

Whitehall Report 2-16

Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction

A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation

James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen



Royal United Services Institute
for Defence and Security Studies

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide guidance to policy-makers and implementers of countering violent extremism (CVE) and risk reduction (RR, also referred to by others as deradicalisation) programmes. While the examples provided are mostly from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, reflecting the authors' professional experiences of programming in these regions, many of the tools and techniques presented will also be relevant to those operating in 'the West'. CVE and RR provide two increasingly prominent frameworks for countering the influence of individuals and entities involved in violent extremism (VE). Widely understood to describe a range of preventative and non-coercive measures, CVE may involve, for instance, community debates on sensitive topics, media messaging, interfaith dialogues, training of state governance and security actors, and a variety of initiatives with individuals deemed to be 'at risk' of being drawn to violence, such as vocational training and mentorship programmes. While there are substantial overlaps between CVE and RR in terms of activities, and many authorities group them under the same umbrella, RR can be considered distinct because its activities more narrowly target individuals who were previously directly or indirectly involved in the production of violence, such as defectors from VE entities, or those serving sentences for terrorism-related charges.

This paper aims to assist policy-makers and implementers by examining approaches through which to understand the drivers of VE and the wider context in which this violence occurs. It also looks at the design of CVE and RR programmes, and outlines key issues relating to programme monitoring and evaluation. We recommend the following:

- **Adopt robust classification systems for VE drivers:** The commonly used categorisation of VE drivers into *push* and *pull factors* is overly simplistic and somewhat ambiguous. We suggest that the CVE and RR communities apply an alternative system, based on existing theory, that distinguishes between *structural motivators*, *individual incentives*, and *enabling factors*.
- **Apply the 'results frameworks' and 'theories of change' approaches:** These approaches should be applied in order to maximise the extent to which CVE and RR programmes contribute to their intended impacts. Through encouraging practitioners to articulate the programme logic, these methods assist with the identification of questionable assumptions and other potentially problematic aspects of interventions, and thus promote critical thinking about superior routes to the desired end.
- **Recognise that CVE is *not* rebranded development programming:** There is a substantial risk that undue emphasis is placed on unemployment, poverty and other such 'structural' drivers, particularly as many practitioners in this burgeoning field arrive from a background in development programming. While such issues may be of considerable relevance in particular locations, they are certainly not by themselves sufficient conditions for VE,

and in specific contexts where VE occurs they may not even be necessary. Alongside such ‘root causes’ it is also important to consider the relevance of social networks, ‘radical’ mentors, revenge-seeking, the pursuit of status, and a host of other motivating and enabling factors. Put simply, the CVE community should ensure that the framework develops into a holistic preventative measure.

- **Target ‘at risk’ individuals:** CVE efforts to influence the broad community of actual or potential supporters of VE may be of substantial relevance in particular where support levels are elevated or such assistance is critical to perpetrators of this violence. However, CVE efforts should also specifically target individuals identified as ‘at risk’ of being drawn to VE, through mentorship, vocational training, and so on, to the extent possible in each location. Such targeting does not consistently occur at present – for example, it is not a requirement of USAID CVE efforts. Failure to concentrate efforts in this manner will invariably result in programmes that underachieve in their contribution to the reduction of VE (the issues associated with identifying such individuals notwithstanding).
- **Mitigate risk without being excessively risk-averse:** Implementers of CVE and RR programmes should mitigate their many possible negative effects, such as stigmatising specific communities, exposing implementing partners to an excessive risk of being targeted by VE entities, enabling VE entities to rally support through highlighting ‘Western meddling’, and so on. However, implementers should also seek to avoid the converse temptation to become overly risk-averse as this will impinge on their ability to achieve their intended impacts.
- **Explore possibilities for experimental and quasi-experimental designs:** Randomised controlled trials and quasi-experimental methods should be explored as a means to evaluate the performance of CVE and RR programmes. In the case of CVE this may involve (a) identifying a number of ‘at risk’ individuals, (b) applying ‘treatments’ (vocational training, mentorship programmes, etc.) to approximately half of these, and (c) assessing changes in their attitudes or behaviours as compared with the control group. While such methods should not be treated as a panacea, and they certainly cannot be utilised to answer the full spectrum of evaluation questions, the authors of this paper believe that they have the potential to provide evidence of programme performance in advance of that which can be supplied through non-experimental approaches.

I. Introduction

1.1 Report Aims

THE PURPOSE OF this report is to provide guidance to policy-makers and implementers of countering violent extremism (CVE) and risk reduction (RR, also referred to by others as deradicalisation) programmes. While the examples provided are mostly from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, reflecting our professional experiences of programming in these regions, many of the tools and techniques presented will also be relevant to those operating in ‘the West’.¹ CVE and RR provide two increasingly widely used frameworks for countering the influence of individuals and entities involved in violent extremism (VE). Widely understood to describe a range of preventative and non-coercive measures, CVE may involve, for instance, community debates on sensitive topics, media messaging, interfaith dialogues, training of state governance and security actors, and a variety of initiatives with individuals deemed to be ‘at risk’ of being drawn to violence, such as vocational training and mentorship programmes. While there are substantial overlaps between CVE and RR in terms of activities, and many authorities group them under the same umbrella, RR can be considered distinct because its activities more narrowly target individuals who were previously directly or indirectly involved in the production of violence, such as defectors from VE entities or those serving sentences for terrorism-related charges.

There is little specific guidance available to the CVE and RR communities on programme design and evaluation, and so this paper aims to help fill this important gap. Key exceptions include Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter’s ‘Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism’, and USAID’s ‘Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency’.² Of course, such works are located within a vast literature on political and ideologically inspired violence that substantially predates the CVE and RR concepts. Yet, as recognised by many experts in the field, and as this paper highlights through examples, much of that literature is of questionable quality. Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert, for instance, observe that studies specifically focused on the concept of radicalisation are ‘plagued by assumption and intuition, [and] unhappily dominated by “conventional wisdom” rather than systematic scientific and empirically based research’.³ On the grounds that the drivers of VE tend to be highly variable and context-specific, we also suggest that accounts that posit universal explanations for such violence should be treated with scepticism (see Section 2).

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1. We welcome comments and feedback on this paper from those involved in CVE and RR programming in ‘the West’ in particular.
 2. Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, ‘Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming’, USAID, October 2009; USAID, ‘The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles into Practice’, September 2011.
 3. Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert, ‘Why Conventional Wisdom on Radicalization Fails’, *International Affairs* (Vol. 86, No. 4, 2010), p. 889.

This paper covers considerable ground and each individual subsection could, in principle, be expanded into a separate article. We have opted for breadth over depth to provide busy policy-makers and implementers with one source from which to draw concise guidance on a range of key programme design and evaluation themes. For instance, we do not provide a review of the state of knowledge of VE drivers (which is, in any case, an almost impossible task given the breadth of the literature). Instead, in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 we focus on causality, complexity and research methods to provide readers with a sufficient understanding of these themes so that they are better able to critically assess the quality of existing studies for themselves.

In Section 3 we describe a range of techniques that should be applied during the programme design phase. The centrepieces are the *results framework* and *theories of change* approaches, which are used to reveal flaws inherent in the design of specific programmes. In particular, these relate to problematic assumptions that may range from the supposition that specific individuals were motivated to contribute to violence by ideological factors, or that psychosocial support can be provided in a manner that overcomes local taboos associated with this treatment. The critical point is that entire lines of programming may fail to contribute to the intended impact if just one assumption is misguided. As such, the wider function of the best-practice approaches outlined in this paper is to promote critical thinking about potentially superior routes to achieve the desired result. Finally, in Section 4 we reflect on key evaluation themes, including the identification of indicators against which progress can be measured.

1.2 Key Concepts

The concept of VE is generally used to refer to both the creation of ideologically motivated or justified violence *and* support for such acts. For instance, USAID defines the term as:

Advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.⁴

The Australian National Counter-Terrorism Committee similarly treats the concept as:

A willingness to use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those of a political, social or ideological nature.⁵

As a response to this phenomenon, CVE is widely understood to be a preventative and non-coercive form of programming involving, for instance, community debates on sensitive topics, media messaging, interfaith dialogues, training of state governance and security actors, and a variety of initiatives, such as vocational training and mentorship programmes, that engage with individuals deemed to be 'at risk' of attraction to violence. As noted by Naureen Chowdhury-Fink, CVE 'has evolved in response to an understanding that while conventional militarized

4. USAID, 'The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency', p. 2.

5. Cited in Minerva Nasser-Eddine et al., 'Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review', Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defense Science and Technology Organisation, Australian Department of Defense, 2011, p. 9.

and repressive counter-terrorism (CT) strategies may be necessary, they are insufficient in ending terrorism when employed alone.⁶ However, it remains assumption-based and under-conceptualised, with the continued absence of formal definitions being of particular note. As Steven Heydemann has observed:

Despite its impressive growth, CVE has struggled to establish a clear and compelling definition as a field; has evolved into a catch-all category that lacks precision and focus; reflects problematic assumptions about the conditions that promote violent extremism; and has not been able to draw clear boundaries that distinguish CVE programs from those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education.⁷

With such critiques in mind, we argue in this paper that CVE programmes should be considered to have two core features. The first is that they should be designed to counter the key drivers of VE in the specific locations in which they occur. While this may sound obvious, there is a substantial risk that undue emphasis is placed on unemployment, poverty and other such structural factors, particularly as many practitioners in this burgeoning field arrive from a background in development programming. While such issues may be of considerable relevance in particular locations, they are certainly not in themselves sufficient conditions for the occurrence of VE, and in specific contexts they may not even be necessary. As discussed in more detail below, alongside such ‘root causes’ it is also important to consider the relevance of social networks, ‘radical’ mentors, revenge-seeking, the pursuit of status, and a host of other motivating and enabling factors. Put simply, the CVE community should ensure that the framework develops into a holistic preventative measure, rather than rebranded development programming.⁸

The second core feature of CVE programming is that it should aim to target individuals specifically identified as ‘at risk’ of being drawn to violence as far as this is feasible in any given location.⁹ Such targeting does not consistently occur at present – for example, it is not a requirement for USAID CVE efforts. VE typically only appeals to relatively limited subpopulations in areas in which security conditions actually allow for such interventions to occur, presenting practitioners with the problem of finding metaphorical needles in haystacks. While efforts to influence the wider community of actual or potential supporters of violence are appropriate in many contexts (see Section 3.1), a failure to focus programme activities on those specifically ‘at risk’ will limit the extent to which CVE initiatives are able to contribute to a reduction in VE.

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6. Naureen Chowdhury-Fink ‘The Blue Flag in Grey Zones: Exploring the Relationship between Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in UN Field Operations’, in James Cockayne and Siobhan O’Neil (eds), *UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is it Fit for Purpose?* (New York: United Nations University, 2015), p. 65.
 7. Steven Heydemann, ‘State of the Art: Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice’, Insights, United States Institute of Peace, Spring 2014, p. 1.
 8. While not specifically discussed within this paper, the principle outlined in this paragraph is perhaps even more relevant to the burgeoning Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) framework.
 9. While the terms ‘at risk’ and ‘vulnerable’ have become common currency, we hold certain reservations about these terms as they may be taken to suggest that the individuals in question lack agency. Put another way, they may imply that radicalisation is something that simply happens to individuals, rather than often being actively pursued.

Thus, we offer the following definition:¹⁰

Countering violent extremism programmes involve a broad range of non-coercive and preventative activities that are united by the objective of counteracting the key drivers of violent extremism specific to the locations in which the programmes are taking place. Such programmes include activities that target individuals specifically identified as potentially ‘at risk’ of being drawn to violence to the extent that this is feasible in each location.

