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Published online: 05 Jul 2021.

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Exploring Youths' Willingness to Engage with Civil Society and Public Sector Institutions: The Untapped Potential of Religious Communities in Preventing Violent Extremism

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ABSTRACT

Research on preventing violent extremism is still in its infancy concerning the question of who the target audiences might be willing to talk to if they need help. To explore this question, we utilized the "Young in Oslo" dataset from 2015, where attitudes toward the use of violence were expressed by students in upper-secondary school (n = 7801). Our analysis revealed that youths who support the use of violence were open to talking to adults in religious organizations if they needed help. This suggests that religious communities should be both consulted and partnered with more closely when (re-)designing prevention work.

Introduction

A change has materialized throughout the European security landscape as many countries have experienced historically high levels of Jihadi terrorist attacks alongside the recent outflux of foreign fighters traveling to the Middle East.[1] Further, in terms of right-wing terrorism and violence, 2019 was the second most deadly of the past six years, with four fatal and 112 severe non-fatal attacks in Western Europe.[2]

Confronted with these developments is the expectation that terrorist threats might rise even further in the years to come.[3] Naturally, these circumstances have brought a new urgency to the question of countering both right-wing and Islamist terrorism in Europe as policymakers and security communities search for new and improved ways to prevent mass-casualty attacks.

In this evolving security landscape, governments have been encouraged to focus more on preventing "homegrown terrorism," which entails violent events committed by citizens that live in the country in which they carry out their attacks. This contrasts with the hegemonic position of military interventions as a catalyst for providing security that dominated counterterrorism efforts in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Presently, however,

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counterterrorism appears to be grounded in a much wider preventive perspective that draws on the whole of society to contribute to countering extreme and political violence. This is not counterterrorism in a conventional sense but instead a wider view on how the public alongside the state should aid society in preventing individual recruitment to terror-promoting environments.[4]

Guiding these developments is a new policy field where counterterrorism has been reformulated as a multi-sectorial security task by combining various fields such as education, health care, and social work, alongside local communities, as key stakeholders in the efforts to prevent radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism. Such efforts are commonly referred to as "preventing violent extremism" (PVE) or "countering violent extremism" (CVE) programs. Thus, contemporary counterterrorism has become a shared state and public responsibility that sees the combination of the government's use of "hard" measures, including military, legal options, and financial incentives, with softer, public sector approaches, such as participatory democracy, cultural integration, education, and psychosocial support.[5]

Naturally, PVE/CVE programs have increasingly been subjects of scrutinizing analysis, and they are particularly criticized for producing and distributing ideas that frame Muslims as so-called "risk groups."[6] In other words, PVE/CVE programs not only reflect security concerns but also draw on important debates about the state of liberal democracy and the integration of minorities in Europe.[7] Critics are therefore apprehensive that the help, support, and services traditionally offered by public fields and local communities may result in a form of "soft policing" of Muslims, where preventive stakeholders risk becoming watchful observers for the state.[8] This is problematic as soft policing strategies to prevent extremism may result in restraining social partnerships between local community members and authorities.[9]

As a consequence, PVE/CVE programs have been debated by scholars and practitioners as the boundaries between the police and security services and local stakeholders' initiatives are becoming difficult to draw.[10] A substantial fear is that the potential blurring of boundaries between "hard" and "soft" preventive measures may ultimately constrain the willingness of the target audience to openly engage in dialogue with local stakeholders.[11] Naturally, this could have a counterproductive effect as stakeholders' ability to establish contact and create trust with the target audience, where the latter can openly engage in dialogue about their beliefs, ideology, and ideas without being judged or dismissed, is vital for preventive work to have its desired effect.[12] Accordingly, scholars and practitioners have welcomed the increased focus on social capital, understood as the existence of trust-based relationships within communities.[13]

However, the majority of research tends to focus on the role of the government[14] and, additionally, the role of public sector organizations such

as schools, social services, public health care, and criminal care in PVE/CVE programs.[15] There has been significantly less attention to the role of community engagement, particularly local faith communities. With a few exceptions, most research on faith communities' engagement has been mooted to highlight negative outcomes of PVE/CVE programs.[16] Still, there are some indications that local initiatives from religious communities can be important in building resilience against and creating counter-narratives to extremist Islamism[17] although available evaluations have yet to provide any conclusive evidence. This could perhaps be explained in how PVE/CVE programs have traditionally been negligent of social contexts by their focus on individual intervention processes.

