



CORDIS Results Pack on **insights into extremism**

A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

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**Research and Strategies
to Prevent Radicalisation
and Violent Extremism**

Research and
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Editorial

The EU was established with the aim to provide common ground, literally and metaphorically, for its members to thrive in a stable and secure environment, being 'united in diversity.' The emergence of violent extremism, populism and radicalisation undermines European cohesion, unsettling the Union's foundations and fostering insecurity among its citizens.

For some, different ideological traditions or religious or political beliefs serve as flags of an 'otherness' they believe must be subdued. Impactful events may also give rise to extreme nationalist groups and/or tendencies. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, for example, in addition to the terrible human losses and destructions it causes in the country under attack, also deeply affects the social fabric of the occupying country as well as European societies in various ways. Not only did it lead to issues such as inflation and a new energy crisis, it also brought to light again another, more sinister façade of human nature often associated with societies in conflict. Extremist narratives surrounding the war emerged, leading to mounting polarisation in society and undermining stability.

Ever since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, addressing radicalisation and violent extremism has been and continues to be at the forefront of EU domestic and foreign security strategies. This challenge has prompted researchers to try to provide a better understanding of collective and individual triggers, geopolitical contexts, economic interests, diffusion channels and narratives. The goal is ultimately to shed light on why individuals embrace, support and act on extremist ideologies and movements that justify violence. Creating and sharing such knowledge constitute the first and most crucial step towards shaping resilient societies and designing interventions to protect the safety and well-being of all EU citizens.

An approach for unity, cohesion and security across the EU

A wide range of approaches (national security, international cooperation, social psychology, social policies, ethnography of social networks) turns the spotlight on the people and communities concerned. Moreover, it focuses on possible ways to address their challenges in order to build new forms of resilience and a common, inclusive sense of social cohesion against hateful and discriminatory extremist thinking and actions.

At a policy level, initiatives such as the [EU Strategic Orientations on a coordinated approach to prevention of radicalisation](#) ensure that actions taken at EU level address and are aligned with the needs and priorities of stakeholders in Member States. Equally, the [Radicalisation Awareness Network \(RAN\)](#) connects frontline practitioners from across Europe to exchange knowledge and approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms.

Moreover, the [Counter-Terrorism Agenda](#) aims to boost the EU's resilience to terrorist threats, while legislation such as [Regulation EU 2021/784](#) tackles the dissemination of terrorist content online. The European Democracy Action Plan also identifies the need to counter radicalisation and disinformation, as a way to strengthen the resilience of EU democracies.

Community-based strategies prevent violent extremism among youth

Better understanding of what drives young people to radicalisation and violent extremism across Europe, the Middle East and Africa led to improved prevention measures.

In trying to make sense of the world, youth can be drawn to radicalisation. There is a growing body of literature on youth radicalisation, but the majority does not take into account young people's opinions.

The EU-funded [CONNEKT](#) project gave youth a strong voice in understanding the phenomenon of violent extremism. It recognised young people as agents of prevention and their right to have a say in the issues that affect them. It also endeavoured to better comprehend grievances that may lead young people to radicalisation.

Making youth the focal point in tackling violent extremism

"The idea is to turn youth from being the 'problem' into the 'key' for a solution," explains CONNEKT scientific coordinator Lurdes Vidal Bertran.

"Their engagement in the design of prevention measures, besides empowering them, is a determining factor in guaranteeing the relevance and legitimacy of prevention strategies and in contributing to better adoption."

The scientists analysed seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30 at transnational/state, community and individual levels. These were: religion; digital socialisation; economic deprivation; territorial inequalities; transnational dynamics; political issues; and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities. The focus was on local

community authorities, organisations and leaders as the main actors of prevention.

From research to practice

The CONNEKT team mapped past and present country strategies and approaches towards radicalisation and violent extremism in Europe, the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia), and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia). This mapping helped to identify the main actors and existing frameworks and policies at state and local levels in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism.

The extensive research resulted in eight prevention toolkits – one for each country studied. They are a set of very practical, on-the-ground, tailor-made strategies and initiatives implemented in specific contexts relating to a particular country or topic. However, they are also replicable and transferable.

For example, the toolkit for civil society organisations and community actors to mitigate local threats in Jordan focuses on economic deprivation and digital socialisation as drivers of radicalisation. Taking into account these drivers and the contexts of social interaction (political and social participation, socialisation/education, cultural and leisure activities), this toolkit empowers youth through digital literacy to build resilience and create pathways for self-improvement and economic prosperity. The tools can be replicated in other countries with a similar combination of drivers and contexts of social interaction.



The idea is to turn youth from being the 'problem' into the 'key' for a solution.



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To complement the toolkits, a set of [cross-regional guidelines](#) provide local authorities with ideas and suggestions on how to better deal with radicalisation and violent extremist movements at home in their municipalities and local contexts.

A matter of policy

To bridge the gap between research and policymaking, CONNEKT published several [policy papers](#) aimed at translating research findings into practical and useful recommendations for multilevel policymakers in the target countries and the EU. Most were also accompanied by [policy briefs](#) summarising the most relevant conclusions and recommendations.

“CONNEKT’s added value is its multidisciplinary approach that de-securitises prevention by focusing on contexts and their local and community actors,” concludes Bertran. “It goes from the collection of primary data and strong academic research to the action-oriented, ready-to-use tools for target beneficiaries beyond the scope of the project.”

PROJECT

CONNEKT - CONTEXTS of extremism iN mEna and balKAn socieTies

COORDINATED BY

European Institute of the Mediterranean in Spain

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870772

PROJECT WEBSITE

h2020connekt.eu/



Countering the populist threat: policy recommendations and educational tools

Populist sentiments and politics are spreading across Europe, dividing society into 'Us' and 'Them'. An EU-funded project addresses this challenge, thereby ensuring stability of liberal democracies.

Populism is present in our societies as a specific mindset of people, as a communication style by both citizens and political actors, and as a political strategy represented by populist leaders and movements. Populist and extremist actors have also emerged in politics with some success in radicalising it.

"So while populism has a strong democratic potential, its political practice is often at odds with the norms and institutions of liberal democracy, therefore, it is also a potential threat to the latter," reflects Zsolt Boda, coordinator of the EU-funded [DEMOS](#) project.

To better understand populism and to address the challenges it brings, DEMOS studied the phenomenon from a multitude of perspectives and disciplines through the lens of [democratic efficacy](#). This is an idea inspired by the notion of political efficacy, which captures citizens' subjective attitudes towards politics.



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Unmasking populism: new insights

Having examined 17 European populist parties and movements across the continent, DEMOS argues that while they all adhere to the standard populist framework, there is not one but [four types of populism](#) in contemporary Europe. These are radical right-wing populist parties, radical left-wing populists, illiberal (post-communist) populist parties, and anti-establishment populists and political entrepreneurs.

