PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

A Technical Guide for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Implementers

SUMMARY VERSION

IRI
INTERNATIONAL
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INTRODUCTION

The nature and threat of terrorism has evolved significantly since the United States launched the "global war on terror" after the September 11 attacks. The international community has increasingly recognized that militarized counterterrorism (CT) approaches are not sufficient to stem the spread of violent extremism. The U.S. Government Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR)[1] and the United States Institute of Peace Task Force on Preventing Violent Extremism in Fragile States,[2] acknowledge that in order to consolidate security gains, these militarized CT responses must work in tandem with efforts to prevent violent extremism from taking root.

This document is a summary version of a technical guide that outlines the International Republican Institute's (IRI) institutional approach to preventing violent extremism (PVE), and offers direction for democracy, rights and governance (DRG) implementers navigating this issue. The full guide is available upon request by contacting info@iri.org.

Democracy and Governance Deficiencies Drive Violent Extremism

When governments are unable or unwilling to respond to the demands and needs of their citizens, violent extremist organizations (VEOs) can provide an appealing outlet for festering grievances. Bolstering responsive governance and increasing transparency and inclusivity can help moderate grievances and delegitimize violent extremist organizations.[3] IRI's research in countries including Indonesia,[4] the Philippines,[5] Jordan,[6] Kosovo[7] and Tunisia[8] has resulted in the following findings:

- *National-local governance dissonance:* National CVE strategies often fail to incorporate consultations with communities most affected by VE. Moreover, state violence and restrictions can sometimes exacerbate VE susceptibility in vulnerable communities. It is essential to open channels of communication between the national and local levels to help ensure an accurate understanding of the threat and mobilize concerted efforts in response.

- *Informal governance and social structures:* Radicalization is a highly social process that can be facilitated — or disrupted — by informal governance and social structures. While positive social networks can function as a bulwark against malign influence, tribal dynamics can fuel corruption and may be volatile when friends and families are overwhelmingly the singular sources of information.

[1] U.S. Department of State, USAID, and Department of Defense. *Stabilization Assistance Review: A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas. Department of State*, 2018, www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/283589.pdf.

[2] For more on the importance of the prevention agenda, see Taskforce on Extremism in Fragile States. *Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A New Approach. U.S. Institute of Peace*, 26 Feb. 2019, www.usip.org/publications/2019/02/preventing-extremism-fragile-states-new-approach.

[3] Waggoner, Luke, and Geoffrey Macdonald. "From Countering to Preventing Violent Extremism." *Open Democracy*, International Republican Institute, 22 Nov. 2016, www.opendemocracy.net/geoffrey-macdonald-luke-waggoner/from-countering-to-preventing-violent-extremism.

[4] International Republican Institute. *Violent Extremism in Indonesia: Assessing Vulnerabilities and Sources of Resilience*, 17 May 2018, www.iri.org/resource/violent-extremism-indonesia-assessing-vulnerabilities-and-sources-resilience.

[5] International Republican Institute. *New Report Explores Violent Extremism in the Philippines at a Moment of Historic Change*, 26 Mar. 2019, www.iri.org/resource/new-report-explores-violent-extremism-philippines-moment-historic-change.

[6] International Republican Institute. *How Vulnerable Is Jordan to Violent Extremism?*, 7 Nov. 2018, www.iri.org/resource/how-vulnerable-jordan-violent-extremism.

[7] International Republican Institute. *New Research: Kosovars Cite Corruption and Unemployment as Drivers of Violent Extremism*, 27 Sept. 2017, www.iri.org/resource/new-research-kosovars-cite-corruption-and-unemployment-drivers-violent-extremism.

[8] International Republican Institute. *New Research: Disaffection and Limited Avenues for Engagement Leaves Tunisians Vulnerable to Violent Extremism*, 1 June 2017, www.iri.org/resource/new-research-disaffection-and-limited-avenues-engagement-leaves-tunisians-vulnerable.

