Combating Violent Extremism: Voices of Former Right-Wing Extremists

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Abstract

While it has become increasingly common for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers to draw from the insights of former extremists to combat violent extremism, overlooked in this evolving space has been an in-depth look at how formers perceive such efforts. To address this gap, interviews were conducted with 10 Canadian former right-wing extremists based on a series of questions provided by 30 Canadian law enforcement officials and 10 community activists. Overall, formers suggest that combating violent extremism requires a multi-dimensional response, largely consisting of support from parents and families, teachers and educators, law enforcement officials, and other credible formers.

Purpose

A growing industry (i.e., research centres, consultancy groups, and government departments) is combating the problem of violent extremism, both in the "real world" and in cyberspace. Known in academic and government circles as 'preventing violent extremism' (PVE) and 'countering violent extremism' (CVE), the former consists of efforts to minimize the conditions (individual and/or environmental) in which violent extremism may thrive, while the latter it is largely designed to divert individuals from radicalization to violence using "soft" approaches rather than purely securitized and/or criminal justice responses.[1] Commonly, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers draw from the insights of former violent extremists and terrorists – colloquially known as "formers" – in a number of P/CVE settings, including intelligence gathering, interventions, and counter-narratives.[2]

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For example, the Against Violent Extremism (AVE) network is a global organization, made up of former violent extremists and survivors of violent extremism, that counters extremist narratives and prevents the recruitment of "at risk" youth. In short, AVE utilizes the lessons, experiences, and networks of those who have experienced extremism first-hand. Here the aim is to engage directly with individuals on several difficult issues as well as undercut violent groups' ability to contact and recruit young people.[3] Another initiative whose core members are reformed extremists is Life After Hate (LAH). In addition to conducting interventions to help people disengage from violent extremism, this non-profit consultancy and speaker agency provide organizations with scalable frameworks needed to implement long-term solutions to combat all types of violent extremism and terrorism. Notably, it works with leaders in several sectors, including foreign and domestic governments, the military, international security and intelligence, policy makers, law enforcement officials, and the private sector, to name a few.[4]

Social media, tech companies and think tanks have been quick to turn to formers to assist in the development of online CVE campaigns. The 'Redirect Method', which identifies those who are searching for violent extremist content on Google and then exposes them to counter-narratives, is one illustration.[5] Formers have been involved in this process on at least two fronts: (1) a small group of formers have developed the list of targeted search terms, and (2) many of the counter-narratives that have been offered to the target audience feature the stories of formers.[6] Formers have also served as intervention providers on online CVE campaigns, including the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's (ISD) "One to One" pilot project, in which formers directly messaged an array of individuals Facebook identified as right-wing extremists or Islamists.[7]

A number of researchers in recent years have incorporated former extremists in their research design. By conducting in-depth interviews with formers, researchers have gained insight

into processes of radicalization to violent extremism,[8] deradicalization and disengagement from violent extremism,[9] or both pathways in and out of violent extremism.[10] In addition, researchers have explored various aspects of the abovementioned processes, including the parental influences on radicalization and de-radicalization,[11] the impact of extremist online content and violent radicalization,[12] factors that minimize radicalization to mass casualty violence,[13] and the role of formers in preventing terrorism and political violence in post-conflict communities.[14] Indeed, formers have provided researchers with first-hand accounts of, and insider's perspectives into, a number of key issues that terrorism scholars, amongst many others, are concerned with.[15] Yet in light of these important contributions, overlooked in this evolving space has been an in-depth look at how formers think that violent extremism can be prevented and countered. This study seeks to address this gap via a series of in-depth interviews with former right-wing extremists.

Current Study

This study is part of a larger project that draws from the experiences of former extremists to in turn develop empirically-informed strategies to build resilience to violent extremism. First, we consulted with key stakeholders, namely, Canadian law enforcement officials and community activists, and they developed a list of interview questions that they would ask former extremists and those questions were incorporated into the interview guide. Second, Canadian former right-wing extremists were asked a series of questions about their involvement in and out of violent extremism, ranging from questions about their pathways in and out of violent extremism to questions about how they think stakeholders can build resilience to radicalization to violence.

