



Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (SOCHUM)

Topic 2: *The protection of vulnerable communities from radicalization*

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Contents

1. Definition of key terms	1
2. Introduction	2
3. Background information	2
4. Major countries involved	4
5. UN involvement and previous attempts to solve the issue	5
6. Timeline of events	5
7. Useful links	6
8. Bibliography	6

1. Definition of key terms

Vulnerable Communities: Segments of the population that are more susceptible to experiencing harm, discrimination, or disadvantage due to factors such as economic, social, physical, or geographic background. Depending on the context, various groups may be considered vulnerable, such as women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, or LGBTQIA+ individuals. Similarly, communities more susceptible to radicalization due to specific socio-economic factors can also be identified as vulnerable.

Radicalization: The process by which individuals adopt extremist belief systems, often leading to a willingness to use or promote violence to advance a specific ideology or political agenda as a means of social transformation. This phenomenon influences perceptions of society and justice, potentially affecting social behaviour and resulting in acts of terrorism.

Terrorism: The deliberate use of violence to create a climate of fear within a population and thereby pursue political objectives. Terrorism takes various forms and has been practiced by revolutionaries, nationalist and religious groups, as well as state institutions.

Discrimination: The intentional or actual differential treatment of individuals or social groups based on generalized traits. While minorities are the primary targets, discrimination can also affect broader groups of people.

Extremism: The promotion or support of an ideology rooted in violence, hatred, or intolerance, aiming to negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others or to foster an environment where such goals can be achieved.

Social Integration: The degree to which individuals engage in a range of social roles and relationships. Social integration includes both a behavioural component—active participation in

social activities and relationships—and a cognitive component—the extent to which individuals feel connected to a community and identify with their social roles.

Prevention: The act or practice of stopping something harmful from occurring.

2. Introduction

In the modern world, the rise of extremist ideologies—both political and religious—has become a significant global concern, impacting communities across continents. Radicalization, the process by which individuals adopt extreme views and potentially engage in violent behaviour to further a cause, poses a serious threat to social cohesion, stability, and security.

Vulnerable communities are often the primary targets of radicalizing influences, especially when defined by socioeconomic status, cultural background, or personal experiences. These groups may include youth from marginalized neighbourhoods, refugees, ethnic or religious minorities, and individuals facing mental health challenges or social isolation.

Radicalization is a multifaceted and complex process, shaped by a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors. These influences range from exposure to extremist ideologies online, feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation, and experiences of discrimination or trauma, to the influence of charismatic leaders or recruiters.

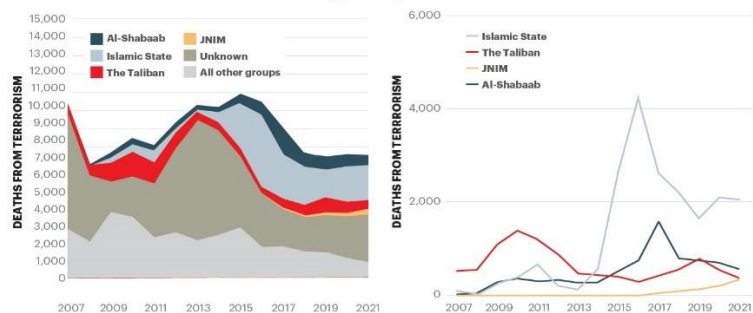
Preventing radicalization and protecting vulnerable communities require a comprehensive, multidimensional approach. This approach should integrate proactive and reactive strategies, including education, community engagement, social integration, counter-narratives, and psychological support.

3. Background information

In recent years, there has been a global rise in both religious extremism and right-wing extremism. Numerous factors contribute to individuals becoming susceptible to radicalization. These include political factors, cultural and identity issues, ideological and religious dimensions, individual psychological factors, social factors, and social media amplification.