A further source of confusion relates to the relationship between CVE and programmes that we refer to as risk reduction.¹¹ We adopt the term RR to refer solely to initiatives that target individuals with a previous involvement in VE, such as defectors or those serving sentences for terrorism-related charges. Of course, there are substantial overlaps between CVE and RR in terms of activities – both may involve vocational training, counselling, exposure to counter-ideologies, assistance with social networking, and so on – and indeed many authorities treat these forms of programming under the same umbrella. However, our stance is that programmes that deal specifically with individuals with a VE history are sufficiently distinct to warrant a separate concept. To provide additional precision, we offer the following definition of RR:

Risk reduction programmes involve a wide range of non-coercive activities (such as vocational training, counselling, exposure to counter-ideologies, assistance with social networking, livelihood support and so on) applied with the aim of ensuring that individuals who previously contributed to violent extremism (for instance, through perpetrating attacks, manufacturing explosives, planning, financing, collecting intelligence, recruiting, and so on) do not return to such activities.

RR has been selected in preference to ‘disengagement’ or ‘deradicalisation’ on the grounds that it is a more flexible term.¹² The concept of disengagement is generally used to refer to an adaptation in behaviour irrespective of whether or not there is a corresponding change in attitudes. We avoid this term on the basis that it is associated most commonly with the specific process of leaving VE entities, and thus for many it may exclude efforts to ensure that ‘formers’ do not return to violence. The latter is generally (although not universally) used to imply the opposite – a modification of attitudes regardless of whether or not this is accompanied by a change in behaviour. Deradicalisation is problematic if treated as a specific objective. This is because, first, not all individuals who contribute to violence actually hold ‘radical’ attitudes (as discussed in Section 2.1, and specifically Box 3) and, second, because it is not always necessary to change attitudes in order to adapt behaviours.¹³ On the subject of terminology, it is also

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10. An elaboration on the limited available definitions of CVE is available in Peter Romaniuk, ‘Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism’, Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2015, pp. 7–9.
 11. We adopt this term as per John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, ‘Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 22, No. 2, 2010), pp. 267–91.
 12. On these two concepts see, for instance, Horgan and Braddock, ‘Rehabilitating the Terrorists?’.
 13. See, for instance, Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun, *Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009).

worth noting that while certain RR programmes share traits with disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) initiatives, others involve none of the three activities that comprise this acronym. Thus, we argue that RR should be treated separately to avoid overstretching the DDR framework.

Box 1: Differentiating between VE and Insurgency

While VE in its common usage can refer to sporadic incidents of ideologically motivated or justified violence, and support for such acts, the term ‘insurgency’ instead generally implies a wider campaign undertaken by non-state actors involving:

- Elevated levels of support and manpower.
- Degrees of territorial control.
- Non-violent campaign elements such as civil disobedience and service provisions.¹

With these three criteria occurring on a sliding scale, there is no clear distinction between VE and insurgency, and indeed it is not uncommon for these terms to be applied interchangeably. However, with these criteria in mind, many groups deemed to be insurgent organisations in their core operational areas are perhaps better considered to be VE entities in more peripheral locations – where they lack support, control, and so on. The latter may apply, for instance, to Tehrik-e-Taliban outside of its base locations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Al-Shabaab in various parts of Kenya.

1. See, for instance, James Khalil, ‘Know your Enemy: On the Futility of Distinguishing between Terrorists and Insurgents’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Vol. 36, No. 5, 2013), pp. 419–30.

1.3 Cast of Actors

To place a number of the discussions in this paper in context it is necessary at this stage to distinguish between three clusters of non-state actors (see Figure 1):

- **VE perpetrators:** These individuals are involved in the creation of ideologically or politically motivated violence to varying degrees, including explosives manufacture, reconnaissance, attack logistics, and recruitment, among other activities. Despite their active participation, however, they do not all necessarily support this violence; in certain cases they may be driven primarily by economic incentives, fear of repercussions as a consequence of their non-compliance, and so on (see Box 3).
- **VE supporters:** This group supports ideologically or politically motivated violence but does not directly contribute to its creation, and as such they can be said to ‘free-ride’ on the efforts of perpetrators.

- **Advocates of ‘extreme’ change through non-violent means:** These individuals support extreme political or socioeconomic transformations, but oppose violence as a means through which to achieve such ends. Of course, ‘extreme’ is a relative concept that can only be understood in relation to the norm, and as such it is unavoidably subjective.

Figure 1: Three Clusters of Relevant Non-state Actors

	Contribute directly to creation of violence	Support the application of violence	Support ‘extreme’ change
Perpetrators of VE	Y	Y (N)	Y (N)
Supporters of VE	N	Y	Y
Advocates of ‘extreme’ change	N	N	Y

In the UK debates often revolve around the relationship between the first and third of these clusters of non-state actors. In particular, there has been a pronounced division between those who argue that followers of highly conservative strains of Islam should be treated as partners against VE, versus those, such as Prime Minister David Cameron, who effectively assert that ‘non-violent extremism’ provides a stepping stone towards the violent variant.¹⁴ Indeed, the UK’s recent *Counter-Extremism Strategy* controversially takes this one step further through specifically identifying *extremism* as the problem, rather than *violent extremism*.¹⁵ In contrast, in the ‘Global South’ the more pertinent discussions tend to focus on the distinction between perpetrators and mere supporters of VE, possibly partly reflecting the fact that the latter are often more numerous than they are in locations such as Europe and the US.¹⁶ This paper also primarily focuses on the first two categories listed above, reflecting our professional experiences in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

14. At a speech in Munich in February 2011 the prime minister asserted that ‘as evidence emerges about the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were initially influenced by what some have called “non-violent extremists”, and they then took those radical beliefs to the next level by embracing violence ... So first, instead of ignoring this extremist ideology, we – as governments and as societies – have got to confront it, in all its forms’. David Cameron, speech at Munich Security Conference, 5 February 2011, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>>, accessed 3 June 2016. We are unable to contribute to this discussion as our professional experiences are in the Global South, although we are sceptical about the extent to which this supposed ‘stepping stone’ thesis reflects an empirically demonstrable reality in the UK or ‘the West’ more broadly. For more on this debate, see Robert Lambert, *Countering Al-Qaeda in London: Police and Muslims in Partnership* (London: Hurst and Company, 2011).

15. Home Office, *Counter-Extremism Strategy*, Cm 9148 (London: The Stationery Office, October 2015).

16. See, for instance, Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, ‘How “Free” is Free Riding in Civil Wars?: Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem’, *World Politics* (Vol. 59, No. 2, January 2007), pp. 177–216.

II. Understanding the Context

THIS SECTION FOCUSES on ways of understanding the drivers of VE, providing necessary background information for subsequent discussions on CVE and RR design. Specifically, the three subsections offer respectively a classification system for VE drivers, a discussion on the issues of causality and complexity, and an elaboration on research methods.

2.1 Classifying Drivers of VE

When researching the causes of VE it is beneficial to draw on systems of classification of such drivers, as this helps ensure that potential contributory factors are not overlooked. In the absence of prominent alternatives,¹⁷ it is worth focusing on USAID's distinction between *push* and *pull* factors. The former are identified as being 'important in creating the conditions that favor the rise or spread in appeal of violent extremism or insurgency', whereas the latter are 'associated with the personal rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer.'¹⁸ USAID does not aim to offer a definitive list of potential drivers, but as examples of push factors it mentions social marginalisation and fragmentation, poorly governed or ungoverned areas, government repression and human rights violations, endemic corruption and elite impunity, and cultural threat perceptions. Pull factors are said to include access to material incentives, social status, adventure, self-esteem, personal empowerment and a sense of belonging, as well as 'the presence of radical institutions or venues, service provision by extremist groups, and extremist involvement in illegal economic activity.'¹⁹

While the simplicity of this binary classification system has substantial appeal, in practice the idea of pull factors in particular tends to cause confusion. For instance, as we noted previously, USAID's Kenya Transition Initiative privileged ideological and religious pull factors, and largely neglected to focus on psychosocial drivers such as empowerment, status, belonging, and so on.²⁰ To be clear, the concern is not that the push / pull dichotomy is not comprehensive, but rather that it tends to be inconsistently interpreted and this can result in critical drivers being overlooked. This may have programmatic implications in that specific counter-measures

17. A variety of alternative classification systems exist, but these are not widely used by the CVE / RR community. For instance, see the division into macro- and micro-level causes and catalysts in Veldhuis and Staun, *Islamist Radicalisation*.

18. USAID, *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*, pp. 3–4.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

20. James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, 'A Case Study of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming: Lessons from OTI's Kenya Transition Initiative', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* (Vol. 3, No. 1, 2014), pp. 6–7.

Box 2: A Critique of Selected Studies on the ‘Rooted in Poverty’ Thesis

Underdevelopment (a term used broadly for current purposes) forms one of the better studied candidate drivers of VE. It is worth reflecting in more depth on this theme to highlight significant issues with two commonly cited and influential academic studies that consider the relationship between underdevelopment and VE – serving hopefully to caution against the uncritical absorption of findings from research more generally. As indicated in the main text, the stance of the authors of this paper is that poverty, unemployment, inadequate education and other related factors may contribute to political violence and/or support for such acts in specific cases, but that these form partial explanations at best.

In contrast, James Piazza from Pennsylvania State University asserts that his statistical models ‘demonstrate that there is no empirical evidence to support the crux of the “rooted-in-poverty” thesis’ and that this ‘is undoubtedly disturbing to many policymakers, for it removes a potential “cure” for the scourge of terrorism and a tool in preventing political violence’.¹ However, in reality this study is substantially limited by the fact that it does not disaggregate state-wide data, and indeed its relevance to the CVE and RR communities is minimal as a result. Of far greater relevance to the current debate is whether or not specific individuals (often only a minority, as previously noted) are driven to violence in part by their socio-economic conditions, rather than broader findings on the relationship between violence and indicators of underdevelopment at the state level.

Similarly, focusing primarily on the cases of Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories, Alan B Krueger and Jitka Malečková conclude that ‘the evidence we have presented, tentative though it is, suggests little direct connection between poverty or education and participation in terrorism’.² Yet, various elements of their broad investigation are of questionable merit – for instance, their cross-country analysis suffers from the same limitation as Piazza’s research. Similarly, while their assessment of survey data from the Palestinian Territories reveals a lack of correlation between underprivileged status and support for violence, this does not in itself undermine the case that underdevelopment may be a partial driver of VE. This is because in many locations, marginalised individuals who may not necessarily support the ostensible objectives of VE still actively contribute to violence to receive financial or other incentives (see Figure 2 and Box 3).

Leaving to one side the validity of their findings, it should also be clarified that no inferences can be made from the Krueger and Malečková study about patterns outside of Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories. Even a cursory glance at the wider literature suggests that there is a correlation between underprivileged status and involvement in violence elsewhere (although see Section 2.2 on the subject of causality). For instance, Stig Jarle Hansen observes that ‘the rank and file of Al-Shabaab consisted of unemployed Somali youth’.³ Indeed, Krueger himself highlights that ‘there are enough indicators that members of the IRA [Irish Republican Army] were disproportionately working class’.⁴

1. James Piazza, ‘Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 18, 2006), p. 170.
2. Alan B Krueger and Jitka Malečková, ‘Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is there a Causal Connection?’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (Vol. 17, No. 4, 2003), p. 141.
3. Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013), p. 45.
4. Alan B Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 44–5.

may not be considered as a consequence. Thus, we propose the following adaptation to this existing typology:

- **Structural motivators.** These include repression, corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, a history of hostility between identity groups, external state interventions in the affairs of other nations, and so on.
- **Individual incentives.** These include a sense of purpose (generated through acting in accordance with perceived ideological tenets), adventure, belonging, acceptance, status, material enticements, fear of repercussions by VE entities, expected rewards in the afterlife, and so on (see Figure 2).
- **Enabling factors.** These include the presence of radical mentors (including religious leaders and individuals from social networks, among others), access to radical online communities, social networks with VE associations, access to weaponry or other relevant items, a comparative lack of state presence, an absence of familial support, and so on.

