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Community-Engagement in P/CVE
In the Interest of Communities?

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Abstract

Engaging local communities in the context of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies has become a widely accepted practice in counterterrorism. Communities are essential for both the prevention of radicalisation, as well as the disengagement and reintegration of (former) violent extremists. However, research exploring the dual role of communities as both the focus of and partners in P/CVE efforts, and the complexities and challenges this duality presents, is limited. The absence of a clear definition of "community" and the lacking delineation of its expected role within P/CVE efforts, particularly within the context of Islamist radicalisation and interactions with Muslim minority communities in Europe, further adds to these challenges.

The main objective of this chapter is to examine the influence of the broader social environment, and more specifically of communities within, on both radicalisation and disengagement processes, and determine how this can be translated into practical P/CVE policies. First, it explores how communities can act as protective factors in the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration process, given that most of this process takes place within the communities an individual is part of. Second, it establishes the different mechanisms by which communities can aid this process both within government-led P/CVE efforts, as well as part of community-based organisations. This analysis suggests that by building on the invaluable knowledge and influence of communities, P/CVE policies can better address radicalisation and support long-term desistance and reintegration of (former) violent extremists. The chapter, therefore, advocates for meaningful community-engagement as a crucial element of successful P/CVE policies, as well as empowering communities within these efforts to serve the interests of not only governments but the communities themselves, and, by extension broader society, providing local solutions to locally rooted problems and potentially preventing future radicalisation.

Keywords

Community, Social Environment, Radical Milieu, Radicalisation, Disengagement, Reintegration, Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

Table of contents

1. Introduction

Community-based approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have become a well-accepted norm in the world of counterterrorism.[1] Engaging civil society organisations, members and leaders from local communities in order to not only prevent, but at a later stage disengage and reintegrate (violent) extremists, hails from the aftermath of the conflict in Northern Ireland.[2] Today, it is present in almost all European countries' P/CVE strategies.

For instance, the "broad approach" taken in the Dutch National Extremism Strategy (*Nationale Extremismestrategie*) aims to tackle a wide range of societal issues by involving a multitude of actors across society, such as community-based organisations, mosques, community/religious leaders and other key figures, in the process of preventing violent extremism.[3] Another example is the Prevent strand of the United Kingdom's CONTEST Strategy that emphasises engagement with local communities,[4] or France's Action Plan against Radicalisation and Terrorism (*Plan d'Action Contre la Radicalisation et le Terrorisme*) that sets forth the "mobilisation of Islamic structures and communities" in the country in order to prevent radicalisation.[5] Communities have therefore become an integral part of P/CVE efforts throughout the entire lifecycle of radicalisation. Community-engagement, if done well, is a step in the right direction for any successful P/CVE policy.

Communities play an extremely important role in people's lives and can be the defining factor in whether a person radicalises or is able to disengage from violent extremism. This is especially true when it comes to minority communities, such as Muslims in Western Europe, where, due to the shared ethnic, religious or socio-economic status, communities can have a unique understanding of people's grievances and motivations for joining violent extremist groups. This knowledge can be invaluable in aiding disengagement and reintegration. P/CVE, if carried out with the interests of the communities in mind, does not only contribute to the long-term desistance and reintegration of former violent extremists, but by giving agency to the communities themselves, it also contributes to preventing radicalisation in the environments where it often begins. Integrating meaningful community-engagement within P/CVE efforts is therefore in the public interest as well.

Nevertheless, questions remain around what exactly is understood to be "a community" and what role it is expected to play in P/CVE. The latter question is especially pressing given the dual role communities are often forced into within the context of governments' fight against violent extremism. They are often not just partners in fighting radicalisation, but also the focus of the same efforts as governments aim to tackle the "breeding grounds" for radicalisation, the environments that foster such processes: communities. This dual role of being both objects and subjects of the same measures not only creates problems for the communities involved, but also compromises the efficacy of the entire P/CVE effort. Delineating the role of communities and making clear what is expected from them within these efforts is particularly important in the context of Islamist radicalisation and by extension when working with Muslim minority communities in a European context, where the relationship between the state and these communities is "built on a precarious and unstable foundation" often lacking trust on both sides.[6] Given the lack of definitional clarity around the term "community", it is crucial to define who exactly is involved under community-engagement and what is expected of them.

Research exploring this dual role of communities, being both partners in P/CVE efforts and focus of the same

[1] See amongst others Hartley 2021; Cherney 2018; Spalek and Weeks 2017.
[2] Spalek 2012, p. 29.
[3] Government of the Netherlands 2024, p. 17; Vermeulen and Visser 2021, p. 143.
[4] HM Government 2011, p. 59; Cherney and Hartley 2015, p. 752.
[5] Government of the French Republic 2016, p. 50; Annovi 2023, p. 393.
[6] Cherney and Hartley 2015, p. 751.

measures, is limited, despite its implications not only for governments and their P/CVE policies, but for the communities themselves as well. Therefore, this chapter aims to answer the question of who is understood to be involved in "community-engagement" by first defining the (contested) notion of "community", with a focus on Muslim communities in Western European countries. Given the increasing emphasis on community involvement in government-led P/CVE efforts, a lack of a broadly understood and agreed upon definition can lead to the misuse of the term, as well as the policies that are built upon it. The chapter then examines both how communities can sometimes enable violent extremism and the way they can also act as a protective factor in the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration process. It then translates this dual role into practical implications for P/CVE policies. Finally, the chapter aims to address the complexities and challenges this duality presents by identifying the mechanisms by which communities can positively influence individuals (attempting to) leave violent extremism behind, and concludes with advocating for meaningful community-engagement within P/CVE efforts.

2. What is a Community?

In order to discuss communities' role in P/CVE and its challenges, it is necessary to define what is understand by the term "community". Unfortunately, as with several terms used in the world of counterterrorism and P/CVE, the term "community" is a contested one, often used by governments as a catch-all phrase to simplify a complex phenomenon and group together diverse social groups and identities.[7]

2.1 Definitional Challenges

This tendency to simplify is not limited to the fields of P/CVE or counterterrorism, as "community-engagement", "-involvement", "-participation" and "-outreach" have long been cornerstones of governmental policies in a number of areas, ranging from health care[8] to education.[9] Governments often seek the involvement of local communities to reach a broader audience or to justify certain aspects of their policies.

With regards to P/CVE, the term community-engagement is often, explicitly and implicitly, understood to refer to engagement with Muslim communities in a European context.[10] While narrower in scope, there is still a difficulty in defining what a Muslim community is given the diverse ethnic, religious and national groups that can comprise such a community. Taking a city like London as an example, is it possible to talk about one Muslim community when it is comprised of Middle Eastern, Southeast-Asian, Afro-Caribbean, African, Sunni, Shia, first, second and third generation Muslims, as well as converts from a variety of other backgrounds? The same goes for other European cities like Paris, Brussels or Amsterdam. How can we then speak of a Muslim community in Europe? Would it make more sense to refer to Muslim communities as opposed to just one community?