This study represents an original contribution to the academic literature on violent extremism, as it addresses three gaps in the research on preventing and countering violent extremism. First, the study addresses an important missing data issue that limits many studies relying on official and open source data to develop and share ways to combat violent extremism. Drawing from the voices of insiders (i.e., individuals former involved in violent extremist groups or movements) not only offers a first-hand account of the strategies that did and did not work during their process of disengagement, but it also sheds light on the strategies that may have engaged or diverted formers from getting involved in violent extremist groups or movements in the first place. Second, a small but growing body of literature – particularly in the Western world – has sprung up around the project of combating violent extremism which oftentimes draws from the insights of – and shares the stories of – former extremists in general and former right-wing extremists and Islamists in particular.[16] Scholars in this space, however, have been much slower to ask formers how *they* think that key stakeholders, including researchers and practitioners (amongst many others) should build resilience to violent extremism. Third, to date and within a Western context, little research in terrorism and extremism studies has conducted a needs analysis with law enforcement officials and community activists in preparation to interview former extremists. This study, however, does not include an evaluation of the effectiveness of a particular strategy for combating violent extremism,[17] nor does it evaluate any of the strategies that former extremists in the current study suggest to us. Rather, the purpose of this exploratory study is to provide an in-depth, descriptive account of how former extremists think that violent extremism should be countered and prevented.

Methods

Data Collection and Interview Guide

Prior to conducting the interviews with formers, law enforcement officials and community activists were asked to generate lists of interview questions that they would ask formers if they were given the opportunity – questions that they believed, based on their own experiences with combating violent extremism, would offer valuable insight into some of the ways of combating violent extremism. The purpose of this approach was simple: rather than developing an interview guide that was derived from an academic perspective only, we included interview questions from key stakeholders for the purposes of developing a multidimensional, multi-perspective interview guide.

In an effort to recruit law enforcement and community activists, contacts from across Canada were contacted to discuss the nature of the project. As a result, a convenience sample of 30 law enforcement officials and 10 community activists were solicited through email communications with a letter of invitation and “word of mouth” tactics. Law enforcement officials who participated in the study were working in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta and New Brunswick and were stationed in various law enforcement divisions, including but not limited to: research and innovation; crime prevention; major crimes; behavior analysis; federal policing; state protection and intelligence; hate crimes, and; the extremist threat division. Community activists who participated in the study were situated in Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta, and were active members of various anti-hate initiatives across Canada.

Approximately 550 questions were collected from these stakeholders, ranging from questions about the identities, roles, goals and activities of former extremists – both before, during, and after their time in violent extremism – to questions about formers’ experiences with leaving extremism, to questions about their perceptions of law enforcement and anti-extremists,

their use of the Internet, and how they think stakeholders can combat violent extremism. Given the sheer volume of interview questions that were accumulated during this process, they were organized into the following categories and duplicate questions were removed:

Personal experiences in violent extremism:

- Before the radicalization process
- Radicalization process
- Experiences in the violent extremist movement
- Leaving violent extremism
- Reflections after leaving violent extremism

Responding to violent extremism:

- Disengagement from violent extremism
- Deradicalization from violent extremism
- Preventing and countering violent extremism

Here the interview guide consisted of a combination of 275 open-ended structured and semi-structured questions.[18] Interview questions, however, were not focused on P/CVE efforts in Canada specifically, nor were they focused on matters pertaining to right-wing extremism. Rather, the interview questions were framed in such a manner that explored matters relating to violent extremism in general, all in an effort to have maximum impact within a Western context.[19]

Once the interview guide was finalized, the next step was to recruit former extremists to participate in the study. Initially we relied on our contacts from our research on right-wing extremism in Canada,[20] which helped us gain access to a few formers. Over time – and through numerous discussions – we developed a level of trust with these formers and they eventually connected us with other Canadian formers extremists who they believed would participate in the study. While we acknowledge the facilitation of snowball sampling to reach a wider group of former extremists, we understand the risk of selection bias which limits the extent to which we observe diverse points of view.

A total of 10 former right-wing extremists participated in the current study and were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Interviews were conducted either in person or via telephone or Skype. Interviews were conducted voluntarily between the months of March and September of 2018. Interviews on average were approximately 4 hours in length, ranging from approximately 1.5 hours to 7 hours.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and all names were de-identified for the purpose of ensuring participant anonymity. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of individuals and the violent extremist groups they were associated with. However, transcriptions were verbatim, all in an effort to stay true to the voices of each respondent. Edits were minimal and did not affect participants' vernacular, use of profanity, or slang.

Sample Characteristics

Eight males and two females, ranging from 27 to 44 years old with an average age of 38, were included in the current study. Each of these participants identified themselves as a 'former extremist', meaning that they no longer identified themselves as 'white power' or were affiliated

with a right-wing extremist group or movement. Most were born in either urban or suburban parts of Canada, but all were involved in violent extremist groups in major Canadian urban centres. A large proportion of the study participants reported encounters with law enforcement during their adolescence, from committed petty crimes (e.g., shoplifting, drugs, etc.) to acts of violence (e.g., assaults). The amount of time that each interviewee spent in the right-wing extremist movement ranged from approximately 4 years to 22 years with an average of 13 years in length. Participants' roles in these mostly racist skinhead groups ranged from presidents and sergeants, to enforcers, musicians, and spokespersons. The majority of the study participants were deemed the "upper echelon" of Canada's right-wing extremist movement and approximately half described themselves as group leaders.

