Participation

Categorization of data, factors and indicators of extremism, polarization and radicalisation
Deliverable D6.2

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 962547.

Deliverable information

Grant Agreement No.	962547
Project acronym	PARTICIPATION
Project title	Analyzing and Preventing Extremism via Participation
Project timeframe and duration	1.12.2020–30.11.2023 (36 months)
WP	*WP 6 - early detection and situation* *Analysis*
Task	T6.2 Categorization of data, factors and indicators of extremism, polarization and radicalisation
Deliverable	*D6.2 Categorization of data, factors and indicators of extremism, polarization and radicalisation*
Status	*Final version*
Version number	2.3
Deliverable responsible	*Di Liddo, Marco*
Dissemination level	PU
Due date	M17
Date of submission	27

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Version history

Version	Date	Author	Description
1.0	22/11/21	Annovi	Violent extremism and terrorism databases
1.1	22/11/21	Rosato	Polarization databases
1.1	2/2/21	DI Liddo	Review and contribution on Violent extremism and terrorism databases
1.2	15/12/21	Di Liddo	Review on Polarization databases
1.3	27/12/21	Dolghin, Brand Jacobsen	Radicalization databases
1.4	10/1/22	Di Liddo	Review of radicalization databases
2.0	18/2/22	Di Liddo	Harmonization of contributions and contents; drafting of first version of the deliverable
2.1	21/3/22	Lauretta	Linguistic review
2.2	24/3/21	Di Liddo	Drafting of the final version of deliverable

2.3	25/3/22	Antonelli	Final revision of the deliverable /report

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Summary of the Project

The overarching objective of PARTICIPATION is to identify future perspectives and trends of polarisation, extremism and radicalisation as well as the social composition of the group at risk in Europe by a participatory and provisional methodological strategy, that permits to co-create with social actors, stakeholders and policy-makers effective strategies for prevention. So, the specific objectives of PARTICIPATION are:

1. Multidimensional modelling to understand current and future trends of extremism, polarisation and radicalisation: to develop a holistic multidimensional model based on participatory fieldwork and mixed-method approaches, in order to better understand the different drivers of violent radical ideologies, how these are organized in different pathways and, complementary to that, which mechanisms, factors and strategies contribute to support nonradical attitudes and behaviours, nowadays and in the future.

Sub-objective (a): targets: analysing and discussing, using a strategy based on the principles of action research involving young people in different parts of Europe, the socio-psychological mechanisms, such as social marginalization, alienation and polarization, that lead to radicalisation, with a special focus on gender, sexuality and regional differences. These objectives will be achieved by milestones M2 ("requirement of analysis and methodologies") [month 6], and by M6 ("Models on radicalisation and extremism") [month 35].

2. Communication dynamics: to develop an analysis of extremism, polarisation and radicalisation on-line dynamics by ICT tools (as semantic analysis) and to co-create with the involvement of civil society strategies to contrast and preventing these phenomena. This goal will be achieved by milestone M3 ("Communication analysis") [month 9] and D.4.5. ("Analysing different communication strategies against extremism and radicalisation") [month 25], D.4.6. ("Projecting counter-narrative campaigns involving young people") [month 33], D.4.7 ("Methodological tools for evaluating counter-narrative campaigns and validation") [month 35].

3. Co-creation: fieldwork to analyse and to generate with the involvement of the social actors in different social spheres, strategies of contrasting polarisation, extremism and radicalisation. Thus, the research processes supporting the achievement of the following sub-objectives: Sub-objective (b): Resilience: developing communicative tools, education approaches and community-based strategies, with the involvement and cooperation of practitioners, stakeholders and young people (with particular attention to gender balance), in order to improve the resilience of the communities and people at risk. Sub-objective (c): Empowerment: to improve the awareness of young people and communities as well as the society at a whole, toward the risks of extremism, hate discourses and radical ideologies, contrasting the processes of marginalization, self-marginalization, and alienation of ethnic, religious, gender and sexualities minorities.

4. Tools: to develop methodologies and policies recommendations for improving the action of policymakers also on the basis of the previous field-work.

Sub-objective (d): Methodologies for supporting decision-makers: to realize databases and a systematic set of indexes and early-warnings, based on previous holistic multidimensional model and fieldworks as well as a testing phase on its practical usability involving decision-makers, in order to support them in decisions, improving effectiveness and social acceptability. Sub-objective (e): Policies recommendations: developing a set of policies recommendations with the participation of stakeholders, policy-makers and targets, in order to optimize strategies and interventions against extremism, hate cultures and radicalisation, at micro, meso and macrolevel of the governance process

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List of abbreviations

Acronym	Description
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ACSRT	African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
BRaVE	Building Resilience against Violence Extremism and Polarisation
CEP	Counter Extremism Project
CISAC	Centre for International Security and Cooperation
CLAT	Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
H.E.A.T. (Map)	Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism
MAROB	Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior
OHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PIRA	Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in Australia
PIRUS	Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in United States
RTI	Research Triangle Institute

START	(National Consortium for the) Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
TESAT	EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCT	United Nations Office for Counterterrorism
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Executive summary

Most databases and datasets related to terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation focus on the phenomenon of jihadism and, in many cases, due to the lack of shared scientific and academic definitions, fail to draw a clear distinction between these phenomena. On a thematic level, phenomena such as violent far-right, far-left and ecologist/environmentalist extremism are less detailed and require more empirical investigation.

Influenced by a security approach, most of the existing databases focus on quantitative aspects (number of attacks or number of people imprisoned for terrorist offenses and violent extremism) and on individual investigation. Consequently, although these tools manage to offer a valid picture of the evolution of terrorist and extremist groups, they fail to deepen the analysis on the social, economic and psychological root causes, they do not consider group dynamics and social ecosystem and, above all, they focus on an individual level of analysis. Collective vulnerability factors are generally ignored or underestimated.

In addition to this, the databases do not offer sufficient information on the dynamics of radicalisation where it relates to gender and age (especially youth).

The most used databases and datasets focus on the physical space and do not offer opportunities for in-depth investigation and classification on the virtual space and on the dynamics of extremist violence and online radicalisation.

Furthermore, de-radicalisation, disengagement, and counter-narrative indicators are missing in databases and datasets.

New developments in communication and co-production of messages of radicalisation are still not present in such tools. More should be considered, such as internationalisation rather than localisation, conspiracy theories, ideological crossings, overlaps of ideologies, the impact of social media, newer generations moving towards extremist thoughts and social economic conditions.

With regards to polarisation, the main element that emerges from studies and research on it, is the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the dimensions of analysis, indicators and measurement methods. Moreover, polarisation has so far been treated mainly in terms of ideological polarisation, while there is still very little research that embraces a broader concept of social polarisation.

Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to outline a draft classification of the factors and drivers connected to violent extremism, radicalization and polarization with the aim of inspiring and supporting the creation of the Prevention Tool Database (PTD), as per task 6.6 of the PARTICIPATION project.

To a large extent, the identification and classification of drivers and detection factors of violent extremism, radicalization and polarization has been the subject of individual tasks of the WP 2 of the PARTICIPATION project. In that case, the consortium decided to use a classification principle based on three levels (micro / individual, meso / social - local and macro / national - strategic).

Consequently, the consortium decided to start from the findings and classification effort of WP 2 and integrate it with the analysis of existing databases and datasets on the subject. This analysis was both direct (on the individual databases and on the criteria they adopted for classification) and indirect (based on the critical review of the existing literature on the subject).

In this way, the support activity for the realization of the PTD intends to materialize as the supply of guidelines that summarize and bring together both the creative and original effort of the consortium and the experience, lessons learned and classification methodologies used by others. subjects (academy, think tank, etc.)

The collection and classification of data is a cardinal and indispensable tool for understanding the origin, structure and evolution of the phenomena of violent extremism, terrorism and radicalisation. A tool that guarantees the sharing of knowledge, continuity in research and analysis and, above all, a continuously updated empirical basis to support the activity of law enforcement agencies and all the actors, both institutional and civil society, involved in the prevention and mitigation of the phenomenon of political violence.

The need to create datasets and databases to monitor the phenomena of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation grew exponentially after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Consequently, in that historical moment, institutional and social attitude towards global political violence became embodied by jihadism and al-Qaeda.

The symbolic impact of the attacks on the Twin Towers and the progressive growth of jihadist terrorism on a global scale have profoundly influenced the ratio for creating databases and how these databases were used by academic, political and security institutions.

Exactly as happened in the case of risk assessment tools and methodologies (as explained in the deliverable 6.1 of Participation "Methodologies and tools for risk assessment on radicalization and violent extremism"), the databases and datasets that were created were mainly dominated by interest in jihadist terrorism. Similarly, the prevailing classification approach was of a security type, i.e. focused on the criminal space (whether or not a person had committed an illegal act) and on the reading of quantitative trends (numbers of attacks or number of people imprisoned for terrorist

offenses or political violence) in order to understand which geographical areas, which social categories and which category of individuals had become vulnerable and increasingly at risk.

This methodology had strengths and weaknesses. In fact, on the one hand it has allowed the exponential growth of knowledge on the jihadist phenomenon, on the other it has neglected other forms of political violence (far-right, far-left, etc.). At the same time, it made it possible to monitor the qualitative and quantitative evolution of jihadist groups, even if it never managed to investigate the social, economic and psychological reasons behind the radicalisation process.

This is a non-negligible gap, as academic research, analysis of the intelligence and security services, and investigations by law enforcement agencies have highlighted how much the path that leads an individual to radicalise, or to commit a crime related to violent extremism or terrorism, is linked to various variables at micro, meso, and macro level. Indeed, as pointed out in 2.1 PARTICIPATION deliverable, radicalisation should be understood as a phased and complex process that, by its very nature, is different for every individual.

Furthermore, the lack of academic and scientific consensus on the definitions of the investigated phenomena weighs on the most widespread classification approaches and, consequently, on the databases and datasets that derive from them. The lack of a widely accepted definition of violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism represents a concrete obstacle to the creation of coherent, interdependent and specialised databases and datasets. In some cases, the lack of an adequate taxonomic distinction between terrorism and violent extremism leads to classifications that include extremely different phenomena, to the detriment of the full scientific understanding and usability of the data for the development of prevention and mitigation strategies.

In addition to this, the classifications based mainly on accidents or trials for terrorist offenses and/or violent extremism tends to overestimate the individual level of investigation (i.e. that of the single perpetrator) to the detriment of research and analysis on social and group dynamics.

Therefore, databases and datasets, like risk assessment tools and methodology, are affected by the historical period in which they were formulated, and by the political and security needs of the context of the early 2000s. Twenty years after 11 September, European and global society spectrum have changed and, with them, the variables connected to violent extremism.

The world of September 11, 2001 was beginning to see the first signs of the imminent digital revolution, while the world in 2022 is fully digitalised. The databases and datasets currently in use do not adequately investigate the virtual sphere and the cognitive, behavioural and symbolic variables at the basis of radicalisation processes and the phenomena of proselytism and violent extremist propaganda online.

Moreover, despite terrorism has taken on new forms over the twenty years after 9/11, the main focus of the classification effort is still jihadist terrorism. The same phenomenon of non-terrorist violent extremism is treated marginally and still linked to the pure legal sphere of having committed a crime or not. In summary, the pre-criminal space is still largely ignored or underestimated.

Similarly, the monitoring of subversive phenomena linked to the extreme right and the extreme left, to the new trans-national identity strands, to ecological and environmentalist radicalism, and to misogyny is just in an embryonic state. Furthermore, most of the classifications do not deepen the understanding of the gender dimension and that of youth participation in the phenomena of political violence.

The vulnerabilities found in the analysis of databases and datasets on terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism become even more profound if attention is focused on polarisation phenomena. Generally, social polarisation is still a misunderstood area for academic research and for analysis, and classification effort appears equally arduous both because of the lack of shared definitions and because of tools for its measurement and archiving of data.

This is a not insignificant shortcoming, especially when considering the fact that, according to a growing number of academics and researchers, social polarisation can represent the pre-condition for the development of radicalisation paths that then lead to forms of violent extremism, including the terrorism.

From a methodological point of view, this paper has been structured as the collection, investigation and analysis of the most used databases to classify the phenomena of violent extremism, terrorism, radicalization and polarization. To facilitate consultation of the paper, the research team decided to include terrorism in the larger section dedicated to violent extremism.

From an analytical point of view, the authors decided to resort to the results of 2.1 literature review on drivers of radicalisation as a starting point for selecting and analysing different databases and datasets. On the one hand, as for extremism, terrorism, and radicalisation, this report has selected databases and datasets tracing those forms of extremism that have been taken into consideration in 2.1 – namely, jihadism, far-right extremism, far-left extremism, and single issue. On the other, it has adopted 2.1 framework in analysing databases and datasets for radicalisation. Indeed, as the section on databases and datasets on radicalisation shows, the criteria of selection are divided in micro, meso, and macro level. More specifically:

- *Micro level is broadly defined as the level of the individual and includes personal trajectory, grievances, and motivations.*
- *Meso level relates to the wider group/community level that represents the enabling environment that fosters a radicalisation process.*
- *Macro level takes into account national, regional and international structural transformations. The evolution of public opinion, party politics, the State's foreign agenda and actions carried out abroad.*

The research team carried out a critical review of the literature to select those most used by the scientific community. Once the most used databases were identified, their analysis was carried out, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. The research team decided to include three types of databases and datasets, each focusing on different – yet interlinked – phenomena: databases on violent extremism and terrorism, those concentrating on radicalisation, and those on polarisation.

The reason behind this analytical choice is twofold. On the one hand, considering datasets that measure and track violent extremism and terrorism offer a broad perspective on how structured terrorist organisations are evolving on the ground and help track down incidents and violent extremist attacks in various regions. On the other, investigating databases on radicalisation and different measurements of polarisation help defining a new preventive approach to such phenomena that can potentially lead to violent extremism. In a fluid context, such as the contemporary one, where extremist violence is hate-based and proliferates easily online and extremist offenders are not part of structured organisations, analysing other factors and measurements besides terrorism helps understand the potential risk of violent incidents.

Finally, in the final chapter, on the basis of the gaps and limitations of the current databases, we tried to define the criteria for the creation of new classifications, in line with the objectives of the other tasks of the Participation project.

The nexus between polarisation, radicalisation and violent extremism

In the last decades, violent extremism in its various forms has been largely studied from a security perspective, focusing more on the threat extremists – and, specifically, terrorists – pose to society and on the strategies to prevent violent attacks. Such an approach has produced mixed results. While a security-based approach has undoubtedly contributed to raising awareness within European security agencies regarding this threat, leading to the development of ad hoc departments for the monitoring of violent extremist cells and/or organisations, these organisations have paid little attention to the triggering factors at the core of violent radicalisation processes, which risks creating ineffective forms of interventions.

With the aim of tackling violent radicalisation and extremism at its roots, the European Union and several EU Member States have designed specific plans for the prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism in the last years. The logic behind this plan of action is that promoting long-term investments in the social environment for prevention is more cost-effective and efficient than acting in reaction to violent extremism. Indeed, based on the assumption that radicalisation – and the potential resulting forms of violent extremism – is a complex and phased process that includes socio-economic, cultural, environmental, and psychological factors (Marinone et al. 2021, p. 18), any type of counter action should try to understand the main drivers leading to extremist violence and to alleviate those grievances and various forms of distress that are at its very core.