In addition to this geographical diversity, a community does not only change in space, but also in time. Returning to the London example, as new generations of Muslims are born and grow up there, mother-country loyalties give way to new inter-cultural and inter-ethnic Muslim communities amongst Muslim youth,[11] further diversifying the community. Young black people of mostly Afro-Caribbean Christian backgrounds converting to Islam, [12] as well as the growing influence of Salafism within British youth and especially amongst young Somalis[13] are just a few recent trends that highlight the ever-changing nature of the Muslim community.

Another problematic aspect of "a community" is that it is often constructed by those who are not part of it, in this case non-Muslims, and are often not perceived as such by those who actually constitute them.[14] Referring to a "suspect community", a term discussed in further detail later (see sect. 5.2), its members "have no essential bond with each other, since membership is defined within the imagination of non-members."[15] Communities are therefore often constructed and subdivided by people working with them without obvious constraints[16] in order to simplify their partnership with the community in question.

2.2 The Community's Place within the Social Environment

Communities do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of the so-called "social environment".[17] The social environment is the physical and social setting within which people live. It is not homogenous, but consists of

[7] Spalek 2012, p. 31.
[8] Jewkes and Murcott 1996, p. 555.
[9] Bray 2003, p. 31.
[10] Vermeulen 2014, p. 288; Cherney and Hartley 2015, p. 752.
[11] Spalek and Lambert 2007, p. 206.
[12] Inge 2017, p. 19.
[13] Ibid., p. 20.
[14] van Meeteren and van Oostendorp 2019, p. 528; Jewkes and Murcott 1996, p. 560.
[15] Breen-Smyth 2014, p. 230; Pantazis and Pemberton 2009, p. 649.
[16] Jewkes and Murcott 1996, p. 560.
[17] Malthaner and Waldmann 2014.

different groups with varying levels of relationship with, and influence on, the individual. When it comes to radicalised individuals, it is best to imagine the social environment as concentric circles surrounding the person,[18] with the extremist group being the smallest one in the middle and the circles becoming wider and less radical going outwards. Each circle represents a different level: micro, meso and macro. Distinguishing the different layers within the social environment is crucial to be able to dissect the different roles they can play: whether it is active assistance in radicalisation, passive support or a conscious and active engagement in the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration process. Communities are important parts of the social environment and can play a significant role in these processes. By examining how these processes take place and who influences them in what way, we can gain a better understanding of which communities can aid disengagement and long-term reintegration of (former) violent extremists and, therefore, could be engaged in P/CVE efforts.

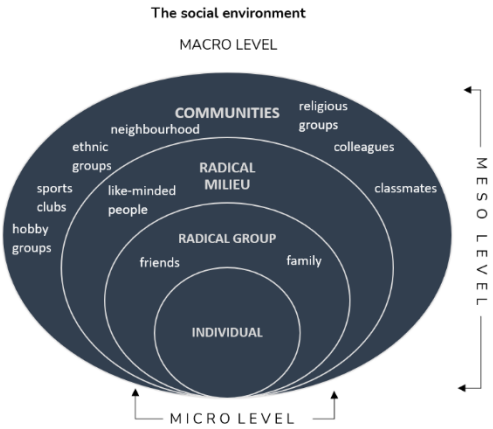

Figure 1: The micro, meso and macro levels of the social environment with the groups that can contribute to both radicalisation and disengagement. *Source:* The author

This chapter defines communities as tightly clustered groups of people surrounding individuals, who are often bound together by the same ethnic, religious or socio-economic status, and share or at least understand the individual's motivations and grievances, and can therefore aid in their disengagement and reintegration. These communities can include family, friends, schoolmates, work colleagues, sports and other recreational clubs, religious and ethnic groups and neighbourhoods. Though the online environment and the different online communities have been proven to play a significant role in the radicalisation of younger people – especially young girls and women[19] –, they are not physically present during the radicalisation process nor during disengagement and therefore could only provide limited, if any, support in the latter. This is especially true for those former offenders who post-incarceration have limited or no access to the Internet as part of their release or parole conditions. A community is therefore physically present and geographically limited for the same reason. It is important that the community is understood as the group of people who are capable of affecting the individual's life directly, though this does not limit the size, but rather the type of relationship they have with the individual.

[18] Ibid., p. 983.
[19] Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, p. 66.

3. The Role of the Social Environment in Enabling Radicalisation

The smallest, closest concentric circle of the social environment surrounding an individual (see *Figure 1*) is the immediate radical group that the radicalised person belongs to. This group consists of likeminded individuals, since group membership and the inter-group context ("us versus them") is a crucial aspect of radicalisation.[20] This enables the group to set itself aside from mainstream society and identify it (or other sub-groups within mainstream society) as responsible for the radical group's grievances.[21]

The "why" and "how" of joining a radical group has been widely researched, mostly focusing on different enabling processes and factors (for a summary of different push, pull and personal factors affecting radicalisation, see *Figure 2*).[22] However, it is important to note that pre-existing social ties (the "who"), more specifically close friendships and family relations, have a significant role to play in group formation.[23] Often, the group already exists before the extremist ideology is adopted by its members, as opposed to the other way around.[24] Terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, are known to exploit this and play on the appeal of brother/sisterhood that exists amongst its members,[25] resulting in new members joining in groups, together with friends.[26] New Islamic State recruits arrived to Syria in cohorts, exemplifying the pre-existing links between its members.[27] Looking at major terrorist attacks in Europe, such as the 2015 Paris and the 2016 Brussels attacks, the large number of siblings and cousins amongst the perpetrators further highlights this tendency.[28] The appeal of brother/sisterhood within these groups is also not lost on those who do not have the support of a "real" family either: the prospect of gaining a new family is understood to be a main draw for recruitment into extremist groups, regardless of the ideology.[29] This is especially relevant for those who lack a parent (most often a father figure)[30] or for those who have been alienated from or rejected by their own families.[31]

Level	Factors	Explanations	Examples
Micro	personal factors	individual, psychological and biographical explanations	⇨ personal characteristics and traits, such as mental health, psychological issues ⇨ demographic characteristics, for example sex, age, ethnicity or past criminality
Meso	pull factors	group-level socio-cognitive explanations	⇨ group dynamics, such as peer pressure, bonding with like-minded people or the influence of family and friends ⇨ charismatic leaders, recruiters and religious leaders ⇨ extremist propaganda
Macro	push factors	structural, political and sociological explanations	⇨ feeling of relative depravation, feeling of injustice, inequality, marginalisation, grievance, social exclusion, frustration, victimisation and stigmatisation

Figure 2: Factors that contribute to radicalisation on the micro, meso and macro levels. *Source:* The author

