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Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism:
A Conceptual Framework

PUBLICATIONS

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PAVE Publications

Published by Trinity College Dublin and Berghof Foundation, Berlin. February 2021.

This publication is part of WP2 of the PAVE project, led by Trinity College Dublin.

Authors: Maja Halilovic Pastuovic, Gillian Wylie, Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, Johanna-Maria Hülzer, Véronique Dudouet

Design: EURICE GmbH

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1. Introduction

The PAVE project (Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Western Balkans and MENA) aims to tackle the issue of radicalisation by examining its root causes and driving factors. The project is based on a comparative assessment of local communities and features of vulnerability or resilience to violent extremism in seven case study countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Tunisia, Lebanon and Iraq.

By generating new knowledge about the role of local communities in fuelling and/or preventing radicalisation dynamics, PAVE will provide valuable insights into the tools and mechanisms that EU and other stakeholders can use in addressing violent extremisms.

A particular focus will placed on the following four thematic areas:

- Overlapping extremisms (the interface between religious, political and ethnic/sectarian extremisms)
- The interaction between religious and state institutions and actors
- Online and offline narratives and de-radicalisation
- Transnational interactions, including impact on and from Europe

This paper presents the theoretical framework for the PAVE project. Following the logic of the project, the next section will focus on a conceptual overview of radicalisation and violent extremisms, navigating through the theoretical complexity of the main terms that the consortium will work with in the project. While the section deals with the main overarching terminology only, a full glossary of all key terms explored in the PAVE project is available on the project _website_. Section 3 of the paper provides an insight into religious, political, ethnic and sectarian extremisms, as related to the Western Balkans and MENA, highlighting that these overlapping manifestations of extremism cannot be researched as separate entities from one another due to their complex interconnections. The following Section 4 explores the drivers of vulnerability to violent extremism. Firstly, it provides a general overview of the drivers of vulnerability related to micro, meso and macro factors. Secondly, it focuses on drivers most relevant for the PAVE project, namely, online radicalising narratives, community vulnerability as related to the interplay between state and religious actors, and transnational dynamics. Gender as a cross-cutting dimension is also discussed in this section. The final part of the paper focuses on community resilience to violent extremisms. Firstly, it provides an overview of the literature on the concept of resilience. Secondly, mirroring Section 4, it focuses on factors relevant for community resilience within the PAVE context – online and offline de-radicalisation, cooperation between the state and religious institutions and positive transnational dynamics. In the same manner as Section 4, Section 5 concludes with a focus on the gender dimension of community resilience.

This theoretical framework paper is based on three baseline studies finalised in September/October 2020 in relation to three PAVE focus clusters[1] – cumulative extremism, the interface of state and religious institutions, and online and offline de-radicalisation – namely, D2.2 Baseline study on Cluster

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[1] While PAVE focuses on four themes, the fieldwork is organised around three main clusters.

A: Cumulative Extremism conducted by the University of Uppsala, authored by Luís Martínez Lorenzo, Desirée Nilsson and Isak Svensson; D2.3 Baseline study on Cluster B: Interactions between states and religious institutions, conducted by the Foundation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, authored by Marie Kortam with support from case study country leaders; and D2.4 Baseline study on Cluster C: Online and offline (de)radicalisation, conducted by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and Université de Sfax in Tunisia.

The glossary of key terms for PAVE *(available here)* was compiled collectively by the consortium. A first consultation round was conducted using a Google spreadsheet with various definitions for core concepts which are currently used. We sought to spark an engagement with these definitions within the consortium and to elicit debate. At a dedicated session at the Methodology Workshop in September 2020, the terms were discussed in sub-groups, critically reviewed and expanded. These discussions, as well as the baseline studies on PAVE's focus clusters (cumulative extremism; interface of state and religious institutions; and online and offline (de)radicalisation narratives), were the basis for the glossary as it now stands. The glossary can be perceived as a general agreement on the key terms by all partners. However, it also needs to be treated as a work in progress – one step in a constant exchange of meaning among partners that include various regional, linguistic and research focus differences. The PAVE consortium acknowledges that some definitions might need to be added, re-negotiated, expanded, focused or differentiated to fit the individual contexts. PAVE partners perceive this ongoing process of 'fine-tuning' as a fundamental element of doing research in a collaborative consortium.

2. Radicalisation and violent extremism: a conceptual overview

It is widely accepted that the current research does not provide conceptual clarity with respect to the terms radicalisation and violent extremism. What we know is that radicalisation is not a new phenomenon and waves of its violent expressions have been present historically. While today, radicalisation is normalised as having a negative connotation, from a historical perspective the term was also used to refer to progressive ideas. For some scholars, radicalisation started with the French Revolution in 1789. In other parts of the world, radicalisation was used as a concept of 'othering' those who promoted ideas that challenged the status quo. For instance, during and in the aftermath of the American Civil War, which ended in 1865, 'Radical Republicans' were members of Congress who promoted emancipation of the slaves and believed in 'equal rights and opportunities for the freed blacks'.[2] In other words, ideas that are radical in one context may be liberal or even conservative in another.

The connection between the concepts of radicalisation and violent extremism, however, is relatively new. The concept of radicalisation was embraced by European officials in 2004 in response to the 9/11

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[2] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Radical-Republican

attacks in general and the Madrid train bombings[3] in particular. Islamist terrorism had been recognised as an external threat up to that point (Crone 2016), the Atocha train bombing was particularly significant as it was the first attack where the perpetrators did not come from abroad but were born and raised in Europe. This raised a number of questions for European officials, such as why these individuals would attack their own compatriots and why they were attracted to extremist ideologies. The officials started looking for a root cause of such radical behaviour, initiating a discourse on the process of radicalisation that focused on vulnerable individuals whose vulnerability needs to be identified and redirected away from involvement with extremist ideologies and violence.

As a consequence of this episode, two issues arose. Firstly, the concept of radicalisation became disproportionally focused on Islam and Muslim populations, leading to an erroneous conflation which to date has not been fully discarded. While homegrown political violence related to groups such as Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) or the Irish Republican Army (IRA) had dominated discussions in the literature on terrorism over previous decades, policy-makers have shifted their focus predominantly towards Islam since the Madrid attacks. There is a possible change on the horizon, with more attention being given to the far-right extremist scene (FRE) lately (RAN 2019).

Secondly, the measures which the EU started to develop as counterterrorism strategies pushed the EU into the realm of prevention. Historically, terrorist activities within the EU were considered to be crimes and were tackled through criminal law. The focus on prevention redirected the EU approach beyond traditional security-oriented methods of policing and intelligence. By conflating prevention and security, the EU's counter-terrorism policies entered uncharted territory and became enmeshed with a number of societal issues such as integration and social cohesion (Coolsaet 2019). Over the past fifteen years, the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE/CVE) has been developed by a fast-growing community of academics, policy advisers and diverse experts (ranging from psychologists to criminologists). At the same time, the critique of PVE/CVE has been fierce, with the field being accused of framing Muslim populations as 'suspect communities', providing tools for governments to profile and screen populations, leading to civil right abuses, and in general creating a misunderstanding of political conflicts and violent action, as pointed out above (Kudnani 2014).

While taking into account the contested nature of the concept, the PAVE project presents a definition of radicalisation below that will be used by the consortium. Definitions of other important concepts are also presented, including extremism, violent extremism, and reciprocal/cumulative/overlapping extremisms.

2.1 Radicalisation

The European Union (EU) defines radicalisation as "a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism within the meaning of the Directive on combating terrorism, to reach a

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[3] The Madrid train bombings (known as 11-M in Spain) happened on 11 March 2004.

specific political or ideological purpose" (European Commission[4]). As such, the term radicalisation is predominately used to describe the *process* towards extremism and extremist behaviour.

The term is well-established in the social movement literature, where it is used in a more general sense, describing shifts towards more extreme aspirations as well as tactical shifts towards more contentious methods deployed by social movements. For example, radicalisation is defined by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2003, p. 69) as "the expansion of collective action frames to more extreme agendas and the adoption of more transgressive forms of contention". Sometimes, it is used to describe shifts from nonviolent to violent means of manifesting aspirations. Radicalisation is then seen as "the process through which a social movement organization (SMO) shifts from predominantly nonviolent tactics of contention to tactics that include violent means, as well as the subsequent process of contention maintaining and possibly intensifying the newly introduced violence" (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015, p. 11). As described by Della Porta and Diani (2020, p. 7), radicalisation refers to "the shift of opposition movement organization toward the adoption of political violence".

A related term used in conflict research is 'escalation', which has been used to define shifts from nonviolent to violent forms of conflict (Mitchell 1981), although the term also has wider interpretations (Kriesberg 1998). A noteworthy difference from the term radicalisation is that 'escalation' tends to refer to dyadic and relational shifts – the two sides in a conflict – whereas radicalisation is predominately used to refer to shifts on one side. This difference may stem from different academic emphases and approaches: social movement theory, in which the term radicalisation is central, tends to theorise social conflicts from the perspective of the opposition, with the main focus on the movement, whereas conflict studies tend to analyse conflicts as a system.

Radicalisation can be used to describe the process of adopting extremist ideas, a notion that has also been described as 'ideological radicalisation'. However, as Crone (2016, p. 590) argues, "in a liberal society, where freedom of speech and opinion—within specific limits defined by the law—is a fundamental right, ideological radicalisation is not in itself a problem, but on the contrary a right". Therefore, a case could be made for restricting the focus solely to the process of adopting a violent extremist behaviour, also known as "behavioral radicalisation" (Crone 2016, p. 590). On the other hand, a more inclusive definition of radicalisation can also open up possibilities to explore how the different parts relate to each other. An inclusive definition would encompass emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Here, radicalisation means **"change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup"** (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, p. 416). The PAVE project will endorse this definition, stressing the importance of the shift in position towards **acceptance of violence**.

2.2 Extremism

In a general sense, extremism as a concept describes a phenomenon that occurs at the margins of, and in opposition to, a centre. Thus, extremist ideologies should be thought about as positions of

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[4] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/counter-terrorism_en

individuals or groups that define themselves in contrast to a more moderate core. The definition of extremism is therefore dependent on the prevalent attitudes of a society, which set the context and boundaries in which extremism can be conceptualised. Ideological extremism can thus be defined "in relation to the majority opinion of the affected population on a key ideological dimension" (Walter 2017, p. 16). Understanding extremism in this way implies that extremism will be context-specific to different types of societies and will therefore vary in time and space, and one position can be considered as moderate in one context but extreme in another. While extremism can, of course, be related to any ideological dimension in a given society, our interest within the context of the PAVE project focuses primarily on the overall principles of governance of a society and the main methods for achieving change. In the PAVE project proposal, we define extremism in terms of "any ideology that opposes a society's core values and principles" (PAVE 2020). It is, of course, a matter for debate what these core values and principles really are, but the emerging scholarly consensus tends to define extremism in terms of opposition to democratic values and institutions, pluralism and human rights.

In Neumann's conceptualisation, extremism relates to aspirations of racial and religious supremacy. In the context of liberal democracies, this could be applied to "various forms of racial or religious supremacy, or ideologies that deny basic human rights or democratic principles" (Neumann 2013, p. 874-875). Based on this, distinctions can be made between political extremism and religious extremism (Aroua 2018, p. 5). However, while Neumann's conceptualisation would include religious, ethno-nationalist and right-wing extremisms, it would not include left-wing extremism, where the dominant social groups are classes and any supremacy would be defined subsequently in class terms. A more general definition of extremism is therefore the following, used by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2020): **"Extremism is the advocacy of a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based 'in-group' over all 'out-groups', and propagates a dehumanising 'othering' mind-set that is antithetical to pluralism and the universal application of Human Rights. […] They may do this through non-violent and more subtle means, as well as through violent or explicit means. Extremism can be advocated by state and non-state actors alike."** This will be the definition used by the PAVE consortium.

Some authors conclude that subscribing to radical ideologies is not necessarily a precondition for violence, at least in the case of Islamist violent extremism, and that not all of those engaged in violence are ideological fundamentalists (Crone 2016, p. 592; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Sageman 2004, p. 117). However, ideology is relevant for understanding violent extremisms, as extremist groups are distinguishable from one another by their ideology, which shapes the content of their message, their strategies and goals (European Commission 2017, p. 11) and, although joining a group is often a social phenomenon, the intensification of the faith and beliefs is a process characterised by active personal learning about the new faith or ideology (Sageman 2004, p. 117). According to Berger (2017), there are three important elements of an extremist ideology: content, distribution and identity. The content refers to the texts employed by the organisation and the values they claim to represent. For the content to resonate and attract someone, it must appeal at an emotional and affective level. Distribution refers to the channels of communication, or how the movement's ideas and values are transmitted. Finally, identity is a description of an in-group, based on features such as race, religion or

nationality, which is opposed to an out-group (Berger 2017). Overall, extremist ideologies develop a collective identity, guide mobilisation and justify violence (European Commission 2017, p. 12).

2.3 Violent Extremism

The concept 'violent extremism' is often interchanged with terrorism, political violence and extreme violence. The Australian National Counter-Terrorism Committee Framework (2020) defines violent extremism as "the use or support of violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals".[5] This definition is commonly cited in articles and reports on the topic of violent extremism, so there seems to be significant consensus on this conceptualisation.

Adding the term 'violent' to extremism is done in order to narrow down the category of actors, recognising that, within a movement, there are individuals and groups holding extremist positions that justify violence, but those who actually carry it out are often only a minority.

This term is often used to describe a broader set of diverse approaches to violence: in particular, the justification of violence, the support of violent actors, and the use of violent means. There are obviously quite important differences between these approaches to violence, and their internal relationship – how justification of violence leads to the use of violence, for example – is certainly something that has been the focus of scholarly discussion.

Nevertheless, while violent extremism does serve to make the concept under scrutiny more precise, it also introduces a set of theoretical questions, as 'violence' is a much-debated concept in and of itself. What is meant by 'violence' is commonly not defined in research on violent extremism. Previous research seems to implicitly understand it as direct violence, leaving aside broader (and possibly more elusive) conceptualisations of violence, including 'structural violence' (Galtung 1969) and 'cultural violence' (Galtung 1990).

Moreover, it is commonly not defined whether the occurrence of violence should be seen as a dichotomy or, rather, as a continuum. Is it, for example, enough that any violence occurs for an extremist movement to be classified as violent extremist? If it is thought of as a continuum, what would count as the threshold for the use of violence? Would threats of violence, instead of actual violence, be considered as violent? And what does 'armed' action mean? While conflict research has by now developed quite strict operationalisations on the use of violence (for examples, see UCDP, CoW, MID[6]), what is seen as 'violence' is largely left undefined in the research on extremism.

Overall, the PAVE consortium views extremism and violent extremisms in *opposition to* **a democratic centre/society and its core values, creating constructions of 'in' and 'out' groups** where in some contexts there is a **radical rupture with the existing social contract.**

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[5] https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/national-security/countering-extremism-and-terrorism/countering-violent-extremism-(cve)

[6] Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Correlates of War (CoW), Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID).

2.4 Cumulative extremisms

One important point of departure for the PAVE project is the recognition that extremism should not be studied in isolation and that several forms of extremism can be present at the same time, hence the term extremisms (*in the plural*). The multiple forms of extremisms can manifest themselves in different ways, and two concepts are discussed from the outset of the PAVE project: reciprocal and cumulative.

The core part of reciprocal extremisms/radicalisation is the need for any movement to use a significant other in order to mobilise: "Because victimisation and demonisation work well together, extremists are in a mutually beneficial relationship. To tell a coherent story, the victim needs a perpetrator as much as the perpetrator needs a victim. In extremism, this leads to an effect called reciprocal radicalisation" (Ebner 2017, p. 10).

This concept resonates with the idea that at the heart of violent extremist ideology there is a description of an in-group based on race, religion or nationality, with a corresponding description of an opposing out-group, and that a movement becomes extremist when it believes that the in-group can never be successful unless it engages in hostile acts against the perceived out-group (Berger, 2017).

On the other hand, the out-group defined by each violent extremist group is not restricted to the violent extremist members of other groups, but extends to broader segments of society. For instance, far-right extremists not only portray Islamist violent extremists as their enemies, but their narrative also sees the elite, the broader Muslim population and immigrants as part of the out-group. Similarly, Islamist extremists not only define far-right extremists as the out-group, but speak more broadly about Muslims and non-Muslims, or believers and non-believers.