For all these reasons, determining how polarisation – understood as a thick "context of factors which are conducive for and coexist alongside drivers of what is broadly termed 'violent extremism' (McNeil-Willson et al., 2019, p.5) – and violent radicalisation interact represents a fundamental step for designing effective counter-extremism measures. Indeed, as McNeil-Willson et al. (Ibid.) highlighted, there is convincing evidence that a politically, socially, and economically polarised environment can act as a "super-charge" for the exacerbation of other factors associated with extremist violence, such as psychological distress, social marginalisation or economic grievances. Polarising ideologies can fuel hate and legitimise violence whenever associated with other triggering events or structural fractures, hence generating a polarising spiral that might eventually accelerate the commitment to violence or anti-social acts (Ibid.). Hence, should the environment in which social interactions take place be highly polarised – for example, characterised by a combination of social and cultural discrimination, financial and economic crises, and political instability – an increase in extremist forms of violence is more likely to occur.

Moreover, besides the necessity of taking into consideration all the factors and variables whenever investigating violent radicalisation, analysing the nexus between polarisation and violent extremism is even more compelling in the light of the current European environment. Indeed, as highlighted by several scholars (Norris & Inglehart 2018, Wodak 2015; O' Callaghan et al. 2014), European society has grown increasingly polarised over the last years due to a combination of factors. Firstly, from a

political perspective, the intertwining of a rise of populism and exclusionary politics based on identity and culture has increasingly normalised extremist and polarised political ideas, specifically linked to extreme right movements (McNeil-Willson 2017; Krzyzanowski, Trianafyllidou, & Wodak 2018; Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2018). The growing success of far-right movements across Europe such as Generation Identity, which has built its strength on casting ethnic minorities (Jews, Muslims, Roma etc.) as fundamental enemies, speaks volumes about the concrete threat such a conflation can represent. Secondly, the worsening of the economic crisis linked to Covid-19 pandemic has caused a decrease in living standards. This systemic shock has lead on the one hand, to an increasing disillusionment of citizens with existing political systems and parties, while on the other, to a exacerbation of socio-economic inequalities. Such a combination of growing economic disparities and frustration has had a considerably large impact on the level of polarisation in society, as it increases the possibilities of societal cleavages (Chakravarty 2015). Finally, the climate of polarisation in Europe is further exacerbated by the effects of misinformation in traditional media and social networks, especially during the pandemic – for this reason, the term "infodemic" has been widely used over the last two years to refer to the proliferation of fake news regarding the virus (Dan & Dixon, 2021). The obsessive focus on sensational news during a crisis – such as those regarding the alleged side effects of the Covid-19 vaccine – as well as the tendency to reproduce polarising narratives concerning highly debated topics (e.g. migration, integration of immigrants and security) have attracted individuals, groups and/or movements to extreme views (Jackson et al. 2011; McNeill-Willson et al. 2019), which are in turn inflated by social media algorithms and the "echo chambers" they create (O' Callaghan et al.2014). Therefore, the spread of anti-vax ideas throughout 2021, the violent radicalisation of anti-vax movements – as several anti-vax protests across Europe prove – and the subsequent polarisation of the public debate over these topics demonstrate how the misuse of traditional and social media can potentially reinforce the nexus between polarisation and violent extremism.

Against this backdrop, it is evident that Europe is becoming increasingly polarised and a breeding ground for the growth and legitimisation of new forms of violent extremism, which are rooted and are strengthened by a polarised society. For this reason, an in-depth investigation of what polarisation is and how it interacts with violent radicalisation and extremism is deemed necessary.

Violent extremism and terrorism: definitions and databases

Introduction

Violent extremism is still considered one of the major security challenges that European society is facing today. The nature of such a threat has evolved over the last decades. While, for example, in the 70s and in the 80s the most dangerous form of violent extremism in Europe was far-right and far-left violent extremism, since 9/11 terrorist attacks – and with the later rise of the so-called Islamic State – religiously motivated forms of extremist violence have increasingly acquired relevance. Accordingly, the operative frameworks of contemporary violent extremism have changed over time, as well-structured violent extremist organisations have been increasingly replaced by new forms of lone-wolf violent extremism (TESAT 2021).

However, despite the global relevance such as disruptive phenomenon has obtained, a widely accepted and recognised definition of violent extremism does not exist. All-too-often, violent extremism is conceived and framed as a self-evident concept, automatically designating a type of violence which can be either politically or religiously motivated (Bak et al. 2019). At the same time, one of the major problems regarding the debate is the frequent interchangeability of terms such as violent extremism, terrorism, and radicalisation in common discourses, hence creating confusion over the boundaries of each concept (Nasser-Edine et al. 2011). Indeed, while radicalisation is widely recognised as a process not necessarily leading to violent actions and terrorism as the apical and most disruptive result of such a process, the concept of violent extremism often overlaps with both.

Similarly, the definition of terrorism raises several problems. Over the last decades, academics, security experts and policymakers have proposed a wide variety of definitions of terrorism including different features of the phenomenon, such as the targeting of non-combatants, its indiscriminate nature and the asymmetric type of warfare it engages with (Schmid 2011, p.39). Nonetheless, while there are several recurring elements cutting across these descriptions, a precise definition of terrorism has not been found yet (Scremin 2017).

Rather than being a mere academic debate, the lack of a definition of violent extremism and terrorism is also a legal and political issue. On the one hand, in fact, the absence of shared definitions risks allowing authoritarian regimes to designate any political enemy as a violent extremist, hence jeopardising the right of social movements or civil society organisations to stand as peaceful and legitimate social and political actors. The same dilemma arises when it comes to terrorism, which can potentially give governments a legal instrument to prosecute any perceived political enemy. On the other hand, any policy or political program aimed at fighting violent extremism and terrorism, both at national and international level, risks being ill-defined and ineffective, as it is measured on a vague and highly subjective concept.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this part of the paper is to analyse and compare various conceptualisations of violent extremism and terrorism to suggest a new working definition of these phenomena. The part of the report is hence is divided into two main sections, each of them following the same outline regarding the analysis of these concepts.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to the concept of violent extremism. The first part gathers different definitions of violent extremism according to the type of institution that has proposed it – namely, intergovernmental bodies, governments, and academics. Based on these results, a new working definition is suggested for violent extremism, combining and synthesising different aspects of the phenomenon. The second part is devoted to the analysis and comparison of several existing databases tracing the phenomenon of violent extremism (both online and offline) either at global or at regional level. This section will help understand which criteria and data are used by modern datasets to build a new database. The second section takes into consideration the concept of terrorism and follows the same analytical framework: hence, the first part considers different definition of the phenomenon while the second part analyses different databases tracking terrorism.

Violent Extremism

Comparing different definitions of violent extremism

As discussed above, whenever investigating violent extremism, it is essential to bear in mind that the fast-evolving nature of the phenomenon and the continuous emergence of new forms of extremism directly influence the definition thereof. Consequently, until the end of the last century, the definition of violent extremism derived from its dominant manifestations of the extreme right and extreme left. On the contrary, since the 2000s, the consolidation and spread of Islamist extremism has profoundly influenced the studies and debates on political violence. For this reason, operational definitions of the phenomenon can differ even among the institutions and agencies of the same country as well as within the academia.

The following part considers several existing definitions of violent extremism that have been proposed by different institutions. The descriptions are divided according to the type of institution that has produced it; for this reason, the analysis is divided between intergovernmental, governmental, and academic examples of definitions of violent extremism.

Intergovernmental definitions

UNESCO: Even if the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization points out that there is not an agreed-upon definition of violent extremism, in the Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policy-makers document, it provides a common and wide understanding of the term, defining violent extremism as a phenomenon that “refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals”.

Moreover, it is also stressed that it can include "terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and sectarian violence" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 17).

OHCR: According to a study of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which has been taken as a reference in the Reference Guide of United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, violent extremism can be described as the "use or support of violence; the 'willingness' to use violence; committing, advocating or encouraging acts of violence; and promoting views which foment and incite violence in furtherance of particular beliefs, and foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence" (UNOCT, p.23). Moreover, it is also pointed out that violent extremism is "generally conceived as being aimed at achieving political, ideological or religious goals, or as the means employed by groups that reject democracy, human rights and the rule of law" (Ibid.).

Council of Europe: According to the Guidelines for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism elaborated by the Council of Europe, violent extremism consists in "promoting, supporting or committing acts which may lead to terrorism, and which are aimed at defending an ideology advocating racial, national, ethnic or religious supremacy or opposing core democratic principles and values" (2016, p.1).

Governmental definitions

United Kingdom: The UK government does not give a precise and clear-cut definition of violent extremism. However, to support the highest degree of operational flexibility to counter extremist forms of violence, in the 2011 Counter Terrorism Strategy (named Prevent), extremism is described as the "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs" (Gov.UK, Revised Prevent Duty guidance: for England and Wales, 2021).

Sweden: In Swedish law, the concept of "violence-promoting extremism" has been interpreted and described according to a set of information provided by the Swedish Security Service. Hence, according to this description, a violent extremist is someone "deemed repeatedly to have displayed behaviour that not just accepts the use of violence but also supports or exercises ideologically motivated violence to promote something" (Government communication 2011/12:44, 2011, p. 9).

United States: While there is an agreed-upon definition of terrorism in U.S. law, there is still not consensus among U.S. agencies over what violent extremism is. However, different U.S. governmental agencies have given their own definition of such a phenomenon:

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation defines violent extremism as "encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals" (Arriaga et al., 2017, p. 2).

The U.S. Agency for International Development defines the phenomenon as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives" (Ibid).

Academic definitions

Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011): In a report summarising existing research on "countering violent extremism" for the Australian Government, Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino and Caluya provided a description of violent extremism, pointing out that it can be described as "a willingness to use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those of a political, social or ideological nature" and its main purpose is to "provoke the target into a disproportionate response, radicalise moderates and build support for its objectives in the long term" (p.9).

Mroz (2009): Mroz defined violent extremism as "violence in the absence of reason, or rather, the belief that committing an act of violence will produce benefits that outweigh the cost of human life." (Mroz 2009, p.23).

Striegher (2015): In its paper Violent extremism: An examination of a definitional dilemma, Striegher gives a definition of violent extremism: "an ideology that accepts the use of violence for the pursuit of goals that are generally social, racial, religious and/or political in nature" (p.79).

Marinone et al. (2021): In the 2.1 deliverable of PARTICIPATION Project, Marinone et al. provide a working definition of extremism, described as "a set of attitudes that lead people to embrace discourses and behaviors centered on a hate culture that fosters discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, serious disability or disease." (p.19).

New working definition of violent extremism

By analysing and comparing the set of definitions of violent extremism given above, there are three main recurring features that characterise violent extremism. These characteristics are:

System of beliefs: Violent extremism always relies on a specific and monolithic system of beliefs. This set of values and narratives helps create rigid worldviews and approaches to reality as well as sanctioning the use of violence against a perceived enemy. Identity often plays a central role in violent extremism, as it constructs specific markers or labels that, on the one hand, strengthen the links within a given closed group, while on the other, helps exclude everyone falling outside it. This rejection-identification model (Kharroub 2015), underpinned by strict conceptualisations of identity, hence fuels discrimination (perceived or real), disrespect, and a culture of intolerance against the society as a whole and/or given communities according to race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, serious disability or disease.

Political, ideological or religious project: Consistently with its dichotomic interpretation of society and politics, violent extremism is also an anti-status quo project seeking to supplant any governing authorities and replace it with a brand-new political or religious system.

Use of violence: As it can be observed above, the very core feature of violent extremism is its support, furtherance, promotion, and commitment to violence as a meaningful and legitimate tool to achieve its goals. The direct or indirect justification of violence represents the distinguishing element between simple extremism and violent extremism: indeed, while the former can be merely a form of cognitive extremism, therefore not leading to violent actions, the latter involves a violence-prone behavior (Neumann 2013).

Therefore, according to this outline synthetising the main features of violent extremism, it is possible to propose a new working definition of violent extremism:

Violent extremism consists in a system of extreme religious, political, or ideological beliefs and a set of actions fostering a hate culture and targeted discrimination. Moreover, violent extremism legitimises, justifies, condones, or engages with violence against institutions, society, or specific segments thereof.

Databases tracking violent extremism

The following part will be devoted to the analysis of different databases tracking the evolution of violent extremism in different regions. The analysis takes into consideration the data and factors constituting the criteria to identify violent extremism and its transformation over time. For every database considered, a distinction is made between databases tracking online and offline (or both) violent activism. In addition to this, the analysis also highlights whether the research is conducted at regional or global level. Broadly speaking, databases and datasets have been selected and analysed as long as they trace the evolution of violent extremist organisations, consider ideologically motivated crimes and analyse violence-based attacks and incidents. By considering the frequency and location of violent incidents and the evolution of violent organisations or groups, these databases contribute to assess better the risk of violent extremism in a given time or space.

ISIS Online (George Washington Project on Extremism): After the emergence of the so-called Islamic State and its massive exploitation of online platforms to recruit, obtain finance and spread propaganda, the Project on Extremism spearheaded an initiative tracking online extremist digital communication over time. Today, the project focuses data collection on multiple platforms, including Twitter and Telegram, with the goal of better understanding how activity on these platforms can link to online networks. The analysis of IS online contents relied on an approach mixing manual coding, PDF analysis and open-source research on case studies. The selection criteria required that groups and channels were pro-IS and included English-language content. Indicators of pro-IS sympathies included: re-posting or sharing official IS media, the creation of unofficial pro-IS media, or direct declaration of support by channel administrators for IS goals, missions, activities, and operations (Clifford and Powell, 2019).

Mapping Militant Project (Stanford/CISAC): The Mapping Militant Project provides interactive maps and diagrams tracing the evolution of several violent extremist groups and organisations and

visualising the changing relationships over time. The project includes two sets of maps: on the one hand, the Global Al-Qaeda and Global Islamic State maps are international in scope, as they document the links among a wide variety of groups and cells spread across the globe; on the other hand, several regional maps are provided to track the evolution of militant groups active at local or regional levels. These regional maps cover the following areas: Aleppo, Iraq, North Africa, Somalia and Syria for the MENA region; Philippines and Sri Lanka for South and East Asia; the North Caucasus and Pakistan for Central Asia; Italy and Northern Ireland for Europe; and finally, Colombia for Latin America. The maps are linked to every group profile, based and designed according to open-source news and public data. At the present the site includes 110 complete profiles of both active and disbanded militant groups. These profiles are compiled according to several criteria, such as the organisational structure (leadership, size estimate, geographical locations), the strategy (ideology and goals, political activities, target and tactics), and the interactions (designated/listed as terrorist organisation, community relations, relationships with other groups, state sponsors and external influences). The criteria of selection of violent extremist groups are not available (Mapping Militant Project).

H.E.A.T. Map – Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism (Anti-Defamation League): The ADL HEAT Map visualises interactively hate, extremist and antisemitic incidents both at state and national level in the United States. The database traces terrorist plots and attacks, extremist murders, white supremacist and antisemitic incidents and provides a geographical distribution of them. For a given incident to be included in the database, it must comply with two main requirements:

It must be related to specific extremist ideologies: this includes Salafi-jihadist ideology (also linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State); left-wing extremism such as anarchists, environmental and animal right extremists, black nationalist extremists; right-wing extremism, both anti-government (under the umbrella of the so-called Patriot Movement) and other types, such as anti-abortion extremism, anti-Muslim extremism, and anti-immigration extremism as well as white supremacism.