Radicalisation, in general, is not always restricted to the family or closest friends, but it does most often take place in "tightly clustered social settings", such as within schools, workplaces, sporting groups, neighbourhoods,

[20] Doosje et al. 2016, p. 82.
[21] Ibid.
[22] See, amongst others Jensen et al. 2020, p. 1067; Vergani et al. 2018, p. 854; Van Ginkel and Entenmann 2016, p. 53.
[23] King's College London 2008, p. 43.
[24] Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, p. 67.
[25] Ibid., p. 68; Atran 2021, p. 481.
[26] Atran 2021, p. 481.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] King's College London 2008, p. 43; Copeland and Marsden 2020, p. 9.
[30] Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, p. 67; Copeland and Marsden 2020, p. 7.
[31] Ibid., p. 64.

prisons or social media communities,[32] with a slight difference between men and women: the latter more often radicalising within online social communities due to cultural restrictions on their movement in public spaces.[33] Regardless of whether they are online or offline, these tight-knit groups exist within a wider environment. A broader circle surrounding the innermost radical group is the so-called radical milieu, a supportive, formative, but not actively participating environment.[34] The radical milieu is understood as "the immediate social environment from which violent groups emerge and to which they remain socially and symbolically connected."[35] It consists of the family members, friendship groups, peers and wider social networks of the members of the radical group. Due to its varied composition, it is not static; the radical milieu constantly changes as its members fluctuate between different levels of involvement and support for the radical ideology/cause. Research has identified three different ways in which radical milieus can be formed in relation to the other two circles: the radical group and the broader community.[36] They can 1) precede the emergence of the radical/terrorist group; 2) be formed at the same time as the group itself; or 3) emerge at a later point during either a terrorist campaign or as a result of a deliberate effort from the group to form a supporting milieu around itself.[37] In the first case, radical milieus emerge as a consequence of escalating confrontation, where clandestine groups form within a protest movement, for instance, often as a result of disagreements about the level of violence/protest needed.[38] This leads to fragmentation within the movement and the further radicalising of the group within. In the second case, the radical group and the milieu around it can form in parallel, as a result of differing views of or reactions to the same challenge.[39] Finally, the milieu can develop organically at a later stage, when the group has already been operating for some time and a supportive environment develops around it or it is created as a result of a strategic effort from the radical group. In this case, the milieu around a group can eventually disappear or the group itself can become isolated and estranged from its former supportive environment. As a result, new, independent groups – so-called "secondary milieus" – can form around it over time.[40]

Finally, the outermost circle consists of the broader communities: the social and political environment within which the radical milieu is situated. This circle can include a multitude of different actors, such as broader social movements, ethnic or religious groups, as well as state authorities or political opponents.[41] For the purpose of this chapter, "broader communities" refers to the ethnic and/or religious communities of tightly clustered individuals situated around an individual, as defined earlier. This community is not only defined as opposed to the mainstream society within which it is situated, but also by the different dynamics that exist within. In many communities of immigrant background in Europe a generational gap exists between the younger, second or third generation and the older generation which initially migrated to Europe.[42] This is especially prevalent in Western European countries, such as the United Kingdom, the Benelux states or Germany,[43] as well as in Scandinavia, namely in Denmark, Norway and Sweden,[44] where the largest wave of Muslim immigration took place following World War II, during the 1950s and 1960s. By contrast, in Southern European countries, such as Italy or Spain, these communities only emerged in the 1990s,[45] and therefore a European-born second or third generation is only just growing up.[46] As a result of this generational gap, second or third generation Muslims in Europe are often said to be experiencing a conflict of identity[47] that their elders might not be able to relate to. In addition, often these generations share different norms and values regarding Islam and what it means to be a Muslim in Europe. This is especially the case with regards to women, where different styles of Muslim

[32] Atran 2021, p. 481.
[33] Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, pp. 66-67.
[34] Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, p. 983.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 984.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., pp. 984-985.
[39] Ibid., p. 985.
[40] Ibid., p. 986.
[41] Ibid., p. 983.
[42] King's College London 2008, p. 29.
[43] Ibid., p. 15.
[44] Larsson 2009, p. 3.
[45] King's College London 2008, p. 16.
[46] While there is a new wave of recently arrived refugees and immigrants due to the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and prior to these in Afghanistan, the social environment in which these people could have radicalised would be in their home countries. The social context (or lack thereof) into which they arrive can also play a role in their radicalisation, an important aspect, especially given that a number of terrorist attacks throughout Western Europe have been attributed to newly arrived refugees and immigrants. However, this group of people fall outside of the scope of this chapter.
[47] King's College London 2008, p. 16; Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, p. 64.

attire can be associated with the level of conservativeness and more conservative outfits worn by younger women can be interpreted as a sign of radicalisation by older women.[48] These clashes between norms and values are then reinforced by the fact that in many of these communities the infrastructure is still geared towards the needs of the older generation, with local mosques and imams emphasising cultural values important for the first generation, but less so for its younger followers.[49] This growing gap between generations can lead to younger people turning to radical ideologies (most often via the internet) as a way to reject the norms of their parents and older members of their community,[50] but also to look for an alternative community, an *ummah* not limited by geography or nationality, they can belong to.[51]

Though the radical milieu plays a key role in radicalisation, it does not exist in a vacuum, but is interlinked with the broader communities within which it is situated. As discussed earlier, the radical milieu is formed in relation to the environment that surrounds it, and they continue to shape each other over time, as well as the individual('s path to radicalisation) within. Hence, while there is a radical milieu from where radical groups and individuals emerge, it has to be understood and analysed as part of a whole, and by extension the radicalisation processes taking place within have to be understood within the context of the broader communities as well.

The line between the radical milieu and the wider circle around it is not always easily distinguishable. In a P/CVE context, a radical milieu is often understood to mean "the community regarded as 'vulnerable' to radicalisation."[52] However, it is hard to determine where this vulnerability starts and ends or whether there is such a category of "vulnerable people", given the multitude of different complexities that determine whether someone radicalises at all, as described above. Neither is the line between radical milieu and the broader community constant, as people might migrate from one to the other,[53] showing various levels of support (or none at all) for the radical ideology/cause at different points of time. The result of the lack of clear separation between the two is that communities where radical milieus can be found often face harsher security measures and unnecessary surveillance by law enforcement or other governmental agencies, directed at members of the community who often do not belong to the radical group or even the milieu around it.[54] They can become the targets of such measures, either as the real members of the group can be difficult to identify or locate or as a result of a deliberate strategy to weaken the support system around the given group.[55] In short, the people deemed vulnerable to radicalisation can become vulnerable to P/CVE practices and the assumptions that guide these as well.[56]