In this light, it is important to explore how local communities can contribute to PVE/CVE programs by providing counter-narratives to Islamic extremist ideas and to facilitate those who have already succumbed to extremism to disengage from violent behaviors and networks. Obviously, more insight is also needed into how the target audience members themselves express a willingness to reach out and seek help from local civil society and public sector services outside of their circles of friends and family. After all, local actors can play a key role in protecting young people from extreme influences and in tackling the grievances that may lead them on the paths toward violent extremism.[18]

The aim of the study

This article aims to contribute to this discussion by exploring how students in upper-secondary schools in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, describe being willing to engage with civil society and public sector services about extremist beliefs, ideology, and ideas. We address this objective by utilizing the "Young in Oslo" dataset from 2015 (YIO2015), where variables of support for extreme violence to achieve political change, alongside a willingness to engage in community dialogue, are included. While the YIO2015 dataset has previously been used to explore grievances that may give rise to radicalization and violent extremism,[19] this article will investigate which civil society and public sector service initiatives young people might be willing to engage with in dialogue to seek help and, further, as a potential strategy to desist and disengage from violent groups and actions. Of course, this does not mean that the young would necessarily engage in dialogue with any local stakeholder, but it might indicate a desire for them to seek help, or to be allowed to voice their feelings and concerns, even on contested and extreme topics, without fear of being stigmatized, dismissed, or punished.

Until this point, there has been limited empirical research aimed at revealing how the target audience of PVE/CVE programs thinks and reasons about community dialogue as a channel for the expression of ideas and beliefs.

Moreover, scarce scholarly attention has been aimed at local religious communities in the efforts to decrease (potential) extremists' motivation to engage with extreme groups or behaviors in the Nordic countries.[20] This is somewhat paradoxical considering how, at least globally, many PVE/CVE programs have primarily focused on Muslim communities, which has also led to framing them as risk groups in the post 9/11 period.[21]

The null-hypothesis being tested in this article is that there is no association between attitudes toward support for extreme violence and willingness to engage in dialogue with civil society and public sector institutions. This leads to the following research question: What civil society and public sector institutions are youths in Oslo, who express support for violence, willing to engage with in dialogue? Civil society organizations are understood as community-based organizations, or faith-based organizations, with an organized structure and mission. Public sector institutions are understood as local, regional, or state governmental organizations.[22]

The article proceeds with these aims in four interrelated steps. First, it begins by providing some background on how civil society and public actors in Europe are being integrated alongside central governments into contemporary counterterrorism efforts. Against this backdrop, attention is also placed on the widespread negative outcomes and side effects of the "securitization" of local communities and stakeholders, as reported in the research literature. The second step outlines our methodological position, including how the YIO2015 dataset with self-report attitudes toward the use of violence was analyzed. In the third step, we will explore the association between students' attitudes toward the support for using violence alongside their willingness to reach out to various civil society and public sector institutions as a means of seeking help and potentially desisting or disengaging from extreme groups and behaviors. In the fourth step, we conduct a binary logistic regression with openness toward religious communities or congregations as the dependent variable, with eight independent predictor variables. Finally, the fifth step discusses implications and recommendations for future research.

CVE through community engagement

Terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalization are contemporary topics that engage all sectors of society, ranging across politics, research, media, and public life. Yet, questions concerning what causes terrorism and how it can be prevented are very much up for debate. During the last two decades, "radicalization" has become the standard term to describe processes that can lead seemingly non-radical individuals toward violent extremism and terrorism.[23] Thus, the dominant policy perspective on terrorism is that it constitutes a behavioral product of being under the influence of unchecked radical or extreme attitudes. So far, the assumption that radicalization serves as

a precursor to terrorism has not yielded much explanatory power on questions as to why some individuals decide to join extreme groups or commit extreme violence. Yet, while general explanations of terrorism are not easy to construct, the assumption that the radicalization of attitudes can lead to violent behaviors remains popular today.