It must falls within specific incident types: this includes extremist murders connected to members of extremist groups and adherents of extremist ideologies; terrorist plots and attacks to engage in significant violent criminal activity against people or property to further social, political, religious or ideological goals (terrorist threats are not included); extremist/police shootouts; white supremacist events, including rallies and protests, counter-protests, white power music events and hate group meetings; white supremacist propaganda, such as distribution of flyers, handbills, posters, stickers, leaflets and banners; and antisemitic incidents, including circumstances indicating anti-Jewish animus on the part of the perpetrator and incidents resulting in Jewish individuals or organisations being victimised.

The Map relies on different sources, including news and media reports, government documents, police reports, victim reports, extremist-related sources and the investigations conducted by the Center on Extremism. (ADL H.A.T.E. Map Website).

Qanon offenders in the U.S. (START): The brief that has been issued from the conducted research defines a framework of the characteristics and offences committed by QAnon members. The information relies on a comprehensive dataset carefully designed to understand QAnon offenders and related crimes. The criteria for selection include: the individual must radicalised in the United States; he/she must have espoused/espouses the QAnon and/or Pizza Gate theory; he/she must have committed an ideologically motivated crime that resulted in his/her arrest, indictment, or death; and that there must be documented evidence to support suspicion that the individual's crime was related to QAnon. Moreover, individual profiling of extremist offender can include age, marital status, employment status, gender, education, and whether he/she have a military background. (Bowie, 2021).

Terrorists and Extremists Database (Counter Extremism Project): This interactive database traces both extremist leaders of any type – namely, Salafi-jihadists, far-right extremists, far-left extremists and separatists. As asserted on the website of the Counter Extremism Project, the database focuses on groups "whose ideology and practices threaten international peace and stability and the security and values of civilized societies, whether by force or terror or politics" (CEP, About, FAQs). The database generates and updates Featured Reports on individuals and provides a narrative overview of single extremists as well as biographical information and known aliases (CEP website). Criteria of selection are not available.

Database on Terrorism and African Terrorism Bulletin (ACSRT): This database is a fortnightly publication providing an assessment of terrorism and violent extremism on the African continent. The Bulletin's data is sourced from the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism. It provides data, statistics and analysis on the evolution of violent extremist groups and organisations across Africa. The criteria of selection are not accessible (Bowie 2020).

RTV Dataset (Centre for Research on Extremism – C-Rex): The RTV dataset retraces acts of right-wing terrorism and violence within Western Europe, covering the period 1990–2018. The database includes only the most severe types of right-wing terrorism and violence. For an attack to be included in the dataset, two criteria of inclusion must be met:

The target selection must be premised on right-wing beliefs: these includes a far-right mix of anti-egalitarianism, nativism and authoritarianism, but also different forms of ideological and practical discrimination against ethnic minorities, religious minorities, sexual minorities, political opponents, state institutions and vulnerable groups.

The severity of the attack must satisfy at least one of the following severity thresholds: "(1) the attack has a fatal, or near fatal outcome; (2) the perpetrator(s) proactively use potentially lethal weapons, such as knives, heavy blunt instruments, guns, or bombs, including attacks causing minor injuries only; (3) the attack causes major and/or disabling injuries, such as coma, unconsciousness, broken bones or other physical trauma, typically requiring hospitalisation or medical treatment" (C-REX, revised 02/07/2021, p.1). In addition to this, vague attack plots missing concrete information about target and/or weapons are covered when they lead to arrests.

Name of the database (+institution)	Content	Geographical focus	Selection Criteria	Other
ISIS Online **(George Washington Project on Extremism)**	Tracking of online extremist content of IS and IS-affiliated individuals, especially on Twitter and Telegram.	Worldwide.	Groups and channels must be pro-IS. They must include English-language content. They must include re-posting or sharing official IS media and/or have created unofficial pro-IS media and/or direct declaration of support by channels administrators for IS goals, missions, activities, and operations (Clifford and Powell, 2019).	
Mapping Militant Project (Stanford/CISAC)	Interactive maps and diagrams tracing the evolution of violent extremist groups and organisations and their changing relationship over time.	**Worldwide** for Global al-Qaeda and Global Islamic State. **Regional** for all the other organizations and groups.	Not available	Profiles are compiled according to the following indicators: - Organisational structure (leadership, size estimate, geographical locations). - Strategy (ideology and goals, political activities, target and tactics). - Interactions (designated/listed as terrorist organisation, community relations, relationships with other groups, state sponsor and external influences) (Mapping Militant Project).
H.E.A.T. Map – Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism (Anti-Defamation League)	Interactive visualisation of terrorist plots, hate, white supremacist and antisemitic incidents.	United States (both state and national level).	Incidents to be included in the database: - Must be related to specific extremist ideologies, this includes Salafi-jihadist ideology (also linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State); left-wing extremism such as anarchists, environmental and animal right extremists, black nationalist extremists; right-wing extremism, both anti-government (under the umbrella of the so-	The Map relies on different sources, including news and media reports, government documents, police reports, victim reports, extremist-related sources and the investigations conducted by the Center on Extremism.

			called Patriot Movement) and other types, such as anti-abortion extremism, anti-Muslim extremism, and anti-immigration extremism as well as white supremacism. - Must fall within specific incident types, this includes extremist murders connected to members of extremist groups and adherents of extremist ideologies; terrorist plots and attacks to engage in significant violent criminal activity against people or property to further social, political, religious or ideological goals (terrorist threats are not included); extremist/police shootouts; white supremacist events, including rallies and protests, counter-protests, white power music events and hate group meetings; white supremacist propaganda, such as distribution of flyers, handbills, posters, stickers, leaflets and banners; and antisemitic incidents, including circumstances indicating anti-Jewish animus on the part of the perpetrator and incidents resulting in Jewish individuals or organisations being victimised.	
Qanon offenders in the U.S. (START)	Database tracing and describing the characteristics and offences committed by QAnon offenders.	United States.	Incidents must include: - The individual must radicalised in the United States; - That he/she must have espoused/espouses the QAnon and/or Pizza Gate theory; - That he/she must have committed an ideologically motivated crime that resulted in his/her arrest, indictment, or death; - That there must be documented evidence to support suspicion that the individual's crime was related to QAnon.	Individual profiling of extremist offender can include: age, marital status, employment status, gender, education, and whether he/she have a military background. (Bowie, 2021).
Terrorists and Extremists	Interactive database tracing	Worldwide.	Not available.	The database focuses on groups "whose ideology

Database (Counter Extremist Project)	extremist leaders of any type (Salafi-jihadists, far-right extremists, far-left extremists, and separatists).			and practices threaten international peace and stability and the security and values of civilized societies, whether by force or terror or politics" (CEP, About, FAQs).
Database on Terrorism and African Terrorism Bulletin (*ACSRT*)	Fortnightly publication providing an assessment of terrorism and violent extremism on the African continent.	Africa.	Not available (Bowie 2020).	
RTV Dataset (Centre for Research on Extremism – C-Rex)	Tracing of the most severe acts of right-wing terrorism and violence.	Western Europe.	The target selection must be premised on right-wing beliefs: these include far-right mix of anti-egalitarianism, nativism and authoritarianism, but also different forms of ideological and practical discrimination against ethnic minorities, religious minorities, sexual minorities, political opponents, state institutions and vulnerable groups; The severity of the attack must satisfy at least one of the following severity thresholds: "(1) the attack has a fatal, or near fatal outcome; (2) the perpetrator(s) proactively use potentially lethal weapons, such as knives, heavy blunt instruments, guns, or bombs, including attacks causing minor injuries only; (3) the attack causes major and/or disabling injuries, such as coma, unconsciousness, broken bones or other physical trauma, typically requiring hospitalisation or medical treatment" (C-REX, revised 02/07/2021, p.1). In addition to this, also vague attack plots missing concrete information about target and/or weapons are covered when they lead to arrests.	Time frame for the analysis 1990-2018.

Comparing different definitions of terrorism

As for the concept of violent extremism, the definition of terrorism remains elusive, as a consensus over what constitutes it has not been reached yet (Scremin, 2017). Several – sometimes controversial – definitions of the phenomenon have been proposed over the decades, generating what Brian Jenkins has described as the "Bermuda Triangle of Terrorism (1980, p.2). However, as claimed by Griset and Mahan (2003, p.10), "terrorism is a complex phenomenon that varies from country to country and from one era to another" and, for this reason, one should "examine the social, economic, political and religious conditions and philosophies at an existing time and place" (Ibid.) in order to deeply understand what terrorism is.

In the attempt to understand the complexity of this definitional debate and to provide a working conceptualisation of the phenomenon, the following section gathers various examples of intergovernmental, governmental, and academic definitions of terrorism.

Intergovernmental definitions

United Nations: Throughout its history, the United Nations have provided several definitions of terrorism.

In the UN General Assembly Resolution 49/60 adopted in December 1994, for instance, terrorism has been provisionally described as "Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them." (Perera 2008, p. 4);

The UN Security Council Resolution 1566, adopted in 2004, gave another formulation, defining terrorism as "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act." (S/RES/1566 2004, p.2);

The UN General Assembly, in a UN panel that occurred in March 2005, described terrorism as "any act intended to cause death or seriously bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act" (United Nations, 2005).

Council of Europe: After decades of debates, in May 2005, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, which uses the definition: "acts of terrorism have the purpose by their nature or context to seriously intimidate a population or unduly compel a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act or

seriously destabilise or destroy the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation" (Council of Europe, p.1).

League of Arab States: In the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers of the Interior and the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice in 1998, terrorism has been described as: "Any act or threat of violence, whatever its motives or purposes, that occurs in the advancement of an individual or collective criminal agenda and seeking to sow panic among people, causing fear by harming them, or placing their lives, liberty or security in danger, or seeking to cause damage to the environment or to public or private installations or property or to occupying or seizing them, or seeking to jeopardise national resources." (UNODC, 1998, p.1).

Governmental definitions

United Kingdom: In the CPS website, terrorism is defined as "the use or threat of action, both in and outside of the UK, designed to influence any international government organisation or to intimidate the public. It must also be for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause." (Crown Prosecution Service).

United States: As for the concept of violent extremism, U.S. governments, state department and security agencies offer different definitions:

The U.S. Department of State has defined terrorism in 1983 as "premediated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience" (Sinai 2008, p.9);

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives" (FBI). The FBI further describes terrorism as either domestic or international according to the origin, base and objectives of the terrorist organisation.

France: In its 2013 White Paper on defence and national security, France defines terrorism as "a mechanism of action used by adversaries that do not abide by conventional warfare to overcome the lack of resources and achieve their goals (Livre Blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité Nationale 2013, p.43). Moreover, in the same document, it is pointed out that terrorists, by indiscriminately striking civilians, "resort to a type of violence firstly aiming at taking advantage of the effects of the brutal outbreak they create on public opinion to force governments' [actions]" (Ibid.).

Academic definitions

Shanahan (2016): In the 2016, Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies, Timothy Shanahan investigates the fundamental elements of terrorism and proposes his definition of terrorism,

claiming that terrorism is "the strategically indiscriminate harming or threat of harming members of a target group in order to influence the psychological states of an audience group in ways the perpetrators anticipate may be beneficial to the advancement of their agenda" (p.110).

Alexander (1976): In 1976, Yonah Alexander described terrorism as "the use of violence against random civilian targets in order to intimidate or to create generalised pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving political goals" (p.XIV).

Schmid (2011): In order to find an academic consensus on the definition of terrorism, Alex P. Schmid, one of the most well-known experts on terrorism at international level, has conducted three rounds of consultations among academics and other professionals. Based on the results of this research, it has defined a revised academic consensus definition of terrorism: "terrorism refers, on the one hand, to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties" (p.1).

New working definition of terrorism

Given the up-to-date and over-arching work conducted by Alex. P Schmid, who has gathered the results of his work in the Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research, edited by Joseph J. Easson and Schmid himself, it is appropriate to use as a working definition the one he proposed. The reason behind this choice is also linked to the fact that Schmid further refines his description by giving more details on what practically and ideologically constitutes terrorism. According to him:

The very core of terrorism is terror – namely, instilling fear, dread, panic, or simple anxiety – spread across society. The immediate intent is hence to terrorise, intimidate, disorientate, coerce or compel a target population, a conflict party and/or institutions.

Terrorism can be considered a tactic and it can be used in three contexts: 1) illegal state repression, 2) propagandistic agitation furthered by non-state actors outside zones of conflict and 3) as an illicit tactic or irregular warfare employed by state- and non-state actors.

Terrorism as physical violence can involve single-phase acts of lethal violence (such as bombings or armed assaults), dual-phased life-threatening incidents (such as kidnapping, hijacking and other forms of hostage-taking for coercive bargaining) and multi-phased sequences of actions (such as secret detention, torture and murder).

Terrorism resorts to a threat-based communication process whereby, on the one hand, conditional demands are made to individuals, groups, governments, societies or segments thereof, and, on the other hand, support is sought according to specific markers of identity, such as ethnicity, religion or political affiliation.

The main, direct victims are usually civilians and non-combatants, but they do not correspond to the ultimate target (such as in classical murder), since attacks are meant as threats and terror generators.

The perpetrators of terrorism can be various: individual attackers, small groups, transnational networks.

The motivations to engage in terrorism can be as wide as the types of perpetrators, including addressing real or perceived grievances, personal or vicarious revenge, collective punishment, national liberation, and the promotion of diverse ideological, political, social, national or religious causes and objectives.

Given the in-depth description of terrorism provided by Schmid, this paper adopts his definition:

"Terrorism refers, on the one hand, to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties (Schmid 2011, p.1)".

Databases tracking terrorism

The following part will be devoted to the analysis of different databases tracking the evolution of terrorism. The analysis takes into consideration the data and factors constituting the criteria to identify terrorism, terrorist actors and terrorist organisations. Some databases analysed are the same considered in the section devoted to violent extremism, as datasets on these phenomena frequently coincide. Databases and datasets have been selected and analysed as long as they trace the evolution of terrorist organisations, consider cases of ideologically motivated crimes and analyse various type of terrorist incident, should it be economic, religious, political or social. These databases contribute significantly to understand the existing risk of terrorist proliferation on the ground.

Global Terrorism Database – GTD (START): The GTD is an open-source database including information on domestic and international terrorist attacks from 1970 to 2019. It includes any type of religious, political, social, and economic terrorism across the world. For each event, data regarding the date and location of the incident, the weapons used and the nature of the targets, the number of casualties and – when identifiable – the group or individual responsible are available. The data collection methodology includes a preliminary investigation of news media sources from around the world for identifying and documenting the incidents. Today, GTD relies entirely on document management and data collection tools that streamline the process from beginning to end. The coding strategy relies on six coding teams and each of them specialise on a particular

domain of the GTD Codebook – namely, location, perpetrators, targets, weapons and tactics, casualties and consequences, and general information.

