

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is a new policy paradigm that aims to address structural and social conditions enabling recruitment and radicalization to violent extremism. Unlike counterterrorism approaches that rely on broad security legislation or heavily-militarized responses, CVE focuses on prevention by trying to alleviate underlying causes of injustice -- endemic poverty, ethnic and religious tensions, and political marginalization -- with the goal of building more conflict-resilient communities.

CVE prioritizes a role for civil society, as these organizations are often viewed by communities as more credible than local governments or law enforcement. They are also better positioned to identify local-level drivers of violent extremism, and more suited to work with neglected groups through education, interfaith dialogues, and arts and sports activities. Ultimately, civil society empowers communities to better deflect extremist agendas.

It is important to note that there is no consensus on any one set of factors explaining an individual's participation in VE or the prevalence of VE within a country. Furthermore, VE is very context-specific, so the factors that are linked to VE in one country may not hold in another; moreover, the factors associated with VE globally do not necessarily apply to a specific context and vice versa.

Understanding the factors associated with violent extremism is important to counter it. I classified the factors into four categories:

- Factors associated with an individual's participation in violent extremism.
- Factors associated with societies experiencing violent extremism.
- Factors associated with countries of origin of transnational terrorism.
- Factors associated with popular support for violent extremism.

Looking at the factors associated with individual participation in violent extremism, we found that there is very little empirical evidence which supports a causal link between violent extremism and low socioeconomic status (1). However, according to a survey of Kenyan al Shabaab members, 65 percent said that government repression plays a major role in the emergence of violent extremism in youth social networks. More importantly, one of the most important drivers of individuals into violent extremism is the lack of critical thinking in teaching methods at schools. Lack of critical thinking has a direct relation with the spread of violent extremism because many who lack critical thinking cannot recognize the complexity of their religion (2).

What makes one society more exposed to violent extremism than another one? Several researchers have found that societies in which civil liberties are protected are less exposed to violent extremism. Countries where civil liberties are restricted and experience human rights violation are more at risk to experience violent extremism (3).

Why do some countries produce transnational terrorists while other countries do not? Researchers have found that democratic institutions reduce the likelihood that a country will produce transnational terrorists. In addition, a country with low civil liberties is more likely to contribute to transnational terrorism, while a country's GDP is no way correlated with its likelihood of producing transnational terrorists.

What are the factors associated with popular support for violent extremism? Poverty is not correlated with public support for violent extremism. However, those who believe that Islam is under threat are more likely to support terrorism while very poor respondents in Muslim countries were less likely to support terrorism (4).

The factor that our project targeted was lack of critical thinking: violent extremists (as compared to non-violent radicals) are less willing to delve into their religion and recognize its complexity. Therefore, we aimed to promote critical thinking in Madrassas (5) because research on CVE confirms that there is a link between engaging in violent extremism and lack of critical thinking skills (6).

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6. Jamie Bartlett & Carl Miller. The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization, Terrorism and Political Violence. (2012). 24:1, 1-21. [https://www.wageningenur.nl/upload\\_m/5/a/b/2b9eddd0-1c48-404b-8e5e-0bdc3cebe04\\_Bijlage%201%20Understanding%20radicalisation%20\(III\)%20-%2024%20march%202015.pdf](https://www.wageningenur.nl/upload_m/5/a/b/2b9eddd0-1c48-404b-8e5e-0bdc3cebe04_Bijlage%201%20Understanding%20radicalisation%20(III)%20-%2024%20march%202015.pdf)