At the same time, we are currently witnessing a paradigm shift in contemporary counterterrorism, where the emphasis is placed on how characteristics of the social environment can lead to either diminished or increased involvement in violent extremism. This shift seems well-founded when assessing the current state of literature as social structures and contexts appear crucial for preventive outcomes.[24] The term "community resilience"[25] is often applied in the literature, which denotes the existence of trust-based relationships, or social capital, among local actors and with the government.[26] Resilient communities focus less on specific interventions and more on features and characteristics such as trustful relationships and social connections that may prevent citizens from being drawn into violent extremism.[27] The assumption here is that by including the softer preventive mechanisms of local communities, society may reduce the necessity to engage in hardened security and counterterrorism measures.

Moreover, the inclusion of communities is based on the supposition that localized PVE/CVE efforts are more appropriate for identifying and intervening in radicalization processes as they are generally better equipped to understand and respond to local issues and situations than central governments are.[28] From other fields of prevention work, locally based initiatives centered on dialogue have been found to greatly influence the working relationship between the target audience and stakeholders.[29] However, the importance of localized PVE/CVE programs is not only argued from the perspective of local communities as "preventers"; there are also indications that affiliative factors including personal relationships, social networks, and community belonging is vital to understanding recruitment to terror-promoting environments.[30]

By incorporating local community initiatives into PVE/CVE programs, it has been argued that community responses may become more legitimate and even bring forth social participation and democratic activism. Yet, this localized preventive logic is also criticized for its close association with neoliberal governance, which is redistributing conventional tasks from the government level to the local level. This is particularly the case regarding security concerns as new domains of social life are continuously reorganized as a response to changing notions of security and risk. Neoliberalism, with its focus on individualization, tends to attribute disproportionate attention to a particular group of boys who already tend to be marginalized by race, religion, ethnicity, class, or sexuality.[31] Consequently, the emphasis on localized prevention efforts may very well go hand in hand with a government that depoliticizes that

responsibility through state interventions that promote the surveillance and monitoring of Muslim communities.

There is frequent mention in the literature regarding how Muslims are framed as a radicalized category. In Birmingham, England, for example, one study uncovered that Muslim communities felt that the police suspected them without cause, subjecting them to racial profiling, which ultimately led them toward having reduced trust in the police.[32] Similar conclusions can be found in Denmark and Norway, where Muslim communities have narrated that they fear being labeled as extremists if their voices do not fit with majority liberal values.[33] This is problematic as it can cause Muslims to turn to self-censoring practices in fear of experiencing stigmatization and polarization.

Yet, one of the most tangible forms of evidence of this in Norway comes from the YIO2015 dataset, which showed how young Muslims boys who had been exposed to cultural and religious harassment and stigmatization also showed the strongest support for defending the use of extreme violence to achieve political change.[34] Naturally, the extreme religious ideas that were narrated by young lives in Oslo do not represent an inherent security threat as extreme attitudes rarely develop into politically motivated violence or jihadism. However, this dataset reveals a broader ideological stream that for a small minority can represent the first step toward radicalized attitudes and perhaps violent behaviors.[35]

The examples from Norway and elsewhere in Europe resemble those in the UK, where the Prevent strategy has caused a widespread informal criminalization of Islam, targeting religious beliefs as if they are related to terrorism.[36] Overall, these findings highlight that there is a genuine concern across many Islamic communities that they are being unjustly framed as potential extremists and that there exist trust-issues between local communities and authorities. Trust between citizens and authorities is crucial for managing various societal crises and disasters,[37] and the same element of trust may be just as important in the wider effort to prevent violent extremism. If the goal of PVE/CVE programs is to prevent violent extremism and terrorism, then politicians should also contemplate attainable ways of doing this. Instilling the "right" values from above is inadvisable, perhaps even counterproductive, and preventive efforts that are perceived as stigmatizing and polarizing may undermine community resilience. A focus on dialogue might, on the other hand, provide an appropriate venue for people to air radical ideas or grievances as a means to foster new ways for citizens to understand their role in society.

Data and analysis

An impediment to the study of extremism is the lack of available reliable and comprehensive data. To our knowledge, the YIO2015 study constitutes the only large-scale survey conducted in Norway that includes questions about

young peoples' attitudes toward the use of political violence and toward seeking help through dialogue. YIO2015 was open to all students attending lower- and upper-secondary schools in the Norwegian capital of Oslo. However, questions concerning the use of political violence were only administered to students in the upper-secondary school (n = 7801). The overall response rate to the survey was good, situated at seventy percent, yet one possible weakness in representativeness was that apprentices and young people not attending school were left out of the survey.[38] The latter group may be particularly interesting in relation to this paper's topic as students with poor grades, educational conduct problems, and "outsider" positions in school and society may show higher support for radical or extreme ideas to begin with.[39]

Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-squared tests of association, and binary logistic regression on the IBM SPSS software, version 25.