It is helpful to elaborate on these categories through reference to the distinction between attitudes and behaviours (see Box 3). Structural motivators (which are largely equivalent to the push factors described by USAID) tend to provide substantial explanatory power for the existence of attitudes that are supportive of the purported aims of VE. However, there is a strong argument that such drivers poorly explain behaviours that directly contribute to this violence on the basis that ‘rational’ actors who support its purported objectives would logically elect to ‘free-ride’ on the efforts of others, and thus avoid the potential costs associated with participation, such as imprisonment, injury and death.²¹ Drivers from the second category (which incorporates many USAID pull factors), including adventure, status, material enticements, fear and so on, overcome the free-rider hurdle through offering incentives that are contingent on actual participation. To avoid some of the confusion associated with the USAID system, the third category (which also includes many USAID pull factors) is distinguished from the previous two by comprising factors that *enable* VE, rather than *motivate* it.²²

Of course, certain readers may take issue with this classification system by questioning the extent to which individuals act in a self-interested or ‘rational’ manner, and instead argue in

21. Unfortunately, this argument may be destined to remain largely theoretical as it is difficult to demonstrate empirically the limitations of such explanations, particularly as interviewees formerly involved in violence themselves frequently focus on the relevance of such *structural motivators*. However, the associated argument is that this focus often distorts reality (see Section 2.3 on the limitations of research more broadly), for instance, respondents may simply reiterate much of the grievance-focused rhetoric of specific VE entities, or they avoid focusing on *individual-level* incentives to evade appearing to be driven by ‘selfish’ motives.

22. While we argue that this system represents an improvement over the push / pull dichotomy, and is a sufficiently robust tool to help implementers understand the environments in which they operate, it remains imperfect. For instance, ideological factors may be a source of confusion as they may be interpreted as *individual incentives* – that is, delivering a sense of purpose to individuals who act in accordance with doctrinal tenets. Or, they may be treated as *enabling factors* – that is, offering worldviews that prescribe violence as a solution to existing grievances. However, of greater importance than ensuring that all such drivers are in their ‘correct’ categories, is that these distinct factors should be considered somewhere within the classification system.

favour of group-centric interpretations. In a classic account that draws from interviews with members of Hamas, Hizbullah and other Middle Eastern groups, Jerrold Post, Ehud Sprinzak and Laurita Denny assert that:

As the individual and group fuse, the more personal the struggle becomes for the group members. ... Subjects were unable to distinguish between personal goals and those of the organization. In their discussion of group action, the success or failure of the group's action was personal – if the group succeeded, then as an individual they succeeded; if the group failed, they failed.²³

While such philosophical debates reach far beyond the study of political violence, we argue that the distinction between being driven by self-interest and being driven by perceived group objectives represents a false dichotomy in this particular context. This is because those who seek to contribute to the achievement of the group often aim to do so (although not necessarily in a self-aware manner) to achieve psychosocial rewards such as status, acceptance, or a sense of belonging.²⁴ The classification system provided above intentionally incorporates group-centric interpretations through including such psychosocial motivators within the category of 'individual incentives'.²⁵ These rewards undoubtedly also partially explain why specific identity groups are often disproportionately recruited into particular VE entities, as is the case with certain tribes and clans and the Taliban and Al-Shabaab. In such cases, status, acceptance and belonging may be bestowed on individuals who directly support these entities once there is a perception that the interests of the VE organisation and the identity group in question are sufficiently aligned.

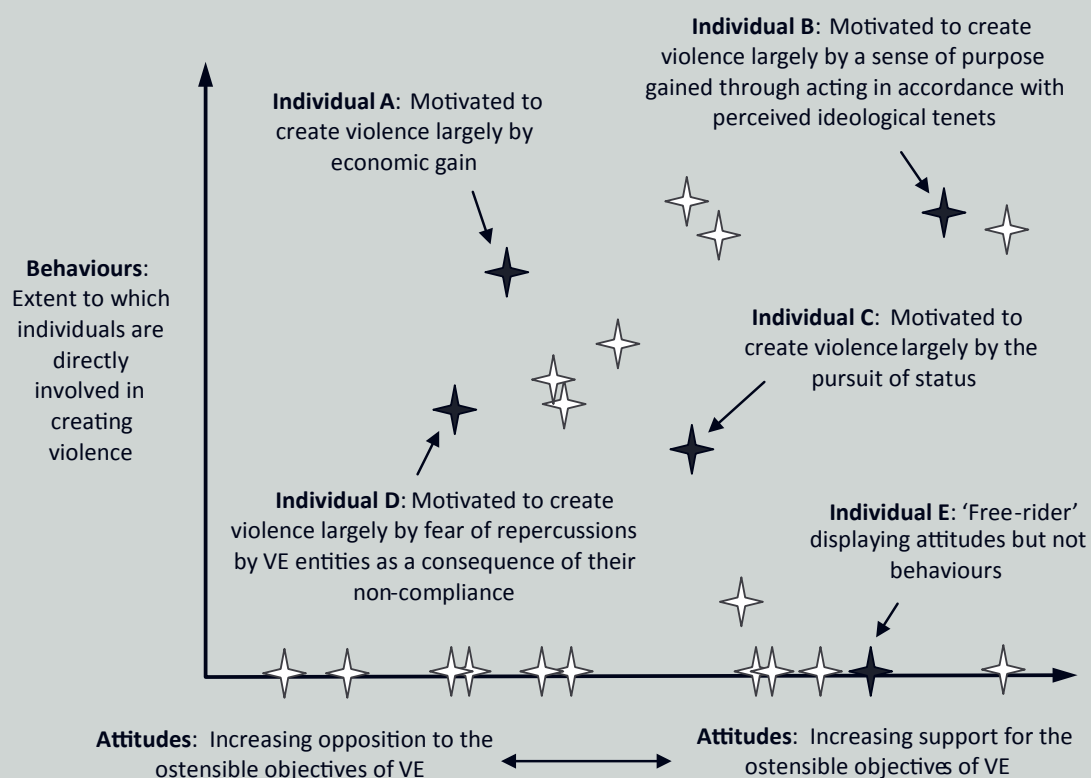
23. Jerrold Post, Ehud Sprinzak and Laurita Denny, 'The Terrorists in their Own Words: Interviews with 35 Incarcerated Middle Eastern Terrorists', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003), pp. 171–84.

24. See James Khalil, 'Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions are not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture Between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of Our Research into Political Violence', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Vol. 37, No. 2, 2014), pp. 198–211.

25. This draws from various strains of identity theory. See, for instance, Seth J Schwartz, Curtis S Dunkel and Alan S Waterman, 'Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Vol. 32, No. 6, 2009), pp. 537–59.

Box 3: The Partial Disconnect between Supportive Attitudes and VE Behaviours

While individuals who are supportive of violence are undoubtedly more likely to become directly involved in its creation, it is important to note that there is a substantial disconnect between attitudes and behaviours in relation to VE.¹ Specifically, it can be observed that those who contribute to the production of VE are not necessarily supportive of its ostensible political or ideological aims (see Individuals A and D below, and Figure 2). This phenomenon is perhaps less pronounced in 'Western' cases as VE entities in these locations are generally less able to coerce individuals or deliver material incentives due to their reduced capabilities and freedom of movement. Conversely, in many or most cases the majority of individuals who support violence are not directly involved in its production (Individual E). For instance, Palestinians sympathetic to suicide / martyrdom attacks typically far outnumber those involved in delivering such violence, with the former reportedly reaching as high as 66 per cent in 2005.²



While various high-profile scholars have observed the importance of this partial disconnect between attitudes and behaviours,³ as yet it has not systematically been incorporated into research on the topic. The authors of this paper argue that a comprehensive understanding of VE requires researchers to treat attitudes and behaviours as two separate, albeit closely interrelated, lines of inquiry.

Source: This box draws from Khalil, 'Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions'.

1. The 'behaviours' axis is intended to represent a theoretical scale, as opposed to one that is consistently measurable, given the unavoidable subjectivity regarding the term 'directly involved'. We adopt a common-sense approach in which, for instance, a suicide / martyrdom attacker and a full-time operational planner would be located higher on the scale than individuals only occasionally involved in attack logistics or reconnaissance, or who periodically contribute funds to the cause.
2. Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 127.
3. See John Horgan and Max Taylor, 'Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research', in Rik Coolsaet (ed), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 174; Marc Sageman, 'The Turn to Political Violence in the West', in Coolsaet (ed), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences*, p. 117.

Figure 2: Selected Individual-Level Motivators Identified as Relating to Three VE Entities

	Al-Shabaab	Provisional IRA	Taliban
Adventure	Referring specifically to Al-Shabaab in Kenya, Anneli Botha claims that a proportion of her sample of 'individuals associated with Shabaab' remained with the group 'for the adventure'. ¹	According to the 'Green Book' of the Provisional IRA, 'many in the past have joined the Army out of romantic notions, or sheer adventure'. ²	David Kilcullen claims that local farmers in the province of Uruzgan assisted the Taliban during a 2006 confrontation with a US / Afghan patrol as 'this was the most exciting thing that had happened in their valley in years'. ³
Belonging	Again referring to Al-Shabaab in Kenya, Botha asserts that this VE entity provided 'a sense of belonging within the organization against a common "enemy"'. ⁴	With regard to sectarian violence in Derry in 1969, Brendan Hughes (who went on to lead the first hunger strike) claimed that 'it gave me a sense of pride and a feeling that we had something to protect ourselves with. I wanted to be involved in that too because our whole community felt that we were under attack. I wanted to be part of that defence'. ⁵	The topic of belonging does not feature prominently in the literature on Afghanistan, but this should not be taken to infer that it is not a prominent motivator. It is often observed that recruitment patterns of the Taliban coincide substantially with tribal affiliations, and it is possible that an involvement with this VE entity at least in certain cases reinforced this identity.
Status	Drawing upon interviews with former Al-Shabaab members, Muhsin Hassan maintains that those who joined the group 'were seen as heroes for defending the country and the religion'. ⁶	Drawing from personal experience in the Provisional IRA, Eamon Collins claims that foot soldiers fought because 'by doing so they gave themselves power, status and influence which they could never have achieved otherwise'. ⁷ He also notes that the cadre had 'considerable status' among selected communities, and that there was 'no shortage of women willing to give more than the time of day to IRA volunteers'. ⁸	Martine van Bijlert observes that ' <i>naraz</i> is a term generally used for local leaders who, over a considerable period of time, have not been treated in accordance with their social standing', and that this concept has 'been crucial to the rise of the Taliban in [the province of] Uruzgan'. ⁹ In other words, such individuals joined or assisted the Taliban partially in pursuit of status.