■ *Political transitions*: In nascent democracies, citizen frustration can compound when progress after a democratic transition — including political and economic advancements — is slower than expected, and injustices, impunity, and human rights abuses continue to pervade. This was identified as a key vulnerability in Tunisia in particular, with many focus group discussants lamenting that nothing had changed after the transition, driving widespread disillusionment.[9]

IRI's Preventing Violent Extremism Approach: Moving Beyond the Drivers of Violent Extremism

IRI has found that focusing only on the macro, meso or micro levels of VE risks obscures the ways in which global, national, subnational, and individual levels interact with and reinforce each other. The drivers of violent extremism have been found to be highly contextual and localized. Violent extremism often overlaps with existing grievances and structural issues that interact with a broader system of conflict dynamics.

In order to address this critical gap in research and programming, IRI developed an institutional approach that emphasizes qualitative (focus group discussions, in-depth interviews) and quantitative survey research (polls), localized trainings and technical assistance, and building the capacity of local stakeholders.

The following sections outline one of the four phases of IRI's approach to PVE: *understand*, *inform*, *equip* and *adapt*.

Table 1: IRI's Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism

Understand:

Examine local contexts to identify governance deficiencies and their impact on the broader conflict system. This includes contextualized research through sources such as returned foreign terrorist fighters and their family members, and local religious, political, and civil society organizations.

Inform:

Building from our strong political and civic networks, IRI disseminates data to those tasked with addressing violent extremism. In the Western Balkans, Tunisia and Indonesia, IRI has convened cross-sectoral taskforces as hubs for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) strategy.

Equip:

IRI uses proprietary data to develop and support localized P/CVE interventions.

Adapt:

Internal and external evaluations test the efficacy of IRI programming, add nuance to our understanding of at-risk communities for more responsive interventions, and help ensure sustainability of resilience efforts.

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[9] Ibid.

UNDERSTAND: Analyzing the Nature of Violent Extremism

IRI's *understand* phase framework includes several levels of analysis to assess "vulnerabilities," as well as sources of "resilience." "Vulnerability" encompasses the full spectrum of VE drivers, including social, political and/or economic grievances that cause an individual to support violent extremism. "Resilience" connotes the ability of individuals to withstand recruitment efforts despite these grievances. Our streamlined PVE mixed-methodology approach allows a comprehensive picture of the local drivers of violent extremism. IRI applies a systems approach to its research and interventions to understand how its interventions impact the environment and what effects certain actions or dynamics may have on one another.

The following are some of the key lessons learned from IRI's research on VE:

- Given the highly political nature of VE, it is critical to fully understanding the governance deficiencies that contribute to VE vulnerability, the interaction of VE with radical political rhetoric, and the impact of political developments on VE.

- Apply "do no harm" principles throughout research and interventions that aim to prevent VE. When focusing on sensitive topics like VE, it is particularly important to ensure that participants provide informed consent and understand the research purpose. A collective understanding among participants should also be fostered by providing definitions of key terms such as violent extremism, radicalization, drivers, grievances, and VE vulnerabilities and resilience points.

INFORM: Ensuring an Evidence-Based Response to Violent Extremism

Policymakers and community leaders are often unaware or lack understanding of local VE drivers. Some actors may also lack the will to address these drivers through a preventative framework and may instead apply hardline security responses to disrupt an immediate threat. The *inform* phase aims to disseminate the findings from the research in the *understand* phase and foster a shared understanding of the problem.

To this end, IRI has accomplished the *inform* phase is by **establishing PVE taskforces at the regional, national and local levels to ensure a coordinated and informed approach to VE**. Such taskforces enshrine a "whole of society" approach to VE by bringing together a range of stakeholders, including members of national and local governmental bodies, civil society organizations, the religious and education communities, the media, and other relevant informal community leaders. From the Western Balkans to Indonesia, the taskforce model is effective in bolstering locally driven initiatives and establishing shared perception of the threat of VE.