Support for violence

The YIO2015 survey contained the three following questions regarding support for violence:

(1) To what degree do you mean that violence can be used to achieve attention for a political cause that many think is important?
(2) To what degree do you mean that violence can be used to achieve political change in Norway?
(3) To what degree do you mean that violence can be used to achieve political change elsewhere in Europe today?

The responses were provided on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "not at all" and 5 indicates "to a very large degree," with a sixth option of "don't know."

Significant inter-correlation was found between the three variables corresponding to the above questions, with a value of r = 0.88–0.92.[40] However, the validity and reliability of these three variables measuring support for violence have not been determined. A test for reliability was conducted using SPSS, and the Cronbach's alpha value was found to be 0.963, indicating very high internal consistency.[41] Based on the very high inter-correlation, the first variable containing expressed support for violence is further used as the indicator for respondents' support for violence in general.

Another approach could be to conduct a principal component analysis (PCA) to reduce the variables into fewer dimensions.[42] Importantly, there is no direct causality between supporting the use of violence and actually committing acts of violence. Therefore, the measure of support for violence cannot

be understood as a direct measure of willingness to commit violence.[43] It does, however, aim at capturing attitudes about support for violence, which for a minority of students may represent the first step in the direction of politically motivated violence.

Results

The present results indicate that the majority of the participants categorically do not support violence (78.6%), or only to a small (12.7%) or some (6.2%) degree support violence. However, a small percentage of the sample of the youths in Oslo have attitudes that support the use of violence to gain attention for a cause to a large (1.7%), or a very large (1.2%) degree.

Association between support for the use of violence and openness to engage with civil society and public sector institutions

The association between support for the use of extreme violence and willingness to seek help was explored by transforming the variable "support for violence" to a dichotomous variable wherein scores of 1 and 2 indicate "not or to a small degree willing to support violence," and scores of 3 through 5 indicate "to a large or very large degree willing to support violence."

Originally, "openness to seek help," the second key variable in the analysis, was scored on a four-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated that the employee or adult with a specific service or organization was of great importance, and 4 indicated that the employee was of no importance if the participant needed to seek help outside of their network of family and friends. The scores for this variable were inverted for easier comparison with the variable presented above; that is, 4 indicates that the employee or adult with a specific service or organization is important. This was converted into a dichotomous variable where categories 1 and 2 were combined into the new category (1) "of little or no importance" and categories 3 and 4 into (2) "of some or great importance." The following were included: employees at school, health service, an outreach service or youth club; someone from a local religious community or congregation; a leader at an activity; someone in the police; child protection services; and some other adult.

A chi-squared test of association was used to compare support for violence with willingness to talk to adults in civil society and public sector institutions. A significant association was found (see Table 1) between willingness to support violence to bring about change or draw attention to a political cause and openness to engage with an adult in local institutions if the participants needed help outside of their circle of family or friends. Only the findings for employees at school were not significant for the whole group of respondents.

Table 1. Association between willingness to support violence and openness to public sector institutions and civil society organizations. (n = 7691–7538).

Employee at:	Sig.	Phi	Odds Ratio (OR)
School	0,067	,021	1,169
School health service	0,010**	,029	1,237
Outreach service or Youth activity center	0,000**	,069	1,879
Religious community	0,000**	,100	2,280
Recreational activity	0,000**	,063	1,702
Police	0,001**	0,40	1,355
Child protection	0,000**	,055	1,649
Other adults	0,000**	,043	1,653

*significant at 0,05 level, ** significant at 0,01 level

Reviewing the phi value, as well as expected versus observed values in the chi-square test, revealed a higher score in all public sector institutions and civil society organizations for youths willing to support the use of violence. This included employees at schools even though this particular category did not reach a level of significance, and showed a low score in both phi and OR. The effect sizes range from 0.21 to 0.100, which indicates a negligible to weak effect size.[44] A phi value of 0.100, indicating a weak association (similar to or greater than 0.1), was obtained for "an adult from a religious community or congregation." As this is the only value similar to or greater than 0.1, all other categories of organizations, services, or agencies are excluded from further discussion.