The GTD defines a terrorist attack as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a nonstate actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" (GTD Codebook: Methodologies, Inclusion Criteria, and Variables, 2021, p.11). This definition sets the parameters for the inclusion in the database of a given terrorist attack, which must strictly meet three attributes:

- *The incident must be intentional – namely, the result of a conscious calculation.*
- *The incident must entail a degree of violence or immediate threat thereof.*
- *The perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors, that means that the database does not include state terrorism.*
- *In addition to this, at least two of the following three criteria must be met:*
- *The act must be aimed at achieving a political, economic, religious, or social goal. When considering economic goals, the simple pursuit of profit does not meet the criterion – it must be willing to achieve a profound change of the economic system.*
- *There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a large audience different from the direct victims.*
- *The action must occur outside the context of legitimate warfare activities. (Ibid.)*

Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism: Database – CLAT (RUSI): The CLAT – the construction of which is still ongoing – aims to record plots and attacks related to lone-wolves terrorism in 30 European countries, including Norway and Switzerland from 1st January 2000 to 31st December 2014. For the data collection, CLAT relies on four sources: firstly, the Global Terrorism Database; secondly, the news reporting terrorism-related incidents; thirdly, additional internet searches to identify any further examples; finally, interviews with country experts to verify that relevant cases were covered (Ellis et al. 2016). For any violent attack to be included in the database, the following criteria must be met:

- *Violence, or the threat thereof, must be planned or carried out.*
- *The perpetrator(s) must be an individual, two people or three people.*
- *The perpetrator must act without any direct support in the planning, preparation, and execution of the attack.*
- *The perpetrator's decision to act must not be directed by any group or other individuals.*
- *The motivation cannot be purely persona-material gain.*
- *The target of the attack extends beyond the direct and immediate victims of the attack (Feve & Bjornsgaard, 2016, p.1).*

Terrorism and Foreign Fighters Database (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network BIRN): This database, launched in 2021 by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, is an interactive resource center recording all the convictions for domestic terrorism in the Balkans – namely, domestic as well as international terrorism in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Variables include location of trials and judicial verdicts of individuals fighting in conflicts in Syria and Ukraine (2010-2020), total number of cases, location of the crime and total figures per country. Moreover, individual case narratives and trial video is provided (Regional Terrorism and Foreign Fighters, BIRN website). Besides convictions and trial for domestic terrorism, the other criteria of selection are unavailable.

Database on Terrorism and African Terrorism Bulletin (ACSRT): This database is a fortnightly publication providing an assessment of terrorism and violent extremism on the African continent. The Bulletin's data is sourced from the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism. It provides data, statistics and analysis on the evolution of violent extremist groups and organisations across Africa based on the terrorist incidents in the continent. The criteria of selection are not accessible (Bowie 2020).

Mapping Militant Project (Stanford/CISAC): The Mapping Militant Project provides interactive maps tracing the evolution of several terrorist and violent extremist groups and organisations, and visualising the changing relationships over time. The project includes two sets of maps: on the one hand, the Global Al-Qaeda and Global Islam State maps are international in scope, as they document the links among a wide variety of groups and cells spread across the globe; on the other hand, several regional maps are provided to track the evolution of militant groups active at local or regional level. These regional maps cover the following areas: Aleppo, Iraq, North Africa, Somalia and Syria for the MENA region; Philippines and Sri Lanka for South and East Asia; the North Caucasus and Pakistan for Central Asia; Italy and Northern Ireland for Europe; and finally, Colombia for Latin America. The maps are linked to every group profile, based and designed according to open-source news and public data. At the present the site includes 110 complete profiles of both active and disbanded militant groups. These profiles are compiled according to a number of criteria, such as the organisational structure (leadership, size estimate, geographical locations), the strategy (ideology and goals, political activities, target and tactics), and the interactions (designated/listed as terrorist organisation, community relations, relationships with other groups, state sponsors and external influences) (Mapping Militant Project). However, the criteria of selection are not available.

Name of the database (+institution)	Content	Geographical focus	Selection Criteria	Other
Global Terrorism Database – GTD (START)	Open-source database including information on domestic and international terrorist attacks. It includes any type of religious, political, social, and economic terrorist incident.	Worldwide.	Two sets of selection criteria for an incident to be included: - The incident must be intentional – namely, the result of a conscious calculation. - The incident must entail a degree of violence or immediate threat thereof. - The perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors, that means that the database does not include state terrorism. In addition, at least two of the following three criteria must be met: - The act must be aimed at achieving a political, economic, religious, or social goal. When considering economic goals, the simple pursuit of profit does not meet the criterion – it must be willing to achieve a profound change of the economic system. - There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a large audience	Time frame: 1970-2019 For each event, data regarding the date and location of the incident, the weapons used and the nature of the targets, the number of casualties and – when identifiable – the group or individual responsible are available. The GTD defines a terrorist attack as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a nonstate actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" (GTD Codebook: Methodologies, Inclusion Criteria, and Variables, 2021, p.11).

			different from the direct victims. - The action must occur outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.	
Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism: Database – CLAT (RUSI)	Database recording plots and attacks related to lone-wolves terrorism from 1st January 2000 to 31st December 2014.	30 European countries, including Switzerland and Norway.	For an attack to be included in the database, it must meet the following criteria: - Violence, or the threat thereof, must be planned or carried out. - The perpetrator(s) must be an individual, two people or three people. - The perpetrator must act without any direct support in the planning, preparation, and execution of the attack. - The perpetrator's decision to act must not be directed by any group or other individuals. - The motivation cannot be purely persona-material gain. - The target of the attack extends beyond the direct and immediate victims of the attack (Feve & Bjornsgaard, 2016, p.1).	Construction of the database still ongoing.
Terrorism and Foreign Fighters Database (Balkan Investigative Reporting Network BIRN)	Interactive database launched in 2021 recording all the convictions for domestic and international terrorism in the Balkans.	Countries included: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.	Variables include location of trials and judicial verdicts of individuals fighting in conflicts in Syria and Ukraine (2010-2020), total number of cases, location of the	

			crime and total figures per country. Individual case narratives and trial video is provided (Regional Terrorism and Foreign Fighters, BIRN website). Besides convictions and trial for domestic terrorism, the other criteria of selection are unavailable.	
Mapping Militant Project (Stanford/CISAC)	Interactive maps tracing the evolution of several terrorist and violent extremist groups and organisations and visualising the changing relationships over time.	Worldwide for Global al-Qaeda and Global Islamic State. - Regional for all the other organisations and groups.	Not available	Profiles are compiled according to the following indicators: - Organisational structure (leadership, size estimate, geographical locations). - Strategy (ideology and goals, political activities, target and tactics). - Interactions (designated/listed as terrorist organisation, community relations, relationships with other groups, state sponsor and external influences) (Mapping Militant Project).
Database on Terrorism and African Terrorism Bulletin (ACSRT)	Fortnightly publication providing an assessment of terrorism and violent extremism on the African continent.	Africa.	Not available (Bowie 2020)	

Radicalisation: definitions and databases

Radicalisation: A Fluid Concept

Radicalisation has been a central concept in PVE/CVE programs of prevention of social conflict and terrorism after 9/11. These have been fundamentally crafted around a Jihadi "external" threat, targeting the "West". But radicalisation and concerns with projects of prevention changed in Europe following the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) attacks, and the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2004. The concern and perception of radicalisation shifted. Born and socialised in Spain, the UK and the Netherlands, the "homegrown" attackers triggered a complex process of understanding how (mostly) young men with Muslim/second-generation immigrant backgrounds picked up the rhetoric of violent Jihad in the West, to the point of identification that led to their decision to go against the state structures of their native countries. Since then, more nuanced understandings of radicalisation emerged, which primarily focus on the scope and "span" of what we mean when we speak about radicalisation (Borum 2011). In the end, since 2005 it has become a pivotal concept in relation to violent extremism and terrorism, the roots and usages of radicalisation have had a broad involvement in political debate since the early 18th century, and many of the causes defended by European "radical movements" in the late 19th and early 20th century were gradually assimilated by the orthodoxy of political and liberal democracy.

A notoriously slippery concept, today the term radicalisation is still primarily associated by pundits and experts with Salafism, the ultra-conservative Islamists who are known for aggressive proselytising and their sympathies for ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Sedgwick 2010). But the process of radicalisation is present in all kinds of terrorism, whether left-wing, right-wing, anarchist, ethno-nationalist or religious. The primary focus on the Islamist element has diminished the focus on the far-right, separatism or left-wing (Doosje et al 2016).

This section speaks about the mainstream approaches to radicalisation, which focus on the process and generally aim to understand, analyse and fundamentally predict when and how a violent extremist action will take place, without, however, necessarily entailing that a violent action will necessarily take place, even in a radicalised context (Neumann 2013). Consequently, approaches often focus on identifying boundaries between radicalisation and violent radicalisation (Hogg 2014) Although meanings and working definitions continue to be protean, the focus is delineating from extremism or polarisation, and establishing main factors and indicators for the process (Muro 2016). The concern of many of the programs lies in separating between the ideology and the individual himself and identifying social, political factors leading to actual radicalisation (Crone 2016, Kudnani 2015).

Indeed, because of this fluid definition of the concept, a substantial amount of the policy and research aims to avoid excessive profiling and stereotyping. Singling out groups – or focusing on one community group – has been found insufficient or worse, to complicate biases (Silke 2001). At the same time, approaches looking at the path towards violent extremism also aim to avoid unnecessary stigmatisation of radical thought and practice sensitivity for attempts that are aware

that radicalisation as a constructive self-critical process of democracy itself, and as action, it can be a good and innovative factor at societal level (Clark, Moskalenko 2008). Defining radicalisation so as to better understand the delineation between thought and violent action takes into account the notion that "whereas not all radicals are terrorists, all terrorists are radicals", an apt way to describe the dilemma at hand (Muro 2016).

Consequently, radicalisation is primarily identified as a relational phenomenon, calibrated by context and driven by developments rather than only individual belief (Hogan, Taylor 2008). For instance, the existing models already used to understand the phenomenon work with this characteristic and chart radicalisation as process, sometimes triggered by a "catalyst event" (the catalyst event can take multiple forms: economic (eg. losing a job, blocked social mobility), social (eg. alienation discrimination, racism), political (eg. international conflicts) and personal (death of a loved one). In addition, there is a long list of triggers (real or perceived) which may initiate the progressive movement towards violent extremism (Wiktorowicz, 2004; 2005). All models are useful tools to understand radicalisation as such, because they all take into account that only certain individuals out of the "radicalised" resort to violent actions and consequently can be counted as perpetrators of violent extremism. By acknowledging this difference, these models also consider how radicalisation, as process by which such patterns of attitudes and action emerge individually and ontogenetically over the course of development, operates.

The Four-Stage Model proposed by Randy Borum (2003; 2011) focuses on the emergence of a "terrorist mindset" and identifies common factors shifting radicalisation into violent acts. His model focuses on grievances and vulnerabilities morphing into hatred of a target group, and how hatred is transformed – for some at least – into a justification or impetus for violence. The four-stage process entails; 1) identifying some unsatisfying event, condition, or grievance ("It's not right"), 2) framing it as being unjust ("It's not fair"). An illustrative example here is how wars in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq become symbols for "war against Islam", 3) blaming the injustice on a target policy, person, or nation, 4) identifying, vilifying and even demonising the responsible party.

Georgetown University psychology professor Fathali M. Moghaddam (2005) developed the "Staircase to Terrorism" model of the process of violent radicalisation. The 5 "staircases" shrink over time, showing why radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violent extremism. "The ground floor" is the group that perceives some form of injustice or deprivation. "The first floor" includes those who wish to that action. "The second floor" accommodates those who, having found no solutions to their problems, displace their aggression onto some enemy. "The third floor" houses those who join a group facilitating a kind of moral engagement before they ascend to the fourth floor, where "recruitment to terrorist organisations takes place". Then, finally, the fifth floor, where they are trained to "sidestep inhibitory mechanisms" and sent to kill.

The Pyramid Model of Political Radicalisation defined by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, two psychologists who conceptualise "political radicalisation as change in beliefs, feelings, and action toward support and sacrifice for intergroup conflict" (2008: 428) operates with a pyramid where the apex represents the small number of active terrorists who remain relatively few in

number when considered in relation to all those who may sympathise with their beliefs and feelings (e.g. superiority, injustice, distrust, vulnerability, etc.). The lower level of activists is composed of those who are not committing violent acts themselves, but provide those sitting at the top with tacitical support (e.g. recruitment, political or financial support, etc.).

The model leaves open the question of how a person moves from the base to the extremes of the apex, an element that is best studied in the Borum and Moghaddam models. The interesting aspect of this model is that it moves away from the individual level and introduces the role of ideologies or "frames" linking the terrorists with their societies at large. In order to understand militants, it is important to pay attention to "group identification" or the way terrorists care "about what happens to the group, especially in relation with other groups" (McCauley, Moskalenko, 2008: 416). Theirs is essentially a relational approach. The drivers are not intrinsic to specific individuals but are found in the contexts they inhabit.

Newer socio-developmental models of radicalisation use a developmental perspective, stating that radicalisation and extremism (like any other developmental domain) can be described as the outcome of a range of (societal, social, individual) determinants and transactional (reciprocally interdependent) ontogenetic development processes (Lerner 2018; Sameroff 2009). Radicalisation and extremism do not simply happen ad hoc or without any antecedents at some point in youth or adult development but have to be explained through ontogenetic developmental processes from which, ideally, corresponding prevention concepts can be derived.

What emerges from this model has also been supported by more recent research on radicalisation, which points to a fault-line between 'ideological radicalisation' and 'behavioural radicalisation' or between 'extremism of thought' and 'extremism of method' (Richards, 2015). 'Ideological radicalisation' describes the process through which a person comes under the influence of extremist ideas, while 'behavioural radicalisation' is the process through which a person—having adopted a radical 'world-view'—accepts violence or is ready to take the step from talk to action to realise his or her extremist ideas. Radicalisation, in other words, lies in this process. To some, radicalisation is a purely cognitive process leading to the endorsement of radical ideas; to others, it implies a behavioural transformation leading to a condition in which a person has either accepted the use of violence or is willing to perpetrate it. But they share the fundamental idea that radicalisation implies an intellectual transformation and that an extremist ideology is somehow the precondition of the violent acts (Wiktorowicz 2008).

Social Approaches to Radicalisation

Consequently, social definitions of radicalisation have by and large followed definitions in reports and policies such as those originating in the EU and the UN, the term radicalisation is referred to as a process that leads to extremism and possibly terrorism (Commission of the EU Parliament, 15 March 2015). A working definition of "violent radicalisation" is provided by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation which has defined it as "socialisation to

extremism which manifests itself in terrorism" (Expert Group, 2008: 7). Violent outcomes of radicalisation are sometimes distinguished from non-violent forms by discerning between cognitive extremism and violent extremism, or cognitive radicalisation and behavioural radicalisation(Guhl 2018, Neumann 2013).

Efforts to delineate between radicalisation and violent action shape a recent UNHCHR report which acknowledges "The notion of "a process through which an individual adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations" but which does not necessarily include "the willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological, religious or other goals"" (A/HRC/33/29, 2016). Definitions of the European Police Office which recommended referring to a "violent extremist social trend", rather than using the term radicalisation, (A/HRC/33/29, 2016) do so because by using the term radicalisation, actors usually limit the focus to either "violent" radicalisation or radicalisation leading to terrorism and limit the aspects of radicalisation which build over time towards violent actions. In fact, Hafez & Mullins have added the "process" to the core definition of radicalisation so that it captures both the duration and the fact that it might not necessarily lead to violent actions. "Radicalisation is usually a 1) gradual "process" that entails socialisation into an 2) extremist belief system that sets the stage for 3) violence even if it does not make it inevitable." (Hafez, Mullins, 2015). The working definitions of the US Federal Bureau of Investigations also acknowledges that "…the radicalisation of an individual is a fluid process that does not have a timetable and does not always lead to action." (FBI, 2006, p.4).