Reciprocal extremism is hence used to define situations where different forms of extremisms feed into and react to each other. The antagonistic relationship between different forms of extremisms is manifested through the definition of the out-group ('othering') where extremists can play into each other's narratives and activate and maintain stereotypes of the other side, and reinforce threat perceptions in the sense that one form of extremism can create increased levels of fear and insecurity, which will prove a point that another form of extremism may have been making about their particular group being under attack. This can enhance the sense of victimhood, which is often part and parcel of the extremists' world-view. In addition, this will help to legitimise violence, by providing credibility to arguments made for the justification of the use of violence. Reciprocal extremism can therefore lead to spiralling actions of revenge and counter-attack.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the level of reciprocity may vary, and one type of extremism may induce another without necessarily the reverse dynamic occurring. The term 'reciprocal' can be problematic to use in such situations where one form of extremism affects another, but there are no mutual processes of reinforcement. There may therefore be reasons to question an assumption that reciprocal radicalisation/extremism affects both sides in an equal manner (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013, p. 9).

The term 'cumulative extremism' was coined by the scholar Roger Eatwell, who defined it as "the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms [of extremism]" (Eatwell 2006, p. 205). The term is used as a synonym for reciprocal extremism, as it tries to describe a similar phenomenon of dynamic interactions between extremist groups. The concept has gained a lot of traction both within and outside academia, but the discussion around it still suffers from some lack of clarity as to precisely what it entails (Busher and Macklin 2015, Bartlett and Birdwell 2013, p. 12).

There is also a degree of conceptual disparity in the field, as slightly different terms are used interchangeably for the same phenomenon: *cumulative extremism* (Carter 2019, Carter 2017, Allchorn 2020, Busher and Macklin 2015, Eatwell 2006, Feldman 2012, Feldman and Littler 2015); *reciprocal radicalisation* (Lee and Knott 2020, Ebner 2017, Allchorn 2020, Macklin 2020); and less commonly *cumulative radicalisation* (Bartlett and Birdwell 2013); *interactive radicalisation* (Virchow 2020, Macklin 2020); *re-active co-radicalisation* (Pratt 2015) and *tit-for-tat radicalisation*, the latter defined as a "reciprocal relationship between two or more extremist groups that actively feed off each other's messages and ideologies" (Jackson and Feldman 2011, p. 75).

The main focus of research on cumulative extremisms (regardless of precisely which term is used) is **"how the confrontational relationship between opposing social groups can radicalise those involved, possibly resulting in 'spirals of violence' and causing wider trends of social polarisation"** (Carter 2017, p. 7). PAVE will focus on this definition. The point of departure is the assumption that there may be "a 'symbiotic relationship' between ideologically opposed forms of violent extremism; a relationship that sustains actors who would otherwise struggle to exist independently of one another" (Macklin 2020, p. 4).

The concept as such is broad and includes different types of actors and different units of analysis, but specific studies often have different empirical focuses. There are three main types of actors that can stand in a reciprocal relationship: individuals, movements (or sometimes organisations) and communities (Carter 2019). Thus, actions by one violent extremist social group may lead to increased participation on another fringe, it may lead to shifts towards (more) violent tactics on an organisational level, or it may lead to increased polarisation on the community level.

Cumulative extremism has been used to describe a structure of reciprocal relationships between antagonistic movements on opposite side of an ideological spectrum, for example, far-right movements versus jihadist movements. It should be analytically separated from a different phenomenon where two rival extremist groups within the same ideological fold compete over support or legitimacy from the same identity-based (i.e. ethnic-sectarian) constituency. An example of this is the in-fighting and competition between al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East. In Western Balkan countries, for example, domestic divisions and tensions remain acute, and social, political and economic conditions are ripe for the spread of radicalism. These countries are still struggling with the legacies of the war, which continue to fuel ethnic polarisation through divergent interpretations of history, selective forms of remembrance and different and contested notions of victimhood. Impoverished citizens are fed narratives of victimisation of their own ethnic group through media

controlled by the ethnic elites. The context as such provides a fertile ground for oppositional ethno-religious extremisms based on competitive polarisation.

2.5   Overlapping extremisms

In addition to the concept of cumulative (or reciprocal) extremisms, the PAVE project aims to study a distinct type of interplay between different sources of violent extremisms. Indeed, we will use the term 'overlapping extremisms' to depict contexts where socio-political and ideological/religious drivers of radicalisation seem to reinforce each other in parallel rather than in opposition to one another.

This is the case in the MENA region in particular, where violent extremist movements sometimes draw on several overlapping and mutually reinforcing sources of mobilisation at once – based on various forms of social group identities as well as on ideological trajectories. In Lebanon and Iraq, for example, local violence rooted in socio-economic disparities, local political dynamics and sectarian polarisation seems to be fed by and to feed into transnational violent extremism that draws on radical interpretations of religion. Overlapping extremisms manifest themselves in the mutual influences/impact between religious-inspired (or justified) violent extremism and sectarian-political extremism in a divided/polarised social space. Another illustration of overlapping mobilisation patterns is the mutual impact between locally driven extremism in Lebanon (as in Saida and Tripoli, more particularly the Bab el-Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen series of battles) and extremism that is driven by transnational factors (the war in Syria, the calls for the establishment of a transnational Caliphate, etc.).

Other examples can be found in the Western Balkans. For instance, Islamist preachers have appealed to religion but also to notions of nationalism among ethnic Albanians in the diaspora, recruiting individuals to fight along the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (Spahiu 2020). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the legacy of the conflict led to a segregated education system that uses an ideological and ethno-centric curriculum to feed into ethno-radicalisation of youth.[7]

The concept of overlapping extremisms hence describes **a multi-layered extremist structure where different sources of extremist mobilisation (religion, tribal ties, ethnicity, political affinity, etc.) serve to reinforce each other cumulatively, but within the same movement or community.**

3. Interface between religious, political and ethnic and sectarian extremisms in the Western Balkans and MENA

The section below provides an overview of religious, political and ethnic and sectarian extremism in the Western Balkans and MENA. It is important to highlight that we cannot research religious

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[7] http://www.gated.ie/

extremism, political extremism and ethnic and sectarian extremism as separate from one another, as they overlap both conceptually and practically. In the Western Balkans and MENA, they are interconnected in unique ways in each country context. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnicity as connected to religion played a part in the 1990s conflict. At the end of the conflict, the same ethno-religious entanglement was institutionalised and constitutionalised by the Dayton Peace Agreement, causing current Bosnian society to be politically polarised and providing fertile ground for further ethnic and religious tensions.

3.1   Religious extremism

Religion is often seen as a driver of violence and is usually mixed with ideology in public discourse (European Commission 2017, p. 12). Violent extremists have relied on religious justifications for violence, based on selected texts and interpretations of their respective religions, and can be found in all faith traditions. In PAVE, we focus on Islam as well as Christianity. In relation to the Western Balkans, this mostly relates to extreme forms of Islam that emerged in Bosnia in a form of parajamaat.[8] Similar radical versions of Islam, which were targeted specifically at the Kosovar population, mostly via online messages, and emphasising solidarity with Muslim 'brothers', have influenced over 400 Kosovans to leave Kosovo and become foreign fighters for Syria and Iraq. In Serbia, religion-based 'brotherhood' between Serbia and Russia led around 300 Serbians to become foreign fighters in Ukraine. In North Macedonia, the religious tension between ethnic Macedonians practising Eastern Orthodoxy and ethnic Albanians practising Islam is ongoing, creating fertile ground for religious extremism on both sides. In MENA, there is a different interplay but also increased tensions between different religious communities as well as within the communities themselves.

Modern Islamist extremism has emerged from a series of critical events which took place in 1979: Iran's religious revolution, the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the occupation of Mecca, the first time in Saudi Arabia's history that a Wahhabi movement turned against the establishment. In solidarity with their Muslim brothers fighting in Afghanistan, Muslims rallied to their cause. Marginalised elites, mostly from the Hijaz region in Saudi Arabia, created a global network of charities focusing on inter-Muslim aid, thus facilitating the recruitment of foreign fighters in Afghanistan during the 1980s (Hegghammer 2010, p. 56; Williams 2011). This task was coordinated by the Afghan Services Bureau (Maktab al-Khidamat/MAK), an organisation established by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam (Williams 2011) that can be seen as the precursor to al-Qaeda. The rise of religious violence that followed, peaking with the 9/11 attacks, marked a shift towards a phenomenon described as the Religious Wave of terrorism (Rapoport 2017; Gerges 2005).

With respect to Islam, radicalisation is usually associated with the Salafi/Wahhabi school of thought (PAVE 2020). Salafism represents the "… idea that the most authentic and true Islam is found in the lived example of the early, righteous generations of Muslims, known as the Salaf, who were closest in both time and proximity to the Prophet Muhammad" (Hamid and Dar 2016, p. 8). Salafists can also be

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[8] https://berghof-foundation.org/search/results?q=sead

considered as fundamentalist as they promote "particular habits of the first Muslims, such as dressing like the Prophet (by cuffing their trousers at ankle-length) or brushing their teeth like the Prophet (with a natural teeth cleaning twig called a miswak)" (ibid.) Salafists are often seen as "ultraconservatives". Kaya (2020, p. 5) explains that: "Radicalisation in the form of resorting to the past, religion culture, nativism and ethno-nationalism is a youth revolt against society, articulated on an Islamic religious narrative of jihad, or an ethno-nationalist form of nativism and white supremacism."

It is important to stress also that Salafism is not necessarily violent. Salafism in Saudi Arabia was influenced by the global hakimiyyah/ikhwan theory of Qutb. There is a moment in history that is under-researched and relates to the Arab Cold War (radical pan-Arabism versus monarchies, 1950s-1960s). When Ikhwan were expelled from Egypt, Saudi Arabia gave them a haven. It was there where the two ideas (Qurbi Ikhwan and Wahhabism) merged and planted the seeds of the now familiar Salafi jihadism (Ehteshami, Rasheed and Beaujouan 2021).

Another commonly used term to denote Islamist radicalisation is jihadism. According to Shadi Hamid and Tashid Dar (2016, p. 8), this is: "driven by the idea that jihad (religiously-sanctioned warfare) is an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) incumbent upon all Muslims, rather than a collective obligation carried out by legitimate representatives of the Muslim community (*fard kifaya*), as it was traditionally understood in the pre-modern era. They justify this by arguing that Muslim leaders today are illegitimate and do not command the authority to ordain justified violence. In the absence of such authority, they argue, every able-bodied Muslim should take up the mantle of jihad." Jihadisation has been understood as a process of recruiting, indoctrinating and convincing individuals or groups to be part of jihad and commit violent acts. However, this definition of the term is controversial, as it does not cover the full meaning of jihad.

Literally, jihad means 'to strive', 'to struggle', 'to exert oneself'. It refers to 'striving in the path of Allah' (*jihad fi sabil Allah*). There are several forms of jihad. The term 'greater jihad' (*jihad al-Akbar*) is sometimes used to refer to a Muslim individual's self-struggle to do what is right and good according to Islam (jihad of the heart, understood as the struggle against one's own instincts, sinful inclinations and temptations). There is also the 'jihad of the tongue' (*jihad al-lissan* or *da'wah*), which means speaking on behalf of the good and forbidding evil, and *jihad al-kabir*, meaning the 'spiritual/intellectual quest' to spread knowledge of divine revelation. Far more common than this interpretation of jihad as non-violent spiritual struggle is the use of the term for the warlike activities described above. In this sense, jihad is used to refer to the collective or individual armed struggle and the propagation of Islam against infidels (*kufr*). This is also referred to as jihad of the sword (*jihad as-sayf*) (Schmid 2011, p. 651). This form of jihad is understood to be a lesser jihad and a struggle against an open enemy. The Koran clearly defines who is an open enemy. As explained by Rashid (2017):[9]

> "The short answer is that 'open enemy' is not your government, people of another faith or your fellow citizens. Instead, the Koran permits Muslims to fight in this lesser jihad when five

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[9] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/07/08/jihad-is-not-a-dirty-word/

strict conditions are met: self-defense; when they are being persecuted for their faith; have fled their homes and migrated to a different country to preserve peace; are targeted to be killed for their faith; and to protect universal religious freedom. Indeed, the Koran 22:41 specifically commands Muslims to engage in this lesser jihad to protect 'Churches, Synagogues, Temples, and Mosques' from attack."

Islam is prevalent in all PAVE contexts and its extreme religious form, as well as religious tensions uniquely expressed in different settings, will be researched. It is important to stress that in both the Western Balkans and MENA, Islamic religious extremism will be researched in a broader context. Issues related to patron regimes, state-society relations, consolidation of the nation-state, approach to nation-building, political economy, authoritarianism and most recently globalisation will be explored.

In addition to Islam, Eastern Orthodox Christianity plays an important role in the Western Balkans; this applies to all four countries PAVE will focus on. In Bosnia, Eastern Orthodoxy is the main religion in Republika Srpska[10] and, in tandem with Serbian ethnicity, is a cause of cultural polarisation and territorial segregation. It is the main religious orientation also in Serbia, where 85% of the population are Orthodox Christians (Đurić et al. 2014). The driving force behind the separation of Serbia and Kosovo, the religious tension between the countries, can be traced to the famous Battle of Kosovo which took place in 1389 between an army led by Serbian Prince Lazar and an invading Ottoman army. The battle was fought on the Kosovo Field just outside the current capital Pristina and was won by the Ottoman army. The battle is historically understood as a defence of Christianity against Islam. Interestingly, both Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch shooter, and Anders Brevik, who committed the Norway attacks, claim inspiration from Serbian nationalism and both refer to the Battle of Kosovo (Halilovic-Pastuovic and Vukic, *forthcoming)*. Finally, as mentioned above, in North Macedonia, ethnic Macedonians practise Eastern Orthodox Christianity while ethnic Albanians practise Islam. When radicalisation processes are at play, tensions arise between the two communities.

One Eastern Orthodox Church that PAVE will focus on is the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). SOC is an autocephalous church in canonical unity with other Orthodox Churches. It has a hierarchical structure, with the Patriarch as its head and the Holy Assembly of Bishops and the Holy Assembly of Synods as the most important governing bodies. The jurisdiction of SOC is divided into 30 dioceses. Dioceses are divided into parishes. The SOC owns and controls church property, funds and endowments, and performs an independent control of its revenues and expenditures.

Within the context of Serbia, the relationship between the SOC and members of groups who are engaged in extreme ethno-nationalist violence, such as certain football supporter groups, is of significance. For instance, members of the football club Red Star Belgrade are called *Delije. Delije*, in the Serbian language, means strong, handsome, powerful men possessing courage and determination. *Delije* have become increasingly interested in Orthodox Christianity since the 1990s. According to Mills

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[10] Republika Srpska (Serbian Cyrillic: Република Српска) is one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the other being the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The two entities were formally separated by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

(2018), 'Delije members were praying collectively at Belgrade's imposing Church of St. Mark and boycotting matches scheduled for the Easter weekend'. Like the Church, Delije are opposed to gay rights and the independence of Kosovo. They also undertake a range of charitable events as part of their Orthodox worldview. For instance, 7,000 spectators attended their annual fundraising concert featuring Serbian pop stars. Their rendition of the national anthem, Bože pravde (God Give Us Justice), provoked a storm of emotion among a crowd who heightened the atmosphere with fares and chants drawn from their own repertoire. The whole affair was blessed by the Bishop of the Ras and Prizren Eparchy belonging to SOC. This complex relationship between the ethno-nationalistic violence and Eastern Orthodox Church will be explored further in PAVE.

In relation to MENA, PAVE will focus on the Maronite Patriarchate, which considers itself the founding body of 'Lebanon' (Articles 9, 10 and 19 of the Constitution). The Maronite Church is officially known as the Maronite Syriac Antioch Patriarchate. The Patriarch is elected by the Maronite bishops and is recognised as the head of the Church and the leader of the community. Only the Pope, who is acknowledged as the supreme Head of the universal Catholic Church, is awarded a higher position. The Vatican is intricately involved in church affairs, including patriarchal elections. In order to gain legitimacy, the Patriarch must receive ecclesiastical communion from the Pope. The Vatican must also be informed immediately of a vacant patriarchal see and subsequent elections. Although canon law may suggest that solely the Synod of Bishops elects the patriarch, it is evident that the Vatican exercises considerable influence on this issue. Like other religious institutions in Lebanon, the Church has its own health, social and educational institutions.