The radical milieu and the communities surrounding it can shape each other in a number of different ways. As discussed above, radical milieus can form through various different processes, including as a result of self-separation from the more moderate communities surrounding it.[57] This process can also take place in the context of P/CVE, as a response to the policies implemented in the community. As a result, radical segments of the community can often end up accusing more moderate members of collaborating with "the enemy" (governmental agencies, such as the police or secret services), betrayal or selling out.[58] A good example in this regard was the creation of the Hofstad Network in the Netherlands in the early 2000s, formed in reaction to what radical segments of the local Salafist movement perceived as betrayal by Muslim communities who took part in social inclusion programmes and initiatives offered by the Dutch government,[59] viewed by radicals as an attempt to assimilate the movement into Dutch society.[60]

The lines between these circles are often blurred and continuously change and shape one another. The radical milieu, which consists of the social networks and friendship groups of a radicalised person, is a formative environment and often acts as a catalyst for further radicalisation from where the common

[48] Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, p. 64.
[49] King's College London 2008, p. 29; Schmidt 2004, p. 36.
[50] Schmidt 2004, p. 36; Pearson and Winterbotham 2017, p. 64.
[51] King's College London 2008, p. 16.
[52] Winterbotham and Pearson 2020, p. 7.
[53] Waldmann 2008, p. 27.
[54] Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, p. 989.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Winterbotham and Pearson 2020, p. 7.
[57] Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, p. 990.
[58] Ibid., p. 990; King's College London 2008, p. 35.
[59] Ibid., p. 990.
[60] De Koning and Meijer 2011, p. 226.

(radical/extremist) values and frameworks develop and are embraced.[61] However, it can also be the environment that holds someone back from joining a radical group or engaging in violence. It can present alternatives to violence, other pro-social means of expressing frustration and activism.[62] Finally, it can be an exit option: an environment to return to once someone has disengaged from violent activism.[63] Just like radicalisation, disengagement does not happen in a vacuum. New social connections, as well as a sense of belonging to a community, have an essential role to play in providing a safety net after an individual leaves a radical group behind or following their incarceration.[64] Similarly to how involvement with violent groups occurs within tight-knit groups, close inter-personal ties play an important role in the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration processes as well.[65] Therefore, it is important that P/CVE efforts aimed at reintegration provide positive social networks for those for whom this was an important feature in their radicalisation in the first place,[66] an alternative community to the one that enabled the person's radicalisation. In addition to aiding the development of a broader social identity,[67] one that is not narrowly defined by the radical group's "us vs them" view of the world, these new ties can also provide an environment for developing the previously mentioned pro-social ways of coping with anger and frustration.

[61] Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, p. 994.
[62] Marsden 2017a, p. 152.
[63] Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, p. 994.
[64] Morin 2018.
[65] Marsden 2017a, p. 158.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., p. 157.

4. The Role of the Social Environment in Disengagement

Though the different communities surrounding an individual can contribute to their radicalisation, they also play a very important role in protecting someone from the influence of violent extremism. Compared to the risk factors already discussed (see sect. 3), there is much less research available on the protective factors that enable someone to resist radicalisation.[68] Protective factors can be understood as individual and social resources that allow an individual to successfully adapt to and cope with developmental risk situations, such as radicalisation.[69] They are also considered to contribute to deradicalisation and disengagement from a violent extremist group.[70]

Before looking at what these individual and social resources entail, it is worth clarifying the difference between disengagement, deradicalisation, desistance and reintegration. Though often used interchangeably and meant to cover the same process, disengagement and deradicalisation are distinct and separate processes. Disengagement can be either psychological or physical and entails a behavioural change where the individual is no longer an active member of a violent extremist group,[71] but can still be supportive of their ideology and even remain a supporter of the group or movement in different ways.[72] Desistance, a concept taken from criminology and most commonly understood to refer to regular crime, also indicates a cessation of criminal behaviour and can be defined as both the absence of offending, as well as the process of declining offending, the end of which is marked by a "discrete state of termination."[73] On the other hand, deradicalisation implies a more fundamental change in the attitude, belief system and identity of extremists and refers to psychological and ideological change, not just a behavioural one.[74] If all of these are viewed as different phases of one process, where an extremist first disengages then deradicalises, reintegration can be seen as the end, when the individual re-engages with society.[75] As radicalisation is most often accompanied by a process of isolation from mainstream society and from one's (non-radical) friends and family,[76] reintegration entails not just disengaging from old (radical) social ties, but also forming new ones.[77] Not only can this process be extremely lengthy, but often there are considerable gaps between each stage,[78] leaving the individual vulnerable to re-radicalisation and re-engagement with the extremist group along the way.

Level	Protective factors	Explanations	Examples
Micro	personal factors	individual, psychological and biographical explanations	⇨ self-control ⇨ adherence to law ⇨ acceptance of police legitimacy
Meso	family, school and peer level factors	group-level socio-cognitive explanations	⇨ as positive parenting ⇨ non-violent significant others ⇨ good school environment and bonding to school, higher education ⇨ connection with non-violent peers ⇨ contact with foreigners
Macro	country/societal level factors	structural, political and sociological explanations	⇨ "basic attachment" or integration into society

Figure 3: Protective factors that enable disengagement. *Source:* The author

[68] Lösel et al. 2020, p. 57.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.; Doosje et al. 2016, p. 81.
[71] Silke et al. 2021, p. 2.
[72] Horgan 2009, p. 26.
[73] LaFree and Miller 2008, p. 206.
[74] Silke et al. 2021, p. 2.
[75] Barrelle 2015, p. 133.
[76] Neumann and Rogers 2008, p. 44; Doosje et al. 2016, p. 81; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, p. 423.
[77] Marsden 2017b, p. 58.
[78] Barrelle 2015, p. 133.

Similar to the different push, pull and personal factors examined earlier that contribute to radicalisation (see sect. 3), there are different levels of protective factors that can aid in the above-mentioned disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration process. They can too be divided into micro, meso and macro level factors. On a micro level, often referred to as individual level, research points to factors such as self-control, the adherence to law, as well as the acceptance of police legitimacy that can protect an individual from radicalisation.[79] On a meso level there are family, school and peer level factors, such as positive parenting, non-violent significant others, a good school environment and bonding to school, higher education, as well as connection with non-violent peers and contact with foreigners that are considered important factors.[80] Finally, the macro level is considered to be the country level, where a "basic attachment" or integration into society is mentioned as a protective factor against different types of extremist ideologies,[81] but several micro and meso level factors can also be understood on the macro level as well. A number of theories of desistance from regular crime are also used to examine disengagement, most importantly theories of social bonds and informal social control,[82] as well as social identity theory, that emphasise the importance of these meso and macro level factors' role in desistance.