The project also supports, while studying populism at the individual level, that the emotion of anger is a strong predictor of populist attitudes. "However, we also proved that the strength of populist attitudes is moderated by certain democratic capacities, especially for those who have strong internal efficacy feelings," highlights Boda.

DEMOS further found that the media landscape is witnessing a process of normalisation of populism in news coverage and that there are no national answers to populist 'threats' that are effective everywhere, every time.

Further project [insights](#) can be found on the DEMOS website.

How to address the populist challenge

Given the continued support for populist extremist parties, dealing with the populist challenge is important for the stability of liberal democracies. In this context, DEMOS developed a model of populist policymaking, policy recommendations and practical tools to provide key insights and help counter the populist threat.

The conceptual model of populist policymaking was developed along three dimensions: policy content, policy procedures and policy discourses. "This model was well received by the academic community. Today it may be a thesis in an academic paper, but tomorrow it will shape policies," notes Boda.

Several educational tools were also developed. "For instance, [Wing](#) is a game about populism and social change. It aims to help players learn about a possible path to becoming active citizens, to raise awareness of the skills needed to stand up against an authoritarian regime," explains Boda. Supporting educational material for the game was also developed.

The project expects that the educational tools will see some success. "So far, the website of the Wing game has got more than 300 000 hits and several thousand visits," confirms Boda.

"We expect some of the research findings will have a lasting effect on how we think about populism. We also hope they may be translated into new legal ideas, interpretations and ultimately, decisions," concludes Boda.

PROJECT

DEMOS - Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

COORDINATED BY

MTA Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Political Science in Hungary

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/822590

PROJECT WEBSITE

demos-h2020.eu/en



Unpacking populism: how personal factors shape political views

Data including bombing accounts from World War II, résumés, postcodes and attitudes about corporal punishment yield insight into extremism and the growth of populism.

With the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the British exit from the European Union (Brexit), populism was one of the words most frequently used by political commentators in 2016. Commonly used as a pejorative, populism refers to the engagement of ordinary people in the political process. The EU-funded [EXTREME](#) project used unique data sets and innovative techniques to explore the factors that influence populist perspectives in contemporary and historical contexts and interpreted how populism is linked to extremism.

EXTREME focused on three distinct topics. Using an extensive data set related to work history, the project analysed how career outlook correlated with voting patterns in the 2016 US election. Data on attitudes towards corporal punishment shed light on populist tendencies. Finally, granular data about bombing patterns in World War II and subsequent resistance led to insights on how to resist extremism.



Analysing Trump's appeal

Researchers studied how personal histories and economic shocks influenced voters' decision to support Donald Trump. Using a data set of 40 million résumés from 2010-2016 – the largest available collection of such information available in the US – the project matched education and career information with postcodes and voting variables.



A highlight of the project was learning that individual employment and educational histories affected populist vote. Thus, computing career values and studying their implications for other countries would be of the utmost importance/ the first.

An occupational transition matrix to compute average levels of career values by location and in relation to voting behaviour proved fruitful. According to project coordinator Maria Petrova: "A highlight of the project was learning that individual employment and educational histories affected populist vote. Thus, computing career values and studying their implications for other countries would be of the utmost importance/the first priority."

Corporal punishment and populism

A key question in understanding populism involves uncovering how negative personal experiences influence educational and career outcomes. Petrova sought to discover how corporal punishment in UK schools affected multiple outcomes, including education, employment, antisocial behaviour, voting for the populist UK Independence Party ([UKIP](#)) and Brexit.

Due to regulations that limited access to data in the UK, the project switched its focus to the study of corporal punishment in the US. Based on a survey from 2010, about 70 % of American voters support corporal punishment. Another survey indicates that 42 % of Brexit voters support corporal punishment in schools.

Resisting extremism in WWII

Hand in hand with understanding the root causes of populism is understanding what keeps populist views from devolving into extremism. Petrova used data on treason cases, BBC radio signal strength, daily bombing and wartime daily weather to connect resistance to aggression with exposure to bombing and BBC signal strength. This [research](#) sheds light on what makes people actively resist extremist regimes.

Using a regression discontinuity design and an instrumental variable approach to predict daily bombing, results confirmed that higher levels of bombing correlated with higher levels of domestic opposition and lower morale among German pilots. These results were amplified in areas with stronger BBC radio reception.

Understanding the link between populism and extremism is paramount to ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens. By studying how personal experiences and career outlook influence political views, EXTREME advances our understanding of populism. By studying resistance to extremism despite the risk of personal cost, the project sheds light on how society can become more resilient.

PROJECT

EXTREME - The Rise and Fall of Populism and Extremism

COORDINATED BY

Pompeu Fabra University in Spain

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/803506

PROJECT WEBSITE

sites.google.com/site/mariapetrovaphd/



Analysing cultural factors to raise resilience and reduce radicalisation

Global inequalities are on the rise and religion is sometimes weaponised to address grievances through religiously attributed violent radicalisation. Positive engagement with religious minority groups and culturally sensitive strategies that create trust instead of securitisation can curb violent radicalisation.

The previous decade has been marked by important violent radicalisation trends in European cities, indicating that policies aiming to integrate religious diversity into the mainstream are failing. The question has arisen whether secularism offers the right approach to accommodating religious minority claims. The EU-funded [GREASE](#) project brought together researchers from around the globe, particularly Muslim majority countries, to investigate alternatives and to shed light on best practices for addressing violent radicalisation dynamics. "GREASE sought to better understand the connection between state-religion relations, governance of religious diversity and violent radicalisation processes, in order to inform European efforts to prevent and counter religious radicalisation," noted Anna Triandafyllidou, scientific coordinator of the project.



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A spotlight on indicators

In order to investigate religious governance, researchers reviewed societal norms, laws and practices from diverse regions. A major outcome of the GREASE project was the development of a set of State-Religion Governance Indicators that allowed researchers to create an in-depth analysis of 24 countries across 8 regions, including 13 countries in Europe.

The State Indicators are a useful and accessible [tool](#) and are available for use by any country. The indicators, which included topics such as state recognition of religious freedom and the existence of religiously based parties in the political arena, allowed for quantitative as well as qualitative assessment and enabled a clear analysis of trends within each country and region.

Researchers explored best practices in the responses of 12 countries where acts of violent religious extremism had taken place. These results are presented in the 2020 publication '[An International Handbook of Good Practices for Building Resilience Against Violent Religious Radicalisation](#)'. Furthermore, the project's research on different models of religious governance became chapters in the '[Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity](#)', published in January 2021.

Amplifying the results

A major objective of the GREASE project was disseminating results to a wider audience and delivering key information to policymakers. In addition to creating and contributing to the handbooks, GREASE conducted two Massive Open Online courses, available through the [Futurelearn](#) platform. It hosted meetings and workshops, and uploaded blog posts about the governance of religious diversity



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and building resilience against violent radicalisation in the [openDemocracy platform](#).

