

Community Resilience Against Terrorism: Strengthening Social Cohesion to Prevent Radicalization

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Abstract

This article explores the critical role of social cohesion and community resilience in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. While traditional counterterrorism strategies have primarily relied on military operations, intelligence gathering, and law enforcement interventions, growing evidence suggests that community-based approaches offer more sustainable and long-term solutions. Drawing on global examples, particularly from Denmark and Indonesia, the study highlights how early intervention, cross-sector collaboration, and the active participation of civil society can effectively reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies. It examines the roles of educational institutions, religious organizations, local governments, and community leaders in fostering inclusive environments that discourage radicalization. The paper argues that strengthening social cohesion promotes trust, mutual respect, and a shared sense of belonging, thereby reducing the social isolation, discrimination, and grievances that extremist groups frequently exploit. It further emphasizes the importance of youth empowerment, civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and equitable access to education, employment, and social services in addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism. The study also discusses the significance of localized prevention strategies that are tailored to specific cultural and social contexts rather than relying solely on centralized security responses. By integrating prevention, resilience-building, and community participation into national security frameworks, governments can create more adaptive and effective responses to evolving extremist threats. Ultimately, the article concludes that investing in social cohesion and community resilience not only strengthens public safety but also reinforces democratic values, social stability, and sustainable peace. These findings support the adoption of comprehensive, people-centered policies that prioritize prevention alongside conventional security measures to counter violent extremism more effectively.

Keywords: Social cohesion, community resilience, radicalization prevention, violent extremism, counterterrorism strategies.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, terrorism remains a significant global challenge which not only affects national security but the social fabric of societies. Often counterterrorism measures focus on military or law enforcement strategies, while prevention of radicalization, particularly at the community

level has become central concern in combating terrorism. identified strengthening social cohesion within communities as an effective and sustainable approach to prevent radicalization which leads individuals down the path of violent extremism [1]. This article examines how building community resilience through social cohesion can play a vital role in the prevention of radicalization, drawing on global examples and specific experiences from the Maldives ,Broader Asia and Europe [2].

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UNDERSTANDING RADICALIZATION AND TERRORISM

The notion of radicalization is generally used to refer to the process through which an individual or a group come to adopt an increasingly extremist set of belief and aspirations that may lead them to commit terrorist acts or violent actions or likely to make them more vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist organizations. This process is intricate, involving a combination of personal, social, political and ideological factors, and these include social isolation, discrimination, political grievances, and exposure to extremist ideologies often through online platforms. Terrorism in this context is the violent expression of these radicalized beliefs aimed at achieving political, religious, or ideological goals through fear and violence [3].

Military and intelligence operations are vital in the fight against terrorism. It is noteworthy that they are often reactive rather than proactive, which makes the prevention of radicalization at the grassroots level equally important. Prevention of radicalization at the grassroots level is a key area where social cohesion comes into play .

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL COHESION IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

An exhaustive critical review of the conceptualizations of ‘social cohesion’ and ‘community resilience’ as theoretical constructs lies beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, these concepts are succinctly delineated [4].

Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships and the sense of belonging within a community, which is characterized by mutual respect, shared values, and a collective sense of responsibility among members. Berner and Bertrand stated that communities that are socially cohesive tend to exhibit stronger resilience to the influences of radicalization. Social cohesion helps to create a sense of solidarity, making it less likely that individuals will turn to extremist ideologies when faced with personal, social, or political challenges [5].

Community resilience against terrorism is the ability of a community to resist, recover from, and adapt to the challenges posed by radicalization . Socially cohesive communities are better equipped to detect early signs of radicalization, intervene effectively, and provide individuals with alternative narratives that foster inclusion rather than division. Fostering such resilience involves addressing both the symptoms and the root cause of extremism, encouraging a sense of inclusion, and strengthening community ties [6].