The Maronite Church exerts great influence on the Lebanese Christian parties, through its actions, decisions and finally its political hold, mainly in Mount Lebanon, which hosts the headquarters of the Maronite Patriarchate. Historically, the main choices and decisions taken by the Maronite Church have influenced the creation of the State of Greater Lebanon and thus the formation of the modern Lebanese state. The Patriarch held positions and continued relations with political actors, especially with Christian leaders of the two Maronite groups: the Lebanese forces and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) founded and led by Lebanese President Michel Aoun. Since 2016, the FPM has been led by the son-in-law of the President, Gebran Bassil, known for his racist and radical positions towards refugees in Lebanon. Bassil's harsh discourse towards 'the other' in electoral politics is inspired by the personality of former President Bashir Gemayel. The latter used the same discourse against the Palestinians and Syrians and against Muslims. The purpose of studying this community through the interaction between the FPM and the Maronite Patriarchate is to analyse the drivers of resilience and vulnerability, as well as the factors that can lead to violent extremism, in the political and religious discourse of these two bodies in Lebanon today. Bassil seeks to lead the Christian community in Lebanon and to become the only Christian candidate for the presidency of the Republic. To that end, he frames a discourse that is coherent with the discourse of the Lebanese extreme right, which is based on hatred for all foreigners in Lebanon, especially Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

Figure 1 below presents the three main factors influencing hotspots of religious extremism in the Western Balkans and MENA.

Figure 1: Religious extremism in the Western Balkans and MENA
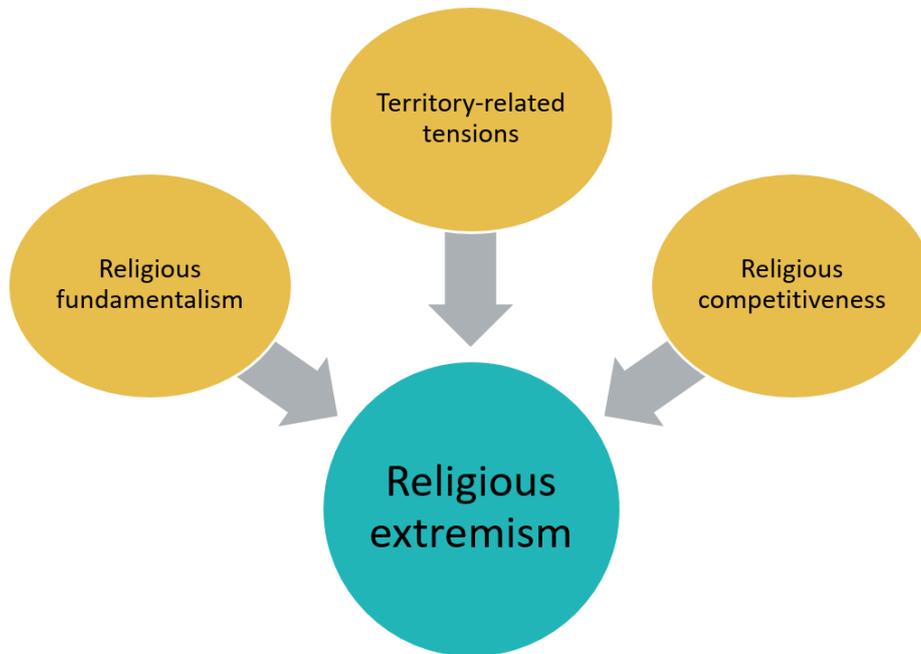
3.2 Political extremism

With regard to political extremism, in the PAVE project we will focus primarily on far-right extremism. This is particularly relevant in the Western Balkans, where a new far-right scene is closely connected to the legacies of the recent conflicts, as described below.

While Rush argued in his article from 1963 that usage of the term 'radical' connotes revolutionary, leftist politics and suggested "extreme right" as a term consistent with the notion of political extremism, various authors still use the terms 'radical' and 'extreme right' (also the 'far right', the 'right wing' and the 'populist right') interchangeably, which often leads to a "terminological quagmire" (Eatwell and Mudde 2004, Mudde 2017). For instance, the German academic world distinguishes strictly between the radical and extreme right. The former are regarded as "opposed to the constitution", whereas the latter are considered "hostile towards the constitution" and can therefore banned (Stojarova 2013, p. 10). Stojarova (2013) includes the radical right, together with the radical left and centre, in the democratic spectrum, while right and left extremism are left out.

Carter (2018) uses these two terms as synonyms and argues that although there are issues of contention among different definitions of right-wing extremism/radicalism, there are two points on which most scholars agree. Firstly, right-wing extremism/radicalism is primarily defined as ideology. Secondly, there is broad agreement that this ideology belongs to the political spectrum of the right. She analysed definitions of right-wing extremism/radicalism by 15 different scholars and concluded that they display five crucial elements (see also Mudde 2002, Eatwell and Mudde 2004, Schmid 2013):

strong state/authoritarianism (7 of them), nationalism (11), racism (12), xenophobia (14) and anti-democracy (13). Other mentioned features of right-wing extremism/radicalism are populism, anti-establishment, free market, economic liberalism and charismatic leadership. Based on her analysis, she suggested a minimal definition of right-wing extremism/radicalism that should include the features of authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and exclusionary or holistic nationalism. She also considers xenophobia, racism and populism to be accompanying characteristics of the concept (Carter 2018, p. 18).

The umbrella term for all these forms of right-wing politics that is becoming more and more popular in the contemporary literature is "populist radical right" (Mudde 2017, Pirro 2015, Akkerman et al. 2016). Mudde (2017) argues that the populist radical right shares an ideology that has at least three main components: nativism, authoritarianism and populism. He defines nativism as a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, which means that the state should be inhabited by members of the native group and that non-native elements represent a threat to the homogeneous nation-state. Authoritarianism delineates the belief in a strictly ordered society, while populism considers society to be divided into two antagonistic groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", where the populist right radicals claim to be "the voice of the (pure) people".

March (2011) agrees with Rush (1963) that the term "radical" is more related to leftist politics and delineates "new European left" as a radical left. He explains that the left is radical in its rejection of the underlying structures of contemporary capitalism and its values and practices. Furthermore, the left identifies economic inequality as the basis of the existing social and political order and advocates alternative economic and political structures for major redistribution of resources. The radical left is not anti-democratic, although it often rejects liberal democracy and globalisation. Nevertheless, the left is internationalist, in terms of both transnational networks and solidarity (March 2011, p. 8-9).

Over the past decades, the far-right extremist scene (FRE) has undergone many changes, including moving from offline to online, embracing gaming culture and increasing its activities via a transnational network. The FRE scene currently extends from the classic type of Nazi group to the alt-right fringe (RAN 2019). Tore Bjørgo and Lars Erik Berntzen have developed a model explaining the different types of FRE ideologies. The model illustrates that current FRE encompasses different ideologies that coexist with more traditional FRE ideologies, such as fascism. For example, some far-right groups embrace cultural nationalism where Muslim culture is seen as backward and repressive. They want Western culture to be protected from Muslim immigration and Islamisation. Those Muslims who are part of Western societies are required to assimilate or return to their homelands. Other groups embrace ethnic nationalism, believing that people of different ethnic groups should not mix. White Europeans and White Americans are seen as having a right to defend their nations from foreign cultures and believe that all foreigners should return to their homelands. In addition to cultural and ethnic nationalism, there exists racial nationalism where the white race is seen as superior and any mixing threatens its survival. Inferior races must be subjugated, deported or exterminated (RAN 2019). In PAVE, we will focus on new right-wing formations in Serbia and Bosnia in particular.

For example, in Serbia, far-right extremist groups have been present since the late 1980s and the start of democratisation and liberalisation of the political and economic system of former Yugoslavia. The wars that followed during the 1990s were a catalyst in the shaping of the Serbian far right since they put (extreme) nationalism high on the political agenda, making it socially acceptable. Another factor that brought about the normalisation of the far right was Serbia's international position during the 1990s. Sanctions and isolation, culminating in the NATO bombing campaign in 1999 and the subsequent secession of Kosovo, increased xenophobia and reproduced strong anti-Western and anti-globalist sentiment among the population in Serbia. Consequently, the Serbian public considered Western policy as unprincipled and unjust, which – combined with the country's economic failures – fostered national frustration (self-victimisation) and strengthened far-right nationalism (Bakić 2013b; Stakić 2015; Džombić 2014).

During the wars of the 1990s, far-right extremists were operating primarily as paramilitary formations, orbiting mostly around the *Serbian Radical Part*y,[11] transforming themselves into various associations and movements after the beginning of the democratic transition in Serbia (2000). After a short period of optimism following Milosevic's fall, a new social context of political and economic transition, with all its shortcomings (corruption, unemployment, etc.), created an atmosphere of social and national frustration for the generations of people who grew up during the 1990s, making them more susceptible to far-right groups, namely *SNP 1389, SNP Naši*, *Zavetnici, Obraz*, *Nacionalni stroj, Krv i cast* and *Srbska akcija* (Bakić 2013b, Stakić 2015; Džombić 2014; Wentholt 2019). They are all registered as either political parties or CSOs, or are not registered as all. The ideology of these far-right movements can be summed up as ethno-nationalism, intolerance toward minorities (ethnic, religious or sexual), anti-liberalism and anti-communism, hostility toward the West, militarism, glorification of war leaders (including war criminals) as national heroes, close ties with the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), Islamophobia, and unification of the 'Serbian territories' (Stakić 2015; Džombić 2014; Barišić 2014). The major division between them is based on their attitudes toward fascism and neo-Nazism. Organisations such as *SNP 1389, SNP Nasi and Zavetnici* declaratively reject fascism and could be labelled as radical ethno-nationalists, while *Obraz*, *Nacionalni stroj, Krv i cast* and *Srbska akcija* are considered either clerical-fascist or neo-Nazi (Stakić 2015).

Obraz was a clerical movement (originating in an Orthodox missionary school) that labelled its ideology as 'St. Sava nationalism' (after the historical founder of the SOC), based on the teachings of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, but almost all of the far-right organisations emphasise religious elements of Serbian identity and include the values promoted by the SOC in their programmes and manifestos (Bakić 2013b; Stakić 2015). For example, *SNP 1389* and *SNP Naši* list the promotion of Orthodox Christianity high on their political agendas. Records of cooperation between the representatives of the SOC and far-right organisations are scarce. However, they often display similar attitudes on the issues of LGBTQ+ rights, the status of Kosovo, EU and NATO membership, the role of Russia, unification of the Serbian territories and reification of war criminals (Barišić 2014).

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[11] Besides SRP, there is another parliamentary party – *Dveri*, which is also considered far-right (Stakić 2015), although some authors dispute that. Bakić (2013b) argues that this party is "highly conservative but not, or at least not yet, a far-right ideological and political movement".

With regard to MENA, far-right extremism is not currently prevalent in the social and political space. In Lebanon, the closest thing to right-wing extremism could be right-wing Lebanese radicalism since that type of nationalism or populism does sometimes manifest itself in violence. Apart from religious extremism, there is no right-wing extremism in Tunisia. Rather, one speaks of "conservative parties", a term that designates Islamist parties such as Ennahdha or *Itilaf Al Karama* (Coalition of Dignity), led by the most conservative elements of *Ennahdha* or the CPR (Congress for the Republic), who are fairly represented in Parliament. There are also a few other political formations not represented in Parliament that are frankly Islamist or populist. This is the case for the legal party called *Ettahrir* (liberation party), but also other conservatives and populists, certainly not represented, but also defending the reference to Sharia in the promulgation of laws, especially those referring to polygamy, adoption, etc. The most representative of these populist political parties is *Al Mahaba*, presided over by Hechmi Hamdi, the owner of a television channel broadcasting from London. Originally from Sidi Bouzid, the city that saw the outbreak of the revolution on 17 December 2010, he is also a former leader of the Islamist trend (now *Ennahdha*). In Iraq, no manifestations of far-right extremism are currently present in the political space.

Figure 2: Components of right-wing political extremism
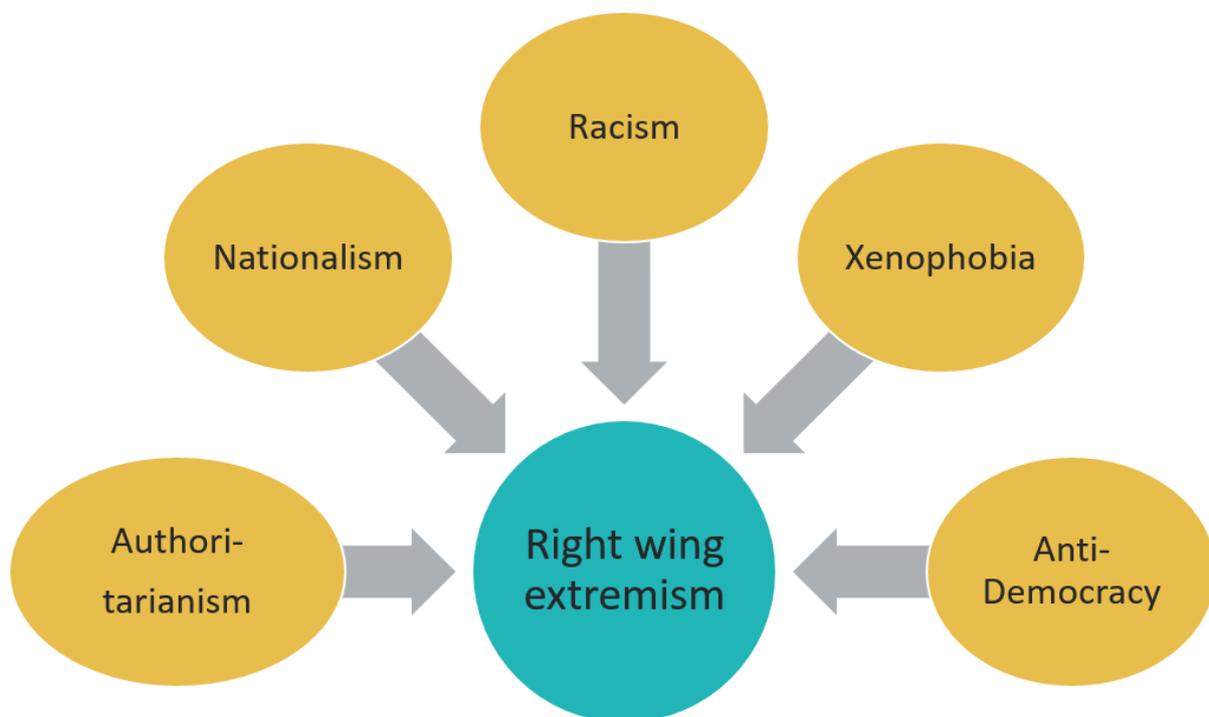
3.3 Ethnic and sectarian extremism

Ethno-nationalist and sectarian extremisms involve the actions of groups or individuals engaged in violent political and nationalistic struggles based on identity, race, culture or ethnic background. In the PAVE context, ethno-nationalist extremism manifests itself strongly in most Western Balkan countries, while sectarian extremism is found in the MENA region. It is important to stress that while ethnic and sectarian forms of extremism are grouped together here, as they are both identity-based, they will not be researched without in-depth understanding of the nuances and unique circumstances of the countries studied. For instance, sectarian extremism is inherently religious, while ethnic extremism may have other sets of drivers, depending on the context.

In the Western Balkans, ethno-political extremism is often manifested as a racist ideology, and as such is largely understood in the context of the far-right politics and nativism specific to the various regions. This does not imply that nationalism is equated with far-right; rather, it suggests that in the case of the Western Balkans in particular, it has a tendency to manifest itself as far-right. In this sense, national ethno-political radicalism in the Western Balkans often draws from alleged historical injustices and promotes hatred against particular ethnic groups, immigrants, the LGTBQ+ community, etc. While the Serbian nationalist groups dominate the current research into far-right politics in the Western Balkans, similar groups exist also in Kosovo and North Macedonia. These groups include political parties and football club fans, as mentioned above. Some operate as non-government organizations under the umbrella of civil society.

While their precise aims differ, the groups share many of the following principles: i) Ethnically based politics; ii) Reference to the 1990s wars, iii) Glorification of war criminals and ethnic cleansing from the 1990s; iv) A belief in victimisation; v) A desire to redraw boundaries along ethnic lines; vi) Hatred or 'securitisation' of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ+) groups; vii) The use of violence; viii) Anti-NATO and anti-EU politics; ix) Pro-Russian attitudes and links; links with organised crime (Kelly 2019).

For example, the far-right Serbian Radical Party mentioned above is an ethno-nationalist party which practises xenophobia and advocates the unification of territories inhabited by ethnic Serbs in Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia. It draws on the history of the Serbian Chetniks, a monarchist resistance group in the Second World War, and on Serbian Orthodoxy (Stojarová 2013, p. 48). In 2008-12, it was the second largest party in the National Assembly with 78 out of 250 seats and in 2016, it was the third largest party with 22 seats. The Serbian National Movement (Naši) similarly advocates against Western institutions, LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality and for the Orthodox faith and a greater Serbia. Naši has "published a list of 'anti-Serbian' national traitors. This included media outlets, NGOs and various individuals, all of which had allegedly breached the Constitution by supporting the independent Republic of Kosovo, and were financed by foreign foundations and embassies" (Dzombic 2014).