The GREASE team also produced two high-quality documentary films featuring first-hand experiences of religious and national identity. The film [Countering Religious Extremism](#) explores specific examples of how to build resilience against radicalisation in six countries. In Italy, for example, having an imam fluent in Italian and Arabic lead prayers for Muslim inmates was instrumental in building community and reducing incidences of prison-born radicalisation. The films are available through the project website as well as YouTube.

There are many factors contributing to the growth of violent radicalisation in the modern world. The work of GREASE to establish highly applicable indicators for analysing religious governance is an important step in understanding and addressing religiously inspired violent radicalisation. When it comes to identifying best practices, Triandafyllidou stated: "Efforts aimed at preventing religiously motivated violent radicalisation should avoid restrictive interference and securitisation and instead focus on promoting democratic engagement and political participation

of religious groups." The project's in-depth analysis of the governance of religious diversity and their efforts to disseminate results are helping to promote an inclusive understanding of citizenship across Europe.

PROJECT

GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives

COORDINATED BY

European University Institute in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/770640

PROJECT WEBSITE

grease.eui.eu/



In-depth analysis exposes risk factors for violent extremism

Sophisticated modelling techniques and unique data sets yield results in the fight against violent extremism.



The ERC-funded [GRIEVANCE](#) project aims to advance the understanding and reduce the risk of extremist violence in all contexts. According to principal investigator Paul Gill: “Collectively, I think we’ve raised the bar and set an agenda for what the scientific study of risk and protective factors for violent extremism should look like.”

Innovative research

GRIEVANCE applied novel approaches to analyse risk factors associated with violent extremism. Among their innovative achievements, the team added to the field of terrorism studies by producing the first nationally representative survey to examine radical intentions and attitudes in the UK. They were also the first to apply [risk terrain modelling](#) to extremist violence in a Western context, as well as the first to apply [discrete choice modelling](#) to understand terrorist spatial decision-making.

In one example of how the project applied innovative modelling to spatial data to better analyse terrorist events, researchers learned that terrorist attacks increased in likelihood when the perpetrator resided close by. In another example, with respect to dissident Republican violence in Northern Ireland, an area was more likely to be chosen for attack if it contained a major road, police station or military base.

Developing data sets and data scientists

Much of the analysis performed by GRIEVANCE would not be possible without robust data sets. A major goal of the project



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was to move terrorism research beyond anecdotal stories that may obscure the bigger picture. Consequently, as well as using existing data sets, the team developed data sets through phone and online surveys and collaborated with agencies such as police departments. They also interviewed people who were involved in terrorism or violent extremism and gathered data through linguistic analysis. "Traditionally, terrorism studies have been viewed as devoid of data. They have come a long way in the last decade," Gill explains.

The collection and management of data related to the risk of violent extremism required a lot of organisation. Initial steps involved analysing the risk of radicalisation and recruitment. Further effort concentrated on spatial and temporal risk factors of violent extremism. Finally, researchers focused on potential negative impacts of government policies and counter-terrorism efforts.

GRIEVANCE has contributed much to the study of counter-terrorism, including the development of innovative techniques, new data sets and contribution to the field through dozens of [publications](#) in peer-reviewed journals. All these efforts demanded a strong cohort of data scientists, and one very promising outcome of the project was the development of human potential. "An important impact that the GRIEVANCE project will have is undoubtedly the cohort of early-career researchers it funded as research assistants and postdoctoral fellows," Gill comments. "Every one of them has already led influential work."

GRIEVANCE has made significant strides in understanding the risk factors involved in acts of violent extremism. They have developed large data sets as well as analytic techniques that help to broaden the study of extremist violence. The direction taken by GRIEVANCE will also allow investigators in related fields to deepen their understanding and combat the threat of violence in many contexts, including domestic abuse, cybercrime and youth violence. GRIEVANCE has set a course for making Europe a safer place.

PROJECT

GRIEVANCE - Gauging the Risk of Incidents of Extremist Violence Against Non-Combatant Entities

COORDINATED BY

University College London in the United Kingdom

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/758834

PROJECT WEBSITE

grievance-erc.com/



Tolerance: one of those things we cannot not want

ERC-funded research sheds light on the significance, measurement and broader implications of tolerance, a concept widely accepted yet difficult to define.

Tolerance is something of a buzzword today. While the concept is widely embraced in national, European and organisational settings, in celebration of diversity, it is also subject to interpretation.

As an essential aspect of a liberal democracy, positive intergroup relations and everyday life, tolerance is much more than putting up with things that we approve. Rather, it's about putting up with things that we find difficult to bear, according to Maykel Verkuyten, a professor of interdisciplinary social science at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, and former academic director at the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations.

Endurance in the face of disagreement

Verkuyten's ERC-funded InTo project explored the concept of intergroup toleration, shedding light on tolerance, its importance, definition and measurement, and implications of the research for broader debates around cultural diversity. Growing polarisation in society and the need for tolerance to prevent violent extremism, discrimination, repression, and oppression provided the main motivation for undertaking this research.

"Tolerance is one of these things that we 'cannot not want'," Verkuyten said, "even as we recognise that it is not the silver bullet for solving all diversity questions."

When asked to define intergroup toleration, he explained that it involves endurance and forbearance in the face of disagreement, disapproval or dislike. It requires self-control and positive behaviour.

"A more tolerant person is more likely to accept conduct that they object to," he noted, providing real-life examples of intergroup toleration in Europe. These include debates over the wearing of headscarves by Muslim women, the building of minarets in several EU capital cities, and public demonstrations by far-right groups.

What is considered tolerable?

The project measured tolerance in two ways: as a general personal difference trait and as acceptance of specific minority practices despite one's disapproval of these practices. Verkuyten emphasised the importance of establishing standards and allowable variations of what is considered tolerable. "Successful policies and interventions for improving tolerance need to set norms and stimulate the willingness and ability to discuss disagreements and put up with group differences," he said.

Considering the challenges of measuring tolerance, it was necessary to distinguish it from prejudice and broad negative feelings towards groups of people. These challenges were addressed through pilot tests and advanced statistical techniques.

Regarding the implications of his research for broader debates around cultural diversity, Verkuyten explained that tolerance is an intermediate position between complete rejection and wholehearted acceptance. "Obviously people should not reject or discriminate others but they should also not be expected to embrace and celebrate all differences," he explained.



Tolerance is one of these things that we 'cannot not want', even as we recognise that it is not the silver bullet for solving all questions.

The research highlighted the importance of establishing boundaries to what can and should be accepted, as reflected in the term 'zero tolerance'. Another key takeaway is that policies and initiatives for promoting tolerance should be included in civics courses, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education.

The InTo project resulted in many [academic publications](#) and the monograph 'The Social Psychology of Tolerance', published by Routledge (2023). Overall, the findings provide insights into the challenges of measuring and promoting tolerance, as well as the importance of establishing standards and boundaries. Policymakers and educators can use this research to develop initiatives and policies that promote tolerance and positive intergroup relations.