- **Political factors:** The political context can facilitate the spread of radical ideologies. For instance, authoritarian regimes suppress dissent, creating an ideal environment for these ideologies to flourish. Similarly, radicalization may occur in contexts of political instability or conflict, or when certain groups feel excluded, marginalized, or disregarded by political authorities.

Four deadliest terrorist groups in 2021



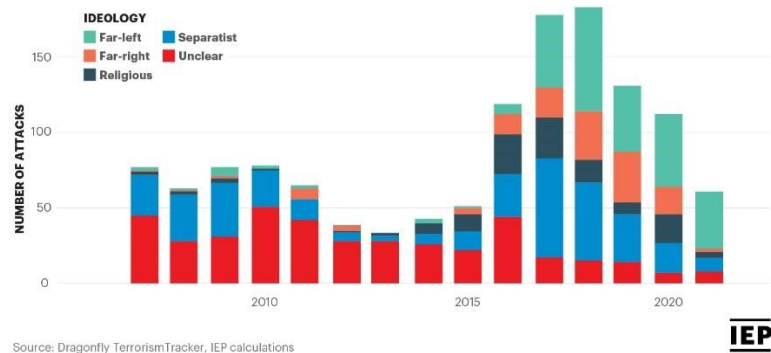
Source: Dragonfly TerrorismTracker, IEP calculations

IEP

- **The role of culture and identity issues:**

Individuals raised in extremist environments or who have experienced cultural marginalization may develop feelings of alienation and identity crises, which extremist narratives often exploit. Cultural and social polarization can lead young people, in particular, to feel a lack of belonging and acceptance by society, fostering hostility toward it.

