", for instance for the right to pass on the Lebanese nationality to children born from mixed couples (foreigners or refugees in Lebanon such as Iraqis, Palestinians and Syrian partners). However, this activism does not suit Maronite parties or the Maronite Patriarchy, as shown in our interview with Monseigneur Mazloum, who confronted this demand, saying "it is taking its precaution to ensure its unity". In the following quotation, he defends the rejection of the Maronite Church on giving the Lebanese nationality to children born from mixed marriages, mainly for demographic reasons:

> To go back to history, Lebanon is a state that is based on the diversity of its 18 sects and on the equality between these sects and Taif accords named this equality "fifty-fifty". There is an imbalance in this equilibrium because Christians have less children than Muslims, second because the migration impacted more the Christians than Muslims, so there is an imbalance in the equilibrium. If we continue in this imbalance and encourage it then in 20, 30 years from now, the Christians will become a minority, maybe 10%. What will be their voice in the state? At this moment, Lebanon will become like any other Arab country. Then, what will prevent our Muslim brothers from saying that Lebanon is an Islamic state? We want to preserve the essence of the Lebanese entity, which is based on the meeting and living together between these 18 sects regardless of numbers. Because this meeting between Lebanese permits people to live together equally regardless their belongings. Equality before the Law, total freedom, freedom of belief, freedom of thought, and that they will not be suppressed in the name of religion, etc. But if we continue on this track, then Lebanon will no longer be a state built on diversity but instead on unity.[12]

Marie Najem, member of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and currently the vice president for administrative affairs within the party, adds: "It is right that

the FPM has a clear position on this question but I think that the Amal movement or Future movement or others do not have a problem with this because they are not afraid like Christian parties to lose [political power]". As a woman, she also made a distinction between her point of view and her party's position:

> On this question, I have my own opinion, and there is of course the opinion of the FPM. This is a question of rights above all. As a woman, I cannot understand why I cannot bequeath my nationality to my children like my husband can. And on the rights level, even the FPM cannot stand against this matter. But back to the context, the reason for this was historically a reaction to the presence of the Palestinian refugees and now the Syrians and so there is fear from making them citizens which will unbalance the sectarian balance in the country. And today, because the refugees are mostly Sunnis, protecting the sectarian diversity in Lebanon passes through impeding Lebanese women from giving their nationality. . . . What the FPM did is that it proposed a law for nationality which treats equally women and men. This law meant that if you want to exclude some nationalities for demographic reasons or political reasons or whatever, this exclusion applies to men and women equally. This means that if we are talking about Palestinians and Syrians here, neither men nor women could bequeath their Lebanese nationality to their children. . . . What I am trying to say is that you are trying to find a solution for a dilemma which cannot reach total equality between men and women which is logical and what should happen, you made half a solution in the absence of law, not a complete law [laughing].[13]

Her answer shows how delicate this issue is because of the importance of maintaining the balance between the sects. Although she considers that the question of rights is above sectarian political calculations, she also recognises that the FPM inherited this system and cannot easily tackle this question without reaching a national agreement to change it. However, this example shows how women's rights are also used as a sectarian issue on the political scene.

This example demonstrates that even the question of rights is viewed through a sectarian lens because of the sacredness of maintaining the sectarian balance between the communities of Lebanon. That being said, the Maronite parties as well as the church are aware that is more a pretence of balance rather than a real balance between the communities and accept this illusory equilibrium to the detriment of women's rights. In addition, this institutionalisation of sectarianism lends institutional legitimacy to sectarian extremist narratives that can be used to further polarise Lebanese society and incite inter-communal violence.

Conclusion

The national PVE strategy articulates key priorities and principles for PVE efforts in Lebanon, stating, for example, that human rights violations cannot

be justified when dealing with terror threats and that PVE efforts should not contribute to the stigmatisation of specific groups. The strategy laid the foundation for the development of a National Action Plan. Upon the endorsement of the national PVE strategy, the Lebanese government initiated various platforms for resource development, institutionalisation, and implementation of the strategy, such as an inter-ministerial PVE committee. The responsibility for overseeing the overall process lies with the national PVE coordinator, based in the PMO.

CSOs were only secondarily considered in the process of the development of the national strategy through the mapping study implemented by UNDP and initiated by the UNSCOL, in contrast to the inclusion of almost all ministries (29 out of 30). It was a top-down process. However, CSOs are major stakeholders in PVE, and they often aim to succeed where the state and religious institutions have failed. For instance, they work in social action and play the role of intermediaries between public authorities and citizens by trying to integrate the religious dimension as a factor of resilience and prevention of violent extremism.