It is clear that a community, therefore, can be conducive to both radicalisation and disengagement from violent extremism. Belonging to certain groups and being surrounded by certain individuals can make the difference in being radicalised or being resilient to radical ideologies. Communities' dual nature is very well reflected in the findings on the role of prisons in radicalisation and disengagement. Prisons have long been considered the "hotbeds" of or "breeding grounds" for radicalisation[83] due to the close physical proximity between already radicalised inmates and other vulnerable individuals. Inmates incarcerated for terrorism-related offences can easily radicalise other prisoners or further radicalise themselves as a result of grievances, frustrations or anger related to being incarcerated.[84] Prisons can also serve as a suitable place for terrorist recruitment, where inmates previously not involved with terrorist groups can be solicited to engage in terrorist behaviour or commit terrorist acts.[85] On the other hand, however, research suggests that imprisonment can also act as a facilitator of disengagement and deradicalisation processes.[86] A review of literature on disengagement and deradicalisation from terrorism and violent extremism shows that prisons are one of the major environments connected to disengagement and deradicalisation.[87] This is due to the fact that prisons can create a physical distance between the incarcerated individual and the violent extremist group they belonged to on the outside or other extremist individuals they were in contact with, while it can also provide an opportunity for reflection and, finally, access to disengagement and deradicalisation interventions.[88] Prisons therefore highlight the same dual role communities can play: proximity to the right people and social connections or the wrong influences can make the difference between someone radicalising or disengaging from violent extremism.

[79] Lösel et al. 2020, p. 62.
[80] Ibid., p. 62 and 64.
[81] Ibid., p. 64.
[82] LaFree and Miller 2008, p. 210.
[83] Hill 2020, p. 207.
[84] Ibid., p. 210.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Silke et al. 2021, p. 6.
[87] Ibid., p. 7.
[88] Ibid.; Lösel et al. 2020, p. 66.

5. Implications for P/CVE

Understanding the complexity of the social environment and the communities within who can influence both radicalisation and disengagement from radical ideologies and violent extremist groups is the first step towards translating this knowledge into practical implications for community-engagement within P/CVE efforts.

Policies aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism have rapidly proliferated across Europe over the past two decades[89] and with them the concept of community-engagement. As is the case with almost all terms related to terrorism and violent extremist, P/CVE is difficult to define. It is generally understood to cover "various types of interventions – educational, social, healthcare, or psychological – with the aim of positively affecting entire populations, specific social groups, and individuals in order to reorient them from potential future involvement and support of violent extremism, including terrorism."[90] According to a review of literature on P/CVE, these policies generally address four key themes: 1) the 'resilient' individual, 2) identity, 3) dialogue and action, and – most importantly, for the sake of this chapter – 4) connected or resilient communities.[91]

Acknowledging the important role communities can play in disengagement and deradicalisation, P/CVE policies are generally aimed at either "engaging communities" or "building resilient communities."[92] Community-engagement in a P/CVE context most of the time refers to the partnership between the communities (organisations or prominent individuals) and the state, governmental agencies carrying out said policies, or the police (community policing). The focus of these interventions is on building a (better) relationship between the state and the communities in order to tackle violent extremism, while acknowledging that community organisations and leaders have more "legitimacy" in the eyes of the members of the community.[93] As mentioned before (see sect. 2.1), "communities" most often explicitly refers to minority communities, such as Muslims within a Western European context. With the proliferation of P/CVE policies over the past two decades, European Muslim minority communities have increasingly become targets of a host of new measures, with their cultural institutions and practices re-scrutinised for potential signs of radicalisation,[94] as discussed later on in detail (see sect. 5.2). However, in order to build on the aforementioned legitimacy of community actors, building partnerships and involving prominent community organisations and leaders have become ingrained parts of P/CVE efforts, with governments recognising that their interest in preventing radicalisation is aligned with that of these communities, as well as the broader public interest. Involving prominent members and organisations from the community in turn builds trust between the different actors. The trust that enables these partnerships then contributes to the success of such P/CVE measures,[95] and by extension increases the public's support towards government policies.[96]

Taking community engagement further, building resilient communities extends beyond the idea of building relationships with the government and focuses more on the characteristics that a certain community should possess in order to prevent its members from engaging in violent extremism or terrorism.[97] P/CVE policies in this regard are aimed at building up this resilience by identifying its main characteristics and strengthening them, therefore enabling communities to not only represent their own interests, but to play an active role as partners in governmental P/CVE policies as well. When translated into concrete policies, these

[89] Millett 2025, p. 1.
[90] Shanaah and Heath-Kelly 2023, p. 1724.
[91] Stephens et al. 2021 p. 348.
[92] Ibid., p. 352.
[93] Ibid., p. 353.
[94] Millett 2025, p. 2.
[95] Spalek 2010, p. 791.
[96] Hartley 2021, p. 3.
[97] Stephens et al. 2021, p. 353.

goals are vaguer than those that target community-engagement; however, a review of the literature suggests that they tend to focus on the quality of relationships and social connections within the communities.[98] Further research differentiates between the types of relationships within a community that can and should be strengthened to build up resilience to radicalisation and terrorist recruitment in a given community. These can either be relationships within the community (social bonding), between different communities (social bridging) or between communities and institutions (social linking).[99]

5.1 The Different Levels of P/CVE

It is obvious that communities can and are involved throughout the entire lifecycle of radicalisation and by extension community-engagement is present in government-led efforts throughout all phases. P/CVE efforts can generally be divided into three main stages: primary, secondary and tertiary.[100] This classification system was implemented into P/CVE from other domains, such as healthcare and criminology, and is aimed at both eliminating risk factors and enhancing protective ones.[101] Primary prevention is targeted at eliminating the "breeding grounds" for radicalisation and addressing its root causes. These measures are generally aimed at those at risk of radicalisation, i.e. those who might not be radicalised yet. In this phase, community-engagement can, for example, entail mentoring at-risk youth or raising awareness amongst those concerned. Secondary prevention is more individually-oriented and is focused on the individuals already radicalised or on the verge of radicalising, but who have not yet committed an offence.[102] Here, communities can be involved by providing family support to those whose loved ones might be at risk or have already radicalised, or tailor-made mentoring to the individual in question. Finally, tertiary prevention targets the violent behaviour itself, aimed at individuals who have gone down the road of radicalisation and have possibly committed a criminal offence as well. The objective of this stage is disengagement from violent behaviour and rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The targets of these measures can be former offenders during or following incarceration, as well as returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members. Communities have a role to play in this stage by providing a link between the individual and wider society and its social and economic networks, as often government-led rehabilitation and reintegration programmes (also known as exit programmes) do not extend beyond incarceration.[103]

The role communities play within P/CVE programmes is determined by the relationship between the communities and the government (agency) leading or implementing the programme; which can be either community-targeted or community-focused.[104] This differentiation is important as it goes beyond the traditionally applied categorisation of "top-down" and "bottom-up" approach, which does not take into account the existence or lack of consent and partnership between the actors involved, but merely indicates the directionality of the initiative (whether it is the government (top-down) or the community (bottom-up) who acts as the initiator). The differentiation between a community-focused and community-targeted approach lies not in the methods they use, but in the values that underpin them.[105] A community-targeted approach, though involving communities, has the preservation of national security via intelligence gathering as its main goal. It can, therefore, be characterised as ignoring the importance of gaining consent from the communities, as their well-being is not its main concern.[106] A community-focused approach, on the other hand, is more concerned with the community itself and is based on a partnership, characterised by community consent and participation.[107] The conflict between these two approaches can be a source of a number of challenges, a number of which will be outlined below (see sect 5.2).