In North Macedonia, ethnic Macedonian extremist organisations include TMORO-VEP (Tatkovinska Makedonska Organizacija za Radikalna Obnova – Vardar Egej Pirin), established in 2006. TMORO refers to the old Macedonian national liberation movement while VEP refers to the 'wider Macedonia'. It

calls for the revision of the borders with Bulgaria and Greece set out in the 1913 Bucharest Peace Treaty. It is against the 2001 Ohrid Framework[12] and calls for a single state for all ethnic Macedonians. Another organisation, TMRO, was established in 2002. TMRO is also named after the old Macedonian national liberation movement and calls for Macedonia to be put on the Balkan agenda. It advocates for the establishment of good relations with the US, Turkey and Israel and sees parallels between Macedonia's situation and Israel's (Kelly 2019).

Current scholarship seems to overlook the impact of the wars which led to the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s in creating the modern far-right extremism momentum. However, the nationalistic ethno-political groups in the Western Balkans represent a continuation of the politics of the 1990s, drawing on historical myths to promote and justify violence, especially against particular ethnic groups. The two most ambitious projects – "unified Albanians" and "Greater Serbia" mentioned above – best illustrate how national ethno-political radicalism is often manifested in practice in the Western Balkans. Both projects reinforce historical myths and ethnic hatred narratives and are based on annexing existing territories from their neighbouring countries (Janjevic 2017; Gadzo 2018).

Figure 3: Ethnic extremism in the Western Balkans
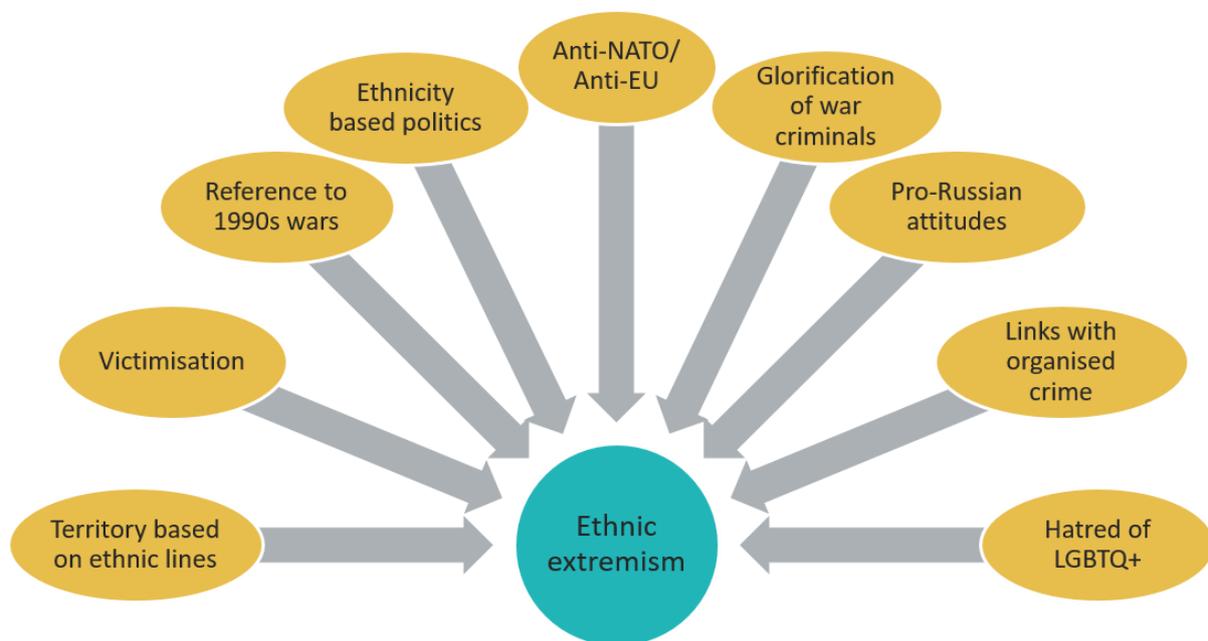
In the MENA region, sectarianism has emerged as a major driver of extremism. Sectarianism is a complex concept, however, and research conducted in PAVE will be mindful of this complexity. In an interview with Mohammad Dibo (2014), the prominent Arab thinker Salameh Kaileh discussed the meaning of the term, stating that there are four main types of sectarianism in MENA. The first is the

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[12] https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622

extreme type which rarely materialises. Here, a sectarian power obtains authority over a state by transforming inherited beliefs into an ideological and political project, thus turning a state into a sectarian state. In the second type of sectarianism, the ruling forces represent another type of sectarian power – one where the views of a minority are enforced in the belief that they represent the majority view. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Velayet-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists) in Iran are examples of this type. A third form of sectarianism is institutional sectarianism. This type is mainly created by colonial forces. The institutions of the state are filled on the basis of power-sharing between different sects, as in the example of Lebanon. Finally, the fourth type refers to a regime that is not essentially sectarian but represents a different class (usually the dominant capitalist class) that has instrumentalised sectarianism in its quest to achieve and remain in power. This is a very common tactic for colonial regimes.

In relation to MENA, it is important to keep in mind that many of the region's problems related to ethnic and religious conflicts are in part the result of divide and rule strategies imposed in the period of imperial domination and the mandate era and by the newly established regimes. European views and colonial policies during the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries had a direct impact on the later events and religious strife (Ussama 2000). Distinctions between majorities and minorities in a particular national territory were largely introduced during the mandate era following World War I, when the borders of many of the new states in the region were drawn (White 2011). In addition, colonial powers installed patron regimes to sustain their interests, including access to energy sources in the region. The exogenous remapping of the region and the establishment of the new states caused social trauma. Post-WWI MENA not only led to the emergence of transnational ideologies against the new states, but also introduced new forms of social coercion from the modern state to local communities. The masses were caught between the traditional legitimacy and new legitimacy of the state.

This is further complicated by a common, but according to Haddad (2014), false dichotomy that emerges in discussions of Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism in the contemporary Middle East which sees dichotomy as secular versus sectarian. As Haddad argues

> "The logic underlining this false duality is obvious enough: a sect is, after all, a subgroup of a religious denomination that exists as a result of theological or jurisprudential peculiarity as shaped by history, politics, and geography. Therefore, logic would suggest that 'secularism' is a plausible antonym for 'sectarianism': a temporal, civic approach to public space rooted in modern understandings of the nation-state and its master institutions and the need to separate church from state. As intuitive as this undoubtedly seems, it remains a false dichotomy that misrepresents sectarian identities and sectarian dynamics in the Arab world and overlooks the role played by class, politics, and power in what is ostensibly a religious issue" (2014, p. 1).

Assuming that violence is cumulative, the history of Tal Afar district in Nineveh Plains in Iraq offers multiple examples of reciprocal extremism in a sectarian setting. Social and political dynamics played out to create fertile soil for grievances which peaked in 2006-2007 and led to violent mobilisation. The

sectarian diversity in Tal Afar was politicised by the state during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the Gulf War (1990-1991) and the area became economically deprived, yet remained under tight security control. While Shia grievances against Saddam Hussein's regime increased, Sunni Turkmen accumulated privileges. This issue shifted after 2003 and the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime. In a similar process of radicalisation from above, the new state marginalised the Sunni, who grew increasingly resentful. Extremism in Tal Afar has an important spatial dimension, and daily contact between different religious communities increased tensions and strife. Following a wave of sectarian violence in 2006-2007, Prime Minister al-Maliki took the side of the Shia community and sent armed forces to help them secure victory over the Sunnis, who were displaced to Mosul. This unleashed a wave of revenge attacks. When the Islamic State was established in 2014, it politicised sectarian diversity further, and alienated the Sunni community from the state. It is also important to mention that economic challenges played a key role in the violent mobilisation of part of the Sunni community in Tal Afar. At the time, joining the organisation was a means to take revenge on the pro-Shia Iraqi state and non-Sunni community, re-assert Sunni agency and regain the pride lost since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The unique backgrounds of ethnic and sectarian extremisms in the Western Balkans and MENA will be further explored in PAVE, with a particular focus on their relationship with the factors of vulnerability and resilience on the community level.

4 Factors of vulnerability to violent extremism

PAVE aims to explore the drivers of vulnerability to violent extremism by focusing more particularly on community-level factors and actors. The sub-sections below provide a general discussion of drivers of radicalisation but also tease out the main drivers of relevance to the PAVE project. In particular, they explore online radicalising narratives, how the interplay between state and religious actors can influence community vulnerability, and the relationship between transnational dynamics and vulnerability. The final part focuses on gender as a cross-cutting dimension in the PAVE project.

4.3 Literature review on micro, meso and macro factors

There are a number of factors that have been considered as relevant in relation to the process of radicalisation. Narratives are an important factor. Similar to the narratives employed by other religious extremist groups, such as *white/great replacement theory*[13] for the far right, the idea of *martyrdom* is a central aspect of Islamist extremism. Fighters who die in combat are promised entry to Paradise before all the other believers (Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019). With the possibility of other-worldly rewards after death, the potential costs of engaging in violence may be offset (Toft 2006). The idea of an *apocalyptic scenario* or a great confrontation between good and evil forces is also common among these groups. The connection between apocalyptic sentiments and religious violence has been

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[13] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/great-replacement-theory-alt-right-killers-el-paso

established in the study of other religious movements as well (e.g. Juergensmeyer 2017, p. 140, p. 152). It commonly entails an image of a great war between good and evil, with prophecies of imminent crises and divine redemption, creating a sense of urgency which may motivate people to join their movements (ibid., p. 140). The narratives employed by religious extremist groups – which are often similar to far-right discourses - are commonly based on the *rejection of multiculturalism* and the perception of people of other faith traditions as a threat to their communities. The opposition to multiculturalism is closely linked with an image of *victimisation* of the in-group.

Social ties and networks are important drivers of violent extremism. For example, a study of 150 jihadist fighters of al-Qaeda found that pre-existing friendship bonds played an important role in their affiliation with the group for two-thirds of them, and most of them joined the jihad in small clusters of friends (Sageman 2004, p. 111). Based on the examples described in Sageman's study, instead of a top-down process of the violent extremist organisation trying to recruit new members, it was a bottom-up process of young people volunteering to join the organisation. Interestingly, they were not particularly religious (Sageman 2004, p. 107-110). Similarly, a study by UNDP (2017, p. 75) in Africa found that half of the people who joined a violent extremist organisation were introduced to the group by a friend, while only 17% were introduced by a religious leader.

The same study finds that another important driver is *government repression*. The study reports that 71% of the individuals who joined violent extremist organisations identified 'government action' as the key incident that motivated them to join (UNDP 2017, p. 5). This can be related to their own experiences but also to the social ties and networks discussed above, as the category of 'government action' included acts such as 'killing of a family member or friend' or 'arrest of a family member or friend' by government forces.

According to Koomen and van der Pligt (2016, p. 240), far-right extremists feel a threat based on the *perceived lack of opportunity* afforded to ordinary people by a society with values that do not correspond with those of the group. The government and the elite are seen as having no interest in their own nation and people, favouring ethnic and religious minorities over the majority white population and embracing internationalism instead or prioritising their own interests (Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019). In addition, they perceive a threat in the arguments of their political opponents, which they see as weak in their defence of a liberal and overgenerous welfare state (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, p. 240; Sterkenburg, Smit and Meines 2019).

However, people join far-right extremist groups for diverse reasons. For example, former neo-Nazis in Scandinavia joined these groups less for political reasons and more as a masculine rite of passage (Kimmel 2007). The interviews by Kimmel (2007) show that the extreme right draws *young, male* adherents and attracts members from the lower social classes. In addition, a history of *personal issues* is often present: many had been bullied at school and had weak family ties. As one interviewee reports, "before I joined, I felt like a nobody, I felt like a loser, I felt like, worthless. […] Their world offered me a world where I was better – just because I was white" (Kimmel 2007, p. 211). In this group, they were often introduced to the movement by friends or older family members.

Those in *weak socioeconomic* positions often suffer discrimination from the majority population and consider certain minorities as threatening (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, p. 241). However, far-right groups are not only composed of heavily tattooed, uneducated extremists, but have a broad recruitment potential with diverse profiles (Sterkenburg 2019, p. 16). For instance, members of the online alt-right movement are often students or well-educated individuals (ibid., p. 17).

In terms of individual factors, *authoritarian personalities* are common among these members. Given its conservatism, authoritarianism appears to align most easily with Islamist and far-right extremism and is often associated with social dominance orientation and defence of inequality (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016). On the other hand, weak social dominance orientations are more commonly associated with far-left radicalisation (ibid.).

A history of *personal adversities and crime* has also been identified as a driver of extremism. Interviews with former far-right extremists in the US show that 45% reported being physically abused as a child, compared to a prevalence of 28% in the general population; and 72% reported problems with alcohol or illegal drugs (Simi et al. 2015). In addition, in the US, only a minority of far-right homicide offenders have higher education, which is significantly lower than Islamist and far-left extremists, and over half of them had prior arrest records and were significantly more likely to have criminal histories (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, 10).

Institutional anomie[14] (Turcalo and Veljan 2018) was identified as an important factor in radicalisation in societies with fragile institutions and high levels of corruption, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (see the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2017). This also applies to societies that are deeply polarised along ethnic lines. This societal polarisation, along with real and perceived inequalities and the inability of institutions to address these issues, can led to institutional anomie – which refers to the tendency of institutions to reproduce existing inequalities instead of acting as a factor of social cohesion. This often results in a loss of trust in institutions generally and in the entire system per se. An annual public survey conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2013 to 2015 demonstrated a sustained distrust in institutions among Bosnian citizens. Political parties enjoy the least trust, followed by government at all levels (ibid.).

The weak institutional context in polarised societies has been linked to another factor affecting ethno-political radicalisation, namely *uncertainty*. Uncertainty was understood to mean insecurities about the future, lack of opportunity and stability. In a financial sense, it also meant unemployment and a non-existent social welfare net. Uncertainty can also make people very receptive to messengers of resolution or salvation. As Turcalo and Veljan (2018) state, such choices and behaviour can be explained by the compensatory control theory, according to which people "embrace ideologies that emphasize personal, societal, or religious control in order to alleviate anxieties they experience when they perceive randomness and disorder in their lives" (Kay and Eibach 2013).

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[14] Institutional anomie was originally developed to explain crime rates in the USA. According to Institutional Anomie Theory (IAT), crime is an indirect consequence of the dominance of the economy over other sectors of society. If a society is primarily shaped by economic interests, economic logic permeates other social institutions.

Education is another extremely important factor, and represents a central pillar in the prevention or outbreak of violent extremism. Here, education is understood in a broader sense than the school system and is defined as a context within which community norms and values are collectively constructed and transmitted to new members. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, education was instrumentalised by humanitarian organisations from Gulf countries as a part of a post-war strategy to attract Bosnians to more radical religious norms, sometimes through offers of financial and material scholarship aid under the proviso that recipients attend mini-madrassas (Turcalo and Veljan 2018). In relation to ethno-political polarisation in Bosnia, Halilovic-Pastuovic (*forthcoming*) argues that the current education system in Bosnia acts as an enabler of social divisions and ethno-radicalisation. The education in the county is largely interpretative and ideological, producing and re-producing ethnic incompatibilities and thus creating a fertile ground for ethno-political radicalisation.

In relation to ethnic-sectarian radicalisation, Lilja (2009) describes the concept of *social entrapment*. This refers to situations when individuals are progressively drawn into rebel groups, starting with legal civilian activities which are subsequently converted into military roles. For example, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) initially recruited individuals into the LTTE civil service, facilitating them to be labelled as LTTE-affiliated (ibid.). In the case of the IRA or ETA, new members justified becoming involved in the groups by referring to the killing or torture of friends and family members by the state, suggesting that violence was an act of *revenge* (Muro 2017, p. 48). Similarly, revenge has also constituted a tipping point to extremism for some people joining the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Özeren et al. 2014, p. 337).

There are some commonalities, and also some differences, between ethnic-sectarian, religious and political extremism. Radicalisation towards violent extremism takes place at the intersection of an enabling environment and personal trajectory, where the actual process is triggered by personal experiences, kinship, friendship, group dynamics and socialisation into the use of violence (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, p. 9). In the different types of violent extremism, we see similar cognitive and emotional effects of threat: perceived injustice, sentiments of exclusion and humiliation (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008, 9; Koomen and van der Pligt 2016). Regarding demographic characteristics, the youth, and in particular young men, are overrepresented in all extremist ranks.