Strengthening cooperation between government stakeholders and civil society, alongside additional research for PVE programme analysis and planning, is hence vital, given that most often interventions are not accurately measured or based on solid analysis. Without further knowledge and research on PVE, future programmes will likely be impeded in quality and scope.

Although the state delegates various roles related to PVE to civil society institutions, CSOs lack a clear mandate in this domain. Furthermore, their actions are often impeded by a lack of coordinated vision, a dependency on the policies of donor countries, and limited resources, forcing NGOs to spend considerable time applying for funds and showing that the money received has been spent on their various activities. Civil society actors therefore cannot replace the obligations of the state in shaping the strategic vision for the future of PVE in Lebanon and advancing implementation through national sovereignty.

Notes

1 Interview with the PVE coordinator, Rubina Abu Zeinab, August 2021.
2 Ibid.
3 The national strategy has identified nine pillars for interventions: (1) Dialogue & Conflict Prevention; (2) The Promotion of Good Governance; (3) Justice, Human Rights, & the Rule of Law; (4) Urban Development & Engaging Local Economies; (5) Gender Equality & Empowering Women; (6) Education, Training, & Skills Development; (7) Economic Development & Job Creation; (8) Strategic Communications, Informatics, and Social Media; (9) Empowering Youth.
4 Various other stakeholders, such as NGOs, have a less positive assessment of the strategy, either because they did not hear about it, although they work on PVE, or because the action plan is still not operational.
5 For more insight on the SCN, see Available at https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/ar/city/%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86/.

6 Interview with Mirna al-Sabbagh, editor-in-chief of the Municipality of Saida, 2021 March.
7 See Available at https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/en/lebanon-saidas-strong-cities-community-prevention-network-concludes-their-pve-teacher-training/.
8 Interview with the PVE coordinator, Rubina Abu Zeinab, August 2021.
9 Interview with Em Mhamad, April 2021.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Interview with Monseigneur Mazloum, October 2021.
13 Interview with Marie Najem, October 2021.

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12 General conclusion

Juline Beaujouan, Véronique Dudouet, Maja Halilovic-Pastuovic, Johanna-Maria Hülzer, Marie Kortam, and Amjed Rasheed

Going back to the central question posed in the general introduction to this volume, rooted in our meso-level approach to the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE): How do various community leaders contribute to the rise and persistence of violent extremist discourses and behaviours or, inversely, to the strengthening of resilience against violent extremism? In this concluding chapter, we offer a few brief responses in light of the complex findings from seven countries in the Western Balkans and MENA, by addressing the cumulative roots and patterns of violent extremism and the multi-agency (f)actors of resilience, and problematising the concept of resilience at the interface of state, religious, and civil society spheres. We end with a few implications for P/CVE policy and practice.

Cumulative drivers of community vulnerability

Although this volume places a primary focus on community-level factors and actors, the latter cannot be studied in isolation from the state. As demonstrated in all chapters across the Western Balkans and MENA region, state leaders and institutions often contribute to weakening society's resilience to violent shocks as a result of their actions – or inaction.

In Part I, we find that dysfunctional power-sharing systems, "ethnocracies", patronage networks, or state collapse play a large part in the vulnerability of large segments of society towards violent extremism. In both the cases of Serbia ("state within the state") and Iraq ("state of no-state"), parastatal structures dominate the political and security landscape. These parastatal formations weaken the state apparatus and its ability to prevent, detect, and react to episodes of violent extremism; at the same time, these powerful groups hinder opportunities for reform while feeding a pervasive culture of extremism across the whole society. In Lebanon, "hybrid" state institutions such as the Sunni authority Dar el-Fatwa are co-opted by sectarian political elites, which impedes a fair and effective provision of services to their community (such as religious education), and leads to their contestation by informal religious entities. As a result of these structural dysfunctionalities, in all three countries, the political system could be described as

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simultaneously weak and resilient to change. We will delve further into this paradox later.

The historical context and the rigid institutional frameworks established in the wake of violent inter-group conflicts have also contributed to a fragmentation of the state apparatus, reflected in uncoordinated and unregulated P/CVE strategies. A related concern expressed in the cases of North Macedonia and Lebanon is a lack of shared analysis among power-sharing state institutions on the causes and patterns of violent extremism, and/or a tendency by state and international agencies to primarily associate this phenomenon with one single community (e.g., Sunni Islam) while neglecting its prevalence among other constituencies (e.g., Shia Islam or Christianity in the MENA, ethnopolitics, and far-right radicalism in the Balkans).