PROJECT

InTo - Intergroup toleration: Its Nature, Processes, and Consequences for Culturally Diverse Societies

COORDINATED BY

Utrecht University in the Netherlands

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/740788

PROJECT WEBSITE

intergrouptolerance.eu/



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An empathetic approach to youth radicalisation in Europe

Through multifaceted and in-depth qualitative research, an ERC-funded project sheds light on far-right extremism and Muslim youth radicalisation in Europe today.

During the last decades, we find ourselves at a historical juncture marked by the escalation of ethnocultural and religious tensions in the EU, hit by two substantial crises, namely the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis. The ERC-funded [ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM](#) project utilised a single optical lens to analyse the factors and processes behind the radicalisation of two groups of European youths: the natives who support movements labelled as far-right and the migrant-origin self-identified Muslims.

Across 2 interview rounds scheduled in 2020 and 2021, the research team conducted 307 interviews in 4 European countries: [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), [France](#) and [the Netherlands](#). Native interlocutors were chosen from middle-sized to large towns away from metropolitan capital cities (Aalst, Dresden, Ghent, Lyon and Rotterdam) and self-identified Muslim interlocutors from capital cities (Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels and Paris).

"As a starting point, the project problematised the neoliberal political tendency to criminalise and pathologise radicalisation by reducing the concept to extremism and terrorism," explains principal investigator Ayhan Kaya. "Contrary to this understanding, many youngsters are prone to non-violent radicalisation resulting from a deeper search for reflexive awareness," argues postdoctoral researcher Metin Koca.

Understanding reactionary radicalism

According to the findings of ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM, those who feel neglected, excluded, marginalised, alienated and forgotten are likely to manifest a reactionary form of radicalisation that is

often exploited by anti-systemic political and societal formations such as right-wing populist parties and movements.

One of the most surprising results seems to be that the density of Islamophobic discourse was much less than expected. The focus of the native youths was mostly on the socioeconomic, political, spatial and nostalgic forms of deprivation that they experience in everyday life.

"The most effective deradicalisation strategy would be to create programmes that reduce the anger and anxiety caused by marginalising factors like unemployment and discrimination," suggests postdoctoral researcher Ayşe Benevento.

Another remarkable result was the realisation of how much all interlocutors appreciated talking about their everyday lives and communicating with the researchers about the hardships they experienced. The latter are mostly related to different forms of intersectional discrimination, labelling, framing, exclusion, discrimination, stigmatisation, inequality and humiliation.

Both groups of youngsters appreciated the chance to share feelings and perceived discrimination. This prompted the researchers to start actively listening by creating the hashtag #LendThemYourEars. Through this hashtag, young people could share their thoughts and feelings with the public via the project's Twitter account.



The most effective deradicalisation strategy would be to create programmes that reduce the anger and anxiety caused by marginalising factors like unemployment and discrimination.



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Solidifying research findings for an effective deradicalisation process

Based on the [rich corpus of publications](#) the project has produced, the team has prepared policy recommendations for actors such as the EU, national governments, local and regional administrations, non-governmental organisations, civil society and media organs.

One of the most important reasons for radicalisation among youth groups, according to project findings, is the fact that many

state actors no longer invest in the formation of cultural, youth and community centres where young people can express their anger, anxiety, frustration and resentment through aesthetic forms of expression, or sports facilities.

Since all radicalisation is local, the central and local state actors and relevant civil society organisations should prioritise the formation of third spaces where young people from diverse backgrounds can communicate with each other, and invest in the practices of collaboration, co-creation, communication, dialogue, and active citizenship.

There is a need for popular culture, arts, music, dance, performativity and sports activities that bring young people together to communicate with each other. They could express

their feelings of alienation and structural 'outsiderism' not through destructive means, but through creative forms such as music, dance, graffiti, painting, and sports. To this end, ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM aspires to engage civil society organisations, universities, schools and municipalities.

PROJECT

ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM - Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism: Culturalisation and Religionisation of what is Social, Economic and Political in Europe

COORDINATED BY

Istanbul Bilgi University in Turkey

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/785934

PROJECT WEBSITE

bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/homepage/brief-description/



No laughing matter: the use of online ‘fun’ as a tool for extreme speech

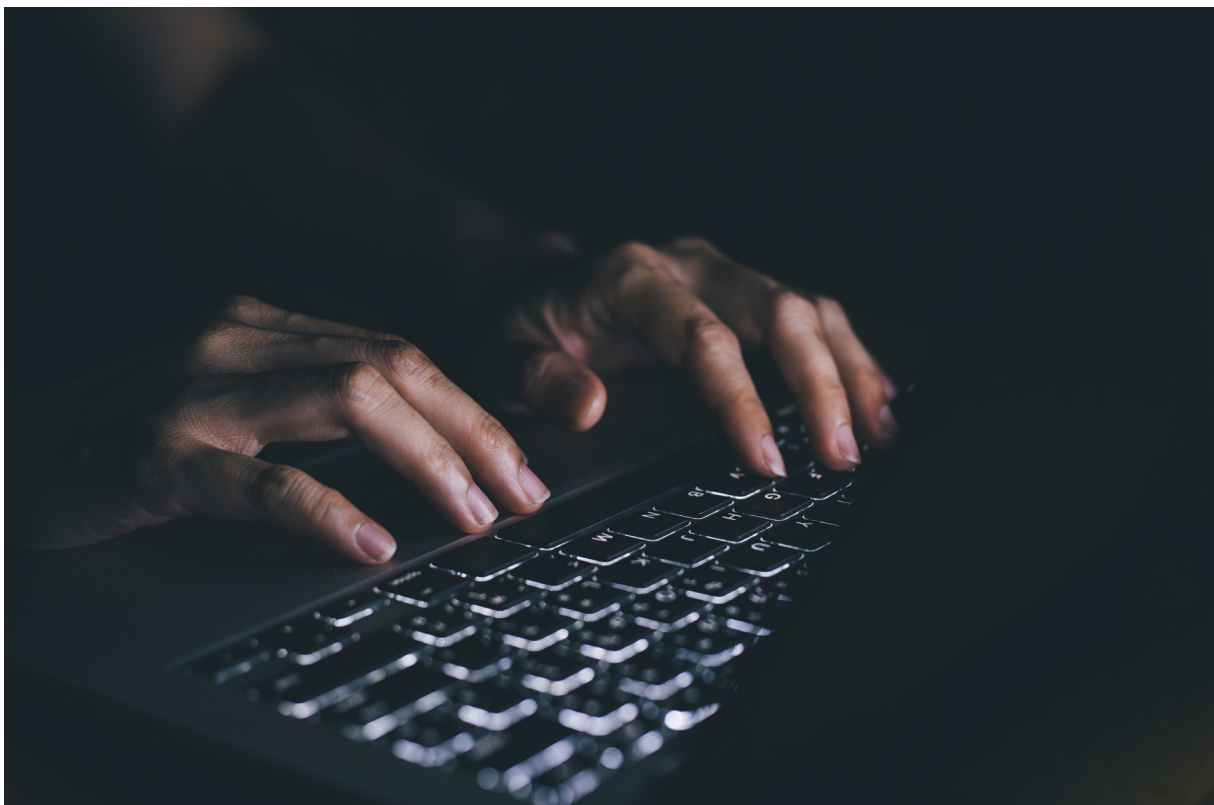
New research sheds light on how right-wing actors use fun to evade online regulations.