1. Anneli Botha, 'Political Socialization and Terrorist Radicalization among Individuals Who Joined Al-Shabaab in Kenya', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Vol. 37, 2014), p. 914.
2. Provisional IRA, 'Green Book', text available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira_green_book.htm>, accessed March 2016.
3. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 40-1.
4. Botha, 'Political Socialization and Terrorist Radicalization among Individuals Who Joined Al-Shabaab in Kenya', p. 915.
5. Cited in Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 53.
6. Muhsin Hassan, 'Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of Al-Shabaab and Somali Youth', *CTC Sentinel* (Vol. 5, No. 8, 2012), p. 19.
7. Eamon Collins, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta Books, 1998), p. 214.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
9. Martine van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan', in Antonio Giustozzi (ed), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London: Hurst, 2009), p. 161.

	Al-Shabaab	Provisional IRA	Taliban
Revenge	Hassan claims that AMISOM's bombing of Somali villages 'built intense hatred toward this group', and that these former members 'joined al-Shabab to seek revenge'. Hassan also asserts that other respondents claimed to seek 'revenge against TFG [Transitional Federal Government] soldiers'. ¹⁰	While the relevance of this driver is highly contested in this particular case, an unidentified member of Sinn Féin interviewed by Robert White conceded that within the Republican movement in 1969 and 1971 'there was a blind wish to retaliate and kill and shoot and burn and so on'. ¹¹	Van Bijlert asserts that 'in a culture where honour and revenge are central to a man's stature, many saw no other option than to join the resistance or, if they did not wish to do so, were unable to stop the young men from their tribe from joining'. ¹²
Fear of being targeted by VE entities	Writing in 2011, Roland Marchal claimed that 'conscription [into Al-Shabaab] has not been performed with guns', although 'there are periods when it took place through pure coercion'. ¹³	While the Provisional IRA clearly relied on intimidation to prevent informers, most authorities maintain that the extent to which individuals were coerced into joining or supporting the movement was limited or even negligible, and indeed individuals were freely able to leave the group. In other words, coercion did not seem to provide a major driver in this case. ¹⁴	Antonio Giustozzi observes that 'forced recruitment was probably the most extreme form of the involvement of local communities in the war effort of the Taliban, as even in communities which sided with the Movement some families would be reluctant to contribute their sons and had to be forced to. Even when recruitment was endorsed by local notables, the line between voluntary and forced enlistment must have been a thin one'. ¹⁵
Material enticements	The International Crisis Group reports that Al-Shabaab 'pays its soldiers and operatives well and regularly and provides for its veterans and the families of its "martyrs"'. ¹⁶	Sources on the Provisional IRA suggest that full-time members received only a modest salary and that during most of the conflict there were few opportunities to gain through extortion. ¹⁷ Thus, it is probably fair to suggest that material incentives generally offered a weak explanation for enlistment in this case as many or most individuals may have gained a greater income through a conventional vocation.	In Afghanistan there is abundant evidence that community members receive funds in exchange for their contributions to violence. Giustozzi observes that 'the Taliban sometimes paid villagers cash (reportedly US\$15–55) to harass foreign and government troops with occasional rocket attacks and shootings'. ¹⁸

10. Hassan, 'Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism', p.18.

11. Robert W White, 'The Irish Republican Army: An Assessment of Sectarianism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 9, No. 1, 1997), p. 31.

12. Van Bijlert, 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles', pp. 160–61.

13. Roland Marchal, 'The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujaheddin in Somalia', Science Po Paris, March 2011, p. 40.

14. See, for instance, Sean O'Callaghan, *The Informer* (London: Corgi, 1999), p. 123.

15. Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 42.

16. International Crisis Group, 'Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It will be a Long War', Policy Briefing, June 2014, p. 15.

17. See, for instance, John Horgan and Max Taylor, 'Playing the "Green Card" – Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 1', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 11, No. 2, 1999), pp. 16–17.

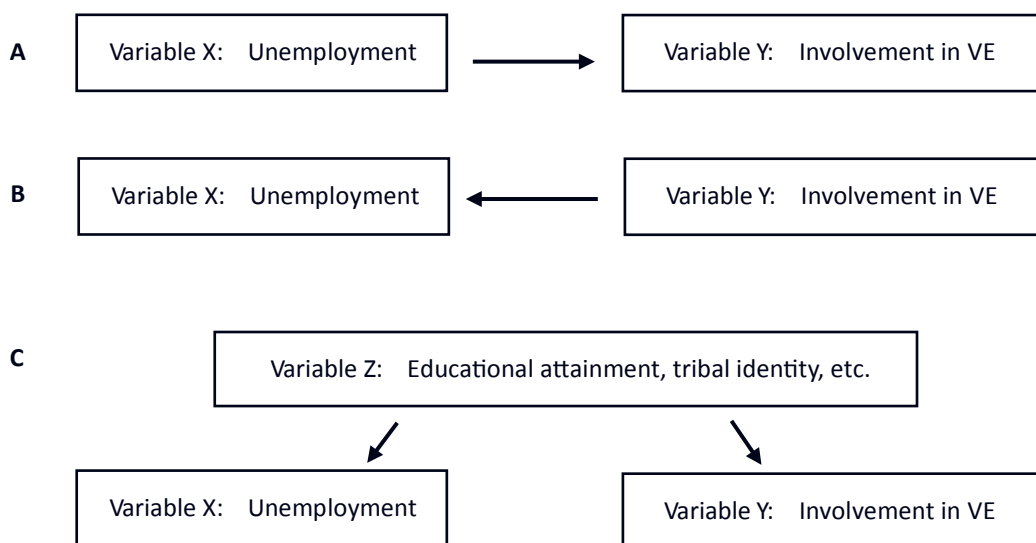
18. Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, p. 41.

2.2 Causality and Complexity

Before focusing on research methods that can be applied to determine the relative importance of candidate VE drivers (see Section 2.3) it is necessary to briefly introduce the topics of causality and complexity. The first step to determining causality in a general sense (as opposed to as applicable to specific individuals) is to identify correlations between VE and particular structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors. Considerable care should be taken with assumptions in this process as even highly intuitive candidate factors often do not correlate with VE, either in a general sense or in specific locations. For example, Mercy Corps found that ‘actual employment status did not relate to propensity towards political violence’ in Somaliland and Puntland.²⁶ In any case, a correlation between unemployment and VE would not have been sufficient to demonstrate that the former drove the latter, as indicated by the oft-quoted axiom that ‘correlation does not imply causation’. To elaborate on this point, if these two variables *are* shown to correlate in another location this may be because:

- Unemployment *may* drive some individuals to become involved in VE because they seek salaries offered by selected VE entities, because the unemployed have additional spare time, and so on (Causal Direction A in Figure 3).
- An involvement in VE *may* contribute to unemployment, because members of VE entities may become tainted by this association (Causal Direction B).
- A ‘confounding variable’ (educational attainment, tribal identity, etc.) *may* contribute to both unemployment *and* an involvement in violence (Causal Direction C).

Figure 3: Directions of Potential Causality (Example 1)²⁷



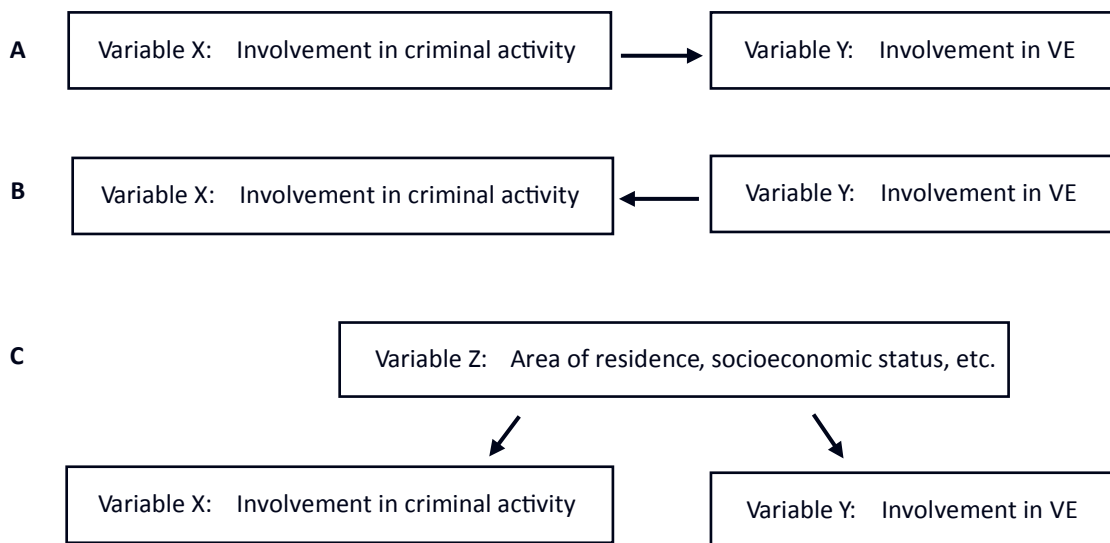
26. Mercy Corps, ‘Examining the Links between Youth Economic Opportunity, Civic Engagement, and Conflict’, Somalia: Research Brief, 2013, p. 1.

27. Figure 3 and the related text is adapted from Khalil ‘Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions.’

To offer another example, in certain locations (such as in Peshawar in Pakistan, or in the Majengo neighbourhood of Nairobi, among others) it is routinely asserted that an involvement in criminality provides a common route to VE. Research into this topic would again first need to show that these two factors are indeed correlated, and if it can be demonstrated that such a correlation does exist then the logic outlined above would again be applicable:²⁸

- Prior involvement in criminal activity *may* drive some individuals to become involved in VE if the associated networks overlap (Causal Direction A in Figure 4).
- An involvement in VE *may* contribute to a subsequent involvement in criminal activities if the associated networks overlap (Causal Direction B).
- A ‘confounding variable’ (area of residence, socioeconomic status, etc.) may contribute to a subsequent involvement in both criminal activity *and* VE (Causal Direction C).

Figure 4: Directions of Potential Causality (Example 2)



This is certainly not an abstract discussion – programmers should be acutely aware that efforts to address unemployment or criminality will *not* serve to reduce VE unless Causal Direction A at least partly reflects reality in the above two examples. Thus, efforts should be made to collect evidence to test these three potential causal routes prior to designing a programme.²⁹ However, the picture is complicated by the fact that causality may run in multiple directions simultaneously – for instance, Causal Directions A and B may both partly explain a correlation in a specific location.

28. This example is complicated by the fact that in many locations there is no clear separation between entities of a criminal and VE nature.

29. Specific techniques are beyond the scope of this paper, but are discussed in a variety of introductory texts to social science methods, see, for instance, Catherine Marsh and Jane Elliott, *Exploring Data* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); and Simeon J. Yates, *Doing Social Science Research* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

To confuse matters further, it is increasingly recognised that the notion of simple linear relationships between potential causes (such as unemployment) and effects (such as involvement in violence) succumbs to a reality of tipping points, feedback loops, path dependencies and other complexities. In addition, pairs of variables do not interact in isolation, but instead interrelate in equally elaborate manners with a potentially infinite range of additional factors, including many of the other structural drivers, individual incentives and enabling factors listed in the previous section. Put simply, our analytical methods remain ill-equipped to deal with such complex problems.³⁰ As such, while it is possible to draw tentative or partial conclusions about the role of specific drivers, policy-makers and implementers from the CVE and RR communities should recognise that there are substantial limitations to our ability to genuinely comprehend the causes of VE, both in a general sense and in specific locations.