Delving more in-depth into the role of religion in its interaction with the state and society, Part II contributes to filling a gap in the P/CVE literature that is largely based on a primordial explanation of violent extremism through religion. The three chapters on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tunisia, and Lebanon showcase that religion is often utilised as a tool of resistance against the state. While religion is instrumentalised by violent extremist organisations to mobilise the masses and recruit members, local communities also use it as a tool to resist the state's hegemonic powers in the face of marginalisation. The case studies explored in this volume show the explicit relationship between violent extremism and social grievances. It is often fuelled by multiple grievances, including social, economic, political, ethnic, and geographic patterns of exclusion, injustice, or inequality. These grievances may take a religious form, as a marker of individual radicalisation or community mobilisation, in societies where religion plays a significant role in shaping collective identities. In this sense, we argue that violent extremism is not unidimensional but often arises from cumulative and self-reinforcing grievances. Therefore, this book problematises the identity-violence nexus beyond primordial and instrumental approaches. It portrays how collective identities are constructs of everyday life that require constant reproduction through practice. As a result, people have multiple identities that change over time and space. However, as can be seen in cases such as Iraq, Lebanon, or Bosnia and Herzegovina, collective identities can be resistant to change and may shape groups' interests, conduct, and relations with others. The legacy of violent inter-group conflict and the persistence of dysfunctional governance systems contribute to a freezing of identity markers and a lingering ethnic or sectarian polarisation, which neither reconciliation programmes nor P/CVE initiatives have been able to overcome.

The role of civil society actors in fuelling extremist discourses is investigated in Part III, with a specific emphasis on media outlets in Kosovo and North Macedonia. The unregulated online media environment, which allows unverified content, including hate speech, to be disseminated, is seen as a key factor in community vulnerability. Traditional media channels, which remain highly influential in shaping public opinion, may also contribute to

the promotion of hostile or victimisation narratives against the outgroup, especially when controlled or co-opted by extremist voices within political elites and religious institutions. In the Western Balkans, cases of national media discussing matters of public interest from the perspective of all communities remain rare.

Community agents of resilience

In all societies, including the two regions under study, violent extremism remains the exception rather than the rule. Most individuals are capable of resisting the appeal or lure of violent extremist groups, even in the midst of an "enabling environment" (i.e., socio-economic deprivation) and in spite of their social grievances against the state. Collectively, most communities are unaffected by violent extremism, and are able to develop effective mechanisms to protect themselves against external threats and shocks – which is at the core of resilience.

What factors and actors contribute to these positive outcomes? This book offers a holistic analysis of the individual and collective attributes that enable local leaders to detect, preempt, and prevent extremist narratives or behaviours from taking root in their community. While we organised this book around three main categories of actors, across state institutions, religious authorities, and civil society, all case studies showcase the strong relational dynamics at play between state and non-state actors, who constantly interact and influence one another. Within the state apparatus, the case of Serbia highlights the return of the state in the formerly isolated Muslim community of Sandžak as a positive factor for resilience, providing residents with better services, greater economic opportunities, and a renewed sense of being part of the political process. At the municipal level, the case of North Macedonia also showcases the crucial role of mayors and local councils in coordinating the work of a variety of community stakeholders dealing with P/CVE. At the national level, the chapter on Kosovo calls for a comprehensive integration of Kosovo Serbs across public institutions, to counter the appeal of parallel/informal institutions, which perpetuate a radical nationalist discourse.

Outside the state, we find that religious leaders – both formal and informal – act as power configuration actors in societies where religion plays an important role in everyday life. Therefore, they can facilitate P/CVE in their local communities, and should actively be involved in such efforts, as they can hold a high degree of legitimacy and authority among their congregations. However, their ability to promote and sustain community resilience is highly dependent on the degree of trust and credibility they generate among members of the affected communities. The example of Lebanon shows how trusted informal religious leaders are able to respond to the sense of grievance expressed by marginalised groups and can effectively de-escalate conflicts during violent clashes.