Social definitions of radicalisation have also pointed out the importance of social values in identifying radicalisation. For instance, UNESCO's working definition of violent radicalisation points to "the individual person's search for fundamental meaning, origin and return to a root ideology". Given this addition, it also points out the polarisation of the social space and the collective construction of a threatened ideal "us" against "them", where the others are dehumanised by a process of scapegoating (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

Political Approaches to Radicalisation

Political definitions of radicalisation consider ideology as the main factor of radicalisation. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police defines it as a process by which individuals "are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views … [and who] espouse or engage in violence or direct action as a means of promoting political, ideological or religious extremism" (Smith 2009).

In this line of argumentation, radicalisation is defined across ideologies, but always in contrast to democracy. For instance, van den Bos defines radicalisation as a process of growing willingness to pursue and/or support radical changes in society (in an undemocratic manner, if necessary) that conflict with, or could pose a threat to, the democratic legal order (van den Bos, 2018). This testifies to the fact that radicalisation in political definitions continues to be associated with violence and extremist actions. Schmid argues that what is generally meant by radicalisation is the "individual or

group process of growing commitment to engage in acts of political terrorism" (Schmid, 2013: 1). Low levels of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds were not found to be characteristic of terrorists (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003).

UNESCO's definition includes references to "related oppositionist objectives", defined broadly also in relation to "democracy". In the definition of Dutch Security Services, radicalsation speaks about a growing readiness to pursue and/or support – if necessary, by undemocratic means – far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a threat to, the democratic order" (Dutch Security Services, AIVD, 2005). Similarly, the 2019 UK Prevent Strategy works with radicalisation as "the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism" (UK Prevent Strategy, 2011). The Danish Intelligence Services that specifically focuses on "violent radicalisation" as a process by which a person, to an increasing extent, accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective." (Danish Intelligence Services, PET, 2009).

Cognitive Approaches to Radicalisation

Wiktorowicz (2005) introduced the notion of "cognitive opening" – the moment when an individual who faces discrimination, socioeconomic crisis, and political repression is trying to understand life events and suddenly his/hers previously accepted beliefs are challenged and s/he becomes vulnerable and receptive to the new way of thinking—radicalised ideology. The perception of the elements of unfairness and injustice is also central (Moghaddam 2005). The individual thinks that his group does not have the same advantages as other groups, beliefs that sometimes are not supported by empirical evidence. These absolutistic demands for fairness are the starting point of the cognitive openness to radicalisation. In line with Moghaddam's results, Doosje et al. (2013) found the extent to which people experience deprivation, both as individual and as member of a group, predict the radical belief system's determinants. One of these determinants is perceived injustice, which in this model predicts perceived societal disconnectedness, defined as a perception that an individual does not belong to the mainstream of the society, an idea that feeds violent attitudes. Collective deprivation continues with symbolic threats, in-group superiority and attitudes toward violence. Another path includes realistic threats activated by both individual and collective deprivation that is a predictor of perceived distance toward other people that leads to violent attitude.

Some Observations to Existing Definitions

The three categories above are already remarkable because they share overlaps. For the purpose of the report, the authors of the report would like to stress and add two other points, which are present in some cases. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) points to a process through which an individual comes to adopt extremist political, social, or religious ideas and aspirations

which then serve to reject diversity, tolerance and freedom of choice, and legitimise breaking the rule of law and using violence towards property and people" (LENOS et al, 2017). We underline here legitimisation, because the seduction, promise and recruitment ethos are crucial in understanding the reasons that make individuals want to commit acts of violence against a political or social system. It offers a glimpse into a narrative of self-significance rather than a religious or political ideology behind radicalisation and points to grievances which can be located in this system.

Furthermore, the complexity of radicalisation is triggered by the fact that some observations and grievances stem from real problems in society and radical viewpoints which could, without escalation, be constructive viewpoints. A similar suggestion is formulated by the Australian government's "Living Safe Together" program, which makes it a case to show that practices of radicalisation can also suggest ideas and practices that take steps to improve practices of democracy. The processual approach to radicalisation operates across ideologies, whether right or left, and has different sets of working definition. But the attention towards incipient factors and grievances can eventually show the gaps within the liberal democratic systems, which continues to be taken as a neutral terrain. A more suitable definition should integrate grievances, factors pertaining to social and political conditions of the current legal and political mechanism within liberal democracy that do not fully represent or respond to individual interests or needs in society.

Indeed, most approaches to radicalisation tend to contrast liberal democracy to counterparts. Understanding right-wing phenomena, led political scientist Cas Mudde to arrive at twenty-six different ways to define the concept, which contained fifty-eight different criteria (Mudde 1996). Bernd Wagner defines "Right-Wing Radicalism" as a "social reality referring to a family of ideologies, which create organisations, movements, mentalities, fashion, groups and scenes, united by the characteristic constraining of the individual's freedom as 'zoon politikon' and of groups on the account of biological and/or ethnic-cultural reasons and criteria." These "suspend freedom and dignity", as well as "personal rights", support "non-democratic forms of government" and emphasises a sense of "morality and legal status" (Wagner, 2013:3). Arguably however, these have been issues noticeable in (neo)liberalism as well (Smith 2018).

Research on Germany puts forward a collection of essential characteristics of right-wing extremism, the 'consensus group' of social scientists defined right-wing extremism as an opinion based on inequality, the affinity to dictatorships, chauvinism, belittlement of National Socialism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and social Darwinism. However, while this definition is far too broad to identify right-wing terrorism, the consensus group's definition, with its focus on certain ideological characteristics (e.g. anti-Semitism) remains too narrow; it excludes certain right-wing groups or actors (e.g. Anders Behring Breivik, who would not be counted as a right-wing extremist under the consensus group definition due to his lack of anti-Semitism) (Heitmeyer 1992, 1997).

Given these aspects, a further definition of radicaliation could be: "Radicalisation is a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose", European Commission, ' Prevention of Radicalisation',

Measuring Radicalisation

For more than a decade, radicalisation has been a keyword in public discourse about terrorism, yet despite the widespread use of the term, there is no scholarly consensus on how to understand radicalisation. This fuzziness, which allows everybody to conceive of radicalisation as they like, is not only an intellectual problem of concern for scholars, but also a challenge for practitioners—police, civil servants, intelligence agents, social workers, prison guards, teachers, community workers—who are summoned to manage the phenomenon and communicate their worries about 'weak signals' and 'early signs of radicalisation'.

The drivers of radicalisation also require further research, which is currently hampered by difficulties in establishing valid measurement tools. The literature emphasises individual-level factors, often through studies of former terrorists or nationally representative surveys. These studies find that extremists are "want-mores" rather than "have-nots" (Lerner 1958, 368) and that extremism is linked to frustration, anger, and powerlessness (Krueger and Maleckova 2003; Horgan 2009).[1]

Research based on interviews with a group of former terrorists or small surveys based on convent samples of radicalised individuals suffers from selection bias and lacks a comparable group of non-radicalised subjects, prohibiting identification of possible drivers of radicalisation. Studies based on opinion polls face the issue of measurement: the high non-response rate is indicative of the social desirability bias, while some questions used now are just too difficult to interpret accurately.

Datasets and databases that can be of interest and use in flagging, preventing and countering radicalisation do exist, but they are few.

Generally, they work with case-by-case scenarios of events and actors. The contrasting working definitions of the term radicalisation also explains the mix of historical, statistical data and the relative absence of more complex perspectives, such as social or economic factors, primarily gender, economic conditions. At the same time, the degree to which indicators and factors cover the chain of events and pathways of radicalisation into more extremist actions is limited, and a more complex and extensive analysis of social and cultural conditions leading to radicalisation is required. This might explain why, though each model of extremist activity (radicalisation or violence) contains a unique set of risk factors and indicators, the models themselves, and the risk assessments associated with each model, display a significant amount of overlap (RTI International, 2018).

The databases and datasets generally work with data on personal background, situation background and temporal indication indexed in the database or the dataset used to further model risk factors, indicators help signal the presence of that outcome and risk factors which increase the likelihood of a given outcome.

[1] For an in-depth literature review regarding the drivers of radicalisation, see Deliverable 2.1, PARTICIPATION Project.

Broadly speaking, the research team considered databases and datasets that analyse contextual factors (demography, social media, social control, social exclusion) that might trigger radicalisation as well as those focusing more on personal and individual factors of convicted individuals charged of terrorism/violent extremism related crimes. Such a comprehensive overview can help understand better how the risk of radicalisation in given spaces and time.

Datasets on Radicalisation

Datasets and databases on radicalisation are difficult to identify as such, but many of the databases and datasets used for extremism can be useful to chart the process of radicalisation.

Most tools and methodologies refer to a few specific occurrences, and this is evident while undertaking the indexing work, target groups, namely perpetrators, and most notably focusing on Jihadism. They are mainly focused on the adult and male population and do not draw a clear line of separation between detection and prediction, and between violent extremism, terrorism and radicalisation processes.

The Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in the United States (PIRUS): This dataset contains deidentified individual-level information on the backgrounds, attributes, and radicalisation processes of over 2,200 violent and non-violent extremists who adhere to far-right, far-left, Islamist, or single-issue ideologies in the United States covering 1948-2018. Coded using entirely public sources of information, the PIRUS dataset is among the first efforts to understand domestic radicalisation from an empirical and scientifically rigorous perspective.

It includes 147 variables that cover demographic, background, group affiliation, and ideological information for 1,473 violent and non-violent extremists from across the ideological spectrum. It employs demographics information, personal information, plot and consequences information, radical group information, radicalisation information, socioeconomic information (See Table 2).

Studies have used this database using comparative descriptive statistics and multivariate logistic regression techniques to produce life-course narratives of individuals who were radicalised in the United States. Through qualitative comparative analysis, which determines the causal conditions and pathways most salient for explaining the journey from radicalisation to violence, some particular factors point to the importance of certain indicators. Findings show the importance of considering age and gender when designing prevention and intervention programs (Jensen, LaFree 2016). Age as indicator suggests that older individuals are linked to far-right views. Conversely, women are more attached to far-left views. Criminal activity and post-radicalisation single group membership are important indicators for radicalised people, and associating with others holding extreme views. Ideology is an important factor in the type of violent intervention that is used. Individuals with a far-right ideology and those motivated by Salafi jihadist ideologies are more likely than animal-rights and environmental activists to engage in violence. Psychological and emotional vulnerabilities – affecting self-significance, personal trauma, and collective crises - are other factors that need to be taken into account.

The Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in Australia (PIRA): This dataset captures 122 different variables relating to background, demographic, group affiliation, and contextual information on individuals who have radicalised to violent extremism in Australia from 1985-2020, and is modelled on START's Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in the United States (PIRUS) dataset. Like PIRUS, PIRA draws on open-source materials to identify and code for data on specific individuals identified as having radicalised to extremism and includes individuals espousing Islamist, far-right, far-left or single-issue ideologies. Importantly, these individuals were included in PIRA for either committing ideologically motivated illegal violent or non-violent acts, joining a designated terrorist organisation, or associating with an extremist group/organisation (also see START, 2018). Individuals have not been charged for a specific terrorist act, but have acted in an ideologically motivated way to indicate alignment with radicalised beliefs, causes and associates. To be eligible for inclusion, each person must meet the following criteria: 1) the individual radicalised while living in Australia, 2) they espoused or currently espouse ideological motives and 3) they showed evidence that their behaviours are/were linked to the ideological motives they espoused/espouses. Information has been collected across 122 different variables canvassing background, demographics, group affiliation and contextual information such as ideology, age, education, ethnicity and migrant status, plot details if accused or charged for a terrorist offence, extremist group affiliation, recruitment and radicalised social networks (e.g. relating to the location of exposure to radicalised groups), number and names of extremist associates, use of social media in terrorist plot or connecting to extremist groups/individuals, family, education and work history, contact with the criminal justice system, history of violence, and radicalisation catalysts (e.g. triggering events or grievances, studies employing the dataset confirm some of the findings in the US, primarily that social conditions, educational achievement, mental health problems, active engagement with online social media, exposure to other radicalised networks and associates, personal grievances and triggering events) are essential indicators of radicalisation (Cherney, Belton 2020).

Common features that can be seen in this data demostrate that they specifically focus on individuals and individual categorisations: location, context, personal histories, educational profiles. Information about the social context of individuals, correlated with indicators such as origin, family background country, is preferred to more complex and cross-analyses of social and economic conditions, class, to demonstrate potential early onset of radicalisation. However, these represent useful tools of charting to perform a meta-analysis, as research reports are systematically searched and coded on many sample-related and study-related variables, as well as on statistical outcomes (i.e., to calculate effect sizes).

The motivations, methods and goals of violent extremists differ substantially from those who commit “ordinary” violent acts, making it complicated, if not impossible, to measure risk factors (Borum, 2015). However, indicators presented in the tools selected do not focus on risks or motivations of radicalisation, in their ideological, political or social context. In addition, many of the indicators closely align with the five categories of promising variables identified by Monahan (2012, 2015). Specifically, Ideology (commitment to ideology justifying violence), Affiliations (personal contact with violent extremists), Grievances (perceived victim of injustice and grievances) and Moral

Emotions (feelings of hate, frustration, persecution, alienation) all have items that directly identify the presence of these concepts.

The primary gap in the indicators and data collected in the datasets is a lack of social/ideological connotations in the indicators, narratives about moral connotations, about values and self-interpretations of these acts by individuals themselves. This might also have to do with the "court economics", with many far-right or Jihadi extremists being prosecuted for specific but various criminal statues (e.g. causing an explosion, possession of illicit-arms, attempted murder) and in many cases receive equal to even longer prison sentences as they would have been liable to receive under terrorism legislation (Bliesener 2012). Nevertheless, an attention to narratives, keywords, self-definitions would greatly help a more complex understanding of radicalisation. In other words, "meso" and "macro" indicators and factors for radicalisation in the data collected are underdeveloped.

Databases Radicalisation

ACLED (The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project): Is a database which collects real-time data on the locations, dates, actors, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America & the Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe, and the United States of America. ACLED's data contains information on the specific dates and locations of conflict events, the types of events, the groups involved, reported fatalities, and changes in territorial control. Information on the data, contexts of individuals are provided when available.

Although ACLED offers a wide array of classification of incidents, some focusing on political radicalisation, contextual information on actors, however, socio-economic triggers are missing. Arguably, this is caused by the difficulty of collecting comparable data and context specific information.