2.3 Conducting Research in Challenging Environments

The obstacles to comprehending VE drivers do not only relate to the complex nature of this phenomenon, but also to issues with data quality. Open-source information tends to be available about VE and relevant contextual issues in most locations, and can be drawn from the academic literature, think-tank papers, reports from civil society organisations, media sources, and so on. The core field research methods generally include:

- **Key informant interviews:** Interviewees will vary according to location, but may include implementers of related programmes, government officials, NGO workers, private sector representatives, religious leaders, and so on. Semi-structured research tools are generally preferred, allowing the research team to tailor their lines of enquiry while also covering the themes of key interest.
- **Focus group discussions (FGDs):** FGDs enable key information to emerge through discussion among participants, with the most suitable approach again generally being semi-structured research instruments. FGDs tend to be conducted with selected groups (such as women, youths, religious leaders, and so on) and are often used in preference to one-on-one interviews as they provide respondents with a sense of ‘safety in numbers’ while being asked about sensitive issues.
- **Quantitative surveys:** Surveys deliver statistically-based information on a broad range of topics, such as perceptions of the legitimacy of violence (see Section 4.2 on impact indicators), perceptions of the state, local employment prospects, and so on. In certain contexts, it is possible to conduct household surveys, which require specific statistical methods and sampling procedures for the selection of geographical locations (such as villages, towns and urban districts), households in these areas and individuals at the doorstep.³¹

30. On complexity theory as it relates to social science, see, for instance, David Byrne and Gill Callaghan, *Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

31. While best practice for survey research varies considerably between locations, many important techniques are outlined, for instance, in Asia Foundation, ‘Afghanistan in 2014: A Survey of the Afghan People’, 2014. Unfortunately, cultural, logistical and security-based constraints often prevent the application of such techniques to the required standard. In such cases it is

- **Observations:** Under selected circumstances researchers may be able to observe events that drive VE, such as sermons that advocate violence. However, more commonly this method is of value for monitoring and evaluation purposes as it is often possible to witness CVE and RR programme components in action, including community debates, livelihood trainings, and so on.

While these methods are straightforward in principle, specific issues routinely arise during the data collection process. Firstly, the research team may face pressure from a range of stakeholders to provide results that suit specific agendas. Secondly, it is often the case that even the most qualified research teams lack expertise – particularly in fragile environments. For example, the researchers may fail to build adequate rapport; they may ask questions in a leading manner; they may misapply survey techniques; and so on. Thirdly, security-based constraints may prevent access to specific locations and / or individuals. Fourthly, cultural constraints often present hurdles in locations in which VE occurs – for example, it may not be possible for men to interview women and vice versa, and researchers from specific religious, ethnic or tribal groups may not be able to conduct investigations with individuals from other communities. Finally, study respondents may provide false or misleading information, for reasons including:

- Because they are ill-informed or offer opinions presented as facts.
- To discredit others.
- To be viewed favourably by the interviewer.
- Out of the fear of perceived repercussions of divulging information.
- To aggrandise their own role in events.
- As a result of a process of unwitting self-deception.

To elaborate briefly on this final issue, assertions regarding the extent to which individuals are coerced into assisting VE entities are often apparently downplayed by supporters of such groups in an effort to legitimise their efforts. Conversely, those formerly involved with such entities often have an interest in highlighting the importance of this driver in an effort to reduce their own culpability.

In highlighting such issues we certainly do not intend to suggest that the CVE and RR communities should abandon the idea of researching these topics. Indeed, we strongly advocate for the need to commit a substantial proportion of programme resources to field investigations precisely to help alleviate such issues. Furthermore, we argue that such investigations are required throughout the lifecycle of programmes, rather than only as upfront baselines, because

impossible to determine whether apparent patterns in the data represent genuine findings, or are attributable to suboptimal or inconsistent methods. Under such circumstances quantitative surveys do not represent a suitable research option. Unfortunately, they are regularly conducted irrespective of such issues and highly questionable evidence is routinely used by the programming community to support a wide range of claims.

implementing teams require a real-time understanding of rapidly evolving contexts. Under such conditions, we suggest that best practice involves:

- Adopting a mixed method approach to draw from the strengths of each of the selected techniques.
- ‘Triangulating’ information from various sources (state officials, religious leaders and community members, among others) to the extent possible in order to cross-validate the collected data.
- Focusing research efforts on those individuals who have travelled some way down the radicalisation path, to the extent that this is possible, since information drawn from many other community members often represents little more than hearsay.
- Selecting local research providers with suitable expertise and experience, an understanding of development- and security-related issues, and established ties to local communities.

III. Designing CVE and RR Programmes

HAVING EXAMINED APPROACHES through which to understand the context in which CVE and RR programmes occur, in this section of the paper we switch our focus to the design of such programmes. We outline various approaches to assist with this design, including, in particular, the results framework and theories of change approaches.

3.1 Shortlisting Programme Components

It is worth reiterating the critical point that the drivers of VE vary considerably between contexts. As a consequence, in the words of Denoeux and Carter:

Programming must reflect the distinctive features of the specific environment in which a particular VE group or movement operates. To be sure, many such movements present similarities in their characteristics and the dynamics that sustain them; they often are influenced by the same regional or global forces as well. Nonetheless, they also are shaped by local grievances and problems, and by idiosyncratic historical legacies and cultural attributes. Programming must reflect that situation, and avoid “off-the-shelf” or “cookie-cutter” approaches.³²

A simple technique that can initially be applied by programme designers is to list the key drivers of VE identified through localised research (using practices outlined in Section 2.3) in accordance with the classification system outlined in Section 2.1. Once this list is complete, candidate responses can be identified that correspond to each of these factors (see Figure 5), recalling that certain measures lie outside the scope of CVE and RR due to the non-coercive nature of these frameworks, such as direct confrontations with VE entities, provisions of security to those threatened by such movements, and so on. At this stage, this should primarily be a ‘brainstorming’ exercise, although at least some attention should be paid to the extent to which these potential responses are likely to contribute to the desired CVE impact in an effective and efficient manner (see Section 4.1 on the topic of evaluation criteria). While certain CVE and RR initiatives deliver a wide range of programmatic elements, others are more narrowly focused, and decisions regarding their breadth are often a key consideration during the design phase.

32. Denoeux and Carter, ‘Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism’, p. 1.

Figure 5: Key Drivers of VE in a Hypothetical Location and Candidate CVE Responses³³

	Key Identified Drivers in Location X	Candidate CVE Responses
Structural motivators	State repression	Advocacy for institutional reform, training of state actors, community awareness-raising of rights, state-community forums, etc.
	Limited economic opportunities	Education and vocational training, careers guidance, financial literacy schemes, credit schemes, etc.
	Historical tensions between identity groups	Intercommunity forums and events, interfaith dialogues, support for moderate religious leaders, civic and peace education, etc.
Individual incentives	Status	Mentoring of individuals, education and vocational training, careers guidance, financial literacy schemes, credit schemes, etc.
	Material incentives	Education and vocational training, careers guidance, financial literacy schemes, credit schemes, etc.
	Revenge	Messaging initiatives, support for moderate religious leaders, civic and peace education, psychosocial support, etc.
	Fear of repercussions by VE entities	-
Enabling factors	'Radical' mentors	Individual mentoring, support for moderate religious leaders, etc.
	Online 'radical' forums	Online messaging initiatives, etc.

Of course, discussions about the types of activities that the programme will deliver are intimately tied to considerations regarding the targeting of CVE efforts, and in particular the extent to which the focus should be placed on individuals identified as being 'at risk' as opposed to the broader body of actual or potential VE supporters. In many or most cases the perpetrators of violence are far less numerous than the supporters of VE. For instance, as observed in Box 3, Palestinians sympathetic to suicide / martyrdom attacks have commonly far outnumbered those involved in delivering such violence, with the former reportedly reaching as high as 66 per cent of the population in 2005.³⁴

33. This tool can also be applied for RR efforts, with the core difference being that the range of possible responses is reduced given that this form of programming deals more narrowly with defectors or those currently serving sentences for terrorism-related charges.

34. Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, p. 127.

Addressing support for violence should certainly be a consideration for CVE implementers since, at the very least, supportive attitudes may predispose individuals to subsequent direct involvement in violence. The extent of support for VE in a particular community is also likely to provide a key determinant of whether said community bestows status on perpetrators, which could, in turn, potentially encourage individuals to engage in VE. In particular, CVE efforts to combat those attitudes supportive of VE may be applicable in contexts in which:³⁵

- Support for VE is particularly widespread, and thus long-term solutions necessarily involve extensive efforts to change attitudes.
- The perpetrators of violence are highly dependent on local communities for material resources, shelter, information on the security forces, and so on.
- The narrower targeting of those deemed to be ‘at risk’ of becoming perpetrators may be particularly likely to provoke a hostile response from VE entities, and thus a wider focus must be adopted out of necessity.

However, in a broader sense this paper also argues that CVE programmes that fail to focus on individuals narrowly identified as ‘at risk’ of being attracted to violence will likely be ineffective or inefficient. As previously noted, this is because VE typically only appeals to relatively limited subpopulations in those locations in which security conditions actually allow for CVE interventions to occur, and thus practitioners are confronted by a ‘needle in a haystack’ problem. Yet, there is some resistance among implementers to the idea of identifying those who are ‘at risk’ on the basis that efforts to create terrorist profiles have been unsuccessful to date.³⁶ However, as we observed in a previous paper, this stance is misguided because the objective should not be to precisely identify individual ‘types’, but rather to more modestly narrow targeting efforts on a probabilistic basis.³⁷ How this may be achieved in practice is highly location-specific – although see Box 4 for on an approach recently adopted in Nairobi. While males and youths are obvious candidates in most contexts, more precise targeting may also be achieved in specific communities by focusing on individuals from specific ethnic or clan groups, recent religious converts, attendants of specific religious institutions, school drop-outs, unmarried individuals, those involved with crime, those with existing familial links to VE entities, and so on. Of course, this is only applicable if research (see Section 2.3) has adequately demonstrated that such traits are disproportionately associated with VE, rather than basing such efforts on anecdotal evidence that may simply reflect existing prejudices and preconceptions in the societies in question.

35. On this theme also see Denoeux and Carter, ‘Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism’, p. 5.

36. John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. xxii; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-first Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 17.

37. Khalil and Zeuthen, ‘A Case Study of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming’, p. 7. The distinction between ‘profiling’ and ‘narrowing targeting on a probabilistic basis’ is subtle but important. The former implies a fairly precise ability to identify individuals according to specific traits, whereas the latter is more modestly about marginally increasing the chances of identification on the basis of evidence that individuals are *somewhat more likely* to be ‘at risk’ if they have specific characteristics or demonstrate specific behaviours.

Box 4: Identifying 'At Risk' Individuals in Nairobi

One component of the 2014–15 EU-funded *Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism* (STRIVE) programme in the Horn of Africa involved providing mentorship to 'at risk' youth in regions of Nairobi with a high prevalence of VE. To identify candidates for this mentorship, a series of community workshops were initially undertaken by the STRIVE team, focusing on issues such as violence and crime. Drawing from their prior community knowledge, the STRIVE team conducted interviews with individuals identified as being 'at risk' during the workshops, in particular focusing on:

- Those believed to be perpetrators / supporters of VE, or to have peers associated with VE.
- Those believed to be involved with crime, or to have peers associated with crime.
- School drop-outs.
- Recent converts to Islam.