Most of the drivers towards violent extremism are shared by the different types of violent extremist groups. For instance, studies examining the drivers for different types of violent extremist groups underscored the influence of radical mentors (Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente 2017; Khalil and Zeuthen 2016; RAN 2017 p. 4) and the importance of family and friendship ties to current extremists (Özeren et al. 2014; Aytekin 2019, p. 70; Sageman 2004, p. 111; Reinares, García-Calvo and Vicente 2017, p. 7; Kimmel 2007; Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008) as group-level factors. At a more structural level, state fragility and instability have been identified as a contributing factor to extremism (Azinović and Jusić 2015, p. 42; Allan et al. 2015, p. 38). Like their history of crime, this was a key feature of most European foreign fighters (Coolsaet 2015), several members of religious extremist groups (Juergensmeyer 2017, p. 115), far-right extremists in the US (Ravndal and Bjørgo 2018, p. 10) and the PKK (Özeren et al. 2014, p. 335). In addition, there are numerous emotional

reasons for being drawn into violent extremism that do not directly relate to ideology, such as a sense of belonging, status, adventure or revenge (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016; Sterkenburg 2019). Overall, an antipathy against what is seen as the elite of the society is a common driver of both Islamist and far-right extremism: "Most scholars agree that far-right and Islamist extremist groups share a common enemy, the 'establishment', as well as a common target audience, disenfranchised youth" (Ebner 2017, p. 11).

It is important to stress that previous studies show ambivalent results for the influence of factors such as mental health, education and socioeconomic conditions in the radicalisation process.

While the majority of members of violent extremist groups do not appear to present mental health disorders, some features of autism and psychotic illness can facilitate radicalisation and encourage 'lone wolf' attacks, such as social isolation. Nevertheless, mental health disorders alone are not a good predictor of radicalisation, and the fact that someone is being treated is considered a protective factor.

With regard to socioeconomic position and education, in some violent extremist organisations most of the recruits are poor and unemployed (Azinović and Jusić 2015, p. 42; UNDP 2017, p. 39; Özeren et al. 2014), and some people describe unemployment and financial problems as motivation to join these groups. For instance, several people were told that if they joined the PKK, they would no longer have to worry about money (Özeren et al. 2014). On the other hand, among groups such as the alt-right, ETA and Islamist extremists living in the West, individual members are often well-educated, have a job and may have above-average levels of education and socioeconomic status at the time they join the movement (Sterkenburg 2019, p. 17; Reinares 2004, p. 484; Koomen and Fränkel 1992). For example, less than 1% of the recruits of ETA were unemployed when they joined the group, 16% were students, and the vast majority had a job (Reinares 2004, p. 484). Thus, while some studies suggest that violent extremists do not come from economically deprived backgrounds or have little education (Moghaddam 2005, p. 161), others identify the lack of basic education and employment as potential drivers contributing to extremism (Azinović and Jusić 2015, p. 42; UNDP 2017, p. 39). With regard to economic situation and educational levels, the results are therefore inconclusive.

Overall, there is a consensus in PAVE that radical extremism occurs at the *intersection of personal trajectory and enabling environment* and the drivers described above can be divided into three levels: micro, meso and macro. Micro-level factors are related to the individual level. They can involve identity problems, failed integration, feelings of alienation, marginalisation, discrimination, relative deprivation, humiliation (direct or by proxy), stigmatisation and rejection. They are often combined with moral outrage and feelings of revenge as described above. Meso-level factors are related to the wider radical milieu and the supportive or even complicit social environment, such as kinship and family ties. Macro-level factors are related to the role of government and society at home and abroad, the radicalisation of public opinion and party politics, tense majority-minority relationships, the influence of foreign diasporas and the role of socio-economic deprivation on the state level (Schmid 2013). Figures 4, 5 and 6 below provide an overview of the most relevant factors identified by PAVE.

Figure 4: Micro-level factors related to radicalisation

Figure 5: Meso-level factors related to radicalisation[15]

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[15] Individual education levels and socio-economic deprivation are disputed factors.

Figure 6. Macro-level factors related to radicalisation
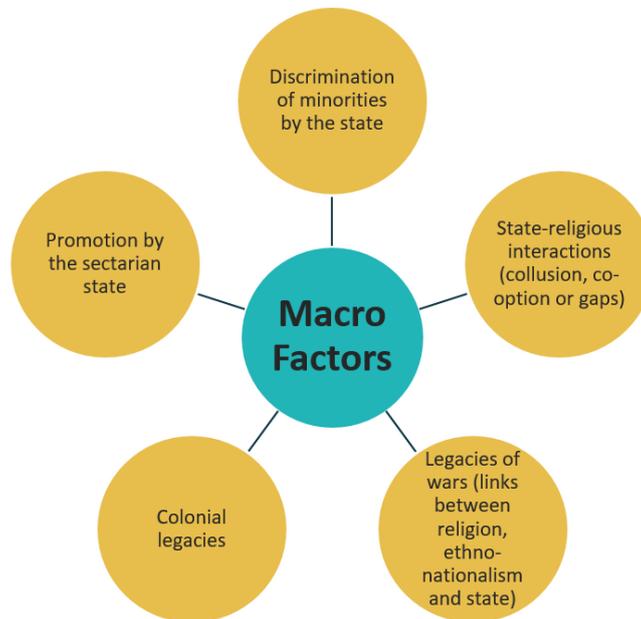
While it is understood that radicalisation as a complex process relies on the interplay between factors at all three levels, the PAVE project will focus mainly on the meso and macro levels.

4.4   Focus on online drivers and narratives fuelling community radicalisation

In the framework of the PAVE project, we want to understand the "roles of online narratives fuelling radicalisation that get disseminated through social media propaganda, and peer-group socialisation patterns through local social networks within a given neighbourhood/municipality" (PAVE 2020, p. 9). Narrative is understood as "an account of events in the order in which they occurred to make a point" (Aarten, Mulder and Pemberton 2018, p. 559).

Extremist narratives offer cognitive closure (understood as the elimination of ambiguity and arrival at definite conclusions) and a quest for significance (understood as achieving a sense of respect and "being someone") that psychologists see as fundamental motivators of human behaviour – including towards illegal violence (RAN 2019). An extremist narrative is:

> "a system of stories that collectively provides a coherent world-view for the purpose of supporting individuals, groups, or movements in the furthering of their illegal violence and violence-assisting activities. Extremist narratives are effective because of their simplicity; their use of scapegoating; their emotional appeals to fear, anger, shame and honour; and their awe-inspiring solutions" (ibid.).

The manner of transmission is equally important; it can be done online or offline. Popular extremist propaganda often includes: high production value; fast-paced editing; music; a charismatic narrator;

and a call to action. The professional and sophisticated use of social media by IS has been a game-changer. While the Dark Net is important to extremists, the majority of their recruitment efforts are focused on mainstream online platforms. The speed, effectiveness and reach of online extremist messages make prediction and prevention a significant challenge, and authorities are often unable to hold people accountable (Whittaker 2017).

Narratives of victimisation in particular play an important role in the process of radicalisation, especially in relation to online radicalisation. They often involve shock and awe tactics or moral shock campaigns. Aarten, Mulder and Pemberton (2018, p. 558) argue that: "The link between victimisation experiences and radicalisation can be direct, with victimisation experiences serving as a causal factor in the development and extremity of religious and political views that may motivate political violence and terrorism."

For instance, an investigation of the Islamic State's use of online narratives targeted at the Kosovo audience shows that it exploited the vulnerabilities of the post-war society in the country which grappled "with forging an identity, past grievances pertaining to the 1998-1999 war such as wartime rape and the perceived bias against Muslims" and used this to "incite recruits from Kosovo to join its war efforts in the Middle East" (Kraja 2017, p. 6). The IS narrative to Kosovo's public is "a power play that lures its followers with the promise of an alternative way of life in the so-called caliphate, purportedly compliant with Sharia laws" (ibid.). Another report by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) found that imams have a tendency to develop their own profiles on social media and publish sermons and other lectures which can often promote radical content when not sanctioned by religious authorities (Jakupi and Kelmendi 2019). The most worrisome finding of the report is that online extremist narratives are much better organised and effectively disseminated than counter-narrative activities (ibid.).

In the case of Tunisia, so-called 'radicalised imams' requisitioned several mosques and a self-proclaimed 'morality paramilitary brigade' emerged as sermons and statutes on social media started calling for Jihad in Syria. In parallel, terrorist attacks were perpetrated against the police force and the army. These acts of violence, often carried out by vulnerable young people, cannot be dissociated from the sermons and 'fatwas' produced by the Tunisian and other Arab 'Salafist', Islamist figures mentioned above.

On the question of which online platforms are utilised for radicalisation, a research study by Conway et al. (2019, p. 145) found that Twitter was the "preferred online spaces for IS and their 'fans', with an estimated 46,000 and 90,000 pro-IS Twitter accounts active in the period September to December 2014". The same study shows that although Twitter tried to disrupt IS propaganda on its platform, a "large number of accounts were created daily to disseminate this propaganda" (ibid. p. 149). The sheer numbers show how challenging it is to effectively counter and disrupt radical narratives and propaganda online.

YouTube has become a popular choice for those preaching extreme views and in some cases is effective in ideological indoctrination, giving rise to the phenomenon of the 'YouTube preacher'. Part of the problem has been "YouTube's recommendation algorithm, which some argue has turned the

service into a 'radicalisation engine'" (Ingram 2020, para.1). A study by Ledwich and Zaitsev (2019) argued that the algorithms that power the site help to radicalise people by recommending ever more extreme videos.[16] However, a study by Penn State into far-right radicalisation argues that this thinking is misleading, because it implies that simply changing YouTube's algorithms will solve the problem (Meisenzahl 2019). The study by Kevin Munger and Joseph Phillips shows, however, that "YouTube makes uploading content and forming communities around shared ideas easier than on other platforms" and thus poses a threat in its "capacity to create radical alternative political canons and interpretive communities to match" (ibid., paras. 4-5).

A study on IS's use of Twitter for propaganda purposes shows how algorithms may connect different unintended users to radical channels: "For the uninitiated user, once one IS-related account was located, the automated Twitter recommendations on 'who to follow' accurately supplied others" (Conway et al. 2019, p.150). IS even created sub-communities on Twitter to target particular ethnic groups based on language and other interests (ibid.).

PAVE's aim is to create a similar understanding about the extent of outreach and the modus operandi of radical channels in the Western Balkans and MENA in order to extend the knowledge base related to the process of radicalisation and produce recommendations for effective de-radicalisation interventions online. The countries PAVE will focus on in relation to exploration of online narratives are Kosovo, North Macedonia, Lebanon and Tunisia.

4.5   Focus on the interplay between state and religious institutions

In addition to exploring online narratives and their role in the radicalisation process, the PAVE project will examine the interplay between state and religious actors who influence their communities' propensity to become vulnerable to violent extremism. The following themes have been assessed as particularly pertinent to explore across the two regions of MENA and Western Balkans: the role of tribal or clan-based leaders as agitators in conflicts at the nexus between politics and religion; the appropriation of religion by radicalisation 'entrepreneurs' to justify violent extremism; Islamism and the politicisation of new social groups in the process of building up the nation-state; state narratives vs. religious narratives and forms of dysfunction among state, community and religious institutions.

To explore these themes, PAVE will undertake research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Tunisia, Lebanon and Iraq. The countries which are the subject of the study are divided into two models: the ideologically polarised countries and societies, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Lebanon and Iraq, and societies with a recent history of acute political and social upheavals, such as Tunisia. In some cases there are overlaps.

In these countries, violent extremism is increasing due to factors such as the fall of regimes, injustice, human rights violations, poor governance, social and political exclusion, and corruption. Further factors that have encouraged men and women to join extremist groups are the absence of the state,

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[16]   https://theconversation.com/youtubes-algorithms-might-radicalise-people-but-the-real-problem-is-weve-no-idea-how-they-work-129955

fragility of state institutions, lawlessness, and the predominant institutional anomie which intensifies the feeling of victimisation. Often, communities experience the abuse of power and the denial of political rights and civil liberties, resulting in mistrust in the state institutions. The power-sharing between state and religious institutions in Lebanon, Iraq and Tunisia and between state institutions and ethnic groups in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina has led to dysfunctional justice.

Serbia still struggles with the legacies of wars, but also with the aftermath of international isolation during the 1990s and late democratic and economic transition, which started in 2000 after the fall of Slobodan Milošević. Conflicting historical narratives, competitive victimisation and collective grievances, combined with the poor economic situation, widespread corruption and malfunctioning of state institutions that fuel ethno-religious polarisation, are the main drivers of community vulnerability to radicalisation and extremism. All these aspects are most visible in the territory of Sandžak, where the absence of the state has led to total marginalisation. Sandžak is an internal region of Serbia with a majority Muslim population (over 50%). The conflicts and tensions in Sandžak in the 1990s led to the establishment of the Independent Government of Sandžak and resulted in the complete isolation of the region (Corovic 2017). As a result of the isolation of the Sandžak region, the Muslim community experienced religious and political polarisation that led to political instability and radicalisation of the population. Sandžak is one of the least economically developed regions in Serbia with a very young population (over 50% is younger than 30) and high unemployment (around 50%) and poverty rates. In addition, it has serious infrastructure and investment problems (Kisić 2015). These unresolved problems caused a lack of trust in state institutions that increased support for local government. In addition, the grievances were exploited by extremist groups (Petrovic and Stakic 2018).

The particular vulnerability of today's multi-faith and multicultural society of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the product of the 1990s conflict in the country. Conflict remnants still burden community interactions, making the entire society "especially vulnerable to ethno-nationalism, political radicalism, and ideological extremism" (Turčalo and Veljan 2018, p. 2). The interaction between the state institutions and the religious communities is overloaded by ethno-political secrecy and the fragility and complexity of state institutions. Despite the Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in 1995, which divided the state into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced the absence of the state. Instead of taking action for social cohesion, the three primary ethnic communities compete for power and further fragmentation takes place on the subnational level within the 10 divided cantons that comprise the Federation. Polarisation of the three ethno-religious communities highlights the lack of mutual trust and inability to resolve problems institutionally. The decentralised structure of the police and security sector, in which 16 police agencies are scattered between the state, two entities and 10 cantons, weakens the sense of belonging and the capacity to combat corruption and crime. It also weakens the judicial institutions' ability to implement the rule of law (Gordana 2020). Islamic and Christian extremist groups have emerged in this context. The first to arrive were the Salafists during the Bosnian conflict; funded by Islamic charities, their purpose was to support an expansion of informal religious groups

and communities. In response, the Serbian Orthodox Church moved towards extremism, claiming that there was a need to fight to preserve the purity of the Orthodox faith.

Lebanon is similar in regard to the weakness of the state institutions represented in the official constitution, which gives the right to religious institutions to operate without supervision. Article 19 states in specific terms: "The officially recognised heads of religious communities have the right to refer to their Council laws relating to personal status, the freedom of belief and religious practice, and the freedom of religious education."[17] Political interests shape the elected religious and legislative council leadership, and the religious leaders selected are generally closely affiliated with the political elite within their respective communities. In Lebanon, political and religious polarisation is considered the main vulnerability driver that affects the political structure directly. This led to external authorities appointing the head of Dar El Fatwa. President Gamal Abdel Nasser approved Hassan Khaled as the Grand Mufti for the Lebanese Sunni Muslim community in 1966. Similarly, Muhammad Rashid Qabbani gained recognition by Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad. Abdul Latif Derian was selected through a bilateral agreement between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in 2014 (Henley 2016). The Druze community shared the same fate; the Syrian regime had the authority in appointing Sheikh Al-Akl to counterbalance the leadership of Walid Jumblatt. Another vulnerability factor is the legitimacy of political representation. The dilemma of religious recognition within Lebanon's modern sectarianism points to the particular understanding that religious authorities are an outcome of a somewhat elitist clerical ranking. Such a form of representation can be understood as appealing to specific institutions more than the greater Lebanese community and leads to the creation of a group of non-charismatic leaders who lack a popular mandate authority and influence. This in turn encourages segments within particular communities to turn to informal leaders who have the power and freedom to manoeuvre politically, as they are not limited by mutual interests and interaction with the political class. These informal leaders often promote extreme views and are seen as progressive, populist and radical.