Social media platforms have become a powerful tool for far-right movements to spread extreme speech and ideology. They also present significant challenges for online regulation and moderation.

One researcher, Sahana Udupa, a professor of media anthropology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany, embarked on a project to explore the complex relationship between digital media and the political cultures of religious identities in India and its diaspora in the UK and Germany.

Udupa's ERC-funded project ONLINERPOL was inspired by her first monograph, an ethnography of news media and urban politics. During that work, she observed major transformations in how people consumed and engaged with media.

"The vast expansion of smartphones and cheap data plans revolutionised the scene," she explains. "This shifting media scenario was a major infrastructural inflection point for historically shaped structures of power around religious and nationalist identities."



Fun as a right-wing strategy

One of the most significant outcomes of Udupa's research is her theory of "fun as a meta-practice" of online extreme speech. She discovered that right-wing actors strategically use fun to evade regulatory attention and content filters.



I was surprised by how vitriolic exchanges on online media are often experienced as enjoyment.

"I was surprised by how vitriolic exchanges on online media are often experienced as enjoyment," she says.

For instance, fun allows for the formation of social bonds among users who share the same ideological positions. It is not about being funny but about trending the hashtag and making a mark in online discussions.

In countries such as Denmark and Germany, online fun has allowed far-right activists to escape strict regulations around speech while deriving pleasure from clever twists of words, suggestive phrasing and coded language.

"Fun lies in remediating memetic texts and infusing them with the splendour of pop cultural symbols – from Bollywood, Hollywood and regional cinema to folklore, local idioms and wordplays," Udupa elaborates.

Together with fact-checkers

To understand the regulatory implications of fun and complex culturally coded expressions in relation to right-wing political cultures online, Udupa teamed up with fact-checkers, AI

developers and ethnographers. After building a collaborative coding model to detect problematic speech, they developed the framework of 'ethical scaling' as a critique of AI. It highlighted the significance of community involvement in the imagination and development of technology.

ONLINERPOL has contributed towards understanding how the internet has become a vital connective tissue of xenophobic and exclusionary nationalist politics globally. A recipient of the Francqui Chair in 2021 for her academic research in the area of extreme speech research, and a Fall 2021 Joan Shorenstein Fellow, Udupa has also drafted a strategy paper for UN Peacekeeping concerning the challenges presented by hate speech in the online space.

Looking ahead, she plans to continue researching different dimensions of digital cultures and strengthening For Digital Dignity, a network of scholars and activists with a shared vision to foster enabling spaces of political expression online.

PROJECT

ONLINERPOL – Faith Online: Transnational Religious Politics on New Media in India and Europe

COORDINATED BY

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in Germany

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 – ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/714285



Understanding – and preventing – violent extremism and radicalisation

Involving decision makers, along with civil society, marginalised minorities, scientific communities and academia, is the key to making democratic societies more robust in facing the threat of extremism and polarisation.

From far-right violence to jihadist terrorism, extremism, radicalisation and polarisation are frequent topics of discussion in modern society. The decline of society as a place of institutional integration, social participation and a source of morality generates self-victimisation, marginalisation, anomia and unhappiness: the effort by some to disconnect from this reality leads them to try to rebuild their subjectivity via violent extremism.

"Quite different forms of far-right extremism are having an impact in Europe and along its borders," says Francesco Antonelli, professor of sociology at [Roma Tre University](#), Political Science Department.

"Far-right violence which emerged in violent football 'ultra' groups that in some cases mutated into militias, far-right cultures across gaming platforms, and jihadist violence that remains a threat – these are just a few examples of the extremism that permeates our everyday lives."

How do we mitigate the spread of extremism and prevent it from escalating into violence? According to the EU-funded [PARTICIPATION](#) project, it all starts with implementing more effective social and education policies and interventions.

After 2001, the massive return of terrorism to our societies has determined, among other things, an increasing divide between political elites and experts engaged to understand and tackle violent radicalisation, homegrown terrorism and extremism. This discord also extends to civil society, usually a prisoner of

fear and sometimes seen as part of the problem rather than the solution.

"Stopping extremism must start from the assumption that it has to be fought through a broad mobilisation of civil society – an alliance between science, academia and society," adds Antonelli, who coordinated the project.

A bottom-up approach to stopping extremism and radicalisation

The PARTICIPATION project is unique in that it takes a holistic, bottom-up approach to stopping extremism and radicalisation.

"This approach allows us to capture and explore contemporary experiences of extremism and radicalisation and propose concrete actions, policies and digital tools that will empower policymakers and practitioners to respond to a changing reality," explains Antonelli.

To start with, researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of what drives extremism and radical ideologies. Based on these findings, they then looked at possible communication and



Stopping extremism must start from the assumption that it has to be fought through a broad mobilisation of civil society – an alliance between science, academia and society.



education-based countermeasures. These include a number of ICT tools and handbooks for teachers.

Next, the team turned to developing policies, methodological tools, and a set of early warning signs, skills and knowledge that could be used to tackle radicalisation. Finally, the project shared their proposed solutions with civil society actors, practitioners and decision makers.

“What makes this strategy so unique is that it cast people – those who are most often the victims of such extremism – as the main protagonists for preventing violent radicalisation,” remarks Antonelli.

“Instead of driving the conversation, decision makers take a supporting role, developing policies geared towards empowering society against extremism.”

Empowering society against extremism

Radicalisation is a process, whereas extremism refers to a person's beliefs. One of the most important outcomes of the project is an innovative methodology for analysing violent radicalisation. The method, which has been fully tested and validated, uses a combination of participatory approaches like a social lab and traditional research tools such as surveys.

A blueprint for holistically addressing violent radicalisation

Thanks in part to this methodology, the PARTICIPATION project has developed a blueprint for not only understanding the root causes of violent radicalisation in Europe but also taking a society-centric approach to addressing these causes.

By involving decision makers, along with civil society, marginalised minorities, scientific communities and academia, the project believes it can help make democratic societies more robust in facing the threat of extremism and polarisation.

"We demonstrated that it is possible and necessary to contrast violent extremism, as well as the authoritarian regimes threatening some European countries, with an improvement in the quality of democracy and the reconstruction of the alliance between social sciences and civil society," concludes Antonelli.

To further strengthen this connection, the project team is now looking at how it can add co-creation to the PARTICIPATION methodology. Researchers have also made the project's results available via the [First Line Practitioners platform](#).