While the first of these factors requires no elaboration, there is some evidence that the remaining three are correlated with (but not necessarily causal to) future involvement in VE in specific regions of Nairobi, and as such they can be tentatively used to identify those individuals who are 'at risk'. Not all of the candidates were willing to be interviewed, but the process fortuitously coincided with an amnesty period in Kenya, offering a relatively open environment for such discussions. To further narrow the 'at risk' list the following topics were discussed during the interviews:

- Role models of the respondents.
- Sources of news / information.
- Identification with the Kenyan nationality.
- Perceptions of the legitimacy of the Kenyan intervention in Somalia.
- Perceptions of violence in the name of religion.

The responses to these questions collectively gave further insight into the mindset of the selected individuals, and through such narrowing the STRIVE team was able to subsequently select 40 respondents for mentorship.

Note: The STRIVE programme was managed by one of the co-authors of this paper, Martine Zeuthen.

More pertinent concerns relate to the extent to which such narrow targeting may provoke responses from VE entities and if this approach may contribute to the stigmatisation of specific communities. The latter issue often features in the UK debate – for example, the government's review of the *Prevent* strategy asserted that the previous iteration of the programme had inferred that specific communities 'were collectively at risk of radicalisation and implied terrorism was a problem specific to Muslim communities'.³⁸ While this may be taken to suggest that less specific targeting may be appropriate, we argue in favour of the contrary stance – at least in the Global South where we have gained our professional experiences. Through providing mentorship, vocational training and other such initiatives to a limited number of individuals narrowly identified as being 'at risk' it is possible to clarify that the targets of CVE programmes are *within* given communities, as opposed to being the communities

38. HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092 (London: The Stationery Office, 2011), p. 40.

themselves. Of course, this is not to suggest that it is possible to entirely mitigate such negative effects (see Section 3.2), and indeed certain groups will undoubtedly take issue with this form of programming irrespective of how it is implemented. Programmers can help minimise the extent of such negative effects through establishing suitable relationships with the relevant community leaders, and satisfactorily explaining their intent.³⁹

3.2 Results Framework and Theories of Change

Once a list of candidate programmatic responses has been created (see Figure 5), the process of initially selecting from this list will involve assessing the feasibility of the various options in light of the existing political, economic and security-based constraints in the location in question. Selection should also, of course, be based on merit – that is, the extent to which these options are likely to contribute to the desired programme impact in an effective, efficient and sustainable manner (see Section 4.1 on evaluation criteria). While there is still only a limited base of rigorous empirical evidence revealing the extent to which candidate responses score well against these criteria, implementers should nevertheless consult the available literature to draw insight from past initiatives. With these issues in mind, it is also necessary to articulate the intended programme impact at the outset, and to simultaneously establish a results framework. Generic frameworks for CVE and RR initiatives have been provided as Figures 6 and 7 for demonstrative purposes, with the relevant terminology offered in Box 5.⁴⁰

Box 5: OECD DAC Evaluation and Results-Based Management Terminology

While many agencies use alternative terminology, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) terms have been adopted in this paper on the basis that they are widely used within the industry. While several of the terms below are expressed in the language of development, they are equally applicable to CVE and RR interventions.

- **Impacts:** Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.
- **Outcomes:** The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs.
- **Outputs:** The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention.
- **Activities:** Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilised to produce specific outputs.
- **Inputs:** The financial, human and material resources used for the development intervention.

Source: OECD, Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management (Paris: OECD Publications, 2002).

39. While beyond the scope of this paper, substantial lessons can be learnt from the UK *Prevent* strategy in particular.

40. These generic frameworks will undoubtedly *not* be suitable for any one specific programme because (a) donors tend to adopt different results systems and (b) all such frameworks in any case require adapting to local contexts. In particular, the latter applies to Figure 6, given the wide range of elements that CVE initiatives may incorporate.

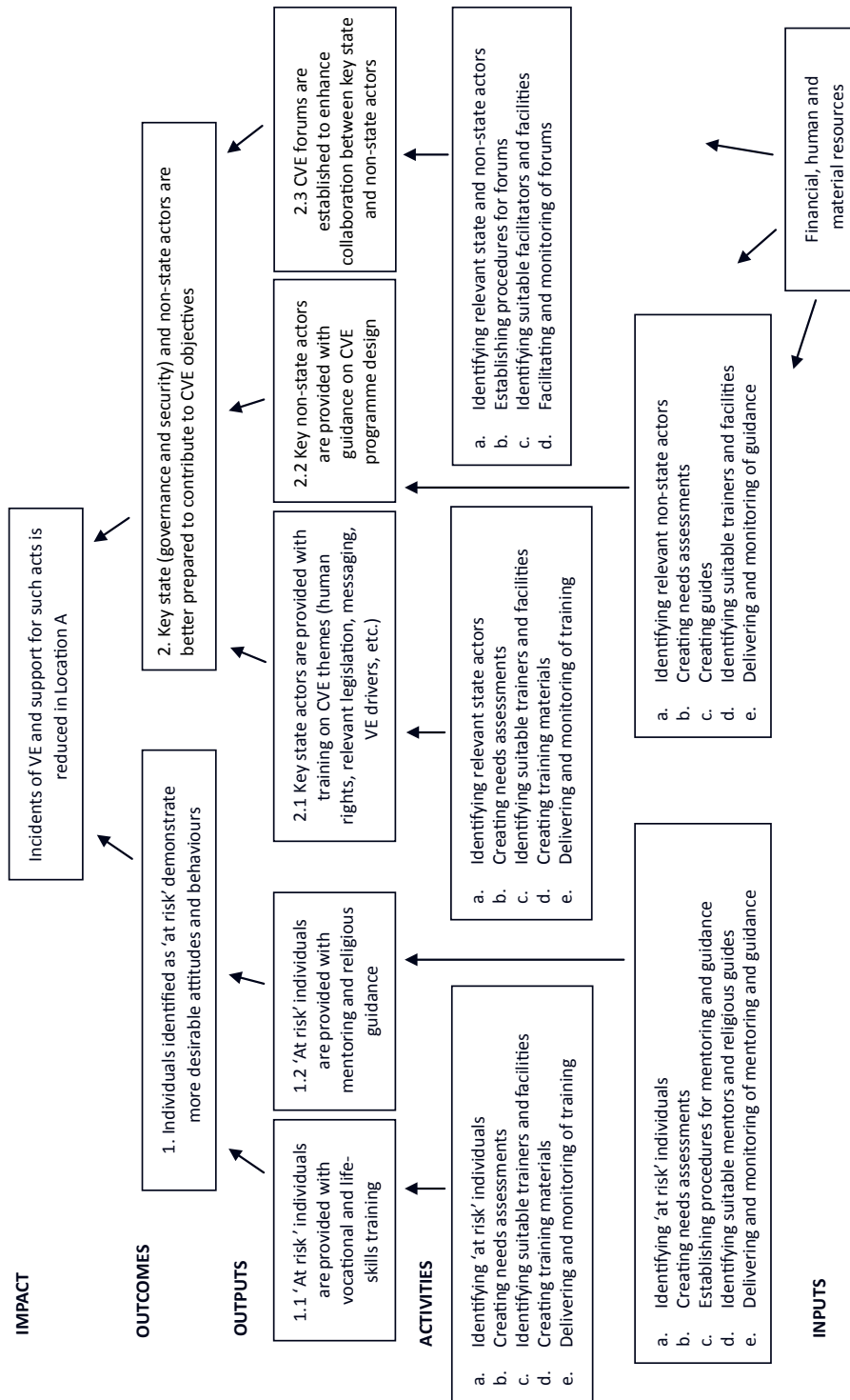
Figure 6: Generic Results Framework for a CVE Programme

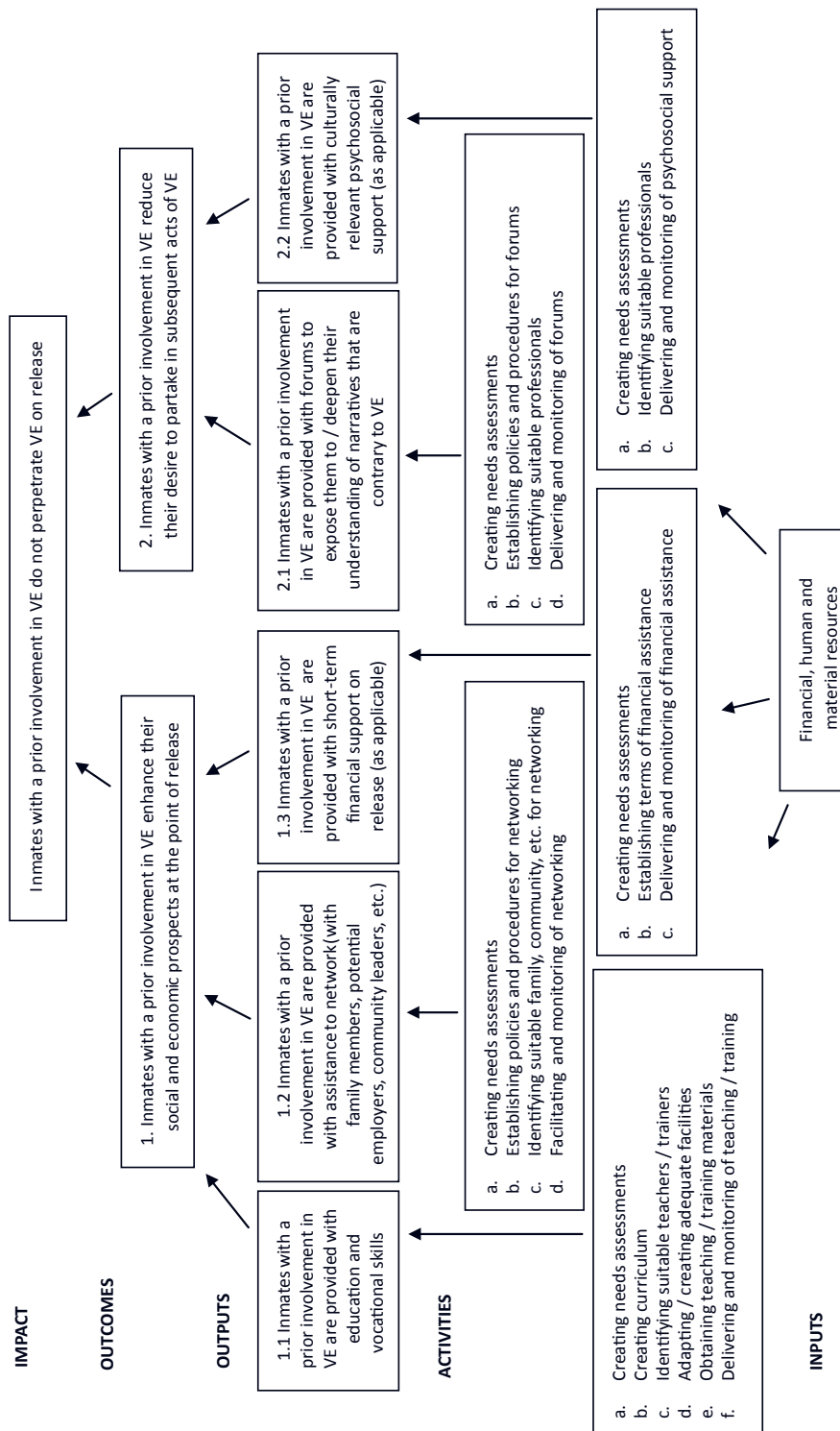
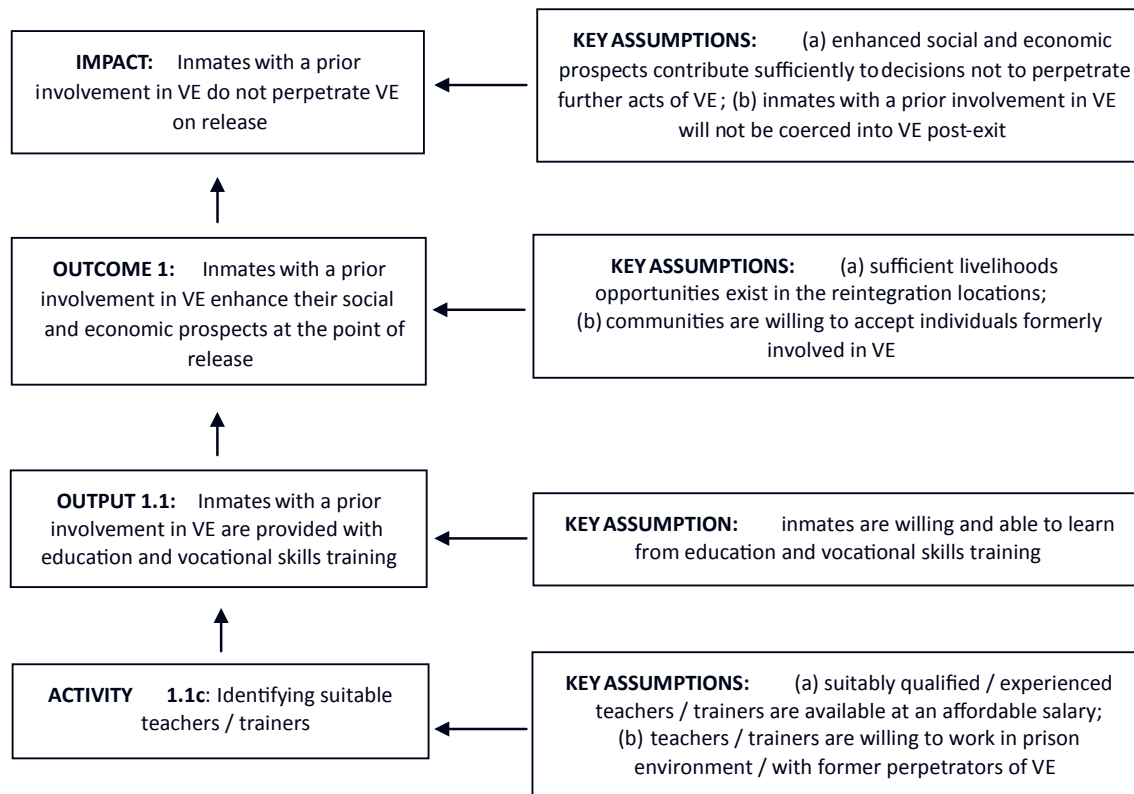
Figure 7: Generic Results Framework for a Prison-based RR Programme