For example, IRI's Western Balkans Taskforce on Extremism has become a model for regional cooperation on countering the corrosive influence of state actors like Russia and nonstate violent extremist actors. This led to the organization of two Western Balkans Resilience Forums, funded by the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (State/CSO), as well as supporting small grants activities that seek to counter VE in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

EQUIP: Providing Local Actors with Tools and Resources to Prevent Violent Extremism

IRI equips state and nonstate actors with resources, strategies and capacity aimed at addressing vulnerabilities to VE and the marginalization of at-risk communities and individuals. The unique, localized challenges associated with VE require coordination and action from a wide array of state and community actors.

How Can Democracy, Rights and Governance Implementers Prevent Violent Extremism?

DRG interventions are often conceptualized as part of the governance cycle, which includes:

- The "*supply side*" of the governance cycle, including government officials at the local or national level who are delivering services to the "demand-side" of the governance cycle.

- The "*demand side*" of the governance cycle, including civil society and other community actors, who are receiving those services and holding the "supply-side" actors accountable.

EXAMPLES OF "SUPPLY-SIDE" PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROJECTS

National-Local P/CVE Consultations
Effective P/CVE policies and programs must be based on evidence and an understanding of local dynamics. IRI coaches and advises local government leaders on best practices in democratic governance and PVE. IRI also facilitates coordination between national and local actors to ensure national-level policy considers local dynamics and expertise.

Government Outreach
Political exclusion has been recognized as contributing to VE vulnerability. IRI addresses this key issue by building trust between citizens and governments. Whether through town halls or public forums, government outreach programs can minimize citizen dissatisfaction and bolster government legitimacy. IRI aims to increase citizens' positive perceptions of the government and to empower citizens to work within a democratic system to redress grievances that may lead to VE.

Political Engagement
Engaging political actors on PVE can include shaping campaign messaging of political parties, or legislative strengthening to more effectively prevent VE. For example, in the Philippines, IRI engaged members of parliament in the newly established region, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, to discuss key opportunities and to foster political cohesion and tolerance.

SUPPLY

*IRI views a democratic political system as a **feedback loop**; where government officials and institutions are accountable, responsive and transparent to citizens, and citizens have a say in decision-making.*

DEMAND

EXAMPLES OF "DEMAND-SIDE" PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROJECTS

Community Cohesion and Civic Engagement

Real or perceived social marginalization can be a driver of VE across a variety of country contexts. In Tanzania[10] and Tunisia,[11] IRI has facilitated unity and cultural festivals to prevent terrorism. In Tunisia, this festival sought to showcase the talent and culture of a historically marginalized region in Kasserine and resulted in the government committing funds for future festivals from its budget.

Promoting Tolerant and Democratic Alternative Messages

In Bangladesh, IRI will conduct counter-messaging campaigns, which include encouraging positive forms of political and civic engagement, discouraging violence, and promoting examples of social and religious tolerance.

Bolstering Digital Literacy and Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

In Indonesia,[12] IRI focused on enhancing journalism skills that are conflict-sensitive and apply a human rights lens. As a result, journalists developed content, including articles, videos and even a documentary movie, that is actively circulated to spread awareness on the danger of hoaxes and VE.

ADAPT: Tailoring Preventing Violent Extremism Programming

This phase seeks to enshrine two elements in all IRI's PVE programming: agility and sustainability. Programmatic agility in the PVE space is essential and requires constant monitoring and a focus on contingencies. As threats morph, progress is made, key stakeholders change, and policy priorities shift, it is essential that all PVE programming contain nimble, yet substantive evaluation, adaptation and learning. The *adapt* phase includes evaluative frameworks and contextualized tools to facilitate learning. As VE morphs and evolves, it is imperative to consistently measure the impacts of programmatic interventions on the fluid threat and adapt accordingly. IRI has built in a number of programmatic pause points into the design of PVE projects. Adaptation must continue to be systematized to ensure projects are responsive and do no harm.

[10]   Robertazza, Victor. "Building Resiliency in Vulnerable Populations: Replicating Success on the Ground in Tanzania." *Democracy Speaks*, International Republican Institute, 12 Jan. 2018, www.democracyspeaks.org/blog/building-resiliency-vulnerable-populations-replicating-success-ground-tanzania.