		Database	Dataset	Criteria	Categorisation
Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in the United States (PIRUS)	Data		x	Islamist ("jihadism" as a militant methodology practiced by Sunni Islamist-Salafists who seek the immediate overthrow of incumbent regimes and the non-Muslim geopolitical forces which support them, in order to pave the way for an Islamist society which would be developed through martial power), far-right (s racial, pseudo-national, survivalist, far-left (overthrow of the capitalist system, including the United States government, and seek to replace it with a new, anti-imperialist economic order that empowers members of the "working class"), single issue.	1.**Individual** (1. the individual was arrested; 2. the individual was indicted of a crime; 3. the individual was killed as a result of his or her ideological activities; 4. the individual is/was a member of a designated terrorist organisation; or 5. the individual was associated with an extremist organisation whose leader(s) or founder(s) has/have been indicted of an ideologically motivated violent offense.), Location (US/ no) Ideology (at least one **1. Plot and Consequences** (Location, Data, Target - Businesses Government (general) Police MilitaryAbortion related Airports & aircraft Government (diplomatic) Educational institution Food or water supply Journalists & media Maritime (includes ports and maritime facilities) Non-governmental organization Other (e.g., ambulances, firefighters) Private citizens & property Religious figures/institutions Telecommunication Terrorists/non-state militia Tourists Transportation Utilities -Unknown) Attack Preparation Group Nature Group Activities and Dynamics
	Factors			Radicalisation Ideology Personal relationships Identity social exclusion	Demographics, Citizenship history, Ties to Society, Socioeconomic Status (Education, Finances and Employment, Change, Employment history) Socioeconomic stratum, Personal (Abuse and Psychological Concerns, Abuse Adult, Abuse type) , Family and Relationships, Criminal Activity
	Indicators			Beliefs Behaviours Sequence	Beliefs_Trajector, Behaviors_Trajectory, Radicalisation_Sequence
The Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior (MAROB)	Data		x	Networks, operationalization of networks	Characteristics (identity, type); state-organisation relations; extrernal support (from diaspora, foreign state, IGOs, NGOs); organisational behavior/strategy; nonviolent and violent behavior; criminal activitiy (money laundering, arms trafficking, drug production, human trafficking etc); official participation in crime (do state officials and security personnel cooperate with the organisation's criminal activity?); domestic crime networks (presence of established cooperation with domestic criminal networks); transnational crime networks (presence of established cooperation with transnational criminal networks)

	indicators			Grievances of organisation Organisational ideology	Dominant political/ economic/ cultural grievance The guiding ideology in addition to ethnicity (Does it advocate policies to: incorporate religion into public life/ redistribute wealth/ favor free market or traditional economic elites/ include or exclude women from public life? Does it advocate authoritarianism / democracy/ superiority of certain groups
	Factors			Cultural/economic/political	Ethnicity
Profiles of Individual Radicalisation in Australia (PIRA)	Data		x	Demographics, social control, ideology, social media	1. Demographics (gender, age, relationship status, highest level of education, history of alcohol or drug abuse, history of mental health problems and criminal record), 2. Ties to society (marital status, close family, work history, engagement in education), 3. Ideological affiliation, 4. The role of online social media in radicalisation (no known role, played a role but was not the primary means, was the primary means), 5. Severity of online media social activity (passive, active)
	Indicators			Social learning	Whether an individual was a member of a formal or informal extremist group Whether an individual was actively recruited, either from current radical associates, friends, family or others Whether an individual was a member of a close-knit group of peers or radical clique
	Factors			Individual and collective strains	1. Individuals (perception of their group as being victimised, subjected to injustice or under threat by authorities or government) 2. Event significance (no significant event which was directly influential or related to one's radicalisation; significant events direclty related to radicalisaton: 1. September 11, 2. Syrian Civil War, 3. Afghanistan/Iraq War, 4. Emergence of the Islamic State, 5. Events which generated grievances (i.e. being watched by security agencies and police), 6. War on Terror, 7. US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, 8. Assad regime, 9. Other personal events or experiences)

In all these cases, the selection refers to Jihadi radicalisation, with little possibility of identifying patterns in far-right or separatist phenomena. The PIRUS project is one notable exception, as it looks at both far-right extremism and far-left extremism, reflecting the divisions within US politics. Similarly RADAR focuses on observable behavioural indicators related to an individual's identity (social context, ideology and criminal action orientation) and their potential for coping. Regarding Radar, they are not used or specifically designed to be used within prisons but focus on individuals in the general population who manifest signs of radicalisation.

Generally, indicators are socio-economic (e.g. class, criminality), historical (e.g. family), cultural (e.g. ethnicity, background) and biographical (ideology, beliefs). Cultural factors are less charted by the initiatives, and primarily when it comes to the far-right. For instance, culturally, there are very different responses to the government, particularly law enforcement in Europe (distrust or trust). This is not to suggest that each individual member of a community shares the same opinions and experiences of the community at large, though. Psychological factors are the prime focus. An important aspect related to "modus operandi", for instance the typology of action and attack.

The indicators generally range from "macro" (cultural, ideological) to "micro" (age, biography).

A notable addition which might enrich the field are indicators on messages, discourses, and narratives.). Another important addition is adding hate crimes to indicators on terrorism (that is radicalisation) on the right-wing, which would give great nuanced perspectives. "As the legal label 'terrorism' seems inadequate in many countries to realistically grasp the phenomenon of extreme right-wing violence and terrorism, a more holistic descriptive framework is warranted." (Kohler, ICCT 2018).

A necessary indicator to emphasise, primarily because it is not approached consistently in the databases and datasets analysed, is gender. Although gender is taken for granted in relation to males, gender self-identification and orientation are not included in the indicators. The self-identification is crucial to understand the process of radicalisation.

An overview on polarisation

From social conflict to violence: the crucial role of polarisation

In recent years, policies to counter radicalisation and violent extremism have started to shift their focus to polarisation processes (Kubin and von Sikorski, 2021). The reason is that the dynamics of contrast and division within a society were identified as fertile ground from which extremism and violence can emerge. It therefore becomes a priority, from a prevention perspective, to intercept and analyse polarising dynamics in order to avoid a possible escalation of conflict (RAN, 2017; Brandsma, 2020).

But what is meant by polarisation? The term figuratively means opposition, incompatibility, dichotomy, and in political language is used to indicate the marked tendency of the electorate to concentrate votes on two opposing parties or groups of parties. The term in the social sciences identifies the concentration of opposing values and ideas in society, and thus the tendency of the population to side with one of the two poles.

Polarisation is not a negative process because it is a manifestation of conflict, which in scientific, and especially sociological, thinking is now understood as an ineradicable component of society and an agent of transformation. Conflict is in fact a primary social relation, practically present when two individuals, two groups or two communities enter into mutual relations. Modern societies are characterised by experiences such as "conflictual societies" (Freund, 1983). In particular, polarisation and conflict are an integral part of democracies and pluralistic societies.

Starting from this neutral concept of conflict and polarisation, however, it is essential to understand the factors that come dangerously into play in this process of opposition, risking transforming a latent conflict into a violent and organised confrontation.

The processual dynamics of the phenomenon of polarisation is very clear within some models elaborated by scholars of the peace research (Kriesberg 1982, 1984; Gasl, 1982, 1997). In particular, Fiedrich Gasl (1997) elaborates a model of conflict escalation in 9 phases through which it is possible to grasp a sort of logic, internal to the same conflictual relations and free from the motivations of the individuals. This long and gradual process identifies polarisation as the second phase. The first phase defined as 'hardening' is characterised by the crystallisation of opposing points of view: groups begin to develop a collective conflictual identity by marking differences with the other party. The second phase is precisely that of 'debate and polarisation' where moments of opposition multiply and conflictual use is made of debate. Indeed, the role of communication is central in this phase: each side tries to gain an advantage instead of seeking a solution. The debate becomes radicalised and there is real incommunicability between the parties.

The interesting element that emerges from Gasl's model is the identification of precise phases that allows someone to intervene in the conflict in a rational and beneficial manner. According to the scholar, when someone is within the first three phases it is still possible to resolve the dispute, to find points of contact before the causes of the conflict are no longer seen in terms of incompatible points of view but are considered as rooted in the characteristics of the "other". The identification of the antagonistic group as the "enemy" is in fact the harbinger of violence.

The enemy is no longer simply an adversary, it has an identity profile that is strongly connoted as a symbolic construction: it is the result of precise historical, cultural, social and political circumstances that give rise to collective processes of labelling, on the basis of which the enemy takes shape and acquires a threatening substance (Alexander, 2006).

Analysing this process means in fact understanding not only the 'objective' dimension of the conflict (economic interests, unequal distribution of resources, power rivalry, etc.) but also the 'subjective' one, understood as the set of values, perceptions, cognitive schemes, narratives, etc., which are the basis of the process of enemy construction.

Stereotyping is at the basis of the process of enemy construction, and therefore closely linked to the phenomenon of polarisation. This dynamic of redefining relations between groups and communities is activated crisis situations and during complex social events whereby certain groups are identified as antagonists and as obstacles to a positive transformation of the situation. The stereotype is a socially shared belief, articulated in a set of typified characteristics - often according to arbitrary criteria - and attributed to a category of people. Stereotypes are a means of reducing cognitive complexity, introducing principles of order but increasing distance and abstraction. Stereotyping, however, does not ineluctably produce the figure of the enemy, further elements must intervene to achieve the extreme ‘negativisation’ of the ‘Other’. In addition to the cognitive dimension, there must also be evaluative and emotional dimensions and a particular construction of identity. The latter is constructed in a self-referential and narcissistic way so that the positive stereotypes of one's own group are accompanied by negative stereotypes of the ‘Other’ (Toscano, 2000). The negative and degrading stereotype destroys the social identity of the enemy, activating that process of 'dehumanisation' that denies the enemy's humanity and facilitates his symbolic and physical elimination. The first signs of this process are social distance, measured by the level of social interaction between groups, and the degrading and stigmatising language characterised by the shift from 'you' to 'them'. The process of enemy construction is completed when ‘Evil’ becomes the constitutive principle of the nature of the enemy itself and is no longer comprehensible through the categories of morality and justice (Arendt, 1963; 2001). From the sociological point of view, the enemy/evil combination becomes a real common heritage through the mediation of group processes with a high emotional content. Thus groups are formed in which feelings of love and hate become more intense and reasoning more extreme and virulent. Within such a highly polarised context, all those who remain neutral and do not take sides are also considered 'enemies'.

The multiple definitions of polarisation

In the literature, the topic of polarisation has been approached mainly in terms of political polarisation, understood as differences and ideological distance between parties and their electorate. More recently, it has been broadened to include a "societal" perspective that includes differences in socio-economic status beyond the strictly political and ideological differences (McCoy and Rahman, 2016; Guan at al. 2021). Moreover, some scholars have highlighted the centrality of the emotional aspect, whereby polarisation is based on the concept of social distance and is manifested through the emotional reaction of party supporters to partisan divisions (Iyengar at al., 2012).

By reviewing the different definitions of polarisation that have been proposed in the literature so far, we try to provide an overview of the aspects that have been most analysed on this phenomenon with the aim of identifying the drivers of social polarisation and the possible development of indicators for its measurement.

Political polarisation

Ideological polarisation refers to the divergence of political opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and stances of political adversaries (Dalton, 1987; 2008). Sartori indicated polarisation, together with the number of parties, as one of the two criteria underlying his typology of party systems (Sartori, 1976; 2005). Mass polarisation was defined as an ideological distance measured on the left-right continuum, i.e. a ten-point scale ranging from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Sartori first used the presence of large anti-system parties (whose messages aim to undermine the legitimacy of the political systems they oppose) as an indicator of systemic ideological distance. Later, when data from the eight-nation study and Eurobarometer polls became available, he switched to quantitative measures of polarisation. The subsequent index of ideological polarisation of the party system thus measured the distance between the relevant parties occupying the extremes of a left-right continuum. This index was calculated using the average self-locations of the partisans of the most extreme political parties (Sartori 1982). Along these lines, Dalton (2008) then developed his famous polarisation index, which uses voters' perceptions to measure the relative position of each party along the left-right scale, weighted by the parties' vote shares. Most current analyses of polarisation use Dalton's index or revised versions of it.

Political scientists Paul DiMaggio, John Evans and Bethany Bryson (1996) gave the following definition: "Polarisation (sic.) is both a state and a process. Polarisation (sic.) as a state refers to the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum. Polarisation (sic.) as a process refers to the increase in such opposition over time." (DiMaggio et al. 1996, 693). Polarisation is thus the distance between different (political) opinions. If these opinions

diverge, we can see a process of polarisation. If the distance between opinions is already very large, we see a state of polarisation.

In their study, the authors attempt to explain the large gap between the perceived polarisation in public discourse and the observed stability (or convergence) in public opinion distributions. To analyse this phenomenon, they used two surveys, the NES (National Election Survey) and the GSS (Generated Social Survey). The two measurement scales were very similar and used together they completed a series of items considered useful for analysing citizens' opinions on a series of social issues where the phenomenon of polarisation is best observed. The two scales included dimensions relating to: 1) political philosophy, 2) Election participation, 3) Political activism, 4) Aid to minorities, 5) Attitude towards abortion, 6) Role of women, 7) Opinion on other groups (people of colour, poor, liberals, conservatives), 8) Attitude towards religion, 9) Gender role in the family, 10) Attitude on sexuality, 11) Attitude on crime and justice, 12) Attitude on sex education, 13) Divorce law, 14) Preacher in school.

The study thus shows this paradox between the perception of a high level of polarisation in public discourse and the actual opinions and attitudes in public opinion. This discrepancy can be motivated by many factors that could come into play: possible institutional changes, changes in the resources available for the mobilisation of different groups, increase in factionalism and electoral volatility, decline in cultural authority etc.

Another interesting study that instead focuses on the relationship between political culture and protest behaviour is the one carried out by Kleiner (2018). More specifically, it addresses the question of whether public opinion polarisation of the social environment influences individuals' decision to participate in legitimate demonstrations. The author argues that mass polarisation regarding normative notions puts many citizens on the defensive regarding their values and beliefs. In an environment of polarisation, people become insecure, i.e., they experience deprivation, which in turn drives them to political action.

To measure polarisation and its possible impact on protest behaviour, three issues were identified: 1. immigration, 2. social inequality and 3. Homosexuality.

Analysis of the data confirms the hypothesis that the mobilising effect of polarisation particularly affects individuals who are emotionally or cognitively quite involved in politics and therefore more concerned with developments in their socio-political environment. In particular, it emerges that the values that lie at the heart of people's ideologies are strong motivators of protest. This study thus gives rise to an important reflection on the relationship between the polarisation of public opinion and participatory inequality. Having shown that extremist citizens are more likely to protest than moderates, it is likely that their views will be taken more into account by politicians. Polarisation may therefore act as an amplifier, stimulating participatory inequality and thus also leading to inequality in policy choices and outcomes.

Societal polarisation

Recent studies have broadened the analysis of polarisation by trying to go beyond understanding of polarisation in strictly political, ideological and partisanship terms. According to some scholars, it is also useful to broaden the perspective to include social and economic dimensions, since polarisation within a society can also occur through dimensions other than the classic ideological dimension measured on the left vs. right scale. Identities, and a possible polarisation process, can be formed around various cleavage lines. McCoy and Rahaman (2016), through the analysis of some case studies, identify the following: religious/secular, national/cosmopolitan, traditional/modern, urban/rural, austerity/anti-austerity, economic ideology of market/socialism, participatory/liberal conceptions of democracy.

"Societal polarisation" therefore refers to processes of categorisation and polarisation between groups that extend to spaces of social coexistence (communities, families, churches, etc.), which can also reach extreme forms of psychological and physical exclusion.

The study seeks to identify the different types of drivers that characterise different types of polarisations and the links between them. The causal mechanisms of polarisation are divided into three levels: 1. Level of agency, 2. Institutional level, and 3. Structural level.

The first level is divided into elite-led polarisation and mass-led polarisation. The former refers to the top-down action of elites and leaders who in certain situations exploit existing cleavages to achieve certain goals. Electoral strategies are a classic example where this mechanism is often activated through the elaboration of divisive symbolic narratives. Conversely, when we speak of the polarisation of civil society, we refer to its action in the public sphere, for example through demonstrations and protests. At the individual level, it is also possible to understand the mechanisms of group polarisation. Studies in social psychology show how opinions tend to polarise along mutually exclusive identity markers when there are social interactions with like-minded people.