Figure 8: Theories of Change applied to a 'Branch' of Figure 7

While certainly not applied by all agencies, results frameworks should be considered necessary as they provide a structure against which programmes can be monitored and evaluated (see Section 4.2), and more immediately as they enable implementers to develop a theory of change (ToC). While often presented in overly technical terms, ToCs serve simply to articulate the intended pathways from inputs / activities to the desired programme impact, and to identify the key assumptions associated with these pathways, as demonstrated in Figure 8. The specific purpose of this technique is to help identify aspects of programme design that may be problematic. For instance, it is worth highlighting a number of potentially tenuous assumptions that are implicit in Figure 7:

- The inmates with a prior involvement in VE are / were ideologically motivated to engage in VE (see Box 3).
- Counter-narratives to VE ideologies can be effective in sowing doubt about the validity of VE ideologies.
- Conditions requiring psychosocial support may contribute to future acts of VE, and thus interventions are required to counter such conditions.⁴¹
- Psychosocial support can adequately address the identified psychosocial issues, and can be provided in a manner that overcomes local taboos with this treatment.

41. There is in any case a strong moral argument for providing psychosocial support, irrespective of its ability to contribute to the intended *impact* of the programme.

To the extent feasible the implementing team should seek to test *all* identified assumptions as soon as practicable through collecting relevant empirical evidence (see Section 2.3 on research). Of course, the critical point is that entire lines of programming may entirely fail to contribute to the intended impact if even only one assumption is misguided, and thus the wider function of the ToC approach is to promote critical thinking about potentially superior routes to the desired end. In practical terms, this may involve anything from subtle alterations of specific components of the initiative to the removal of entire programmatic ‘branches’.

Of course, programme effects are not necessarily all positive and implementing teams must also consider potential negative consequences through the ToC process. Particularly pertinent negative effects of CVE and RR initiatives may include:

- Programme implementing partners, beneficiaries or other stakeholders being threatened or physically targeted as a consequence of their involvement.⁴²
- Specific communities being stigmatised if programmes appear to be targeted at these particular groups (see Section 3.1).
- VE entities being enabled to rally support through highlighting evidence of ‘Western meddling’ in cases of externally-funded initiatives occurring in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.⁴³

Implementers should attempt to mitigate such undesired effects and completely avoid programming in a way that may produce excessively negative consequences. However, they should also seek to avoid the converse temptation of becoming excessively risk-averse as this will undoubtedly impinge on their ability to achieve their intended impacts. In particular, to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes it is often necessary to develop modalities through which to operate in relatively insecure environments, and to target those specifically deemed to be ‘at risk’ (as previously discussed in Sections 1.2 and 3.1). As such, while many authorities advocate a strict adherence to the principle of *do no harm* (for instance, Denoeux and Carter), we suggest that this would almost inevitably provide a recipe for underachievement.⁴⁴ Put another way, it is necessary for CVE and RR practitioners to take calculated risks in order to maximise their likelihood of success, and the unfortunate reality is that on occasion this will result in negative effects.

42. A specific example of this is discussed in Khalil and Zeuthen, ‘A Case Study’, p. 8.

43. In practice this is often overcome through intentionally downplaying the involvement of external agencies and instead emphasising the role of domestic state or non-state bodies.

44. Denoeux and Carter, ‘Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism’, p. 45.

IV. Evaluation Considerations

HAVING DISCUSSED CVE and RR design, this final section focuses on issues relating to evaluation. In particular, building on the earlier discussion of research methods (see Section 2.3), emphasis is placed on evaluation questions and key impact and outcome indicators.

4.1 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

In the previous section it was briefly argued that the selection of programme components should reflect the extent to which they are likely to contribute to the desired impact in an effective, efficient and sustainable manner. Alongside relevance, these form the core OECD DAC evaluation criteria against which initiatives at the security–development nexus are increasingly assessed. Not all of these criteria are equally applicable to all interventions, and others (such as coherence, as more recently also suggested by OECD DAC) may additionally be of significance.⁴⁵ These criteria provide the basis for evaluation questions, which should ideally be created by members of the programme team and specialist evaluators in collaboration, thus combining contextual knowledge of the programme with monitoring and evaluation expertise. In Figure 9 we offer candidate questions, although in a practical setting it would be necessary to substantially reduce the number and / or merge the questions as relevant. Outside of the context of evaluations, we argue that it is also good practice for implementers to articulate evaluation questions prior to the initiation of programmes as an additional measure (alongside ToC, see Section 3.2) to promote early critical thinking about their likely effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and so on.

In a wider sense, we also argue that insufficient attention is paid to such criteria in conversations among the CVE community, and that this has clear negative consequences. For instance, there are common calls for gender-based programming as a component of CVE, with the underpinning arguments including: (a) that mothers may have elevated influence over ‘at risk’ children; (b) that women may be more attuned to notice behavioural changes among other family members; and (c) that women are, of course, also involved directly in violence. However, little or no empirical evidence exists to demonstrate that gender-based activities actually contribute to CVE objectives in an effective and efficient manner in comparison to the feasible alternatives (leaving to one side the other potential positive effects). This is not to suggest that gender-based programming actually is ineffective or inefficient, but rather that it remains necessary to demonstrate that this offers a valuable use of resources. Of course, this applies equally to all other components that may fall under the CVE and RR frameworks, including community debates, media messaging, interfaith initiatives, mentorship programmes, and so on.

45. OECD, *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results* (Paris: OECD Publications, 2012).

Figure 9: Candidate Questions for CVE / RR Programme Evaluations

Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the programme suited to the policies / priorities of the donor? • To what extent is the programme suited to the policies / priorities of the recipient government? • To what extent is the programme suited to the priorities of the target population?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent has the programme achieved its intended impact? • To what extent has the programme driven other positive effects? • To what extent has the programme inadvertently driven negative effects?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the programme's outcomes been achieved? • To what extent have the programme's outcomes contributed to the achievement of the intended impact? • To what extent have the programme's outputs and activities contributed to the achievement of the intended outcomes?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the programme's outcomes contributed to the intended impact in a resource-efficient manner in relation to feasible alternatives? • Have the programme's outputs and activities contributed to the intended outcomes in a resource-efficient manner in relation to feasible alternatives? • Have the programme's components been optimally sequenced to maximise efficiency? • Have the programme's systems (budgetary, information management, etc.) been designed and applied in a manner that optimises efficiency?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the programme's benefits be sustained after the involvement of the donor / implementer ceases?
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have donors / implementers ensured complementarity with other initiatives, including those funded by other donors? • To what extent have lessons been shared between relevant programmes?

4.2 Impact and Outcome Indicators

A full consideration of programme evaluations is beyond the scope of this paper, and this final subsection instead more narrowly considers impact and outcome indicators. There is considerable scepticism about the extent to which CVE programming has to date delivered the desired results, for instance, with Peter Romaniuk suggesting that this framework has 'risen to prominence in a manner disproportional to its achievements'.⁴⁶ Equally, data to demonstrate the supposed successes of RR are also in short supply.⁴⁷ With this in mind, the point of departure for this final subsection is that it is necessary for the CVE and RR communities to pay greater attention to demonstrating programme performance in order to justify their budgets and to enhance our collective understanding of what works in this field.

46. Romaniuk, 'Does CVE Work?', p. v.

47. As observed, for instance, by Horgan and Braddock 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists'.

If the intended impact of a specific CVE initiative is understood to be a reduction in violence *and* a reduction in support for such acts (as per Figure 6), then straightforward indicators may include:

- Number of incidents of violence in Location A across Time B.
- Percentage of population supporting VE entities in Location A across Time B.

Given the intensity of the VE problem in many locations in the Global South in particular, the standard of success for a programme may realistically be considered to be a suitable reduction in these metrics, rather than a decrease to zero. Information for the first of these indicators can commonly be gained from state agencies, or international or civil society monitoring bodies. The second can often be measured using quantitative surveys undertaken before and after an intervention.⁴⁸ Of course, nuance should be added through phrasing the response options in terms of *the extent* of support for / opposition to VE entities (for example: ‘strongly support’; ‘somewhat support’; ‘somewhat oppose’; or ‘strongly oppose’), rather than as a binary distinction. Efforts should also be made to ‘triangulate’ this data through drawing insights about general support for violence from community leaders and other key informants (see Section 2.3 on the topic of research).