Several countries recognize the importance of social cohesion in preventing radicalization. These countries have implemented numerous programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening community resilience, demonstrating that local-level interventions are critical to the success of counterterrorism strategies. In this article, two examples, one from Denmark and one from Indonesia, are presented below to illustrate such initiatives focused on enhancing community resilience [7].

Denmark: The Aarhus Model

The Aarhus Model offers an internationally recognized, multidisciplinary approach to preventing radicalization through early identification and tailored interventions. This approach is founded on pragmatic, interdisciplinary collaboration among frontline professionals across sectors such as law enforcement, education, social services, housing, and welfare, with continuous input from academic experts [8]. By integrating these diverse efforts, the model emphasizes support and rehabilitation over punitive measures, thereby strengthening community resilience and social cohesion in the face of violent extremism.

highlights a central strength of the Aarhus Model in its ability to facilitate early identification of individuals at risk of radicalization [9]. Reports from citizens and frontline professionals are reviewed by a multidisciplinary team, which draws on expertise from both security and social services to assess

potential threats. Where appropriate, personalized interventions are introduced, prioritizing supportive measures such as housing, employment, and psychological support, along with preventive engagement from police. These cases are subject to ongoing monitoring to evaluate the outcomes and effectiveness of the interventions.

The Aarhus Model enables more effective intervention in cases identified by state authorities. Scholars recognize that its multidisciplinary approach is consistent with contemporary theoretical frameworks on radicalization. Although countries implementing the model have experienced terrorist incidents and individuals traveling to join ISIS in Syria, these occurrences have been proportionally fewer than in comparable nations. This suggests that approaches grounded in social cohesion and community-based collaboration can play a significant role in mitigating the risk of radicalization and violent extremism [10].

Indonesia: Community-Based Counter-Radicalization Initiatives

Indonesia ranks as the fourth most populous country and the third-largest democracy in the world. With approximately 87% of its population identifying as Muslim, it holds the distinction of being the largest Muslim-majority nation globally [11]. Indonesia has long struggled with radicalization and terrorism, particularly in its efforts to prevent the rise of groups like Jemaah Islamiyah and ISIS affiliates. The approach to countering radicalization in Indonesia emphasizes local-level community engagement and the promotion of social cohesion .

Reported that Indonesian authorities increasingly recognize civil society organizations (CSOs) as essential partners in countering violent extremism [12-13]. The 2017 Joint Statement emphasized collaboration between government, subnational bodies, and CSOs to address terrorism's root causes through community-based CVE programs, reaffirming earlier national policies promoting CSOs in advocacy, research, and dialogue facilitation.

The independence of CSOs enhances legitimacy and acceptance within communities, especially among rehabilitated extremists [14-15]. For example, Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian operates a restaurant in Solo that functions as a social hub for former violent offenders, facilitating rehabilitation and monitoring [16]. The operational flexibility of CSOs allows quick response to individual needs, avoiding government bureaucracy and strengthening grassroots resilience .

The transition towards community based collaboration has emerged in response to the demonstrated ineffectiveness and, in some cases, counterproductive outcomes of hardline approaches. According to the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, notable advancements have been achieved in fostering social cohesion through joint efforts between communities and government institutions, leading to an enhanced ability of the criminal justice system to prevent violent extremism and ensure community safety. This shift highlights the critical role of community engagement and the fostering of social cohesion in mitigating the risks associated with radicalization and violent extremism.[17-25]

CONCLUSION

The prevention of radicalization and violent extremism necessitates a shift from solely security-based responses to strategies that prioritize social cohesion and community resilience. As demonstrated through initiatives such as Denmark's Aarhus Model and Indonesia's community-based counter-radicalization programs, fostering strong, inclusive, and engaged communities can significantly reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies. These approaches emphasize early intervention, cross-sector collaboration, and the empowerment of local actors, including civil society organizations, to address the underlying causes of radicalization. The evidence presented affirms that enhancing social cohesion not only strengthens community bonds but also serves as a proactive and sustainable means of safeguarding societies against the threats posed by terrorism.

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