[11]   Mooney, Lauren. "Tunisia Needs a Local Approach to Preventing Violent Extremism." *Democracy Speaks*, International Republican Institute, 24 Jun. 2019, www.democracyspeaks.org/blog/tunisia-needs-local-approach-preventing-violent-extremism.

[12]   Mooney, Lauren. "The Politicization of Intolerance in Indonesia." *Democracy Speaks*, International Republican Institute, 8 Nov. 2018, www.democracyspeaks.org/blog/politicization-intolerance-indonesia.

MEASURING RESULTS: Monitoring and Evaluation of Preventing Violent Extremism Programs

Measuring the effectiveness of PVE programming is a complex issue. In order to understand impact — in this case, the prevention of violent extremism — one must clearly define the VE dynamics that the project hopes to influence. Because proving the counterfactual, that a project helped reduce the amount of VEO recruitment or acts of VE in the context of a single project lifecycle, monitoring and evaluating PVE programmatic effects is challenging. The VE vulnerabilities and resiliencies identified in the *understand* phase function as proxy indicators that are (somewhat) easier to measure.

The following list provides examples of proxy indicators that could be measured to determine progress toward preventing VE.

- Media: Coverage of PVE topics in line with international best practices, presence or absence of intolerant (for example, radical, far-right, ethno-nationalistic) themes in mainstream or social media

- Community: Levels of cohesion, feelings of belonging, existence of social networks

- Political: Confidence in civic institutions (religious/security/community/political),

optimism for personal/community/country future

- Attitudinal: Change in support for local VEOs, support for violence in various circumstances, support for foreign terrorist fighters, accessibility of conflict resolution mechanisms

Featured Evaluation Methods

Selecting an evaluation approach for PVE programs necessarily involves tradeoffs that are driven by program context and design. There are several monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches that can effectively measure certain aspects of PVE projects.

Complexity-Aware Evaluation

PVE projects tend to be complex, meaning that the relationship between cause and effect is understandable in retrospect, but difficult to predict in advance.[13] The field of complexity-aware evaluation focuses on describing and understanding project implementation and context in order to determine a project's contribution to a social change.

Outcome harvesting and most significant change are two complexity-aware, nonexperimental evaluation types that do not required specialized software. Outcome harvesting involves the collection of evidence of achievements and then determines whether and how the project contributed to them.[14] Most significant change involves the collection and selection of significant change stories from beneficiaries.[15]

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[13] For a useful introduction to complexity aware evaluation, please see Rogers, Patricia. "Using Programme Theory to Evaluate Complicated and Complex Aspects of Interventions." *Evaluation*, 2008, citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.666.4955&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

[14] For more on outcome harvesting, see Wilson-Grau, Ricardo, and Heather Britt. *Outcome Harvesting*, Ford Foundation MENA Office, *USAID Learning Lab*, May 2012, dev.usaidlearninglab.org.623elmp01.blackmesh.com/sites/default/files/resource/files/outome_harvesting_brief_final_2012-05-2-1.pdf.

[15] For more on most significant change, see Davies, Rick, and Jess Dart. *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use*, funded by CARE International, et al., *USAID Learning Lab*, Apr. 2005, dev.usaidlearninglab.org.623elmp01.blackmesh.com/sites/default/files/resource/files/MSCGuide.pdf.

Impact Evaluation

Measuring the effects of an intervention against a control or comparison group, or otherwise ruling out alternate explanations of change, is the clearest and most effective way to demonstrate influence of a project. However, it is also the most-costly method, and project design must be built around the impact evaluation. These types of methods allow programs to see how a similar group of people or institutions that did not have exposure to P/CVE projects compared to those that did, and more rigorously identifies the degree to which a social change is attributable to a specific project.

Process Tracing is a type of impact evaluation that requires high-quality existing outcome data as well as contextual data. It is a case-based approach to infer causality and posit alternative explanations.[16] While this method does not provide the certainty about causation provided by experimental and quasi-experimental methods, it creates more clarity on the degree to which a project plausibly influenced an outcome.

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[16]   For an introduction to process tracing, and reference resources, see "Process Tracing." *BetterEvaluation*, 28 Apr. 2016, www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/processstracing.