PROJECT

PARTICIPATION - Analyzing and Preventing Extremism Via Participation

COORDINATED BY

L'Università degli Studi Roma Tre in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 – SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/962547

PROJECT WEBSITE

participation-in.eu/the-project/



New insight into driving factors of radicalisation and resilience to tackle violent extremism

Training tools and guidelines help policymakers and community leaders to prevent and mitigate violent extremism.

Violent extremism has gained increased attention from the research community both within the EU and beyond. Scholars have mainly focused on the structural and individual drivers of violent extremism.

However, little attention has been paid to community dynamics that impact and are impacted by violent extremism. A better understanding is needed of the roles that communities play, particularly the factors that make them resilient to violent extremism.

The PAVE team conducted fieldwork and case studies on municipalities in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia). They explored political dynamics, the state's role, and the relevance of past conflicts in the development and persistence of violent extremism. They also looked at the role of religious and civic education and media influences.



By generating new information about ways that local communities can counteract radicalisation, we provide valuable insights into the tools and mechanisms that the EU and other stakeholders can use in managing the various factors and contexts of violent extremism.

Dealing with the complex issue of violent extremism

The EU-funded [PAVE](#) project addressed the knowledge gap on how local communities promote and/or prevent religious or ethno-political radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. "By generating new information about ways that local communities can counteract radicalisation, we provide valuable insights into the tools and mechanisms that the EU and other stakeholders can use in managing the various factors and contexts of violent extremism," explains project coordinator Véronique Dudouet, senior research advisor at the Berghof Foundation in Germany.

Results show that these factors have a dual role. Each can exacerbate or mitigate violent extremism. This depends on the context and the way relevant actors are involved. "Vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism are two sides of the same coin," comments Dudouet.

Involving local actors in finding tangible, effective PVE measures

Findings also reveal that preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives can be successful only when actors such as civil society organisations, formal and informal religious leaders, government and administration representatives, security agencies and educators collaborate. A report presented the [main research outcomes](#).



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Project partners created a [toolkit](#) on cross-regional vulnerability and resilience factors among diaspora communities in Europe for a broad audience, including public authorities and practitioners involved in PVE, social integration, social cohesion, intercultural programmes and education. The toolkit was developed together with an interactive [risk and resilience map](#) on transnational radicalisation dynamics between the EU, the Western Balkans and the MENA region.

Improving resilience within communities

Another [report](#) outlined policy guidelines for multi-stakeholder cooperation in PVE. In addition, [policy briefs](#) for all seven countries put forth concrete, targeted and implementable recommendations to foster community resilience against violent extremism.

The researchers developed five online and offline [training modules](#) for practitioners and local communities. The aim is to strengthen their ability to promote and support inclusive local multi-stakeholder partnerships between civil society, religious actors and government officials in preventing and addressing violent extremism. Led by facilitators, the modules are designed as an online option for individual users or an in-person group format.

“PAVE looked at both drivers of radicalisation and drivers of community resilience across two regions rarely studied together – the Western Balkans and MENA,” concludes Dudouet. “This allowed us to identify what contributes to, but also what mitigates, the emergence of violent extremism at community level, paying particular attention to the role of leaders based on different kinds of social authority and legitimacy.”

PROJECT

PAVE - Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA

COORDINATED BY

Berghof Foundation Operations GmbH in Germany

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CORDIS FACTSHEET

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PROJECT WEBSITE

pave-project.eu/



The multifaceted interrelationship between protest and democratic order

An ERC-funded project explored the function of political protest in contemporary social and political transformations within modern democratic societies.

In times of cataclysmic social transformation, a continuous updating of our interpretation tools regarding political expression is imperative. The ERC-funded [POWDER](#) project investigated the interplay of democracy and protest. More specifically, the researchers assessed whether contemporary protest movements influence the premises of democracy, and whether the democratic order gives rise to specific forms of protest.



It is important to understand how protest influences the way people perceive the democratic order and whether they can feel part of it or not, what horizons of experience are opened up by protest, and what social imaginaries about agency, community and conflict resolution emerge.

POWDER was divided into an overarching 'Theoretical Framework Project' and the following empirical sub-projects: 'Digital Protest Movements', 'No-border and refugee protest' and 'Rightwing Identitarian Protest'.

Deciphering the meaning and the function of protest today

The 'Theoretical Framework Project' focused on interpreting the meaning and function of political protest in modern democracies and developed [normative criteria](#) for assessing its democratic quality. "It is important to understand how protest influences the way

people perceive the democratic order and whether they can feel part of it or not," explains principal investigator Christian Volk.

Crucial here is the distinction between reformist protest – that expresses dissatisfaction, criticises and raises awareness on neglected issues, and pushes policymakers to meet its demands – and transformative protest – that initiates discourses of legitimacy about the structure of the democratic order and its specific modes of exercising power. Transformative protest, in turn, can be distinguished into emancipatory and non-emancipatory based on the political interaction that exists within protest collectives, between political opponents and the public.

This distinction is highlighted, for example, in the case of certain environmental movements as a threat to democratic order. "Protests in the face of the climate crisis have mobilised the concept of civil disobedience for their actions. New actors such as ['The Last Generation'](#) perform politically motivated violations of basic rules of the democratic order as a means for democratic emancipatory struggles," clarifies Volk.

The mechanics of protest in contemporary democracies

'Digital Protest Movements' focused on the ways digital activists seek to politicise issues of political participation, democratic decision-making and transparency through the design of digital

technologies. "What emerges out of this research is a strategy of productive protest, when combined with a public critique of the power relations that emerge through the digital transformation of modern democracies," explains research fellow Daniel Staemmler.

'No-border and refugee protest' unravelled the mechanisms through which protest and border struggles challenge and contest common presuppositions about the execution of democracy. "By claiming that questions of belonging and equal rights should not be structured through citizenship, the protests by irregularised migrants publicly articulate dissident interpretations of fundamental principles of democratic orders," points out research fellow Laura Gorriahn.

'Rightwing Identitarian Protest' examined how contemporary grassroots right-wing movements organise their protest in the name of democracy. By claiming to defend free speech and represent the people, they structure their framing mechanisms around an ideology of exclusion. "In demanding the fallacious return to a homogenous people, they assault basic principles of democratic ordering," notes research fellow Danniell Gobbi.

"Our research perspective has proven to be an advanced tool for understanding contemporary developments within democratic societies," states Volk. "It seems important to us to continue disseminating these findings in the media and the political public sphere to help avoid premature devaluations of protest." The team is currently in the process of preparing several co-authored papers for this aim.

PROJECT

POWDER – Protest and Order. Democratic theory, contentious politics, and the changing shape of western democracies

COORDINATED BY

Humboldt University of Berlin in Germany

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PROJECT WEBSITE

sowi.hu-berlin.de/de/lehrbereiche/theorie-der-politik/research/aktuelle-forschungsprojekte/



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Material grievances make some communities more receptive to violent extremism

In-depth case studies and regional comparisons shed new light on the dynamics of violent extremism in the Balkans, Middle East and North Africa.