5.2 The Dual Role of Communities in P/CVE

Though it might seem straightforward, the role of communities in P/CVE can be complicated because of their possible involvement in both radicalisation and

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ellis and Abdi 2017, p. 290.
[100] Gielen 2020, p. 67.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Marsden 2017b, p. 44.
[104] Spalek 2012, p. 37.
[105] Ibid., p. 37.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.

disengagement. Communities are on one hand the focus of such efforts as governments aim to tackle the "breeding grounds" for radicalisation, the environments that foster such processes; while, on the other hand, they have become partners in these same efforts, and, by extension, both the objects and subjects of P/CVE policies (see sect. 1).[108] This dual role can create conflicts between the government and communities, as well as within the communities themselves, and it is the very reason why P/CVE policies should be designed and implemented with the interests of communities in mind, considering that these are very much aligned with not just the government's interests, but that of society as a whole. A misguided or inadequately carried out policy can further alienate precisely those actors who are so important in preventing radicalisation and halting the spread of violent extremism. This dual role communities are required to play, together with the lack of definition of what a community is at the onset of designing and implementing P/CVE policies, can create several challenges which, if not addressed, can lead to a failed partnership and ultimately a failed P/CVE policy.

One of these challenges is the lack of trust and the construction of so-called "suspect communities". The issue of trust, or a lack thereof, can manifest itself in two different directions: on one hand within the communities themselves, and, on the other, between the communities and the government. Being associated with the government and its agencies, such as the police or the security services, can create distrust within the community, and can even be perceived as "selling out" if the government is viewed as not representing the interests of the communities.[109] This can create intra-community tensions and can even result in reputational damage for those who have credibility and standing within the communities and choose to cooperate with governmental efforts.[110] An inadequately designed and implemented P/CVE policy can, therefore, lead to a lack of trust between the implementing government agencies and the communities at the receiving end of these policies. A consequence in the long term is facilitating the construction of a suspect community where the whole community is treated differently from the rest of the population in law, policy as well as police practice.[111] Though the term "suspect community" is also a contested one,[112] it implies that the whole community, in this case the Muslim minority community, is dangerous and can therefore be a legitimate focus of security measures.[113] It sets Muslims apart from the rest of society by placing responsibility onto them for radicalisation and terrorism, as opposed to treating the problem as one that the whole of society is responsible for.[114] Responsibility is instead placed on the community itself and its members who are encouraged (or even expected) to stand up against radicalisation and terrorism.[115] As a result, the whole community and its members remain suspicious until proven otherwise.[116] Some short-term consequences of this practice are the infringement of its members' civil liberties, intrusive and intensified policing techniques and the enabling of society-wide racism against the entire community in question.[117] In the long term, being viewed as suspicious can lead to the stigmatisation, exclusion and possible marginalisation of these communities and their members,[118] possibly further fuelling radicalisation and therefore accomplishing the opposite of what P/CVE policies set out to achieve.

Another challenge arises from the difficulties in selecting the right partners for P/CVE. Communities, as discussed in detail, are seldom homogeneous entities, instead they are often comprised of a multitude of different actors and groups. Therefore, it is not always straightforward for governments to pick what groups or which segments of the community they work with, and it often depends on how they view the problem of radicalisation and violent extremism in the first place. Governments can follow one of two approaches when establishing a partnership with communities: a "value-based" or "means-based" approach.[119] A "value-based" approach identifies violent extremism as a theological problem and thus entails implementing P/CVE policies aimed at changing extremists' religious ideologies and values, hence its name.[120] In practice, governments tend

[108] Ibid., p. 28.
[109] Cherney and Hartley 2015, p. 757.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Vermeulen 2014, p. 288.
[112] van Meeteren and van Oostendorp 2019, p. 528.
[113] Ibid., p. 526.
[114] Ibid., p. 536.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Breen-Smyth 2014, p. 225.
[118] Vermeulen 2014, p. 286.
[119] Ibid., p. 292.
[120] Ibid.

to engage with moderate Islamic organisations, leaders, community groups and members in order to strengthen moderate Islam as opposed to its orthodox or more radical streams.[121] On the other hand, a "means-based" approach looks at radicalisation from a socio-political perspective and therefore favours a strong engagement with organisations, groups and individuals who will have the most credibility with extremists, including those on the radical end of the spectrum.[122] Regardless of the approach, choosing the right partners to cooperate with carries its own challenges for both sides. Governments have to make sure they keep the engagement as wide as possible in order to avoid the impression that they are cherry-picking certain groups and excluding others,[123] while choosing partners that are politically acceptable to work with. Needless to say, engaging with groups that are viewed as too radical or even extremist carries its own (political) risks, while it is far from certain that engaging with non-violent extremists does in fact help curb violent extremism.[124] From the communities' perspective, being "picked" – or not – for government engagement can lead to tensions within the community and resentment due to being left out or not deemed legitimate enough. Governments also have to make sure they chose to engage with individuals or groups who do have the legitimacy, reach and platform within the community they represent.[125]

5.3 Actors and Mechanisms for P/CVE

This section will focus on tertiary prevention and summarise who the actors involved under community-engagement are and what role they can play during the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration process, whether that is in an informal setting, via community-based initiatives or within governmental programmes. For this, it is useful to once again refer back to the micro, meso and macro levels where push, pull and personal factors affect radicalisation (see *Figure 2*), and where protective factors have an impact on disengagement (see *Figure 3*). On each level there are various actors who can engage with the individual,[126] focusing on the different aspects of disengagement.

Level	Actors	Programmes	Mechanisms
Micro	⇨ family ⇨ friends	⇨ psychological and social	⇨ social and mental support ⇨ safe space for dialogue
Meso	⇨ ethnic or religious groups ⇨ neighbourhood ⇨ colleagues/classmates ⇨ leisure/sports clubs ⇨ community-based organisations	⇨ psychological and social ⇨ religious ⇨ recreational	⇨ psychosocial support and counselling by trained practitioners from community-based organisations ⇨ reconciliation mechanisms ⇨ safe space for dialogue ⇨ dialogue with religious or ideological leaders ⇨ employment ⇨ administrative and logistical support
Macro	⇨ specialised government agencies ⇨ society	⇨ psychological and social ⇨ religious ⇨ educational	⇨ employment ⇨ (re)education ⇨ administrative and logistical support

Figure 4: The main actors and mechanisms that aid disengagement both within and outside of formal programme settings. *Source:* The author

On the micro level, the close and extended family as well as friends of the person can help play a role by providing social and mental support. These groups of people can often provide a safe space for open discussions, where the individual does not have to face stigma or repercussions for what they say as there is a pre-existing trust between those involved. It is important to note, however, that these groups of people do not substitute trained social and mental help professionals and as discussed earlier (see sect 3) can also exert negative influence on the person.