Vulnerability factors in Tunisia are caused by internal and external issues. Internally, successive governments have been influenced by corruption and the weak political system. The uncontrolled area between Tunisia's southern border and Libya opened the way for Tunisian youths to join ISIS. The spread of informal religious institutions (Salafi mosques) and organisations (unauthorised Koranic schools) in Tunisia after 2011 was demonstrated by the large increase in the number of associations, the emergence of Islamist political parties, the openness of the country to regional military powers, and the government's failure to combat corruption. The interaction between state and religious institutions passed from cooperation to excessive divide. The number of informal Koranic schools increased. The education system was affected by the new Salafist ideology and some teachers employed by the Ministry of Education took advantage of their position and gave lessons in religious indoctrination instead of teaching the regular curriculum. This occurred after 2011 when many Salafi instructors came into Tunisia. The new democratic context permitted citizens to discuss their ideological ideas openly, which often led to some teachers bypassing the objectivity of the official curricula. The political structure remains unstable. According to Tunisian officials, many individuals

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[17] https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Lebanon_2004.pdf?lang=en

left the country to join ISIS as foreign fighters. The presence of a large number of jihadists in Libya has created anxiety for Tunisians when crossing the border. While the country was in the midst of revolutionary turmoil, still hesitant about which new political system to adopt to replace the old regime, the jihadist groups began taking action. The first terrorist attack took place in Rouhia in the governorate of Siliana. Afterward, terrorist acts multiplied, including the assassinations of political activists, killings of soldiers and the execution of Anis Jlassi, an officer in the Tunisian National Guard. An entrenchment was set up in the Chaambi, Mghira, and Semmama mountains, all of them located in the west of the country, in the governorate of Kasserine. There was also an attempt to establish an Imara (principality) in Ben Guerdane, in southern Tunisia, 33 kilometres from the Libyan border.

The war on Iraq in 2003 brought about a new wave of violence. The collapse of the Iraqi state provided the space where jihadists can operate and attack the US and its allies in the region. Al-Zarqawi, an ex al-Qaeda member in Afghanistan, travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan in 2002 and established his network with the jihadists there. In 2003, he and his followers began to attack the Americans and the Shiites. Their so-called Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad was initially established in 1999 by al-Zarqawi in Afghanistan. In 2004, the group pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and changed its name to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). As Rasheed et al. (2018) argue, "the group played on sectarian tensions between the Shiite and the Sunni communities inside Iraq. It was calculating that if they attack the Shia, which they did, they would retaliate by attacking the Sunnis, which they did. The Sunnis would then seek protection from al-Zarqawi and his followers, which they also did. By doing this, it would gain Sunni sympathy and it did so quite dramatically". Al-Zarqawi was killed in an American airstrike in summer 2006. When the Egyptian militant Abu Hamza al-Muhajir took over as leader of AQI, he promised to pledge allegiance to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as the leader of what later became known as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), arguably to give the group a national flavour (ibid.). The Arab uprisings and the civil war in Syria helped ISI to expand and flourish again. The chaos attracted ISI. The group began to control areas in Syria between 2012 and 2013. As soon as it controlled Raqqa in 2013, it changed the name of the group to the Islamic State in Iraq and a-Sham (ISIS). And once Mosul fell under its control in the summer of 2014, the group began to call itself the Islamic State (IS).

In Iraq, like elsewhere in the MENA following the events of the Arab Spring, the Sunnis staged sit-in camps in Anbar, Hawija and other places to peacefully protest against Nouri al-Maliki's divisive and authoritarian policies and government. By that time, Maliki had managed to strengthen his grip on the military and the state institutions following the United States' withdrawal from Iraq. The legitimate demands of the protesters were denied, and the sit-in camps were destroyed. In addition to cracking down on the Sunni demonstrations, the courts issued arrest warrants for prominent Sunni figures under the pretext that these individuals were supporting terrorism. Disenfranchised, the Sunnis created space for the jihadi groups in the Sunni areas, in an attempt to protect themselves from the tyranny of Maliki's army. As soon as the Sunni demands were neglected, the black flag of IS (ISIS back then) was seen in the sit-in in Anbar. IS managed to regroup inside Syria by capitalising on the civil war in the country following the protests in 2011. As soon as the rift emerged between IS and the al-Nusra Front in Syria (now Jabhat Fatah al-Sham), the group began to call itself the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). This exercise of power allowed the group to claim legitimacy in Syria and Iraq. As the

civil war was heating up in Syria, ISIS began to carry out attacks against the United States and Iraqi army inside Iraq. The decisive victory was the occupation of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, in the summer of 2014 following the seizure of control of Fallujah and Ramadi. This incident marked the beginning of a long summer of Sunni discontent. The group declared the establishment of the Islamic State (IS), erasing the colonial borders between Syria and Iraq in late June 2014. During this uncertain situation, thousands of people left Mosul as soon as IS took control of the city. To fill the dearth of manpower and paint the battle against IS with an ideological brush, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani called for Shia Jihad against the Islamic State, which led to the establishment of Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF). Having succeeded in erasing the Sykes-Picot borders between Iraq and Syria for the first time since the establishment of the modern Middle East, IS jeopardised the juridical sovereignty of the country.

IS was driven out of Mosul in 2017 with the help of the United States-led coalition which included the Iraqi army, the PMF and the Kurdish Peshmerga. A few weeks later, the Kurdish President Masoud Barzani declared that Kurdistan region would hold a referendum on the negotiation of independence with Baghdad. Despite the heroic role played by the militia, it now poses a challenge to the legitimacy of the government. As of 2017, the militia constitutes 69 factions with a total of 140,000 to 150,000 men. It controls massive areas of Iraq, replacing IS as a non-state actor in the Sunni areas. Mostly importantly, it operates as a peacekeeping force in the Sunni areas, but it has already been accused of committing war crimes under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The PMF has also been accused of committing social abuses, conducting mafia-like activities, and being an obstacle to the return of internally displaced people (IDPs). Unlike IS, however, PMF is legally part of the Iraqi security apparatus. The organisation benefited from a $2.16 billion budget in 2018-2019, which is two and half times larger than the budget of the Ministry of Water Resources, three times that of the Counter-Terrorism Service, and 18 times that of the Ministry of Culture.

All these complex settings and multifaceted interplay between the state and religious actors and their relationship to community vulnerability to violent extremism will be further studied within the PAVE project.

4.6   Transnational factors of vulnerability

Finally, the PAVE analysis will be complemented by an empirical study on transnational dynamics fuelling cross-border manifestations of violent extremism between Europe, the Balkans and the MENA region (including the role of diasporas, foreign fighters, transnational flux or recruiters, and/or organised crime).

Islamist extremism has important transnational and transregional dynamics. Terrorist organisations, social movements and foreign states are among the main transregional actors that can affect the trends and factors of radicalisation. The main forms of transregional and transnational involvement that PAVE will focus on are: i) the preparation and implementation of attacks and the recruitment of radicalised persons from terrorist organisations outside of the above-mentioned regions; ii) the

promotion of conservative and radical interpretations of Islam and Islamism by Islamist activists and movements; iii) the involvement of foreign states in the promotion of specific doctrines of Islam to influence religious institutions and actors elsewhere; and iv) the role of transnational actors as foreign terrorists/fighters or terrorist cells and hit squads. The main outcome of this transregional process is the differentiation of radicalisation trends and the development of new push factors in the dynamics of violent extremism.

The research on the transregional and transnational dynamics of violent extremism will rely on network analysis. There is a need for better understanding of the complex and diverse dynamics of transnational and transregional radicalisation and development of violent extremism between the MENA region and the Western Balkans, as well as between those regions and the EU Member States. The outcomes of the research will support stakeholders and decision-makers by providing knowledge of the hotspots of violent extremism and possible transregional spillovers.

Within the PAVE project, a network will be understood as

> "a set of items, which we will call vertices or sometimes nodes, with connections between them, called edges. Systems taking the form of networks (also called 'graphs' in much of the mathematical literature) abound in the world. Examples include the Internet, the World Wide Web, social networks of acquaintance or other connections between individuals, organizational networks and networks of business relations between companies" (Newman 2003, p. 169).

The study of networks, in the form of mathematical graph theory, evolved as the fundamental pillar of discrete mathematics but networks have also been studied extensively in the social sciences. In the 1930s, sociologists realised the importance of the patterns of connection between people for understanding the functioning of human society. Typical network studies in sociology involve the circulation of questionnaires asking respondents to detail their interactions with others. Following the collection of data, researchers reconstruct a network in which vertices represent individuals and edges the interactions between them. Typical social network studies address issues of centrality (which individuals are best connected to others or have most influence) and connectivity (whether and how individuals are connected to one another through the network). In recent years, there was a shift in networks research away from the analysis of single small graphs and the properties of individual vertices or edges within such graphs to consideration of large-scale statistical properties of graphs. This new approach has been driven largely by the availability of computers and communication networks that allow data analysis on a scale far larger than was previously possible (ibid. 2003).

Some scholars argue that terrorist groups develop as chain-like, decentralised structures, while others maintain that terrorist networks form patterns of redundant ties and organise around a few highly connected individuals or central hubs. The findings obtained by McMillan, Felmlee and Braines show that

> "terrorist groups navigate the efficiency/security tradeoff by developing increasingly well-connected networks as they prepare for a violent incident. Our results also show that highly central nodes acquire even more ties in the years directly preceding an attack, signifying that

the evolution of terrorist networks tends to be structured around a few key actors" (2020, p. 1).

Networks are important not only for the planning of the attacks but also for the recruitment of the foreign fighters and the spread of radical interpretations of Islam.

The Balkan countries are among Europe's top exporters of volunteers fighting for radical Islamic organisations such as IS and Jabhat al-Nusra. The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) estimates that over 300 fighters from Kosovo have travelled to warzones in Iraq and Syria (as discussed above), while 330 fighters have come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 110 from Albania, 100 from Macedonia, 50 from Serbia and 13 from Montenegro. This places Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina as the top two European countries by percentage of population who have joined terrorist organisations, while Albania is ranked in fourth place just behind Belgium (Petrovic 2016).

Radical interpretations of Islam were alien to Muslim communities in the Balkans, which are traditionally oriented towards the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam[18]. Furthermore, 50 years of communist rule in the region instilled a sense of secularism in Balkan Muslim communities and gave rise to an Islamic tradition that is markedly different in its interpretations and practices from its more conservative counterparts in the Arabian Peninsula. More conservative interpretations of Islam (such as the Salafist movement) and its militant form (Takfirism) first arrived in the Balkans in the early 1990s, when some 2,000 Arab mujahedeen fighters came to fight on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims during the Yugoslav wars (ibid. 2016).

Salafists, mainly supported and funded by Saudi Arabia, have spread their interpretation of Islam and their ideas across the Balkans mainly through mosques, Islamic humanitarian centres and non-governmental organisations. A report entitled 'From the Balkans to ISIS' by SEERECON, a political risk analysis firm, estimates that of the $800 million of Saudi money to have entered Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the conflict in that country, $100 million is "untraceable and lost in a maze of charity organisations and possibly used to fund Islamic extremism" (ibid. 2016).

The radicalisation of diaspora communities in Europe is one of the most vivid and conflictive topics of research and public debate in the field of violent extremism. Diaspora involvement in radicalisation process is not a new phenomenon; however, new trends have begun to emerge in the modus operandi of the global jihadist movement. While the external influence of the Salafist jihadist variant of militant Islamism is the main point of discussion with diaspora communities when it comes to identifying sources of radicalisation, it is not the only framework that PAVE will use in diasporas analysis. Other issues, such as failures of integration, marginalisation and the perception of discrimination, are among the possible factors that may contribute to diasporas radicalisation (Zimmermann and Rosenau 2009). One important dimension to consider when researching diasporas radicalisation is the mutual influence between external forces and autonomous militancy (Waldman 2010). To that end, the research on the radicalisation of diaspora communities and the transregional linkages will be based

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[18] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanafiyah

on three levels of analysis: micro (individual identity and community), meso (dynamics and environment) and macro (host and home countries) (Haider 2015).

4.7 Focus on gender as a cross-cutting dimension

While the concept of 'sex' indicates biological traits that societies associate with being male and female, 'gender' refers to the cultural meanings attached to being masculine and feminine that shape individual identities (Zevallos 2020). Gender is also embedded in social structures and institutions, shaping inequalities and power structures (Connell 1987). Many institutions of power are male-dominated and certain expressions of masculinity associated with idealised manliness are socially revered. By contrast, femininities and alternative expressions of masculinity are subordinated in most societies. Gender identities and power dynamics are present from the micro to the meso and macro levels in all societies.

Violent extremism is 'a highly gendered activity' (Ndung'u and Shadung 2017). There is a growing body of academic literature which suggests that gendered identities, norms and power relations play an integral part in shaping radicalisation processes, with young men particularly vulnerable to these dynamics. In general, with few exceptions, direct violence is cross-culturally a male arena (Ness 2005, p. 354), and a disproportionately high percentage of males is a feature of all forms of extremism (Bakker 2007; Groen, Kranenberg and Naborn 2010), with young men are overrepresented in all extremist ranks. One explanation for this observation is that male youths are more likely to be influenced by the glamorising of violence in war films and computer games (Bourke 2014). Some of the most popular computer games are based on conflicts in the Middle East, and games such as 'Call of Duty' typically portray an idealised image of the 'good guys', with a strong sense of loyalty to their comrades and a tendency to black humour that contrast with the dehumanised picture of faceless insurgents (Bourke 2014). As an illustration of this enthusiasm for violence among youths, interviews with young males who joined far-right skinhead groups in Quebec show that most of them displayed a real fascination with physical activities, guns, including banned weapons, and violence (Tanner and Campana 2014, p. 26). Most of them had developed this fascination before joining a skinhead group and some confessed that they had become members of the skinhead group "just for that" (Tanner and Campana 2014, p. 26). On the other hand, it has been argued that the search for significance typical of that age group might play a role (Kruglanski et al. 2009), as does their desire to prove themselves by accepting risky challenges (Azinović and Jusić 2015, p. 41). In his book *Healing from Hate*, Michael Kimmel, a sociologist specialising in masculinity, details how ideals of a domineering form of masculinity are part of the attraction of extremisms, especially for young men. He writes that violent extremism can emerge from a variety of gendered factors which can include "a thwarted sense of male entitlement, shame at social position, a sense of belonging to brotherhood, (or a longing for) ideological certainty and conservative gender norms" (Kimmel 2018).

While gender differences are apparent across all the different forms of extremism, with more males taking part in violent extremist groups than females, it is noticeable that gender differences are less pronounced for far-left extremist groups than for ethno-nationalist, far-right or Islamist organisations.

The gender ideology of leftist extremist groups – and the opportunism of leftist military organisations in need of recruits – mean that these groups are more open to the recruitment of women and many leftist groups have a relatively high proportion of women combatants (FARC, PKK, YPG and EPLN are examples). Wood and Thomas (2017) found that embracing a Marxist-oriented 'leftist' ideology increased the prevalence of female fighters, whereas Islamist ideologies among rebel groups produce the opposite effect. The same can be said of ethno-nationalism and RWE.

In the case study contexts being researched in PAVE, where the focus is on Islamist, ethno-nationalist and right-wing extremisms, the gender differences across groups are consistent in some respects. Many more males take part in these groups and mobilisation into the groups is motivated by conservative gender ideologies (secular or religious), expressed through performances of militarised masculinities and the subordination of women. While both Islamist and far-right extremists accuse each other of lacking respect for 'their' women, misogyny and traditional gender perceptions are central to both ideologies (Ebner 2017, p. 10). Indeed, adopting a gender lens can reveal warning signs of Islamist or ethno-nationalist extremism and violence emerging in communities. True and Eddyono (2017), for example, identify increasing restrictions on women's movements and escalating gendered violence as indicative of processes of Islamist radicalisation in a case study of communities in Indonesia. In respect to the PAVE field sites, a similar trajectory was identified in Sandžak, where researchers noted a relationship between rising extremism and strict rules placed on women (Speckhard 2018).

Islamist and ethno-nationalist extremisms are sites of the production of male dominance and violence, but some women do join voluntarily. The role of women within Islamist extremism has become more noticeable over time (Ranstorp 2019, p. 22) and there are similar cases in RWE extremism, such as the 'white border guard femininities' associated right wing women's activism in Finland (Keskinen 2018). Some women in these groups do engage in acts of extremist violence, such as female suicide bombers in al-Qaeda (Sutten 2009) and prevailing gender norms about femininity can make such violence seem surprising and inexplicable (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). However, women may engage in extremist violence for a range of reasons similar to men's, from family revenge to ideological persuasion. Interviews on the subject seem to indicate that women express the same political motivations and willingness to fight for them as men (OSCE 2005, p. 5). Religious and ethnic beliefs are often a touchstone for the motivation and commitment of females involved in violent extremism. However, most women engaged in these extremist movements act in support roles rather than engaging in overt violence. Moreover, they may play support roles because they share the overarching conservative gender ideology associated with certain interpretations of religion or idea of the nation and the 'othering' of those of different identities and persuasions. They share in the narratives these groups employ based on traditional gender roles, where women are mainly seen as mothers and wives. For example, in a case of conservative gender politics intersecting with racist thinking, women in the Finnish group 'Close the Borders' engage in anti-immigrant extremism on the grounds that the ethnic purity of womanhood and families must be preserved and restored (Keskinen 2018).