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Literature published since 9/11 has improved our understanding of radicalisation processes and how groups that promote violent extremism operate. Despite its usefulness, this body of research has obstructed our awareness of the fact that most people

are not radicalised, even in areas that provide fertile ground for radical ideas. These so-called enabling environments are places of poverty that lack social mobility, leading people to feel hopeless about their future.

Investigating the foundations of local community resilience

The EU-funded [PREVEX](#) project explored why some communities are more likely to experience violent extremism through empirical investigations on the ground in the Western Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel.

Findings revealed that even in the most enabling environments in the Middle East or the Sahel, the majority of people were not radicalised. These are detailed in multiple [project outputs](#) such as working papers, policy briefs, key stakeholder dialogues and podcasts.

Both individuals and local communities were very resilient in the face of violent extremist ideas and groups. “This has huge implications for how we think about and design preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies, as this high level of local community resilience often is overlooked and ignored both in national and international approaches to P/CVE,” explains project leader Morten Bøås, research professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

Boosting societal resilience

The PREVEX team conducted case studies on the occurrence and non-occurrence of violent extremism, gathered the results and made regional comparisons.

Strong focus on the non-occurrence of violent extremism was a key innovative aspect of the research. This is because most research on violent extremism deals with answering the question of why some people take up arms, instead of answering the reverse question of why people living in enabling environments often choose not to become involved in political violence. Therefore, P/CVE policies must incorporate knowledge of why individuals and groups resist such influence, even in enabling environments.

Project partners found that local resistance to radicalisation originated from a long, continuous tradition of religious tolerance and social moderation supported by traditional or religious leaders who appeared to be trustworthy and who were themselves relatively moderate and uncorrupted. However, these leaders must also deliver something that matters to the local community, and which strengthens the social cohesion in the community. If all these factors are present, it creates a ‘glue’ in society and constitutes a significant defence against radical ideas.

Rethinking P/CVE programming in the future

An equally important finding was that the journey into violent extremist insurgencies rarely starts with religious conviction.

“PREVEX drew considerable attention to the blind zone that almost two decades of work on the occurrence of violent extremism created, namely that most people are not radicalised,” comments Bøås. “Even among those who join these movements as rank-and-file, the majority are not motivated by religion or ideological conviction, but by very genuine material grievances such as lack of opportunities in life, work and education, or by heavy-handed state security approaches.”

The project continues to interest policymakers, politicians and academics alike. Bøås has been commissioned to write three articles on radicalisation and violent extremism for ‘Open Access Government’. The influential journal reaches a wide range of policymakers and public employees in Europe and North America. The first [article](#) was published in February this year.

Several project partners have turned their focus to the impact of social media on vulnerable populations in enabling environments.

“We know that violent entrepreneurs attempt this through AI and other cyber tactics, but to come up with policies to counter this trend, we need to know more precisely how large this amplifying effect is and who is most susceptible,” concludes Bøås.

PROJECT

PREVEX - Preventing Violent Extremism in the Balkans and the MENA: Strengthening Resilience in Enabling Environments

COORDINATED BY

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
in Norway

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870724

PROJECT WEBSITE

prevex-balkan-mena.eu/



PREVEX drew considerable attention to the blind zone that almost two decades of work on the occurrence of violent extremism created, namely that most people are not radicalised.

Looking to the past: Docutube helps teens think, reflect and discuss religion

Researchers use the learning with history approach to promote religious and convictional toleration among European youth.



Many European narratives feature conflicts between religion and society. Understanding these narratives can promote religious coexistence, diffuse radicalisation and support inclusive and reflective European societies – a goal of the EU. The EU-funded RETOPEA project, which used primary source materials to create a didactic methodology targeting teens, addresses this goal.

Learning with history supports tolerance of religious diversity

According to project coordinator Patrick Pasture: “Our aim was to address the issue of religious diversity through the learning with

history approach, a concept that invites young people to think critically about the past and present by reflectively engaging with primary sources.”

RETOPEA used this approach to develop a didactic tool for stimulating toleration and peaceful coexistence among young people. The project also adapted it to formulate conclusions and advice for policymakers, especially for those who are engaged in [interconvictional dialogue](#).

Docutubes and clippings

RETOPEA developed an educational toolkit for formal and informal educational settings, available in several languages on the website. Young people were asked to make a short documentary called a docutube about religious toleration and coexistence. As part of the toolkit, an extensive collection of [clippings](#), including images and extracts from peace treaties, served as a starting point for discussion and inclusion in the docutubes.

The result provides young people with a safe space to reflect and discuss their experiences, increases their historical and religious literacy and develops their media skills. Open University has also developed a [badged open course](#) to teach educators how to work with the methodology.

Amplifying the RETOPEA methodology

Helping teens reflect on and communicate about religion and culture has gained traction with educators. Euroclio, the main association in Europe for civics educators and history teachers, promotes the project's methodology on its [website](#).

Project partners have promoted RETOPEA's work in a variety of settings. A grant from [Culham St Gabriel's](#) supports continued testing among interfaith groups in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Presentations to agencies in Jordan and Oman have extended the project's reach in the Middle East, and institutions in Canada and the United States have also expressed interest.

The project has published one book on [Religious Diversity in Europe: Mediating the Past to the Young](#) (London: Bloomsbury)

and another on the use of clippings and docutubes is in production, further amplifying RETOPEA's message. The methodology is being adopted by various organisations and in diverse contexts. In one example, clippings will be used in a pilot project in Germany to provide a digital training course for social workers.

Promoting religious tolerance early on

RETOPEA found that young people are interested in talking about religion but feel like there is not much opportunity to do so. Pasture says: “Making space for that is really necessary. Young people are often very wary about public discourse and the way religion is portrayed in the media.” While the project has captured the interest and leveraged the skills of teenagers, efforts to extend the approach to younger children has proved challenging. Project partners emphasise that to optimise the impact of the methodology, educators need to provide adequate time and space.

Overall, the project's approach paves the way for teenagers to think about religious cohabitation in a more nuanced, empathetic way. Pasture concludes: “RETOPEA thus contributes to preventing radicalisation, improving ways of dealing with interconvictional conflict and promoting a more harmonious society.”



RETOPEA thus contributes to preventing radicalisation, improving ways of dealing with religious conflict and promoting a more harmonious society.

PROJECT

RETOPEA - Religious Toleration and Peace

COORDINATED BY

KU Leuven in Belgium

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/770309

PROJECT WEBSITE

retopea.eu/s/start/page/home/



Authority, order and the role of religious vigilantes

In cities where government agencies struggle to provide security for all, ethnographic studies investigate how religious actors assert control and maintain order.