With respect to the structural, cultural and institutional level, the drivers of polarisation can be identified in some 'objective' elements such as economic inequalities, cultural divisions, ethnic fragmentation, etc. These are numerous cleavages present in the society. These are numerous cleavages present in a society that can produce competition for resources and power and can be exploited for divisive and conflictual purposes. The institutional design may also contribute to polarisation, e.g. highly majoritarian electoral systems or party political systems which, by excluding certain parties from political life, encourage their radicalisation.

Affective polarisation

Affective polarisation is based on reflecting the role of identity in politics (Mason, 2018), and how the salience of identity within groups (e.g., political parties) can exacerbate animosity towards the

out-group (Gaertner et al., 1993; Iyengar et al., 2012). Affective polarisation assesses the extent to which people like their political allies and dislike their political opponents (Iyengar et al., 2012).

The authors were part of a debate on the degree of polarisation of the American mass public, where the positions of the so-called 'maximalists' and 'minimalists' were opposed. While the former argued that partisans' views on policies had become more extreme over time (Abramowitz, 2008), the latter (Fiorina and Abrams, 2008) argued that the majority of Americans remained centrist, and that the small centrifugal movement that had occurred reflected the ordering, i.e. the increased association, between partisanship and ideology. Instead, the authors propose an alternative definition of polarisation, based on the classical concept of social distance (Bogardus 1947). This concept considers the emotional reaction (affect) in a two-party system such as the US, whereby affective polarisation results from the interaction of two simple elements: how strongly partisans dislike the opposing party (out-party) and how strongly they care about their own (in-party). Attachment to the preferred political force and antagonism towards the opponent are measured, at the mass level, by means of the "feelings" thermometer ratings included in a series of national and cross-national polls.

The authors argue that politics-based division is only one way of defining partisan polarisation and propose an alternative indicator deemed more diagnostic of mass polarisation: the extent to which partisans see each other as an anti-partisan out-group. The ultimate test of social identity (Tajfel 1970; Tajfel and Turner 1979) requires not only a positive feeling for one's own group, but also a negative feeling towards those who identify with opposing groups. Thus, to the extent that party identification represents a meaningful group affiliation, the most appropriate test of polarisation is affective, not ideological, identity.

In their ground-breaking work, Lyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012, p. 407) thus demonstrate "that Democrats and Republicans not only dislike the opposing party more and more, but also impute negative traits to the ranks of the outside party." The net effect is a situation in which party supporters show intense dislike and animosity towards the opposing party and its partisans.

There is an interesting explanation that the authors put forward with respect to the intensification of inter-party animus after examining the interaction between political preferences and party thermometer ratings. The 'principled' dislike for the other party is said to be only a small component of the interparty influence, so it is plausible, according to the scholars, that the intensification of polarisation can be attributed to political campaign rhetoric.

Pernicious polarisation

McCoy and Somer coined the concept of "pernicious polarisation" to define severe polarisation that divides societies into 'Us versus Them' camps, based on a single dimension of difference that overshadows all others (McCoy and Somer, 2019a; 2019b).

This type of political and social polarisation is not based on ideological distance between parties, voters or leaders, because it is argued that in contemporary divisive democracies there are several important cleavages that cannot be measured with the classic left-right scale (McCoy at al., 2018).

Moreover, the division of the electorate into two antagonistic camps, internally united and externally separated by a predominant cleavage, implies the use of a relational concept, which considers both loyalty towards the internal group 'Us' and hostility towards the external group 'Them'. Consequently, both measures of support and rejection for political parties are combined to assess the strength of polarisation (Lauka at al., 2018).

According to the authors, a polarised society exhibits certain features, which the mere existence of difference of opinion or multitude of identities cannot cause or explain. Some of the most striking features of pernicious polarisation that clearly distinguishes the situation from a healthy pluralism in democratic society are:

- *Collapse of multiple cleavages into one dominant cleavage or boundary.*
- *Articulation of demands and interests around those identities.*
- *Two camps characterised in moral terms of 'good' and 'evil'.*
- *Treatment of these identities as mutually exclusive and antagonistic, thus negating the possibility of the existence of common interests between different groups.*
- *Greater intra-group cohesion and lesser inter-group bonding.*
- *Increasing level of stereotyping and prejudice due to lack of direct communication and/or social interaction with the opposing group(s).*
- *The centre drops out and the polarised camps attempt to label individuals and groups in society as one or the other.*

This antagonistic relationship manifests itself in spatial and psychological separation of the polarised groups.

These factors highlight the difference between a "pernicious" polarisation and a polarisation that can be described as “benign” by McCoy and Somer (2018). Indeed, the latter can be a vehicle for democratisation, a more just and equitable society with equal opportunities for all. It can therefore be defined as a democratising polarisation. Very often it is a bottom-up process triggered by social movements. When they recognise and fight against injustice or oppression, the first thing that is expected is a hardening of positions, as the dominant or privileged groups feel threatened and will reject their demands. If the public pressure of the social movement becomes strong enough, polarisation develops into democratisation.

Below is the table elaborated by McCoy and Rahaman (2016) summarising the types of polarisations, the different dimensions of cleavage and the relevant case studies analysed.

Toward a framework for polarisation (McCoy and Rahaman, 2016)

TOWARD A FRAMEWORK FOR POLARISATION			
	Definition/Description	Country Examples	
Type of polarisation	**Overall definition**		
Political.	The normal multiplicity of interests and identities in a society align along a single dimension, splitting into two opposing camps with impermeable boundary and perceived zero-sum interests and mutually-exclusive identities. Adversaries become enemies to be eliminated.	Egypt, Turkey, Hungary, Thailand, Venezuela, Greece, Bangladesh, United States.	
Societal.	Citizens internalise the partisan divide in their daily life spatially and socially, and view the 'other' as posing existential threats to their way of life.	Bangladesh, Venezuela, Turkey, Thailand, Greece, (emerging) United States.	
Dimensions of cleavage			
Single dimension.	Cleavages overlap to point of forming a single boundary between two camps, with one cleavage becoming the dominant one in political discourse.	Venezuela, Egypt, Hungary, Thailand, Bangladesh.	
Multiple dimensions.	No single dimension is dominant in political discourse, but multiple cleavages aligning into two camps.	United States	
Types of Cleavage		**Dominant discursive cleavage**	**Underlying**
Populist – elite/people.		Venezuela, Thailand, Greece.	
Religious/secular.		Turkey, Egypt, Bangladesh.	
Globalist/nationalist.		Hungary, Turkey, Greece.	
Cultural -- Traditional/modern.			Greece, Turkey.
Urban/rural.		Thailand.	
Economic ideology – market/socialist; austerity/anti-austerity.		Greece.	Venezuela.
Political Ideology – concept of democracy (participatory/liberal; royalist/liberal).			Venezuela, Thailand.
Polarisation driver			

Elite-led.		Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Thailand, Venezuela, Bangladesh.
Societal-led.		Latent societal drivers in Thailand and perhaps in Venezuela and Greece.
Outcome for newly included group/leader	**Outcome for democracy**	
New incumbent/group removed from power; return of old elite.	Possible democratic collapse.	Egypt 2013, Thailand (2006,08,2013), Venezuela and Turkey (attempted).
Alternation in power or divided government.	Gridlock, instability, democratic careening	Greece, Thailand (2006-15), Bangladesh, Venezuela (2015-16), United States.
Newly-included group/incumbent stays in power through growing authoritarianism.	Democracy under threat.	Turkey, Venezuela (2004-13), Hungary.

False polarisation

The concept of 'false' polarisation is intended to unveil those cognitive and affective mechanisms highlighted by behavioural science according to which, although partisan gaps between groups are real, participants dramatically overestimate their magnitude as well as overestimate people's ideological coherence. According to Ferbach and Van Boven (2021), such mechanisms are very dangerous because they reinforce existing polarisation and inhibit compromise. Underlying this analysis are meta-perceptions, i.e. people's perceptions of others. Recent research has shown that people consistently tend to overestimate the negative perceptions of out-group members towards them. Furthermore, it was shown that these negative meta-perceptions were higher among those who expressed more ideological extremism and predicted a desire for social distance from members of the other group. According to the authors, 'false' polarisation and such negative meta-perceptions are exacerbated by three basic cognitive and affective processes:

- *Categorical thinking: natural process of complexity reduction that amplifies differences.*
- *Simplification: simplification of the world with respect to reality.*
- *Emotional amplification: politicised and competitive contexts invite emotional reactions, further amplifying the processes of categorisation and simplification.*

Polarisation and communication online

As we have repeatedly pointed out, communication plays a fundamental role in the process of polarisation. In particular, in order to understand the role of mass media in polarisation processes and in preparing for conflict, it is necessary to briefly reflect on their nature and functioning. One characteristic of the media is that they provide information that simplifies reality by favouring the creation of a shared symbolic environment, especially in times of destabilisation and crisis. They thus predispose to the creation of public spheres of discussion within which opinions are structured and reinforced. Manipulations and distortions, more or less intentional, are 'physiological' within the so-called 'media logic' that is based on the simplification of messages and the activation of emotionally loaded mechanisms. All these features are particularly functional to Manichean and oppositional thinking structures.

With the emergence and spread of social media, these effects seem to have been amplified and there is an open debate among scholars on the relationship between online and offline polarisation processes. One of the most debated questions concerns the possible effects of social media on polarisation and other processes such as radicalisation and violent extremism. Some studies show that social media actively increase offline polarisation through the formation of echo chambers, i.e. by facilitating the ability of citizens to seek out sources of information they find agreeable and to exclude others that prove dissonant (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Stroud, 2010). Other studies point out that they merely reflect offline polarisation (Vaccari at al., 2016), while others even argue that, given their nature, social media actually helps to reduce polarisation because they offer users a greater variety of information and opinions that they would not have been available in their offline social networks (Bakshy at al., 2015). Certainly, this form of media has specific traits: diffusion, versatility and, above all, interactivity. The latter aspect is fundamental if we consider the importance of interacting with and fostering emotional involvement among the public 2.0 platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram that facilitate person-to-person interaction. However, it is important to acknowledge the risks inherent in new technologies, such as the 'algorithmic dimension'. Social media algorithms are based on a selection mechanism that tends to offer personalised content, thus constantly exposing individuals with certain opinions to content in line with their beliefs. In so doing they limit the spectrum of different opinions, fostering polarisation and prejudice.

Recent studies are measuring online polarisation through various methods. One of these is the computerised linguistic analysis of discussions on social media. An example of this is the study of an Australian Day celebration campaign on YouTube (Bliuc at al., 2020). The aim of the analysis was to analyse online interactions in the form of user comments and replies in order to test how indicators of polarisation are affected by intragroup and intergroup interaction.

The measurement was carried out using software (Linguistic Inquiry Word Count Software) to process textual data from online contributions and to create quantitative variables to capture polarisation. The categories and subcategories in the dictionary are both linguistic and psychological dimensions. The indicators used are:

- *Social identification: first person plural pronouns (e.g. we, our, us) and third person plural words (e.g. they, their, they'd) were used to capture intergroup language ("Us" vs. "Them") and social identification within the respective ideological field.*
- *Certainty of position: language used to measure the level of certainty of position, as a positive indicator (e.g. always, never), to capture provisionally a negative indicator was used (e.g. perhaps).*
- *Psychological distance: indicators were used to express three different feelings through language: anxiety (e.g. worried, fearful), anger (e.g. hated, killed, annoyed), hostility (e.g. swear words).*

The research shows a dual pathway of polarisation (intra-group and inter-group) that shows how different interactions produce different effects: inter-group interactions would increase the feeling of hostility, while intra-group interactions decrease the hesitancy to express the group position. What emerges from the analysis is that these online interactions are not simple exchanges of opinions but are structured as two opposing psychological groups proposing and defending conflicting narratives and reproducing polarising patterns that can occur within and between other conflict groups.

In addition to analysing the language used by users in their online interactions, studies aimed at measuring online polarisation in social media can also analyse users' orientations through the dissemination or otherwise of certain ideologically oriented content. For example, a study on political polarisation in the US attempted to measure this phenomenon through the analysis of a large longitudinal Twitter dataset of 679,000 users over the period 2009-2016 (Garimella and Weber, 2017). In order to observe the signs of political polarisation, the focus was on the tendency to follow or disseminate content with partisan information along the left-right political spectrum. In particular, it was analysed:

- *Their network, i.e. how people follow political and media accounts.*
- *Their tweeting behaviour, i.e. whether they retweet content from both sides.*
- *Their content - how partisan the hashtags they use were.*

This research shows that over 8 years, online polarisation has increased and that, depending on the measure, the relative change has been 10%-20%.

As the analysis of online extremist narratives in task 4.1 "Literature review on counter-narrative communication strategies" showed clearly, extremist groups have been able to adapt to technological advancement and current social norms to effectively disseminate their narratives. These groups communicate through alternative media, such as blogs, websites, forums and traditional social media platforms. In particular, far-right actors are very active online in disseminating offensive discourse, hate campaigns and misinformation. These extremist narratives are to be considered both the cause and the effect of polarising dynamics both online and offline, so there is an urgent need to understand the indicators and drivers of polarisation processes in

order to help formulate techniques, actions and policies for 'de-polarisation', i.e. capable of intercepting the first signs of a clash that can degenerate into processes of radicalisation and violent extremism.

An example of polarisation dataset

The most comprehensive proposal on polarisation indicators is certainly the one elaborated by the European project BRAVE (McNeill-Wilson et al. 2019). The study aims to identify a framework of what are broadly conceptualised as factors, operating on macro, meso and micro levels, which may either increase or decrease the likelihood that communities become fragmented and polarised within a European context.

By analysing and synthesising the current literature on polarisation, the authors have identified 20 indicators that help to understand the causes and social processes of polarisation that can foster the development of violent extremism. The indicators are divided into 4 categories:

- *Socio-economic.*
- *Historical.*
- *Cultural.*
- *Communication-based.*

For each category, the indicators are further classified according to the three macro, meso and micro levels.

At the socio-economic level, the indicators identified are financial inequality and deprivation, the role of state welfare and minority-state interaction. Welfare decline and privatisation are often communicated as being linked to migration, fuelling polarisation. The development of diversity- and minority-based recruitment, access to employment and education programmes can also contribute to polarisation.

At historical level, the influence of the far-right is mentioned as a relevant factor of polarisation and the representation of minority groups and opinions at government levels. Individuals and groups without political rights can take action to redress inequalities. Laws protecting minority groups also have an impact on polarisation, as states with limited or less consistently enforced legislation on hate crimes and minority rights are more likely to legitimise racism and community division. Individual voting behaviour is also considered relevant, as the likelihood of voting significantly for populist parties or policies can fuel community division and trigger processes of polarisation.

At the cultural level, the main indicators relate to the role of identity and the perception of self and others. Narrow and exclusive identity constructions foster polarisation. Continuous coexistence with different identity groups perceived as hostile and threatening fosters feelings of victimhood and humiliation that are at the basis of the processes of social construction of the enemy.

Finally, at the communication level, productive exclusionary practices, hate legislation and polarising media content are identified as central factors of polarisation. Polarising communications play an important role through the dissemination of violent material by extremist groups and also by governmental actors. In addition, an increasing role is played by selective social media communications that operate through algorithms, that direct users towards increasingly extreme content through the development of so-called online 'echo chambers'.

Below is a table summarising the proposed categorisation of polarisation indicators by BRAVE.