The importance of understanding the way in which gender shapes processes of radicalisation for both men and women is therefore an important cross-cutting theme in studies of Islamist and RW

extremism. Increasingly conservative gender ideals and practices can signify processes of radicalisation, and the pull of these groups for some lies in their gender order and manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Although as a cross-cutting theme there are strong similarities in patriarchal gender relations, associations of masculinity with violence and femininity with subordinate support across the extremisms studied in PAVE, it will also be important to acknowledge differences (e.g. between religious and secular roots) and develop context-specific analyses of how gender shapes radicalisation across the field sites.

5 Community resilience to violent extremism

5.1 Concept of resilience

Resilience has become a buzzword in academic and policy discourses on violent extremism – as a positive mirror image to the 'prevention' of violent extremism. In the past decade, the concepts underpinning policy approaches to the phenomenon have evolved from the securitised lenses of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which were found to be ineffective and sometimes counter-productive, to a more holistic paradigm labelled Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE). Like CVE, PVE has a problem-solving orientation that seeks to prevent and mitigate threats, and in its broad conceptualisation subsumes a large variety of policy programming approaches ranging from educational, youth and economic development initiatives to prisoner rehabilitation schemes.

To compensate for the conceptual deficiencies of both CVE and PVE, 'resilience' has become the latest step in this line of conceptual and policy developments. Focused on enhancing the positive features of societies, communities or individuals, this approach is at the forefront of current reflections and agendas in the continuing effort to push back on a global security threat.

The conceptual origin of the term 'resilience' is located in the material sciences – as the capacity of a material to absorb large amounts of energy quickly and release them again without breaking. It has since been adopted in various fields, including psychology, ecology and development studies. As Stephens and Sieckelinck (2020, p. 144) point out: "Within the social and psychological fields, certain fundamental features of this concept can be discerned amongst the multitude of definitions, including: (a) it refers to the functioning of an individual or system in the face of some form of stress or adversity …; (b) it implies some form of positive or healthy functioning in the face of this adversity – that is, a resilient individual or resilient society is generally regarded as positive in that they are able to emerge from stress in a manner that is desirable…; and (c) it implies moving primary attention from deficits to be fixed to the identification and development of strengths (…)."

Applied to the field of political science, one definition of resilience is "the ability of political systems and (in)formal governance arrangements to adjust to changing political and social conditions while keeping their structures intact" (Carpenter 2006, p. 6). Defined in this way, resilience is not inherently normatively good. Repressive governments and corruption may also prove to be resilient systems. As Diane Coutu (2002) noted, "…resilience is neither ethically good nor bad. It is merely the skill and capacity to be robust under conditions of enormous stress and change".

Others have criticised resilience, on the other hand, as an inherently normative concept (Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020; Anholt 2017; Ungar 2011; Amery 2019). These academics argue that the definition of resilience inherently defines a desirable outcome in the face of adversity. Yet the attributed values of what constitutes a desirable outcome is subjective – and thus culturally relative and inherently framed within the context of a given world-view (Ungar 2011).

The aspect of cultural relativity resonates in critiques of the concept that perceive it as a westernised approach, which assigns the responsibility for coping with a challenging environment to the individual and stresses the importance of psychological self-resilience. The application of this 'Western' resilience concept to local contexts in the MENA region, for instance, often ignores the high importance of collectivity and community in the social realities there (see also Keelan and Browne 2020, p. 466) and lacks sensitivity to local definitions of the term. In MENA, the term resilience hence became tainted with a connotation of passivity and adaptation/coping with negative circumstances, rather than addressing the need to change their structural drivers.

If interpreted in line with its original meaning in the natural sciences, as the ability of a system to return to its previous state after a negative shock, the concept of resilience can be deeply problematic in societies where the status quo ante is part of the problem, for instance when the actions (or inaction) of state institutions are among the root causes (i.e. push factors) of radicalisation. A recent publication on resilience promotion in Palestine has put it starkly: "the manner in which the language of resilience has permeated the NGO sector in Palestine is ethnocentric, with the inference that Palestinians should learn to 'cope' rather than reject the status quo particularly problematic. Designating notions of resilience paradoxical to that articulated by Palestinians themselves further highlights the manner by which the development and humanitarian sector is culpable in bolstering the occupation" (Keelan and Browne 2020).

Accordingly, if resilience is (mis)understood as efforts towards maintaining stability and the status quo in contexts of (severe) asymmetric power relations, it can de-legitimise and dis-empower efforts to change the status quo towards a more equal and politically inclusive society (see also Torrekens and de le Vingne 2020, Olsson et al. 2015, Keelan and Browne 2020, Stephens and Sieckelinck 2020, Anholt 2017, Evans and Reid 2013).

In recognition of these critiques, in the PAVE project, **we define resilience as the ability of political systems and (in)formal governance arrangements at the community level to adjust to changing political and social conditions**. As our focus in PAVE is on the meso level of community dynamics, the concept of resilience more specifically underscores the structural and agency-based capacity of a community to react to the threat of violent extremism, and places a particular emphasis on the roles of social connections, social bridging and belonging (Carpenter 2006, Ellis and Abdi 2017).

To limit the critique of resilience as de-politicising, our approach to resilience stems from the basic assumption that community agency matters greatly in the prevention of violent extremism, while being mindful of the need to contextualise this meso level of analysis within a broader framework that accounts for the role and responsibilities of the state, as well as for transnational dynamics. This emphasis on local agency echoes research findings that PVE interventions are unlikely to be impactful

and sustainable if local actors are not deeply involved in the processes (Morina et al. 2019). According to previous publications by PAVE consortium members in the Western Balkans, a community moves up along the resilience spectrum following the "intervention or active engagement of various stakeholders of the community vested with some authority to either prevent or counter violent extremism. Therefore, resilience assumes awareness of the problem by various stakeholders in a community and their aggregated action to act against a certain phenomenon. It also includes the community's attitude toward such a phenomenon and their reaction in the wake of the emergence of the violent extremism activity, or events perceived as leading up to its appearance" (Jakupi and Kraja 2018, 9). Resilience hence encompasses three dimensions of stakeholder agency: awareness, attitude and action (Morina et al. 2019).

Given the primacy of agency in building community resilience, and in contrast to aforementioned approaches of resilience prioritising a return to the 'status quo ante', the PAVE project considers community *resistance* as an important facet of resilience – understood as purposeful nonviolent action against the root causes (e.g. state disfunction or social exclusion), the drivers (e.g. recruiters and preachers) and the manifestations of violent extremism.

5.2 Factors of community resilience

Resilience comprises micro (individual), meso (community) and macro (structural) factors that overlap, intertwine and influence each other. Factors that increase community resilience are affected by the resilience of the individuals that constitute the community and are supported or impeded by the national infrastructures that serve and/or contain it. Communities are what connect the other two levels. Resonating with the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis, Ellis and Abdi (2017) identify social connections as the central factor for community resilience and differentiate three relevant types: social bonding (social connection *within* communities), social bridging (social connections *between* communities) and social linking (social connection between *communities and institutions* or governing bodies). The level and quality of social bonding within a community are inter-related with the horizontal dynamics of social bridging and the vertical dynamics of social linking.

As pointed out before, we consider agency as a central factor for community resilience and as a multiplier that also influences the levels of social bonding, bridging and linking. Such agency exists when leadership figures in a community are aware of violent extremism as a potential threat to their community, and are willing (through their attitudes and actions) to influence factors promoting resilience on the individual, community and structural levels.

We will list here a few examples of research findings on the individual (micro) and structural (macro) levels, while the next sub-sections will focus on meso/community-level factors that will be investigated in the PAVE project. At the individual micro level, Grossmann et al. (2017) identified five key personality traits that foster resilience, especially among young people: 1. Cultural identity and connectedness (e.g. familiarity with one's own cultural heritage, practices, beliefs, traditions and values), 2. Bridging capital (e.g. trust and confidence in people from other groups), 3. Linking capital

(e.g. trust and confidence in government and authority figures and in community organisations), 4. Violence-related behaviours (e.g. willingness to speak out publicly against or challenge the use of violence by others; acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of resolving conflicts), 5. Violence-related beliefs (e.g. support for violent behaviour by certain actors or perception of violence as conferring status and respect).

At the other end of the spectrum, structural factors on the macro/national level are linked to state policies that foster community resilience, such as: responsiveness of the central state to the needs of local communities (quality of service delivery, education system, resource distribution, infrastructure, justice and rule of law, security, accountability, etc.). Another factor for resilience is the representative system of governance in the country, which defines the level of decentralisation, community powers and responsibilities, representation and influence of communities at the central state level. A study comparing two municipalities in Kosovo pointed to the fact that the resilient community had much better representation at central level via political parties and personal ties to high-level politicians, which increased their effectiveness in generating investment and general responsiveness to their needs, while the community affected by violent extremism had no such representation and had significantly fewer resources (Jakupi and Kraja 2018). Through their promotion of tolerance when covering issues of religious/ethnic diversity, the national media may also influence resilience by shaping frames of reference and narratives (Houston et al. 2015).

5.3   Resilience factors: Focus on the PAVE thematic clusters

In the following sub-sections, we present the factors of community resilience that are of particular interest for the thematic clusters under investigation in the PAVE project – overlapping extremisms, the interplay between religious and state institutions, online vs. offline radicalisation, and transnational dynamics. There is still limited knowledge available on community resilience, particularly for the Western Balkans and the MENA region, and not all factors listed below have been academically validated. The fieldwork conducted for the PAVE project will aim to examine their validity and relevance in selected communities across the Western Balkans and MENA. Many of these factors are relevant for more than one, if not all, PAVE thematic clusters; however, we aligned them according to what we perceive as the most direct connection. We also illustrate the concept with several initiatives and projects that aim to enhance community resilience towards violent extremism. One common problem with these initiatives is the lack of systematic research on resilience factors and impact assessments based on consistent and coherent monitoring and evaluation. Coherent criteria that grasp the targeted aspect of community resilience are required (KCSS et al. 2020, p. 18) in order to evaluate their success.

5.3.1   Resilience factors against reciprocal and overlapping extremisms

As noted earlier, little research has been carried out to date on the interface between religious, ethno-political and sectarian manifestations of violent extremism; and there is even less existing research on

the set of factors preventing reciprocal/overlapping radicalisation, and building community resilience to these dynamics. However, as dynamics of reciprocal and overlapping extremisms must include at least two sets of radical narratives and invested followers, the factors that specifically promote resilience to such dynamics must be able to either break the dynamic between actors on a behavioural level and/or address the duality of the narratives through deconstruction of both or promotion of an alternative.

One example of breaking the dynamic of reciprocal extremism is a USIP-facilitated dialogue and local reconciliation agreement between Iraqi tribal leaders ahead of the return of IDPs that addresses the radicalisation driver of revenge, which is particularly characteristic of cumulative extremisms (USIP 2020). Increasing the state's or local society's capacity to address conflicts, either through a functioning judicial system or alternative means of conflict resolution, is thus a factor that can promote resilience (Idris 2019). For the Western Balkans with its multi-ethnic societies and legacy of civil war, where several sets of radical narratives persist, a comparative study on community resilience by the Berghof Foundation identified multiculturalism and diversity to be especially important in communities with a multi-ethnic structure (Morina et al. 2019).

Another factor identified by Morina et al. (2019) is the promotion of alternative narratives and identities, with a focus on building bridging identities, e.g. being a citizen of the town/city/region, which can foster a sense of belonging and limit the ideological appeal of overlapping extremisms. A study on human security approaches to PVE in Tunisia identified an educational strategy comprising civic literacy as the cornerstone for social stability, by promoting the values of civility and peaceful coexistence and countering societal "attitudes of indifference and tolerance towards violent extremism" (Zoghlemi and Toumi 2019, p. 28). In the context of the Western Balkans, where there is a long legacy of reciprocal radicalisation, factors of resilience can be efforts that foster inter-group reconciliation in the wake of inter-ethnic violence and, through the increased communal bridging and bonding, can also promote resilience to religious-inspired radicalisation. Initiatives that facilitate contact and dialogue between community groups thus seem suitable for preventing cumulative extremisms within communities, as increased exchange between diverse groups challenges discourses of othering and de-humanising (Lorenzo, Nilsson and Svensson 2020, p. 39). Overall, the promotion of resilience against cumulative extremism requires a comprehensive approach that pays attention to multi-dimensional conflict dynamics (including the legacy of past inter-community violence) influencing the behaviour and ideology of violent extremism organisations (Holmer and Bauman 2018).

5.3.2. Leadership at the interface of state and religious institutions as drivers of resilience

In the previous section, we identified the absence or shortcomings of state institutions as one of the main drivers of violent extremism in the Western Balkans and MENA. In such contexts, other actors and institutions emerge to fill existing gaps in service delivery and responsiveness by the state, and this is where not only vulnerability but also factors of resilience have an impact.

As Kortam et al. (2020) observe, in Iraq, for example, there is significant divergence between the regions in terms of governance. In Kurdistan, the government has the monopoly on the use of force, whereas in other regions, traditional sources of legitimacy are incorporated into grassroots organisations, with clan, tribal and religious leaders "playing the role of the state" and delivering public services. To cite a recent study (Wainscott 2019, p. 41-2): "Iraqi religious leaders are already engaging in efforts to promote reconciliation within their communities, and sometimes across community lines, drawing on religious ideas, practices, and rituals to do so." In these and other settings, a factor for community resilience can be social cohesion in the form of collective adherence to local values and de-legitimisation of external interference in the organisation of local social life, as described by Carpenter (2006) for the Maysan district of Iraq. In Maysan, around 14 tribes oversee all aspects of daily life, from conflict resolution to justice and welfare distribution, forming the "building block of society". These tribes set a unified policy to deal with militias, relying on surveillance by informal networks and punishment for militia members who attack tribes and their property (Carpenter 2006, 19). Likewise, another study conducted in Ben Guerdane, Tunisia, found that inhabitants have refuted extremists' claims to legitimate societal control through social resilience built upon a strong community-based/traditional order, popular forms of religious commitment that reject external religious views, and irregular economic activities as a means to earn a living rather than to accumulate wealth (Zoghlemi and Toumi 2019, p. 9). Equally, religious education and literacy have been identified both in the Western Balkans and MENA as factors for resilience. In both regions, religion is also perceived as a driver of solidarity and thus a basis for social connections. Relating to the factor of agency, religious actors can also take the lead in promoting community resilience; the Interreligious Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an example, involving local religious institutions and the community in promoting positive values and strengthening engagement against violent extremism (Kortam et al. 2020, p. 28).

In other cases, local state agency also acted as a driver of resilience: echoing the communities in Iraq and Tunisia in rejecting external influences, in the Western Balkans and particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, local public authorities contributed to enhancing community resilience by refusing to accept conditional foreign aid and curbing suspicious foreign donations (Turcalo and Veljan 2018). Particularly in cases where ethnic or religious divisions can be or are being exploited for political reasons, the election of public authority figures who do not engage in promoting divisions is critical. These leaders "have the potential to play a key agency role in fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and openness toward diversity at the governmental level"; having the 'right' people in crucial positions can thus promote resilience (Morina et al. 2019, p. 42).

Furthermore, it is rare for other (traditional) social structures to almost completely replace state structures; they are more likely to exist in parallel or intertwine. An effective collaboration between different social actors from the state or religious institutions is a factor for resilience. One example reported in Morina et al. (2019, p. 40) relates to the Kosovo municipality of Deçan, where "local imams and officials from the Islamic Association of Kosovo have collaborated early on with municipal authorities to root out any challenges to their control over religious affairs". Also in the MENA region, religious institutions realised that they needed to enhance their role in consolidating highly contested

statehood issues and therefore started collaborating with international donors and initiatives in developing a contemporary religious discourse and reconciling religious and civic values. This directional change was taken by CSOs as an opportunity to involve these religious leaders in capacity-building and training programmes on human rights and international humanitarian law (Kortam et al. 2020, p. 26). In Lebanon, the Strong Cities Network (SCN) has organised consultations with Lebanese mayors and local prevention networks in the cities of Saida, Tripoli and Majdal Anjar in cooperation with the PVE unit of the Council of Ministers and external actors to highlight the importance of integrating all stakeholders, practitioners and local authorities in the national strategy on PVE.