Religious institutions can hence play a positive role in strengthening resilience and peacebuilding – although not uniformly across the seven countries under study, given the differentiated relations (e.g., control, independence, co-optation, or cooperation) they entertain with the state. If the religious figures involved are perceived as part of an unjust political system that is responsible for community grievances, these actors are less trusted, and a space opens up for the emergence of new religious authority figures – promoting alternative worldviews, often driven by foreign influences – who fill this gap. These actors' agency and influence are also shaped by their collaboration with other local leaders, from civil society or other faiths. Several chapters highlight the importance of local inter-religious initiatives, and the need to institutionalise those bottom-up efforts at the national level. Nevertheless, as argued earlier, recent experiences of civil wars in most countries under study have contributed to disrupting trust and perpetuating segregation between different religious and ethnic/sectarian communities that coexist in these countries. This may demotivate religious leaders from taking such roles as "bridges" and interacting with their peers across different communities. In fact, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, religious authorities are often perceived as fuelling inter-group antagonism and discourses of victimisation, especially when aligned with war-time narratives of the past, and allies with political actors who hold extreme worldviews. A similar scenario can be seen in the MENA region.

Whether religious authorities should remain autonomous and free from interference by the state is also a matter of debate. Our Lebanese authors suggest that the independence of religious institutions is a vehicle towards democracy and allows the inclusion of dissenting voices, while the chapters on Serbia and Tunisia imply a need for state institutions to reassert control over informal religious institutions in order to delegitimise harmful foreign influences. In Iraq, even though the religious institution(s) are independent from the state, they remain influential in shaping the politics of the country. Therefore, the relationship between the state and religion is rather complex, especially in postcolonial contexts where the processes of consolidation of the "modern" nation-state system are still ongoing.

In the later chapters of the book, we demonstrate that although civil society (as defined in the introduction to Part III) is not equally developed and empowered across the two regions under scrutiny – due to various financial, cultural, institutional, and political constraints, civil society leaders can play important horizontal and vertical bridging roles, for constructive social bonding (within communities), bridging (across communities) and linking (across state-society relations). In the Western Balkans, especially, civil society actors have taken the lead in prevention work, while governments have primarily focused on the hard-security side of P/CVE through policing and prosecutions of violent offenders. The cases of Tunisia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Lebanon portray a vast range of civil society actors at the forefront of resilience-building efforts, ranging from professional

NGOs, cultural associations, grassroots movements, and women's groups to traditional and social media outlets. Even when they are not labelled or conceived as P/CVE initiatives, civil society-led efforts to enhance social cohesion through, for example, social clubs, artistic projects, or religious festivals, contribute effectively to the prevention of extremist narratives and behaviours by providing disenfranchised youth with a renewed sense of pride and civic engagement. One may even argue that youth-led nonviolent protests against socio-economic marginalisation or corrupt state policies (from the 2011 revolution in Tunisia to the late 2019 protests in Lebanon and Iraq) contribute to community resilience, or in fact resistance, against the drivers of violent extremism and provide a constructive alternative to the lure of extremist groups.

With regard to gender dynamics, the chapter on Tunisia explains women's vulnerability to indoctrination by radical Islam through a combination of cultural factors (tribal conservatism and patriarchal dominance) and economic hardship. As argued in the chapter on North Macedonia, women also play a vital role in P/CVE, notably through their work in social organisations, schools, CSOs, and families, and as such, are well placed to identify early symptoms of extremism in their communities. However, across all case studies, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions across states and society. In Lebanon, the new national PVE strategy seeks to tackle this problem through gender-sensitive programming supporting women's civic empowerment and political engagement.

Finally, the role of international P/CVE policy actors is mentioned in various chapters, both for their constructive and disruptive influence. In countries where governments have been slow and inefficient in reacting to the threat of violent extremism, sometimes deliberately, and only mobilised when pressured into doing so by international actors, NGOs have been the primary recipients of foreign P/CVE programmes. This has helped strengthen their capacity for early action. However, as argued in the cases of North Macedonia and Kosovo, the over-reliance of CSOs on external funding impedes their sustainability, and the non-alignment of international agendas with the real community needs on the ground may hinder both prevention and resilience. For instance, such discrepancies can be exploited by extremist entrepreneurs to depict NGOs that receive external funding as tools of foreign influence in order to weaken the legitimacy of their projects in the eyes of local communities.

Vulnerability and resilience as two sides of the same coin

The concept of resilience needs to be treated with caution, as it takes various meanings and connotations from one language/culture and political system to another. The capacity to absorb shocks and rebound from adversity can be a force for constructive change, or for the preservation of a dysfunctional status quo.

Resilience appears in many forms and is not inherently positive. This is most clearly expressed in Part I, where state apparatuses in both regions under study are depicted as fragile but displaying self-sustainability and a high level of resilience against change, under the control of ruling elites. This also implies that different types and levels of resilience can be in tension with each other, as the resilience of the state at the central level may hamper resilience-building at the community level. The cases of Lebanon and Iraq illustrate how states play an active role in hindering social resilience. While often depicted as weak forms of governance, their survival despite the constant security, political, and economic challenges is self-evident. Furthermore, it appears from the case studies on the Western Balkans that while individuals and communities are generally resilient, there is a persistent, and even growing, culture of extremism on a societal level – manifested through aggressive ethno-religious or ethno-national narratives.