Incidents and deaths from terrorism in the West by ideology, 2007–2021



Source: Dragonfly TerrorismTracker, IEP calculations

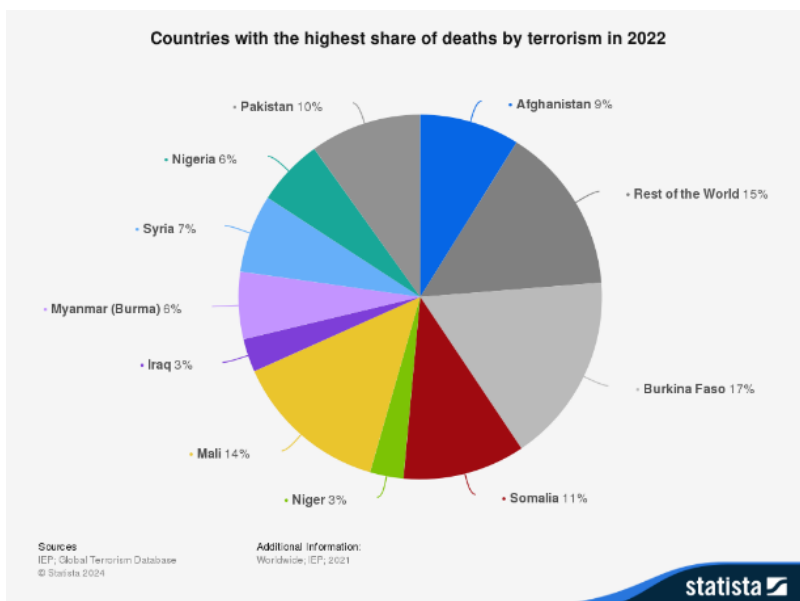


- **Ideological, conspiracy, and religious dimensions:** One significant driver of terrorism in recent years has been the Salafi-jihadi interpretation of Islam and the Islamist narrative advocating the protection and spread of Islam worldwide. Additionally, conspiracy theories have emerged as a growing threat, easily propagated on social media and reflecting deep societal anxieties. These narratives thrive in environments where critical thinking is lacking. An example is the "great replacement" theory, which falsely suggests that white populations are systematically being replaced by non-white populations through mass migration and other factors.
- **Individual psychological factors:** Certain psychological traits can predispose individuals to radicalization. These include feelings of alienation, anger, frustration, humiliation, social isolation, and a strong sense of injustice. Other contributing factors include rigid binary thinking, misinterpreting situations, a sense of victimhood, low self-esteem, lack of empathy, and mental health issues. Traumatic life events, such as peer violence or family dysfunction, can also increase susceptibility to violent extremism.
- **Social factors:** Social factors, combined with personal experiences, can lead individuals to feel rejected by society, fostering a belief that they cannot succeed or fit in. This sense of exclusion fuels the radicalization process. Key factors include real or perceived social exclusion, limited education or employment opportunities, displacement, criminal activity, lack of social cohesion, and self-exclusion.

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- **Social media amplification:**

Modern social platforms serve as effective propaganda tools for terrorist organizations, enabling the rapid dissemination of misinformation and fake news to large audiences. Extremist movements exploit these



Sources: IEP, Global Terrorism Database © Statista 2024

Additional Information: Worldwide, IEP, 2021



platforms' capacity to amplify content and target specific audiences effectively.

In the last decade, the world has witnessed a concerning rise in terrorist activities, particularly from far-left, far-right, religious, and separatist organizations. The most intense activity in the West occurred between 2016 and 2020, with groups like the Islamic State and the Taliban ranking among the deadliest terrorist organizations in 2021. However, many extremist organizations remain unknown. For example, in 2020, 262 terrorist organizations carried out attacks globally, but in 32% of cases, the responsible group was unidentified. By 2022, the countries most affected by terrorism were concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa.

4. Major countries involved

- **Afghanistan:** Afghanistan has been a centre of radicalization for decades, beginning in the 1980s during the Soviet-Afghan War. The U.S. and Pakistan supported Afghan fighters, attracting global jihadists, including Osama bin Laden, who later founded Al-Qaeda. In the 1990s, the Taliban took control, enforcing strict Islamic law and further fuelling radical ideologies. After the U.S. invasion in 2001, the Taliban was overthrown, but the country remained unstable, with extremist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K continuing to operate. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 raised fears that Afghanistan could once again become a base for terrorism.
- **Iraq:** Radicalization in Iraq surged after the U.S. invasion in 2003. The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime led to sectarian violence, with Sunni Muslims feeling marginalized by the Shia-majority government. This created an opportunity for groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which later evolved into ISIS. In 2014, ISIS seized control of large parts of Iraq and declared a caliphate, drawing fighters from around the world. Although ISIS was militarily defeated by 2017, radical ideologies persist, particularly in rural areas, due to ongoing sectarian conflict, militia activities, and weak governance.
- **Syria:** The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, exacerbated radicalization as groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra exploited the chaos. ISIS declared a caliphate in 2014, attracting foreign fighters and spreading extreme ideologies. Many Syrians, particularly those in opposition-held areas, were drawn to radical groups due to the violence of the war. Although ISIS was territorially defeated in 2019, Syria remains a hotspot for jihadist activity, with extremist groups continuing to operate amid ongoing conflict and foreign intervention.
- **Pakistan:** Pakistan's radicalization is linked to its role in the 1980s Afghan-Soviet War, during which the U.S. and Pakistan supported Afghan rebels, leading to the rise of militant groups, including the Taliban. Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in the 2000s, Pakistan became a frontline state in the War on Terror, hosting groups such as the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Despite government efforts to combat extremism, radicalization remains a major issue, fuelled by sectarian violence, political instability, and the continued presence of extremist groups in tribal areas and urban centres.

5. UN involvement and previous attempts to solve the issue

The **United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)** has implemented programs aimed at preventing radicalization, strengthening community and institutional resilience to protect vulnerable communities, and fostering social cohesion.