However, while data should certainly be collected on levels of violence and support for such acts in order to maintain a sense of the scale of the problem, we argue that CVE programmes should *not* be judged against such ambitious criteria, for three interrelated reasons.⁴⁹ Firstly, the limited budgets that are generally available to implementers realistically preclude an ability to drive substantial changes at this elevated level. Secondly, specific CVE initiatives typically form single elements of far broader responses to VE, and the above indicators are more applicable to such system-wide efforts than they are to individual projects. For instance, additional elements in the UK include other components of the national *Contest* strategy, and in many Southern locations they also comprise security-sector reform (SSR) programming, counter-terrorism, and other initiatives.⁵⁰ Finally, crediting changes at the impact level is particularly problematic in light of what is widely referred to as the ‘attribution problem’. While a reduction in VE in a given location may be driven by a specific CVE intervention, such a change may also be a consequence of lower levels of violence in neighbouring locations, political accommodations,

48. Implementers should not be under the illusion that this research method can deliver reliable estimates of the levels of support for violence for the reasons outlined in Section 2.3, i.e. as respondents may fear perceived repercussions of divulging information, as they reply in a manner to be viewed favourably by the researcher, etc. However, while limited faith should be placed in the *absolute* findings (i.e. in terms of the percentage of respondents reporting to support VE), varying degrees of confidence can often be retained with regard to the *comparative* results (i.e. differences in these percentage figures between locations or over time). This is based on the (admittedly also often problematic) assumption that the above-mentioned data distortions are consistent.

49. The arguments provided in this section represent a substantial adaptation of the stance adopted in Khalil and Zeuthen, ‘A Case Study’, p. 3.

50. Ignoring the role of these parallel efforts would be akin to evaluating a programme to provide educational materials on its ability to deliver improved learning, irrespective of the quality of teaching staff, the curricula, school infrastructure, and so on.

an economic boost offering increased employment, a decrease in the availability of arms and other equipment, and so on. Indeed, while the attribution problem is typically discussed in such terms, this actually considerably understates the severity of the issue given that VE represents a complex problem involving, for instance, tipping points, feedback loops, and path dependencies (see both Section 2.2 and Box 6).

Box 6: Randomised Controlled Trials and Quasi-Experimental Methods

One partial solution to the attribution problem is to apply randomised controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental methods. Such approaches are in principle able to overcome this issue through selecting ‘treatment’ and ‘control’ locations (districts, towns, villages, and so on) through specific randomisation or matching processes, and determining whether greater progress towards the intended programme impact has been demonstrated in the former. However, while the authors of this paper support the use of such methods under specific circumstances, they should certainly not be treated as a panacea on the basis that:

- These methods require the application of uniform intervention activities across the treatment cases, and this conflicts with the general need to ensure that programmes are adapted to the context of each location.
- The approach may become invalid in certain contexts as ‘spillover effects’ from the treatment locations ‘contaminate’ the control cases. For example, the message provided through an informational campaign may inadvertently travel from treatment to control areas.
- Such methods are generally costly as they tend to involve substantial research with both treatment and control groups over considerable periods of time – often up to several years if it is expected that there may be a lag between treatment and effect.
- Through intentionally controlling for selected variables these methods are unable to deliver insight into the complex interactions between these and other factors (such as tipping points and disproportionate feedback loops, among others – see Section 2.2). Thus, while they can in principle overcome the attribution problem in its circumscribed sense, they cannot deal with VE as a complex problem.¹
- Moral issues may arise based on the often arbitrary selection of treatment versus control cases, although in certain instances this can be overcome through adopting a phased approach in which the latter are also subsequently subject to the treatment.

Greater potential is arguably offered by the application of RCTs and quasi-experimental methods with more precisely identified treatment and control groups. More specifically, rather than focus on residents of entire districts, towns and villages, these methods can be applied to groups of individuals identified as being ‘at risk’ in the case of CVE, and inmates or defectors for RR (again, selected through specific randomisation or matching processes). A number of the above concerns become less relevant if this approach is employed – for instance, the required research would not necessarily be excessively expensive and spillover effects would likely be easier to prevent.

1. Byrne and Callaghan, *Complexity Theory and the Social Sciences*, p. 173.

Keeping the above arguments in mind, we recommend that CVE implementing teams should be assessed only against their performance at the *outcome* level.⁵¹ Not only is this more realistic in terms of achievements attained on a limited budget, but it is also more practical, since the greater degree of agency typically held by implementers at this tier of the results framework leads to the attribution problem being less problematic. For instance, if a specific CVE outcome focuses extensively on state capacity building, the before / after indicators against which it is judged may include the percentage of civil servants who:

- Understand that VE is motivated and enabled by multiple factors.
- Understand that VE tends to be partly driven by legitimate grievances.
- Understand that there is no standard pathway to VE.
- Understand that physical responses *and* messaging are important.
- Understand that civil society actors have an important CVE role.
- Acknowledge the potential negative effects of security force excesses.
- Acknowledge the potential deleterious effects of stereotyping.
- Understand the legal framework in the relevant location.

Similarly, if another desired outcome is articulated in terms of a positive influence on the attitudes and behaviours of specific individuals identified as being 'at risk', relevant before / after indicators may include the percentage of these individuals who:

- Maintain gainful employment.
- Maintain an association with radical institutions or individuals.
- Claim that they would vote at the next elections (if applicable).
- Claim to acknowledge the legitimacy of the government.
- Claim to identify as citizens of the state in which they live.
- Claim to be willing to befriend those from other religions.
- Recognise that religious doctrines are subject to interpretation.
- Claim that violence is not a legitimate expression of their religion.

If measured before and after an intervention, these indicators collectively demonstrate whether or not the identified individuals followed a positive path during – albeit not necessarily as a result of – the programmes in question. Of course, a more direct measure would be to record whether the 'at risk' participants subsequently become involved in the creation of violence (or if they re-offend in the case of RR). However, this particular indicator is highly problematic, because: (a) the relevant authorities are often unable to collect such information; (b) these authorities are commonly not predisposed to share such information in cases where it has been collected; and (c) the potential lag between the intervention and possible subsequent contributions to violence may not coincide with reporting periods.

51. This is common practice in development programming.

Box 7: A Critique of Selected Efforts to Evaluate USAID CVE Initiatives

Studies that aim to draw conclusions about the effects of CVE programmes frequently rely on comparisons between the attitudes and / or behaviours of treatment and control groups (see Box 6). However, the processes needed to conduct such research are precise and a number of recent studies aiming to assess USAID efforts have applied sub-standard techniques. For instance, a 2013 evaluation conducted only post-intervention research on treatment and control groups in Somalia and Kenya, with seemingly no effort made to account for pre-existing differences in attitudes.¹ While certain more desirable attitudes were observed in the treatment populations, this may have occurred (a) as a result of their involvement with the USAID-funded programme, or (b) because their pre-existing attitudes drove them to enlist in the programme in the first place (see Section 2.2 on causality). The method applied cannot distinguish between these rival explanations, and as such it cannot provide evidence of programme effects.

The quantitative element of a separate study conducted in Chad, Mali and Niger also exhibited fundamental flaws. For this research a number of locations were selected in a manner so that ‘both treatment and comparison clusters had similar ethnic, religious and linguistic features’.² A post-intervention survey revealed somewhat more positive perceptions in the treatment areas, and on this basis the authors concluded that ‘the program appears to be having modest yet significant impact across all three countries’.³ However, the robustness of the study is substantially undermined by the fact that the research team aimed only to achieve ‘some level of randomisation’,⁴ rather than adopt recognised survey techniques (see Section 2.3 on this topic). However, of greater relevance to the current discussion is that post-intervention research in a limited number of treatment and control locations alone is in any case insufficient to demonstrate programme effects in the absence of suitable baseline data to show changes in perceptions over time.⁵ Put simply, on the basis of this study it is not possible to reject the alternative hypothesis that the somewhat more desirable perceptions in the treatment areas actually predated the treatments. In future, USAID should ensure that the experimental and quasi-experimental research it funds adheres to recognised best practices in order to reliably demonstrate programme effects.

1. USAID, ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of Three Countering Violent Extremism Projects’, QED Group LLC, 23 February 2013, p. 21.
2. USAID, ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of USAID’s Counter-Extremism Programming in Africa’, AMEX International and QED Group LLC, February 2011, p. 8.
3. *Ibid*, p. 2.
4. *Ibid*, p. 10.
5. Certain related pre-intervention data were available from other studies, but the authors concede that ‘the data gathering and analysis methodology was not always the same’, thus rendering it incompatible. *Ibid*, p. 8.

V. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to provide guidance to both policy-makers and practitioners of the *en vogue* CVE and RR frameworks. A core recommendation is that key donors should drive the process of further conceptualising CVE. This would involve providing definitions and guidance on how such initiatives should vary between contexts. For example, guidance is required in terms of the balance between CVE activities aimed at state institutions versus those aimed at the community, and in terms of how to adapt such interventions according to varied levels of insecurity.

A second recommendation is that efforts to comprehend VE should be based on the three-way distinction between structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors. The commonly used categorisation system that separates between push and pull factors is overly simplistic and ambiguous. We also argue that those involved in CVE and RR programming should commit a substantial proportion of their available resources to field investigations and analysis. This is necessary not only to help alleviate the substantial research challenges, but also as VE drivers tend to be highly location-specific.

Turning attention to programme design, we advocate the application of the *results framework* and *theories of change* approaches in order to maximise the extent to which CVE and RR programmes contribute to their intended aims. Through encouraging practitioners to articulate the programme logic, these methods assist with the identification of questionable assumptions and other potentially problematic aspects of interventions, and thus promote critical thinking about possible superior routes to the desired end.

Implementers should also specifically reflect on the OECD DAC evaluation criteria during the programme design phase. This would include, for instance, considering whether gender-based initiatives, messaging, cultural activities, and so on are likely to contribute to the intended impact in an effective and efficient manner in comparison to feasible alternatives. While efforts to influence the wider community of actual or potential supporters of violence are appropriate in many contexts, we also strongly recommend that CVE efforts should specifically target individuals identified as ‘at risk’ of being drawn to violence to the extent to which this is feasible in each location (indeed, we incorporate such efforts into the suggested definition in Section 1.2). Failure to target efforts in this manner will deliver programmes that underachieve in terms of the extent to which they actually contribute to a reduction in VE.

Implementers should also aim to mitigate the many possible negative effects of CVE and RR programmes, such as stigmatising specific communities, exposing implementing partners and beneficiaries to excessive risk of being targeted by VE entities, and so on. However, they should also avoid the converse temptation to become overly risk-averse as this will impinge on their ability to achieve their intended impacts.

Our final recommendation is that randomised controlled trials and quasi-experimental methods should be explored as a means of evaluating the performance of CVE and RR programmes. In the case of CVE this may involve identifying a number of 'at risk' individuals, applying 'treatments' to approximately half of these, and assessing changes in their attitudes or behaviours as compared with the control group. While such methods should certainly not be treated as a panacea, and they cannot be used to answer the full spectrum of evaluation questions, we believe that they have the potential to provide evidence of programme performance in advance of that which can be provided by non-experimental approaches.

About the Authors

Dr James Khalil works as a consultant researcher and a design, monitoring and evaluation (DM&E) specialist on security-based projects in locations such as Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. His expertise in political violence was originally gained as a coalition force analyst in Iraq and Afghanistan and as technical lead on a number of UK Ministry of Defence studies on internal conflict. His doctorate was gained from the University of Leeds and focused on the relationship between the Maoist insurgents and the local population in remote parts of Nepal during the 1996–2006 conflict.

Martine Zeuthen currently works as Team Lead for the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), implementing an EU-funded pilot programme that tests key assumptions on Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) in the Horn of Africa. She also recently conducted a qualitative evaluation of a USAID-funded CVE programme in Kenya and was involved in a study on the relationship between livelihoods and militia recruitment in South Central Somalia for DFID. More broadly, Martine specialises in data collection in fragile states and is particularly concerned with methodological innovation to improve evidence for development and security-related programming.

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Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation

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