The case of Serbia also brings to the fore a temporal perspective on the vulnerability/resilience nexus across the state/non-state divide. On the one hand, the control and integration of both far-right (e.g., paramilitaries and football hooligan groups) and Salafi extremists by state actors, through brokerage and patronage networks, have so far helped to pacify and moderate these actors, preventing them from committing violent acts. However, in the long term, these strategies may be dangerous by increasing the vulnerability of the whole state system.

Beyond the state, Parts II and III also provide ample evidence that any given actor can be portrayed as influencing society in the direction of either vulnerability or resilience, depending on the local context and perspectives. One example is the education system in North Macedonia. On the one hand, segregated education in divided communities creates fertile ground for extremist ideas by locking teachers and students into a narrow-minded perspective with negative stereotypes and prejudices shaping their outlooks about others. At the same time, the education sector is portrayed as a key pillar for developing critical thinking among young people, and making them less vulnerable to the narratives of extremist groups – if educators are sufficiently informed and equipped to take on such constructive roles.

Policy implications

Given that P/CVE is primarily a policy-driven field, we feel compelled to end this book with a few brief considerations for national and international policy-makers and practitioners derived from the case study findings:

- Ethno-political or sectarian manifestations of violent extremism are as relevant as religiously inspired or expressed violent extremism. Therefore, on the governmental level, national P/CVE strategies and international funding schemes should pay equal attention to all forms of identity-based radicalisation, which often develop cumulatively in reaction to one another.

- While "radicalism" as such is not a societal problem (in fact, it can be a force for positive social change), violent extremist narratives and behaviours should be prevented and countered. Therefore, P/CVE policies should prioritise programmes that prevent and mitigate violence, focusing on behavioural change rather than "deradicalising" people's beliefs and ideologies.
- In post-war societies across the Western Balkans and MENA, there is a high level of trauma, competitive victimisation, and mutual stigmatisation. Only a conflict-sensible, contextually based approach to P/CVE can contribute to reducing the risk of alienating stakeholders and opening a space for meaningful and effective dialogue. Where post-war legacies of inter-group antagonism serve as a breeding ground for ethno-political, sectarian, or religious extremism, P/CVE needs to be combined with programmes for dealing with the past and reconciliation.
- P/CVE strategies are often perceived to be driven by external priorities and agendas, especially when national governments are fragmented and lack a common vision of the problem and its solutions. In order to have a joint approach to prevention and resilience-building, whole-of-government strategies fostering a coherent approach to prevention are required. In order to mitigate the risks of donor dependency, national and local actors should drive and own the design and implementation of P/CVE programmes, especially when these are supported through external funding.
- Given that the role of the state is not always "neutral", and can contribute to fuelling violent extremism in society, it cannot be given sole responsibility for P/CVE implementation. For example, while recently launched national P/CVE strategies such as those in Lebanon and North Macedonia have effectively adopted an inter-ministerial approach, they still insufficiently include non-state actors such as faith-based leaders and civil society practitioners. While it is difficult to circumvent the state completely, international P/CVE programmes should look for counterparts at the community level. This is especially relevant for local religious leaders (both formal and informal) who hold trust and legitimacy in their community. In doing so, one should be aware of the entanglement of religious actors in formal sectarian institutions, as they may be complicit with repressive or corruption-ridden political systems. In supporting local faith-based leaders, a discreet and light-footed approach is required to avoid delegitimising their role if they become perceived as pursuing a foreign agenda.
- Given the important role of civil society actors in preventing violent extremism, P/CVE initiatives should involve CSOs and media outlets as agents of resilience. They should also support locally led development programmes to empower youth, women, and marginalised groups within society in order to create space for the emergence of alternative and non-sectarian elites. However, similarly to religious leaders, local CSOs aligned with international P/CVE policies and receiving foreign funding can be perceived as detached from, or misaligned with, local realities and national

priorities. Therefore, any effort to channel programmes through CSOs should also seek to strengthen multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships across the state and society.

- Indeed, violent extremism emerges at the interface between intra- and inter-group dynamics, and therefore its prevention can only be sustained through the cooperation of multiple sectors within and between communities. In other words, an actor-centric approach to P/CVE requires the combined efforts of state, religious, and civil society leaders – working together for the security, well-being, prosperity, and resilience of their communities.

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