In addition to state and religious institutions, Kortam et al. (2020) identified a third actor that acts as a bridge between them in building community resilience in the Western Balkans and MENA, namely civil society organisations (CSOs). Here, the CSO category is understood in a broad sense, covering social actors such as trade unions and professional associations, NGOs and grassroots organisations (e.g. youth and family associations). In Serbia and Lebanon, for example, CSO organisations and government programmes engage on religious issues to promote resilience. Furthermore, these approaches aim to include a gender lens. One example is the Western Balkans Civil Society Hub, which aims to empower CSOs, women, youth and faith-based organisations and improve their capacity to implement projects and engage in dialogue with political power-holders, influencing policy and decision-making processes relating to P/CVE in the region. Most of these CSOs' activities are directed towards the youth and state/local institutions, and an insightful list of recommendations for these two groups of actors has been developed (DamaD 2015, DamaD 2018). In Iraq and Tunisia, CSOs are the sole effective actors in this context due to the almost complete absence of the state (Kortam et al. 2020, p. 23). Tunisia also has a well-established tradition of trade unions that seems to offer a unique means of resistance to radicalisation. Two main factors come into play here: the modernisation policy since the country gained independence in 1956, and the important role played by the two big industrial labour unions. The historical presence of labour unions in some areas "gave the citizens an outlet for expressing their grievances and a mechanism for taking collective action to seek redress". Thus, resistance towards the state has historically been channelled through nonviolent means. This contrasts with areas where no labour unions were established: here, grievances were expressed through violent action (USIP 2019, p. 22). Considering the important roles CSOs play in communities in both MENA and the Western Balkans, the constitution and vibrancy of civil society and its organisations are a factor for community resilience.

5.3.3. Community resilience through online and offline de-radicalisation

Radicalisation is a process at the individual level which is highly personal – as is the process of de-radicalisation. Yet, again like radicalisation, de-radicalisation does not happen in a void and communities can shape the setting and factors influencing de-radicalisation – through their agency exerted in both online and offline spaces. PAVE research is particularly interested in investigating how online and offline de-radicalisation processes function and how their mechanisms diverge.

First, radicalisation can be prevented or reversed through disruption mechanisms – understood as "efforts to counter and oppose the radical doctrine, the ideological positions or interpretations that are utilised to justify radical views as well as violence in their pursuit" (KCSS 2020, p. 13). As outlined above, narratives play a crucial role for radicalisation. Narratives are transported online, particularly via social media but also in the offline space of day-to-day social interactions.

On the offline space, many of the factors that can reduce the attraction for extremist narratives and positively impact an individual's resilience fall under the aforementioned categories of social bonding, bridging and linking. An effective disruption of the spread of extremist narratives among community members is conditioned by their awareness of the spread of extremist narratives and its severity, in terms of promoting the use of violence or recruiting for violent extremist groups. Knowledge of the extent to which such extremist narratives are being promoted, and where this is happening, enables action to be taken to disrupt the transmission of narratives, including reducing recruitment. Research from the Western Balkans includes evidence of instances where local religious leaders became aware of the potential threat from foreign discourses and foreign influence in their communities, and took a proactive stance to prevent or curb these external influences and promote moderate or non-violent narratives. In some instances, this was achieved through a concerted effort within the hierarchy of religious institutions or in collaboration with the municipal authorities (Morina et al 2019). This form of communal gatekeeping included the banning of a religious preacher who was not accredited by the Islamic Association of Kosovo (Jakupi and Kraja 2018).

Such efforts to disrupt radicalisation by limiting exposure to extremist narratives or social links to recruiters or promotors of violence are harder to trace or initiate in the virtual world. Current research indicates that the Internet is the preferred means of individual radicalisation, especially among young people, and the Internet penetration is high in both in the Western Balkans and the MENA region. One factor that might potentially curb online radicalisation is to enhance online literacy, particularly among young people. However, research has yet to confirm that this is in fact an effective factor in increasing resilience. To counter the spread of online propaganda and violent extremist narratives, specific counter-narrative programmes have been developed. Counter-narratives aim to offer a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or to deconstruct or de-legitimise extremist narratives (Silverman et al 2016). Initiatives that seek to address online radicalisation are, for example, the online social campaign "As-Sakinah" launched to counter the online promotion of extremist ideologies through an intellectual and academic approach (al-Mushawwah 2013, p. 44-45). In the Western Balkans, a project called "Resonant Voices Initiative" was launched to expose false, biased or manipulated online content and to map radicalisation trends; it also provides training, mentoring and technical support for counter-narrative campaigns run by various stakeholders (Lorenzo, Nilsson and Svensson 2020, KCSS et al. 2020, p. 20). Yet de-radicalisation approaches relying on counter-narratives have been criticised for their insufficient theoretical and empirical foundations (Glazzard 2017, Reed 2018). There is still limited research on the impact of narratives on radicalisation processes and, in turn, on the effectiveness of counter-narrative programmes. Although the online work primarily targets individuals, communities can utilise such programmes or online offers to enhance their work offline, for example in schools or youth programmes. The As-Sakinah online campaign mentioned

above works to create an open dialogue that includes exposing 'fallacies' and a deviant understanding of Islam and eradicate related negative narratives while promoting a moderate Islamic ideology. The programme also provides advice to families if they detect signs of radicalisation in one of their members, thus building a bridge between online and offline de-radicalisation efforts (Al-Mushawwah 2013, p. 50f.).

The second form of de-radicalisation, besides disruption, consists of the disengagement of radicalised individuals from violence, and in due course from violent-justifying narratives. With the exception of online counter-narrative programmes (e.g. Silverman et al. 2016), the pathways to disengagement via online tools are largely unexplored, and most existing programmes adopt offline de-radicalisation approaches.

Disengagement can be promoted through (religious or mainstream) education programmes that foster a culture of debate and critical reflection on the core tenets of extremist ideology and radical narratives. The *al Munasaha wa al-Islah* (advise and reform) committee founded in Saudi Arabia is a de-radicalisation programme targeting the religious education of prisoners. Under the banner of promoting the 'true teachings of Islam', it promotes religious norms such as the prohibition of the use of violence against both Muslim and non-Muslin civilians. The programme offers social and economic incentives for prisoners to cooperate and the committee can make recommendations about the release of individuals (Stracke 2007, p. 10). In Egypt, imprisoned leaders of the violent groups *al Gama'a al-Islamiya* (IG) and *al-Jihad al-Islami* (IJ) unilaterally announced a cessation of violence in 1997 and 2007 respectively. This led to internal de-radicalisation processes in these groups that were facilitated by the Egyptian authorities through allowing respected scholars to visit the prisons in order to debate critical issues with the imprisoned leaders and other group members (Ashour 2015, Chowdhury-Fink and El-Said 2011, p. 8). It should be noted that these cases of de-radicalisation were primarily a disengagement from violence per se, not from the ideology or the general aims, and that there is debate about the effectiveness of the disengagement approach targeting extremist ideology.

Community members are also at the frontline of social reintegration approaches to disengagement. Examples are educational or rehabilitation initiatives in prisons which aim to prepare (mostly male)[19] inmates for life post-release by introducing vocational training to support social inclusion or build job-related skills. These programmes can support disengagement from radical ideology by addressing personal challenges and ideally supporting the inmate's re-definition of his/her identity towards nonviolence (RAN undated). One example of this is the *Moussalaha* (reconciliation) programme in Morocco which works towards the participatory reintegration of individuals imprisoned for extremism-related offences. Here, 'ordinary' prisoners are trained to coach their fellow prisoners. The programme evolves around the key term 'reconciliation', which involves several pillars: firstly being reconciled with oneself; secondly being reconciled with the text of the Qur'an; and finally being reconciled with all of society (GREASE 2020, p. 9). In Lebanon, the organisation "Rescue me", which works with detainees, also engages with their families to prepare and smooth their return to civilian

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[19] According to the PERICLES project, in the European context, prison inmates convicted for violent extremism are generally male, under 30 and married, with prisons described as sites of recruitment for 'angry, isolated, young men' (Kudlacek et al. 2020, 26).

life. Other examples of programmes that tackle de-radicalisation through a social work approach are "Hayat Canada" and "Families For Life", which operates in the UK. Both these community-based organisations (CBOs) are intended to act as anchor points for relatives and friends of young people affected by radicalisation, offering counselling and training on prevention of radicalisation and de-radicalisation. The basic assumption here is that working with the families and the community of radicalised individuals is as important as working with the individuals themselves. Both organisations were founded by mothers of individuals who were killed while fighting for ISIS (Sidlo 2017, p. 3)

The role of communities has been found to be particularly important for successful re-integration of disengaged extremists. As noted by Grip and Kotajoki (2019, p. 385) in a meta-study on de-radicalisation, disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremists: "Several studies from diverse geographical areas alluded to the importance of the role of the community, especially after disengagement, to facilitate reintegration and prevent re-engagement. Aspects of the community theme highlighted both the potential conflicts with community members upon return and the transformative process former extremists may engage in after their return to the community. Former extremists may have important roles in the community and social networks that remain politically active after disengagement. (…) In Northern Ireland, former detained extremists participated in community-based activities such as educational initiatives and restorative justice projects, many of which sought to prevent radicalisation among youth."

Community resilience can thus be promoted via such efforts, either conducted by the community itself, by providing funds or general support to organisations engaged in this type of work, or via representation and lobbying with alternative funders such as the state or international donors. Yet overall, most known or suspected factors promoting community resilience seem to lie in the physical world rather than the online space – a gap that PAVE sets out to explore.

5.3.4. Resilience-conducive transnational interactions

Communities' resilience is undoubtedly conditioned by macro-level political, structural and geostrategic factors that go beyond their control – in these cases community agency seems to fall short. Yet there are also transnational factors that in turn might promote resilience at community level, but have not been explored by researchers. Examples are cross-regional connections established between local communities, with the aim of facilitating mutual learning and exchange of lessons learned on effective approaches to PVE or de-radicalisation. The Strong Cities Network is one such example that offers space for peer exchange between municipal authorities. It aims to "facilitate systematic sharing of knowledge, expertise and lessons learned on building social cohesion and community resilience to prevent violent extremism across cities on an international basis, through both regional workshops and international conferences" and empower cities to take action, as well as building a platform to represent their needs towards the national and international actors.[20] There are other cross-national exchange and educational initiatives, one example being the imam training

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[20] https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/en/training/working-groups/counter-narratives-local-communications/

centre in Morocco whose mission is to "unify and coordinate the efforts of Muslim Ulema, in Morocco and in other African States, to make known the values of a tolerant Islam, to disseminate them and to reinforce them"[21] in an effort to curb violent extremism. Largely symbolic transnational acts may also be a factor in promoting resilience, such as the pledge of fraternity signed by the Pope and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar which calls for peace between nations, religions and races (Sherwood 2019).

Beyond such efforts that focus on strengthening community cohesion and tolerance, other transnational factors fall within the category of disruption of radicalisation, such as inter-governmental information exchange and security collaboration to control the movements of foreign fighters and recruiters or to curb financial flows.

5.4 Gender as a cross-cutting dimension of community resilience

The dominant presence of men and the overt celebration of violent masculinities in extremisms and the general social association of women with more peaceful behaviour (as well as influence over young people as mothers and greater community rootedness) have led many CVE projects to see engaging women as an important resource in countering extremism (Giscard d'Estaing 2017). This approach is bolstered by the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda, especially Resolution 2242, which identifies women as potential agents of community resilience, urging attention to gender as a cross-cutting issue within the CVE/CT Agendas (PeaceWomen 2020).

Although the role of women has also been acknowledged in national P/CVE strategies and there is a multitude of development and human security programmes in place that target the socio-economic empowerment of women, due to deeply-rooted traditions and roles in society, women are often hesitant to participate or are hard to reach in the first place. As a result, women are still not empowered enough to intervene in deviant behaviour at home and potentially positive effects of increased female participation, such as additional income and education, are bypassed. This is the case despite the existence of studies that have shown that interventions by women at home have led to decreases in petty crime. "In addition, there have been several recorded instances wherein mothers have prevented their children from travelling to Syria and Iraq to join Daesh" (Sayegh 2017). CVE literature increasingly highlights the need to enhance mothers' capacity to deter their children from joining violent groups. Nevertheless, it has been argued by the Empowering Women Countering Violent Extremism (EWCE) pilot project that an overly strong focus on the role of women as mothers in prevention efforts is to be avoided as it is "based on an over-simplistic understanding of the causes of extremism and the solutions" (Lebanese Centre for Development, Culture and Dialogue employee, cited in Eggert 2018, p. 7).

Several such CSO/Western donor-supported projects that target the role of women are under way in the field research sites. One example of this type of initiative is Sisters Against Violent Extremism, the world's first female counter-terrorism platform established in 2008 (SAVE 2020). Headquartered at the Women without Borders offices in Vienna, SAVE has several country chapters and coordinates a

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[21] https://www.fm6oa.org/en/objectives-of-mohammed-vi-foundation-of-african-oulema/

network of women that actively engages in CVE (SAVE 2020). SAVE is working closely with mothers and families to empower them as parents and help them to identify early signs of grievances, anger and actions that might lead to radicalisation (Chowdhury-Fink and Barakat 2013, p. 5).

Some of the P/CVE initiatives and reports in Serbia are focused on the roles of women in supporting, joining, intervening in, and preventing violent extremism in Sandžak. These initiatives suggest that to challenge extremism, one must also challenge traditional gender roles that suppress the participation of women in private and public life and entrench their financial dependency, poverty and illiteracy (particularly in rural areas). The Dutch Embassy in Kosovo, supported through the Netherlands' Fund for Regional Partnership – MATRA fund, has implemented a series of projects in Kosovo that target community resilience. The "Building Resilience: Communities against Violent Extremism" project is currently being implemented with the purpose of strengthening community resilience through inclusivity. This project aims to empower local communities in Kosovo, targeting women and youth to mobilise informal resilience networks against violent extremism. It seeks to provide local communities with a platform to address security-related concerns, along with information on how to facilitate the reintegration process of conflict-zone returnees. As a result of this project, one of the PAVE partners (KCSS) has established the Women's Security Forum – which is the only platform in Kosovo to provide women from different municipalities with a venue to discuss issues related to security. These forums offer a chance for women to address their concerns related to security, including radicalisation and violent extremism, and to discuss ways in which they can mobilise in their communities to address these issues (KCSS et al. 2020).

However, like many such projects, their effectiveness is yet to be evaluated and there are questions about the assumptions that underlie them. As shown above, for instance, women are often active agents in supporting extremist movements and their automatic association with building community resilience to extremism cannot be assumed. Another potential issue is conservative backlash against women who do engage in such projects, or the dangers they might face if they are seen to be instrumentalised by the state for security purposes (Giscard d'Estaing 2017). It will be interesting in PAVE to explore these assumptions about the gendering of resilience and to see whether placing so much emphasis on women's community work is indeed empowering for them. It will also be interesting to consider whether a gender approach focused solely on women is adequate or whether a gendered approach to resilience also needs to address violent masculinities or work with male allies in institutions marked by gendered power inequalities, such as religious bodies.

6. Conclusion

This paper presented a theoretical framework for the PAVE project. It identified the main concepts which the PAVE consortium will use to explore vulnerability and resilience to the process of radicalisation on a community level. The main concepts include the term radicalisation itself, which will be understood in terms of changing beliefs, feelings and behaviours in directions that justify inter-group violence. Related terms such as extremism, violent extremism, cumulative extremisms and overlapping extremism were also discussed. The term 'cumulative extremisms' refers to the ways in

which one form of (e.g. ethno-political or religious) extremism can feed off and magnify other forms by reinforcing inter-group polarisation, while overlapping extremism is understood as a multi-layered structure where different sources of extremist mobilisation reinforce each other cumulatively within the same organisation or community. The dynamics of cumulative and overlapping extremisms and their effects will be explored by PAVE in four Western Balkan countries and two MENA countries.

In addition to this conceptual synopsis, the paper discusses the interface between religious, political and ethnic or sectarian extremisms in the Western Balkans and MENA, highlighting the complex interactions between them, and the unique ways in which these interactions manifest themselves in different local contexts.

The last two sections of the paper focus on factors related to vulnerability to violent extremisms and resilience to violent extremisms. These factors are discussed in general as well as in relation to the main themes which will be explored in PAVE on a community level.

In relation to the issue of vulnerability, PAVE will explore online radicalising narratives in four Western Balkan and MENA contexts, the interplay between the state and religious institutions in five Western Balkan and MENA contexts and transnational dynamics across seven Western Balkan and MENA contexts as well as their relationship with the EU.

In relation to the factors of resilience, online and offline de-radicalisation, cooperation between the state and religious institutions and positive transnational dynamics will be explored across the matching contexts.

Finally, PAVE will focus on gender as a cross-cutting dimension within the study where a gendered approach will be applied to both the fieldwork and subsequent data analysis. Details of the specific countries studied in PAVE, methodologies employed in situ and the gendered approach employed by PAVE will be presented in the next project deliverable on field site selection and data collection methodology (D2.6).

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