On the meso level, there are the communities the person belongs to, a wide-range of like-minded people who can have influence on their everyday life, including neighbours, colleagues, classmates, members of leisure and sports clubs and ethnic and religious groups. These communities can also provide the individual with a safe space to discuss sensitive topics, as some of them might share knowledge or even grievances around the same issues. Ethnic and religious groups can provide trustworthy leaders with legitimacy in the community who can address religious or ideological questions when needed. These are the communities from which community-based organisations, discussed later in the chapter (see sect 6.2), emerge. If these exists in a given

[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Cherney and Hartley 2015, p. 756.
[124] Baker 2012, p. 83.
[125] Vermeulen 2014, p. 302.
[126] Hedayah 2020, pp. 199-202.

community, they can contribute trained practitioners who can provide psychosocial support and counselling. They can also be involved in reconciliation mechanisms,[127] where the community as a whole has the opportunity to discuss concerns with the individual via a pre-established platform, led by a trained professional. Finally, these communities, via informal networks, can aid in finding employment as well as provide administrative and logistical support following release from prison. The former is especially important given the stigma people formerly associated with violent extremist groups face on the labour market and the reluctancy of employers in hiring them.[128] Informal networks that exist within communities can bridge these challenges and provide individuals with (financial) independence gained from employment, as well as fill potential gaps in the job market within the community.[129] Administrative and logistical support by community members is also key, especially in the case of former offenders, who following release from prison might be limited in their access to the Internet.

On the macro level, there are specialised governmental agencies, such as social services and relevant ministries, as well as the broader society of the given country who can also provide assistance in finding employment in a more formalised manner. They can also help with enrolling in education and vocational training that can later increase employment opportunities. Lastly, specialised governmental agencies can also provide administrative and logistical support in a more formalised manner in order to aid in navigating everyday life in the case of those leaving prison.

[127] Ibid., p. 200.
[128] Stern et al. 2023, p. 13.
[129] Hedayah 2020, p. 201.

6. A Successful Community-Engagement in Reintegration and Rehabilitation

In order to determine what helps someone disengage, one often has to look at why they radicalised in the first place. Research suggests that there is a thematic relationship for each individual between their entry and exit experiences.[130] To put it differently, to understand disengagement processes it is necessary to examine what the individual gained from being involved with the radical group and/or ideology in the first place, and then determine how those same motivations can be used to inform their disengagement.[131]

Whether their initial reason was following a close-knit group of friends, the desire to belong to a community, or ideological or religious reasons, those initial motivations can be redirected[132] as a way to encourage the individual to look for solutions to these outside of the radical group or ideology. This redirection of motivations is a crucial aspect of the so-called "strengths-based approach" to reintegration. This approach, embodied by the Good Lives Model, focuses on "what works", examining what the criminogenic needs are that have to be fulfilled for the individual to remain disengaged in the long term,[133] linking the motivations for engaging in violent extremism to the motivations for disengaging from it. According to the Good Lives Model, increasing the likelihood of desisting can be achieved by developing strengths that would enable the individual to address these motivations in a pro-social way. The basis of this model is the assumption that people aspire to pursue so-called primary human goods that are valued aspects of human functioning and living, such as having a healthy life, achieving excellence in work or finding relatedness through social connections.[134] Most people aim to achieve these in pro-social ways; however, they can also be realised via maladaptive ways by, for example, joining a violent extremist group. In addressing what the individual wanted to achieve by joining such a group and then enabling the person to do the same in a pro-social way can lead to long-term desistance. This, however, is a long process. The model therefore calls for a greater attention to the social, economic and political contexts (or the social environment) of the individual, due to the simple fact that individuals are only involved with rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for a limited amount of time,[135] while most of the process of disengagement and reintegration takes place in their communities.[136]

6.1 Communities as Enablers of Disengagement

As most disengagement and reintegration takes place outside of organised programme settings, the communities an individual is surrounded by have the biggest influence on this lengthy and often non-linear process. Reintegration happens via multiple different mechanisms, and as discussed it is an individualised process that often mirrors the path a person took into radicalisation. With regards to regular (non-politically

[130] Barrelle 2015, p. 132; Bjørgo 2013, p. 89.
[131] Marsden 2017b, p. 31.
[132] Ibid., p. 40.
[133] Ibid., p. 32.
[134] The nine primary human goods are: (1) life (including healthy living and optimal physical functioning, sexual satisfaction), (2) knowledge, (3) excellence in play and work (including mastery experiences), (4) excellence in agency (i.e. autonomy and self-directedness), (5) inner peace (i.e. freedom from emotional turmoil and stress), (6) relatedness (including intimate, romantic and family relationships) and community, (7) spirituality (in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life), (8) happiness, and (9) creativity; according to Ward and Brown 2004, p. 247.
[135] Marsden 2017b, p. 33.
[136] Maruna 2001, p. 28.

motivated) offending, research distinguishes between social, economic and political reintegration,[137] focusing on the different aspects of an individual's life that have to be readjusted. When it comes to radicalised individuals, social connections feature more prominently in their reintegration, given the very nature of violent extremist ideologies, based on the premise that the main goal of these ideologies is to "change the circumstances of a wider community of people in line with a subjectively defined, ideologically informed 'better' future".[138] In order to successfully aid the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration of radicalised individuals, the focus should be on the social aspects, that is building new social connections and disengaging from former, radical ones.[139]

Reintegration, however, does not only depend on the individual making an effort and building new ties. Referred to as a "two-way street", reintegration also depends on the communities the person returns to, as they have to support, or at least allow, the process to take place.[140] Communities can suffer greatly from a member's involvement in violent extremism, either economically or as a result of hate crimes, attacks or heightened police attention.[141] Therefore, their reluctance in aiding reintegration can be understandable. However, if they are willing, there are multiple ways in which communities can enable a successful reintegration and long-term desistance.

Building on the previously defined concept, where they constitute tightly clustered groups often bound together by ethnic, religious or socio-economic similarities, communities can act as a bridge to the wider society and help the individual build new relationships outside of the radical milieu they used to belong to.[142] This is especially important for radicalised individuals who have become isolated not only from mainstream society, but possibly also from some of their former communities, as a result of being members of a violent extremist group. As highlighted before, certain communities can also be the sources and enablers of radicalisation, with people joining violent extremist groups together with those close to them (see sect. 3). In this context, returning to a community where multiple members were radicalised carries its own risks as well as makes establishing new social ties not only more important, but all the more difficult as well. As communities around an individual are varied, relying on those outside of the radical milieu is crucial in supporting reintegration as these can enable the formation of new ties within wider society.