The next analytical step was to conduct a binary logistic regression, with "openness to engage with an adult in a religious community or congregation" as the dependent variable. We included several independent variables in addition to willingness to support violence to control for multiple confounders. The additional variables are gender, having at least one trusting friendship, meaning of religion for everyday life, parents' background (measured through having none/one or both parents born outside of Norway), contact with police within last 12 months, self-esteem, and well-being at school.

Variables with more than two categories were collapsed into just two, and some were inverted for the sake of consistency and readability when evaluating values in regression "coefficients" and odds ratio. The variables that were inverted were parents' background, gender, having at least one trusting friendship, religion's meaning for everyday life, and self-esteem. A higher category (1, not 0) indicated a higher degree of the observed variable (e.g., well-being at school).

Direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of a number of factors on the likelihood that respondents would be open to dialogue with an adult at a religious community or congregation if they needed help outside of friends and family. The model contained eight independent variables (support for violence, gender, trusting friendship, meaning of religion for everyday life, parents' background, contact with police in last

Table 2. Logistic regression predicting likelihood of participants reporting being open or not open to adults at a religious community or congregation, if they needed help outside of friends and family.

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C. I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Support for violence	,573	,117	24,124	1	,000**	1,773	1,41	2,228
Parents' background	,001	,097	,000	1	,988	1,001	,829	1,210
Gender	,281	,080	12,378	1	,000**	1,324	1,132	1,548
A friend you can trust with everything	,137	,088	2,419	1	,120	1,147	,965	1,363
How much religion means for everyday life	2,160	,095	517,304	1	,000**	8,668	7,196	10,441
Contact with police last 12 months	,456	,263	3,012	1	,083	1,578	,943	2,642
Self-esteem	,229	,118	3,780	1	,052	1,257	,998	1,583
School well-being	,065	,200	,106	1	,745	1,067	,722	1,578
Constant	−3,208	,219	215,093	1	,000	,040		

*significant at 0,05 level, ** significant at 0,01 level

12 months, self-esteem, and well-being at school). The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, χ2 (8, N = 7051) = 857,952, p = .000, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who were and were not open to dialogue with adults at a religious community or congregation if they needed help outside of friends and family. The model as a whole explained between 11.5% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 21.5% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in openness to adults in a religions community or congregation and correctly classified 87.1% of cases. However, the binary logistic regression failed the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test (p = 0,000). This is albeit a common phenomenon in large sample size datasets, such as YIO2015.[45]

As shown in Table 2, only three of the independent variables made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model (support for violence, gender, and religion's meaning for everyday life). The strongest predictor of reporting openness to adults in a religions community or congregation was religion's meaning for everyday life, with an odds ratio of 8.668. This indicated that respondents who reported that religion was slightly or very important for everyday life were over 8.6 times more likely to express a willingness to engage in dialogue with adults in a religious community or congregation than those who reported religion as having little to no meaning for everyday life, controlling for all other factors in the model. Regarding gender, an increase in score (from female to male) indicated an increase in openness to adults in a religions community or congregation, with an odds ratio of 1.324. The last significant predictor of openness to adults in a religious community or congregation was support for violence, with an odds ratio of 1,773. This indicated that respondents who reported being willing to support violence to a large or very large degree were over 1.7 times more likely to be open to get help from adults in a religious community or congregation than those who reported to be not or to only a small degree willing to support violence, controlling for all other factors in the model.

Summary of the findings

In sum, we have identified that youths who support the use of violence, at a group level, are more open to engaging in dialogue with adults in civil society and public sector institutions if they need help than those who show lesser support for the use of violence. More specifically, our first analysis indicates that youths willing to support the use of violence are more open to engaging in dialogue with adults in a local religious community or congregation. Additionally, a binary logistic regression model indicated that (in ranked order) religion's meaning for everyday life, support for violence, and gender are significant predictors of openness to an adults in a religious community or congregation. In the following, these findings will be discussed.