BRAVE Polarisation Indicators

Category	Macro	Meso	Micro
Socio-Economic	State Welfare Segregation	Minority Recruitment Diversity Programmes	Individual Assets
Historical	Far-Right Political Influence Laws Protecting Minorities	Lack of Representation Inter-Group Conflict	Individual Voting Behaviours
Cultural	Lack of Transnational Identity	Lack of Cultural Mixing Ignorance of Minority Culture Restrictions on Minority Symbols	Individual Perceptions of Self and Other
Communication-Based	Exclusionary Production Practices	Polarising Communication Online	Selective Communications

	Hate Speech Legislation Polarising Media Content		

Gaps, limitations and conclusions

Violent extremism and terrorism databases provide a valuable tool to keep track of how groups evolve over time. By focusing alternatively on ideologies, violent actions and/or, more frequently, on convictions for terrorism or violent extremism, they contribute to assess the threat they represent to societies and institutions across the globe. However, considering the ever-changing nature of these socio-political phenomena, these databases still present some gaps.

Firstly, none or few databases pay specific attention to violent extremism or to terrorism among youth and women. On the contrary, as 2.1 deliverable of Participation project has shown, these fragile categories must be taken into consideration and addressed, both in P/CVE programs as well as in the construction of ad hoc databases, which constitute the backbone and the benchmark of any intervention.

Secondly, the inclusion criteria of some databases are not available, which means that defining a framework regarding the selection mechanisms of databases tracing violent extremism and terrorism is still a complex task.

Thirdly, since violent extremism and terrorism often overlap at definitional level, the data constituting the benchmark for the databases often coincide, meaning that datasets tracing violent extremism and those tracking terrorism might observe the same phenomenon. The frequent conflation of the features characterising these two distinct phenomena risks erasing the differences between these experiences and, consequently, create ill-defined governmental reactions.

Fourthly, many databases rely on data concerning violent attacks (or explicit threat thereof) and convictions for violent extremism or terrorism, while an in-depth investigation of the socio-economic dynamics at the heart of these phenomena is still missing. Indeed, whenever taking into consideration different forms of ideological violent extremism, it should also be analysed the nexus between radicalising drivers at meso and macro level – such as socio-economic dynamics, political tensions, demographic issues – which constitute important features to understand and track violent extremism and terrorism.

Finally, online violent extremism and terrorism, as well as online propaganda, are still under-investigated in databases. The lack of this type of research is mainly due to two factors. On the one hand, the volatile nature of virtual environment makes tracking online violent extremism and terrorism more difficult and complex. On the other, the pre-emptive action of security agencies in banning online extremist websites, blogs or channels renders open-source research and investigation nearly impossible.

On the radicalisation processes, one general remark on the data selected is that datasets and databases capture the reality that there are few tools or models considering radicalisation independent from violent extremism. More recent sets of data in Europe on the left are missing,

with some notable exceptions regarding animal rights or environmentalist extremists, integrated next to the far-left. This is accounted for by the absence of a unified definition or concept of radicalisation and the fact that it is not a crime in and of itself. Yet certain national datasets of radicalised persons allow for estimation of the scale of this phenomenon. Existing knowledge and databases on radicalisation focus mostly on terrorist actors or incidents (e.g., on global incidents, Dugan, LaFre, Cragin & Kasupski, 2008), on right-wing terrorism and extremism in Germany (Koehler, 2014). In other words, databases and datasets do not consider situations that did not necessarily lead to extremist acts, or hold valuable date on radicalisation. Primarily because the data is geared towards the radicalisation situations, individuals, context and conditions that affect, even if indirectly, in the pathway to violent extremism, data can be a good indicator of radicalisation situations.

For most of the databases and datasets the core continues to be Jihadi terrorism, and specifically on individual cases of radicalisation, trajectories and contexts. Databases and datasets consolidate personal information, origins and background. Less emphasis is being placed on socialisation or networks of aggregation. In terms of criteria and factors of radicalisation, some common traits are the social and cultural background, but these tend to be stereotypical (income, migration status). Few of these can provide valuable insights into recognising non-migrant background radicalisation in Europe.

Furthermore, because data and datasets are focusing primarily on the Jihadi elements, collection of relevant data for far-right extremism is less nuanced. There are few criteria and categorisation that consider the distinct move towards the internationalisation of right-wing extremists, who, although mostly organised into small, local groups, increasingly adhere or form new international identity movements.

Overall, de-radicalisation, disengagement, and counter-narrative indicators are missing in databases and datasets. Same can be said about overlapping narratives, for instance the pull of generally left-wing ideas among the far-right.

Left-wing definitions and criteria are most visible in the cases of American analyses, where historical movements are connected to more recent changes since 2016, and the emerging new wave in Democratic politics. The working definition of left-wing extremism is relevant for the category of radicalisation because these are generally defined as a group linked by a generalised aversion to the state and state institutions and a strong enmity to right-wing political parties.

Similarly, relatively few instruments deal with online polarisation, or formulate indicators or factors for the online sphere, despite the fact that a range of deviant behaviours are specifically driven by the affordances to the online sphere. Although these cannot be separated, databases and datasets should also make room for a review of factors and indicators for the online environment. This issue is particularly stark given the generational gap in how the role of the internet impacts relationships, communication and identity. There is a generation of young people who have grown up with the internet, social media etc., and it is an integrated part of their culture that cannot be separated from

other elements of their day-to-day existence. This needs to be considered when evaluating risk and resilience factors.

Gender is another aspect that stands out in the data selected and further analysis. A gendered perspective would allow for a nuanced understanding of the factors related to, for example, violence and recidivism amongst women and how these differ to those relevant for men.

Finally, with regards to polarisation, the main element that emerges from studies and research on it is the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the dimensions of analysis, indicators and measurement methods. Moreover, polarisation has so far been treated mainly in terms of ideological polarisation, while there is still very little research that embraces a broader concept of social polarisation.

Certainly, social polarisation is a very broad phenomenon that can be analysed through multiple dimensions and different disciplinary perspectives.

The proposal elaborated within the BRAVE project can be considered an important starting point in the study of social polarisation, because it succeeds in identifying and categorising a series of indicators based on the different structural dimensions (socio-economic, historical, cultural and communicative) divided into the three micro-meso-macro levels.

We also note that while the measurement of ideological polarisation can rely on more established measurement methods, there is still no clear consensus on the concept of 'affective' polarisation and appropriate measurement and evaluation methods, especially with respect to online polarisation. Future research should focus on finding standard methods of measurement to ensure greater validation and comparability.

Another gap that we would like to highlight is the total absence of studies relating to the gender dimension and youth. These aspects are at the centre of the ongoing analysis in WP2 of the present project, within Task 2. "Social polarisation, extremism and radicalism: a quantitative survey", which hass included the involvement of hundreds of young European students, and within Task 3. “Gender, extremism and radicalisation: qualitative research”. The results of these two studies may also contribute to identifying useful indicators for future research on polarisation.

A further gap that emerges is the insufficient deepening of the relations between the following dimensions of the polarisation process:

- *‘Objective’ and ‘subjective’ dimensions: drivers at structural, institutional and cultural level and drivers related to the set of perceptions, emotions and dispositions of the actors.*
- *Top-down and bottom-up dynamics: related to agency, i.e., the actors involved in the polarisation process and their role (elites, masses).*
- *Online and offline dimensions.*

The multiplicity of factors underlying the processes of political and social polarisation would in fact suggest adopting a perspective capable of capturing the circular causal relationship between the objective dimension, the subjective dimension and behaviour.

Guidelines for building a new database

Many of the datasets and databases focusing on the violent extremism can offer possibilities for developing insider knowledge and nuanced perspectives on radicalisation, but more work should be done on nuancing indicators and connecting indicators into clusters, so that they offer a complex network of indicators. Some of the gaps identified in 6.1 deliverable of the Participation project are visible in this preliminary report: they are focused on individual cases, there is an overwhelming interest in Jihadism, more recently the far-right type of radicalisation, but hybrid threats are generally ignored: normalisation of values of radicalisation (specifically on the right) in populist left-wing, or 'identitarian' movements. The overwhelming focus on Jihadist or Salafi actors takes away resources from the analysis of equally present and pernicious phenomena, such as far-right radicalisation. Indicators and data are increasingly more nuanced, looking for instance at political views, ideologies and moral beliefs, but these continue to focus on the individual level. This takes away from the potential to understand socialisation, networks of influence.

However, based on 6.2 analysis of databases and datasets tracing violent extremism, it is possible to identify a number of indicators and categories that should be taken in consideration to build the structure of the Prevention Tool Database (PTD).

These categories are divided and organised in two levels – namely, the individual and organisational level. Indicators falling into the first level refer to specific markers that help identify whether and when a single individual is a violent extremist. Indicators belonging to the organisational level help assessing whether a given group or movement can be defined as a violent extremist group.

Individual level

- *A violent extremist, to be considered as such, must subscribe to an extremist ideology – such as Salafi-jihadist ideology, left wing extremism (anarchism, environmental extremism etc.), right-wing extremism (white supremacism, neo-nazi, neo-fascist, anti-immigration, anti-abortion, anti-Muslim, xenophobic);*
- *The suspected extremist must have clear connections with extremist groups and/or adherent of extremist ideologies;*
- *When analysing a suspected violent incident, to be considered as an extremism it be perpetrated against people or property to further social, political, religious or ideological goals;*
- *The target of his/her attacks should be recognised as targets/enemies of extremist ideologies – e.g. immigrants or Muslims for far-right extremists;*
- *His/Her ideologies and practices must be considered as a threat to national or international peace and stability as well as to values of democratic societies.*

Group level

- *The group must suscribe to an extremist ideology - such as Salafi-jihadist ideology, left wing extremism (anarchism, environmental extremism etc.), right-wing extremism (white supremacism, neo-nazi, neo-fascist, anti-immigration, anti-abortion, anti-Muslim, xenophobic);*
- *When analysing a suspected violent incident, to be considered as extremism it be perpetrated against people or property to further social, political, religious or ideological goals;*
- *The ideologies and practices of the group must be considered as a threat to national or international peace and stability as well as to values of democratic societies.*

As the analysis regarding databases and datasets for radicalisation has shown, identifying clear-cut factors and indicators of such a phenomenon is rather complex. Indeed, since radicalisation is considered as a highly subjective process where different variables come into play and interact with each other, establishing when these variables are early signs of radicalisation considered is difficult and, above all, controversial.

Nonetheless, as highlighted in 2.1 deliverable devoted to a literature review of the drivers of radicalisation, it is possible to provide a number of guidelines that should be taken into consideration to build the Prevention Tools Database. Therefore, whenever observing a potential radicalising individual and/or group or movement, such a database should consider three different levels – micro, meso, and macro level – corresponding to three different groups of indicators and factors of radicalisation, corresponding to potential drivers of radicalisation. These three levels comprise socio-economic, historical, biographical, psychological and group dynamics.

Indicators at micro level

- *Demographics: gender, age, ethnicity;*
- *Biographical elements: socio-economic status, history of geographical movements, history of alcohol or drug abuse, highest level of education, history of mental health problems, criminal records;*
- *Ties to society: work history, family history, marital status, engagement in education;*
- *Individual signs of grievance: perception of being a victim, subject to injustice, identity crisis, marginalisation, social exclusion (real or perceived);*
- *Adherence to extremist ideologies, such as jihadism, far right extremism, left wing extremism, single issue.*

Indicators at meso level

- *Membership to formal or informal extremist groups;*

- *Mambership to non strictly political organizations (hoolingans groups, etc.)*
- *Radicalised family members and/or friends;*
- *Membership in online extremist channels, blogs, social media etc;*

Indicators at macro level

- *Significant and disruptive international or national events – related to extremism: e.g. 9/11 terrorist attacks, Syrian Civil War, Afghanistan/Iraq War, Emergence of the Islamic State, War on Terror, Assad regime, emergence of far right transnational movements;*
- *Significant and disruptive international and or national events – not strictly related to extremism: 2008 financial crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine War etc.*

When it comes to **polarisation**, several methods can be used to measure it. Opinion polls are the most widely used instrument to measure the discrepancy of opinions, membership of and identification with a group, and willingness to engage in politics. Through surveys and other quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques, it is possible to detect voting behaviour, political participation, protest or willingness to accept or use violence. All these aspects are useful indicators that can provide information on the degree of polarisation. Additional indicators of political polarisation are the number of extremist parties, their ideological orientation, voting patterns and political behaviour (McNeill-Wilson et al., 2019; Schmitt and Frantzmann, 2016). Particularly useful, especially within the field of communication, is the technique of discourse analysis.

As we have been able to observe, studies on polarisation have focused mainly on political-ideological identity and motivations, and its measurement has relied mainly on the formulation and use of surveys focused on capturing ideological distance to the left-right dichotomy. Only recently some studies have begun to develop tools and indicators to measure and monitor social polarisation in a broader sense.

The authors' proposal to help building a well-structured Prevention Tools Database regarding polarisation will rely on the indicators and factors that help measure the level of polarisation in a given society. Hence, as a result of the analysis conducted in the chapter devoted to datasets and databases to measure polarisation, the Prevention Tools Database (PTD) for this phenomenon should follow a three-step process:

1. Four types of polarisations can be distinguished through general questions:
   - *Mass partisan polarisation: Measured through the questions "Which party do you vote/would you vote for?" and "Which party would you never vote for?"*
   - *Mass affective polarisation: The like/dislike variables are used and the degree of preference/rejection for each party is asked through a scale.*
   - *Party system polarisation: Uses the voter's perceptions of the ideological positions of the parties to calculate how polarised these perceptions are.*
   - *Mass ideological polarisation: Asks people to place their preference on a left-right scale from 0 to 10 to measure the respondent's ideological self-positioning.*

2. According to the definition of pernicious polarisation given by McCoy and Somer (2018) it is primarily important to understand whether a polarised environment is detrimental or good for democracies to evolve. With this aim, some general indicators can help drawing a distinction between pernicious and healthy polarisation*:*

    - *Collapse of multiple cleavages into one dominant cleavage or boundary;*
    - *Articulation of demands and interests around those identities;*
    - *Two camps characterised in moral terms of 'good' and 'evil';*
    - *Treatment of these identities as mutually exclusive and antagonistic, thus negating the possibility of the existence of common interests between different groups;*
    - *Greater intra-group cohesion and lesser inter-group bonding;*
    - *Increasing level of stereotyping and prejudice due to lack of direct communication and/or social interaction with the opposing group(s);*
    - *The centre drops out and the polarised camps attempt to label individuals and groups in society as one or the other.*

3. Secondly, should general assessment of polarisation be conducted, the focus can be on political polarisation.

    When considering *political polarisation,* it is possible to define a set of topics, elements and phenomenon to measure political polarisation. On the basis of the answers given to questions concerning these topics, the political debate is considered more or less polarised:

    - *Political philosophy;*
    - *Election participation;*
    - *Political activism;*
    - *Aid to minorities;*
    - *Attitude towards abortion;*
    - *Role of women;*
    - *Opinion on other groups (people of colour, poor, liberals, conservatives);*
    - *Attitude towards religion;*
    - *Gender role in the family;*

The innovative aspect of the proposed measurement is that it attempts to capture the multidimensional nature of political polarisation by capturing both ideological and non-ideological divisions within a society, i.e., it is a method of capturing the partisan polarisation of the masses that can result from multiple cleavages. The study shows that mass political polarisation correlates strongly with voter perceptions of party differences far more than measures based on ideology and affection. The proposed index is therefore a cross-national index that allows us to rank the most polarised countries in terms of mass partisanship.

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Participation

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 962547.