Secondly, communities can provide support throughout the reintegration process.[143] This support can imply practical help in, for instance, navigating parole conditions and other bureaucratic requirements following release from prison, but also in finding employment or educational opportunities. It can also involve emotional and mental support given the stigma, alienation and shame that can come with being associated with a violent extremist group or having been convicted of a terrorism offence.[144]

Finally, communities can model pro-social ways of responding to grievances and frustration radicalised individuals often experience,[145] which are often the very reasons they joined a violent extremist group in the first place. As mentioned before (see sect 6), the same motivations often influence the joining and disengagement from a group. However, given that deradicalisation is a long process, the grievances and frustrations that lead to the initial involvement can remain present for a long time. As some communities are aware of and can understand (in some cases even share) these grievances, they can be helpful in providing guidance on how to cope and express these feelings in a pro-social way, thereby contributing to building strengths that can enable desisting on a long term.

6.2 Community-based Organisations Focused on Reintegration and Rehabilitation

Communities can perform these functions in an informal way, but also in formalised programme settings under P/CVE policies carried out by community-based organisations. Community-based organisations are non-profit, non-governmental, voluntary organisations

[137] Marsden 2017b, p. 55.
[138] Ibid., p. 51.
[139] Ibid., p. 58.
[140] Ibid., p. 44.
[141] Barrelle 2015, p. 130.
[142] Marsden 2017b, p. 48.
[143] Ibid., p. 49.
[144] Ibid., p. 15, 55 and 56.
[145] Ibid., p. 49.

embedded in the communities they serve. They can carry out a wide array of different programmes that aim to aid deradicalisation, disengagement, reintegration, rehabilitation, desistance or any combination of these, generally grouped into the following main categories: 1) psychological and social, 2) religious, 3) educational and 4) recreational.[146] The line between these categories is not clearcut, as most programmes incorporate one or more different aspects of each, meaning there is often an overlap between programme types and their goals. Most programmes are also tailored to the local context, the type of extremist ideology and the specific individuals they work with. The focus on social integration is also present in this categorisation as most of these programmes enable the individual to form new ties outside of the previously known radical milieu. However, for example educational programmes contribute to finding employment, thereby not only aiding social integration, but an economic one as well.

In order for these programmes to be successful and for communities to operate as equal partners, it is important that the engagement between communities and governmental partners is built on trust. The engagement, therefore, has to be community-focused, based on an equal partnership and the consent of the communities, as opposed to being targeted at the groups and individuals involved. The communities should have the agency to nominate representatives with the influence and platform to instil legitimacy towards those who they work with. This is key not only to avoid intra-community tensions, but also the creation of suspect communities. By clearly setting out which groups and members of the community are tasked with what roles, it takes the responsibility of the community as a whole, and by extension contributes to the communities not left being stigmatised and alienated from mainstream society. Empowering communities within P/CVE efforts aimed at reintegration not only serves the interests of communities themselves, but the public interest as well, as it finds a local solution to a problem that is also often rooted locally and possibly helps prevent future radicalisation. Minority communities that are not stigmatised and marginalised within mainstream society can not only act as trustworthy partners in government-led efforts, but are also better equipped to build resilience towards radicalisation. Creating trustworthy partnerships between governmental agencies and community-based organisations in turn can help maintain the legitimacy of the government and the trust that exists between government and mainstream society. If done well, communities can also greatly benefit from an engagement that is based on their consent, trust and authentic partnership. It can give communities agency in the very measures they are often the targets of, enabling communities and their members to be in control of their own role, and to have a say in the policies that affect them the most. Consequently, by creating real partnerships and dialogue, communities can help subvert community-targeted government-led approaches[147] that might not be in their best interest. It provides an opportunity for people and organisations with real knowledge and expertise to get involved.[148] Finally, via these partnerships, communities can also gain access to governmental funding and resources that can enable successful grassroot projects or initiatives to grow into national programmes.[149]

[146] Though several different categorisations exist, the author deemed this one to be the most all-encompassing. Hedayah 2020, pp. 175-180.
[147] Spalek 2012, p. 43.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., p. 42.

7. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the complex social environment and the communities that encircle individuals within: communities that can influence both radicalisation and disengagement from radical ideologies and violent extremist groups.

By highlighting the complexity of the social environment, the variety of different communities on its micro, meso and macro levels and their different roles in both radicalisation as well as disengagement, the chapter has drawn attention to the challenges that are inherent to engaging communities in P/CVE efforts. However, regardless of the challenges outlined, the chapter argues that meaningful community-engagement that takes the interest of communities into consideration is key for the success of any P/CVE policy.

Focusing on tertiary P/CVE measures, it is clear that there are a number of ways communities can aid in the disengagement-deradicalisation-reintegration process, with different groups taking on different responsibilities, both informally and via formally established community-based organisations. Disengagement, as well as the reintegration of former violent extremists into society, can be a very long process, throughout which governmental bodies, agencies, programmes are often only involved at the start. As discussed in the chapter, most of this process takes place outside of formalised programme settings, when former violent extremists have returned home to their communities. However, governments, priorities and policies change over time and therefore governments often might not or cannot be invested in this process throughout its entirety.[150] Governments being the formal representatives of the public interest,[151] have an obligation to include actors, such as communities, who can complement their efforts in rehabilitation and reintegration and who are invested and present throughout the whole process. Governmental actors and programmes that have a good relationship with community members and have therefore earned the community's trust by extension enjoy better public support as well.[152]

Giving communities agency in the very measures they are often the targets of, enabling community members and organisations to be in control of their own role and to have a say in the policies that affect them the most enables the creation of real partnerships, dialogue and trust that benefits both the governmental actors involved as well as the wider communities around violent extremists. Involving communities in the process of P/CVE also avoids the creation of suspect communities and by extension helps prevent society-wide racism and the infringement of community members' civil liberties.

Engaging the various communities who surround (former) violent extremists is in the interest of not only governments and the communities themselves, but it serves the public interest as well. That individuals can disengage from violent extremist ideologies and groups, are able to pursue primary human goods in a pro-social way and can become useful members of society is in everyone's long-term benefit as it helps prevent these people from (re-)engaging in violence. In the long term, a society where this common goal is shared by all actors, where individuals' rights are respected and minority communities are not stigmatised and marginalised throughout the process, is better equipped to counter threats, such as radicalisation and terrorism, while maintaining the legitimacy of governments and the trust that exists between government and society. The agency, voice and influence given to communities not only enables them to address the disengagement and reintegration of already radicalised individuals, but it also contributes to preventing radicalisation in the

[150] Head 2007, p. 450.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Hartley 2021, p. 3.

environments where it often begins. Community-engagement therefore has to be an integral part of any successful P/CVE effort in order for it to contribute to both long-term desistance and reintegration, as well as to preventing radicalisation in the future.

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