Discussion

The YIO2015 dataset provides both encouraging and concerning evidence about the role of community engagement in efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. Considering how terrorism is a complex task that calls for complex solutions in which no actor has the knowledge, resources, or capacity to handle alone,[46] applying multi-sectorial preventive approaches that encompass a range of locally based initiatives including adults in civil society and public sector institutions may perhaps provide a more promising approach to counterterrorism. Naturally, evaluating the impacts and implications of locally based PVE/CVE initiatives is difficult, but an indirect research approach that focuses on the wider social context sheds light on how preventive measures are experienced by the target audience.[47]

The importance of community dialogue is evident in the YIO2015 dataset in that the young respondents who expressed support for using political violence were also more open to engaging in dialogue with various local institutions and organizations than those who showed less support for the use of political violence. This finding can perhaps attest to the need for emphasizing softer approaches to complement harder security measures such as profiling, surveillance, controlling, and zero-tolerance strategies, the latter of which are often incumbent in PVE/CVE programs. Naturally, soft preventive measures are difficult to quantify, and they may not provide the immediate results that hard punitive measures can,[48] yet soft measures are perhaps more appropriate for responding to structural root conditions such as feelings of exclusion, grievance, discrimination, and lack of political opportunity, which may give rise to radicalization and violent extremism in the first place. Keeping in mind that prior publications on the YIO2015 dataset revealed that the young respondents who expressed support for using political violence also reported having been exposed to cultural and religious harassment, primarily on the basis of being Muslims,[49] these findings can be used to suggest the importance

of preventing young lives from being disenfranchised and marginalized in society in the first place.

Concerning the willingness to engage with local civil society and public sector services, we find that the respondents expressed willingness to enter into dialogue with adults associated with local faith communities and that religion's meaning for everyday life, support for violence, and gender had a significant impact on this willingness. While the role that religion plays in terrorism is contentious among scholars, religious (re)education is often placed at the center for addressing the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. In line with research in Norway, Muslim faith communities seem to acknowledge that they can play a role in preventing the young from experiencing feelings of exclusion or uncertainty surrounding their identities.[50] Muslim faith communities can also contribute by focusing on Islamic literacy and by providing avenues for forming social bonds, which in turn can enable them to call on others for help and to leverage the resources of a broader network of preventive actors.[51] Studies of how individuals disengage from violent extremism show the importance of credible counter-voices and persons outside the extremist environment who care to engage in dialogue and take a personal interest.

A bit surprisingly, our findings do not indicate that employees at school are placed at any particular vantage point in regard to engaging with potential extremist students through dialogue. Schooling and education are usually considered building blocks in PVE/CVE programs,[52] and previous research suggests that schools are important preventive actors.[53] Yet, in our study, the respondents' perception of employees at schools as potential partners in dialogue did not reach levels of significance. Although this result poses a serious impediment to schools, we find that it is actually consistent with some empirical research. To be sure, there are no clear indications that formal education is sufficient for PVE,[54] and those students who adhere to extremist beliefs commonly report being stigmatized and discriminated against in school. In other words, the YIO2015 dataset can be used to highlight what seems to be a rather prevalent problem, namely how students who express having extreme views often feel excluded and marginalized in their school settings.[55]

Although the apparent shortcoming of the educational prevention of radicalization and violent extremism falls beyond the scope of this article, there should be little doubt that it relates to how the "securitization" of education causes a practice of pedagogical surveillance and control.[56] This is particularly the case for the small group of students who actually adhere to extremist ideologies, whom research suggests are not able to voice their feelings in constructive manners in schools. We consider this a severe impediment to inclusive education as the underpinnings to peacebuilding in any form of democracy is dependent on people talking with each other.[57] Hence, any

attempt to prevent radicalization and violent extremism in schools should be grounded in relational support and dialogue with all concerned students, even those that express extremist views. Furthermore, if radicalization processes are understood as the gradual internalization of oppositional and undemocratic attitudes, then establishing a common ground where political conflict can be engaged through dialogue, and where political negotiations and avenues are made possible, may ideally help to prevent political conflict from turning violent.[58]

Implications for policy and practice

Based on our current understanding, local faith community engagement can be a major source, perhaps the primary source, for creating avenues of dialogue and integration.[59] Yet, research indicates that government programs and preventive discourses may work across these purposes.[60] Consequently, PVE/CVE programs need to acknowledge the inherent value of local faith communities in helping young lives in the construction of orientations that supports democracy and peace to safeguard young lives by helping to mitigate structural root conditions that can cause feelings of grievances and marginalization and by creating counter-narratives against extremist views through religious literacy. As Dalgaard-Nielsen writes, local engagement and networks are perhaps the "least bad solution to the complex problem of limiting recruitment into and expediting disengagement from violent extremism."[61]