In 2017, the UN established the **United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)**, which has the following five main functions as listed on its official website:

1. Provide leadership on the General Assembly's counter-terrorism mandates entrusted to the Secretary-General across the United Nations system.
2. Enhance coordination and coherence across the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities to ensure balanced implementation of the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.
3. Strengthen the delivery of United Nations counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance to Member States.
4. Improve visibility, advocacy, and resource mobilization for United Nations counter-terrorism efforts.
5. Ensure that due priority is given to counter-terrorism across the United Nations system and that efforts to prevent violent extremism are firmly rooted in the Strategy.

The UNOCT works closely with the **UN Security Council** to prevent and respond to terrorist acts. As part of its **Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme**, it passed **Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)** on youth, peace, and security. This resolution emphasizes addressing conditions and factors that contribute to the radicalization of youth and violent extremism. It also urges Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making processes at all levels.

Additionally, the **UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism** identifies youth engagement as a priority area. The **UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy** encourages Member States and UN entities to explore innovative approaches to involve youth in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance, and interreligious dialogue. These efforts aim to foster respect for human dignity, pluralism, and diversity through various education programs.

6. Timeline of events

- **1980**: Terrorism and extremism begin to grow globally, particularly with groups like al-Qaeda. Governments start recognizing that social, political, and economic issues contribute to radicalization.
- **1985**: The U.S. establishes the Counterterrorism Center, marking a significant shift toward prioritizing terrorism prevention.
- **1991**: Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islamic fundamentalism emerges as a growing threat. Governments begin to consider the role of marginalized communities in fostering radicalization.

- **1999:** The term “radicalization” becomes more prominent, especially in Europe, amid rising concerns about Muslim youth joining extremist groups.
- **2001:** The 9/11 attacks shift global attention to the importance of preventing radicalization. Countries recognize that extremism arises from a complex interplay of social, political, and economic factors.
- **2005:** The UK introduces its Prevent Strategy, focusing on early intervention for individuals at risk of radicalization.
- **2007:** The EU and other nations emphasize community-based solutions, understanding that preventing radicalization requires more than security measures alone.
- **2011:** The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy underscores the need to address root causes of terrorism, such as exclusion and lack of opportunity, while emphasizing community resilience.
- **2014-2015:** The rise of ISIS prompts increased attention to the radicalization of Western youth, leading to international initiatives like the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) in the EU.
- **2016:** New programs are launched to combat extremist content online as extremist groups increasingly target young people via the internet.
- **2020:** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerates online radicalization. Governments focus on digital literacy and mental health support as key tools to counter this trend.
- **2021-2022:** Governments intensify efforts to combat far-right extremism and other forms of radicalization through education, social programs, and community engagement.
- **2023:** The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) highlights the critical role of local, community-led initiatives in preventing radicalization.

7. Useful links

- [Discussion Paper - Preventing Violent Extremism by Promoting Inclusive Development.pdf](#)
- [Preventing Radicalisation | Safeguarding Network](#)
- [Youth engagement and empowerment | Office of Counter-Terrorism](#)
- [Global Programme on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism \(PCVE\) | Office of Counter-Terrorism](#)

8. Bibliography

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- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_in_Pakistan#:~:text=The%20roots%20of%20terrorism%20in,war%20that%20erupted%20in%20Afghanistan.

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_for_the_day_of_the_September_11_attacks
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_in_Syria
- <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/timeline-the-eu-s-response-to-terrorism/>
- [Vulnerable groups | INEE](#)
- [Radicalisation - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics](#)
- [Terrorism | Definition, History, & Facts | Britannica](#)
- [The root causes of violent extremism, July 2024 - European Commission](#)
- [Global Terrorism Index 2022: Key findings in 6 Charts - ISD](#)
- [Countries with highest share of deaths by terrorism 2022 | Statista](#)
- [New definition of extremism \(2024\) - GOV.UK](#)
- [UNICRI :: United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute](#)
- [About us | Office of Counter-Terrorism](#)
- [Youth engagement and empowerment | Office of Counter-Terrorism](#)
- [Social Integration | SpringerLink](#)