Religious vigilantes act side by side with state actors. They employ violence systematically to maintain control, but they do not seek to overthrow the state or gain the attention of a global audience. The number of megacities in the world is on the rise, as is the number of people with religious adherence. When state agencies cannot provide infrastructure and security to all citizens, alternative forms of governance arise. The EU-funded [SACRASEC](#) project explores how religion serves as a powerful component in the maintenance of civil order.

Ethnographic comparison

The emergence of religious vigilantes points to a different relationship between violence and religion than is emphasised in most studies of terrorism and fundamentalism. To better understand this dynamic, the project conducted an ethnographic comparison of three megacities of the Global South: Jakarta, Lagos and Rio de Janeiro. The case studies focused on Islamic and Indigenous religions in Jakarta, Christian, Islamic and Indigenous religions in Lagos, and Christian and Afro-Brazilian religions in Rio de Janeiro.

Comparing the role of different religions in different communities allowed researchers to analyse the particularities of each context as well as to draw general conclusions about the role of religion in alternative governance. According to project coordinator Martijn Oosterbaan: "We documented in which ways the urban form is shaped by religious actors and how this relates to the neighbourhoods in which order is contested and security is at stake." The project hosted two case studies in each city. A total of six researchers were involved, a combination of PhD students and postdoctoral fellows. Researchers used a

range of ethnographic tools, including participant observation, sensory ethnography, interviews, informal conversations and digital ethnography.

Religious actors in the Global South

The specifics of religious vigilantism in each city shed light on how religion is entangled with alternative governance. In addition to hosting multiple workshops, the project produced several scholarly publications. Jakarta-based [research](#) analysed how portraits of Habib Rizieq, the leader of a banned religious movement, give residents in the neighbourhood where he lives a feeling of security. A forthcoming article in [Culture and Religion](#)

explores how the protective charms, rituals and amulets used by members of Vigilante Group Nigeria give a sense of security to residents in the neighbourhoods they patrol. In Rio de Janeiro, [research](#) showed how the special operations battalion of the military police use Christian symbols and practices to legitimise violence.

At the heart of the project, researchers tried to understand why megacity residents grant religious vigilantes authority, and what the role of religion plays in the legitimisation of vigilante practices. Oosterbaan says: "In megacities of the global south, religion is part of urban environments that expose people to social, environmental, economic and political risks. Non-state actors that compete for authority gain legitimacy because they intervene in mundane and spiritual ways."



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© Martijn Oosterbaan

With megacities on the rise around the world, a clearer understanding of the role played by religion in alternative governance is imperative. The ethnographic insights of SACRASEC will help policymakers reassess the role of religion in governance, bringing us one step closer to making communities everywhere safer.

PROJECT

SACRASEC - Sacralizing Security: Religion, Violence and Authority in Mega-Cities of the Global South

COORDINATED BY

Utrecht University in the Netherlands

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020 - ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/818707

PROJECT WEBSITE

sacrasec.sites.uu.nl/



Using machine learning to identify political violence and anticipate conflict

An EU-funded project is using machine learning to predict and provide early warning of the likelihood of conflict and violence in countries around the world.

In today's world, conflict and violence continue to cause unimaginable suffering and loss. Imagine being able to anticipate the emergence of organised, political violence and predict the likelihood of conflict in countries around the world in order to take measures to prevent violence.

That's exactly what researchers at Uppsala University in Sweden have been working on. Supported by the European Research

Council, their project, called [VIEWS](#), is a major steppingstone towards the ability to assist affected populations before conflict erupts.



If we can predict where and when conflict is likely to occur, we can work with governments and humanitarian organisations to take action before the situation deteriorates.

"We know that early warning systems are essential in preventing and mitigating conflict. But what's even more important is taking anticipatory action based on those warnings," says Håvard Hegre, the project's principal investigator. "If we can predict where and when conflict is likely to occur, we can work with governments and humanitarian organisations to take action before the situation deteriorates."

Putting algorithms to work

VIEWS uses machine learning algorithms to analyse a range of data sources, as well as socioeconomic factors, political developments and past instances of violence.

The system then assigns a risk score to each country, indicating the likelihood of conflict breaking out within the next 12 months, explains Hegre, who is a research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and Uppsala University's Department of Peace and Conflict Research.

Specifically, the system monitors all locations at risk and produces uniform predictions of the number of fatalities in impending state-based conflict. This is coupled with probabilistic assessments of the risks of state-based, non-state, and one-sided violence, at both country and subnational levels. While the national forecasts inform the local forecasts and vice versa, the two levels of analysis differ. They are separate assessments that should be interpreted in conjunction with each other.

For instance, models informing the national level forecasts consider valuable structural and historical factors. On the other hand, the subnational level models accentuate effects from local compound risks related to demography, terrain, proximity to natural resources, local precipitation levels, droughts and conflict history in neighbouring areas.

Inspiration and promising results

According to Hegre, the main inspiration for VIEWS came from quantitative research on armed conflicts conducted since the 1990s. The research identified patterns in conflict occurrence, such as the fact that democracies rarely fight each other in interstate conflicts, and that internal conflicts are more common in countries with a democratic system and poorer regions near international borders.

With this knowledge, Hegre and his team set out to develop a system that can forecast armed conflict and alert the international community to high-risk regions.

First piloted in Africa, due to the high number of conflicts on the continent, VIEWS expanded to the Middle East in 2022.



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The impact of ViEWS is significant, particularly in regions where conflict is a recurring issue. By identifying areas at risk, governments and humanitarian organisations can take steps to address underlying causes of conflict and provide support to vulnerable populations.

Hegre is optimistic about the project's potential to be a game-changer in conflict prevention around the world.

"By providing decision makers with timely and accurate information, we can work together to prevent the devastating consequences of conflict," he says.

For instance, ViEWS forecasts are available through an API that is updated monthly.

"We know the API is accessed by UN organisations – one UN office in particular has set up an internal 'dashboard' where the forecasts are juxtaposed with other information and used for their engagements with stakeholders," said Hegre.

"We continuously engage with international organisations and with governments that have internal early-warning systems," added Hegre. "We do not know exactly how much ViEWS is used – it is publicly available and we have not monitored usage very carefully, but we know that our system is seen as a benchmark and that many of the ideas we have tested out are making their way into their own modelling."

PROJECT

**ViEWS – The Violence Early-Warning System:
Building a Scientific Foundation for Conflict
Forecasting**

COORDINATED BY

Uppsala Universitet in Sweden

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CORDIS FACTSHEET

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viewsforecasting.org/



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RESULTS PACK ON CONNECTING CITIZENS WITH DEMOCRACY

Every 5 years, citizens go to the polls for the European Parliament elections. In the face of reduced trust in governance, increased political polarisation, and growing external threats, this Results Pack highlights 15 Horizon-funded projects exploring the current challenges to democracy, and testing innovative solutions for better engagement with the democratic process.



Check out the pack here:
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