On the other hand, local faith communities cannot face the burden of society alone. Furthermore, as much of civil society, faith communities normally work on a voluntary basis.[62] How should scarce community resources be allocated for preventing radicalization and violent extremism among the young? If local faith communities are asked to react to the threats of radicalization and violent extremism, then training and resources must also be in place. Yet, more importantly, governments need to make an effort to cultivate trust while allowing communities a degree of freedom to test local solutions on a case-to-case basis.[63] Hence, there is a need to deemphasize the central government to the advantage of a networked approach that includes local government and civil society in PVE/CVE programs. Nevertheless, given the complexity of radicalization, violent extremism, terrorism, and their preventions, there is a risk that even the most networked and dialogue-based community initiatives will not lead to the desired outcomes. Still, a solid argument can be made regarding the importance of using dialogue, inclusivity, and support across civil society and public sector institutions. Our findings have demonstrated that local religious organizations should be consulted and partnered with more closely when (re-)designing prevention work. This might help guide public sector institutions to bridge the social and cultural gaps between those delivering prevention strategies and those at the receiving

end. There is, however, the risk of securitizing religious communities and organizations if they, too, are heavily incorporated into national strategies to prevent violent extremism and terrorism. Hence, a balanced cooperation between civil society organizations and those in public sector and government institutions should be devised by incorporating the perspectives of these communities in all steps leading to more formal cooperation. Following the findings of Salyk-Virk, such involvement may be more likely to succeed if they are structured from the bottom and up and engage broadly with the local communities.[64]

While many questions remain regarding the role of school in preventing violent extremism, we suggest that educators take a leading role in facilitating dialogue between target audience and civil society actors alongside public actors. To be sure, the educational system is the common denominator for youth in Norway, and although our findings do not indicate that educators are placed at any particular vantage point in regard to engaging with potential extremist students themselves, schools can potentially serve as facilitators for constructive dialogue between youth and civil society actors. Furthermore, there is reason to surmise that schools are less associated with 'hardened' securitization than the police and security services, which may affect target audience's willingness to engage with different actors.

Lastly, as the binary logistic regression identified, the variation in openness to religious communities and congregations is mostly explained by religion's meaning for everyday life. Drawing on this finding, religious communities and congregations could in particular be useful as points of contact and help for youth who express support for violence in addition to having a strong religious identity.

Limitations

A few limitations should be mentioned regarding this article. First, although adults in religious organizations were found to be someone that youth were willing to reach out to, the identified effect sizes in the chi-squared test were weak and produced low odds ratio. Also, our collapsing of variables into dichotomous ones for the sake of readability and clarity obviously reduces possibly important nuances in the regression model. We do, however, think that our choice is beneficial to present the association and influence of the independent variables upon the dependent variable in a clear way, for practitioners, policymakers, and scholarly colleagues. Further, since openness to dialogue when in need of help is not directly related to ideology or support for violence, we cannot say with certainty that this openness also applies to this topic. These limitations should be considered when reading and interpreting this article.

Conclusion

This paper establishes that religious communities and congregations are organizations that young people who express support for violence may reach out to, or be open to being in contact with, if they need help outside of friends and family. Thus, religious leaders, public sector workers, and adults in NGOs or other recreational organizations should be considered, alongside the police and others, in the broader prevention work against violent extremism. Further, cooperation between religious communities and various public services should also be addressed in future research to explore factors that both facilitate and hinder the cooperation and implementation of services for the target group. This paper's finding on youths' preferred services is of great importance as this has, to our knowledge, never before been published in the scholarly literature. This may contribute to facilitating prevention work in a more strategic and tailored fashion toward its target group. Thus, this paper's contribution is of high societal interest.

Notes

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Acknowledgments

Disclaimer

The data material herein is based on the YIO2015 survey, conducted by NOVA in collaboration with the regional Drug and Alcohol Competence Centers. The youth data are financed by the Norwegian Directorate of Health. NOVA is not responsible for the analyses or the interpretations of the results. The first author applied to the Norwegian Institute for Growth, Welfare, and Aging Research (NOVA) for access to the data. Access was granted on June 22, 2018. The data are kept on a password-protected computer and stored in accordance with the University of Stavanger's guidelines for data management.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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