The majority of the study participants claimed to be part of a violent group but were not violent themselves. Only a small portion of the sample described themselves as violent. The majority of the interviewees identified themselves as "off the grid", meaning that up until the point that they were being interviewed for the current study, never did they make it publicly known – either through media or public events – that they, at one point in their lives, were part of a violent extremist group or movement. Similarly, the majority of interviewees noted that they had never participated in a research study.

Analysis and Coding Procedure

Results were analyzed via thematic coding, initially utilizing a constructivist grounded theory approach which allows us to draw from existing literature to validate codes.[21] Later, as codes were grouped into themes, we specifically focused on perceptions, attitudes, and experiences toward/of preventing and countering violent extremism. Central emergent themes – composed of

respondents describing similar experiences or views – were identified, and less relevant data were omitted (i.e., selective coding).

We coded and analyzed the data independently of one another, identifying the themes and patterns with collaborative agreement reinforcing each emergent theme. Together, the use of multiple perspectives enhanced the reliability of our observations and the subsequent understanding of how former extremists in our sample think that stakeholders should combat violent extremism. The purpose of this strategy was to authenticate our coding and to maximizing the robustness of the results.[22]

Preventing Violent Extremism

At the onset of the interviews, all of the study participants – when asked – made it clear that disenfranchised youths were by far the most vulnerable, susceptible targets for recruitment into violence extremism. This was especially the case for those who, as one participant explained, are:

> looking for the sense of belonging, and are the ones who feel like they're missing out…like they're not getting their…their piece of the pie. And whether that's economically, or socially or whatever, or just feeling like they don't fit in somewhere, I think that's your…your target group [for preventing extremism]. [T]hey just didn't fit in somewhere (Participant 1)

As a result, when asked how to prevent such youth from joining violent extremism, 90 percent of the interviewees noted that they had not given it much thought and took a moment to reflect on the question. Upon further thinking, these study participants regularly spoke about how the development of preventative measures was a difficult undertaking, oftentimes by describing their

trajectory into violent extremism as a complex, multi-dimensional and non-linear process. Approximately three-quarters of the interviewees did, however, believe that a number of key stakeholders, including themselves, should play a role in preventing young people from going down similar pathways as they did. Interviewees provided a number of recommendations in this regard.

Parents and Families

Approximately three-quarters of the study participants noted that a fundamental first step in preventing youth from violent extremism starts at home with parents and more broadly with families. Consistently discussed here was the need for parents to get involved in their child's life – a key component that was missing from approximately three-quarters of the participants' early upbringing. When asked, for example, if a family member had ever tried to stop them from joining a violent extremist group, one former extremist who was involved in the right-wing extremist movement for over 10 years noted:

> I remember a cousin saying to me: "why are you involved in racism? You've just got to love everybody". It didn't help that he was a little pipsqueak, right? Because I was trying to be a tough guy, so I was never going to take advice from this type of guy, right? If only it had happened to be my father or somebody really close to me who could've just said…just painted the picture for me where this, you know…where this was going. (Participant 2)

Much like the above study participant, 70 percent of the interviewees described how meaningful interactions with their parents may have deterred or even prevented them from joining a violent extremist group. Three participants, on the other hand, were a bit skeptical about whether parents

could prevent their children from joining an extremist group – perhaps, in part, because 80 percent of the interviewees did not have strong relationships with their families. In fact, approximately three-quarters described feeling isolated and disconnected from their families. Nonetheless, throughout the interviews, 80 percent of the participants noted that, if parents could in fact prevent their children from engaging in violent extremism, it would have to be a multi-faceted effort consisting of several components. In particular, these interviewees noted that parents – and family members in general – should teach their children, at a young age, about the complexities of polarizing social issues, including but not limited to the issue of racism, intolerance, and discrimination. As one participant explained: "Teach your kids from a young age that, you know what? We are all the same but we're different and our differences are good" (Participant 2). Three participants – reflecting on their own experiences growing at home – oftentimes mentioned that families should not be accepting of passive forms of racism in the home environment. As one participant put it:

> I don't know if you grew up around any of it, but it's…it's like this passive racism that has existed for frickin' generations that we just accept. "Oh, it's Grandpa. He just talks like that." No, he doesn't! "Why does he talk like that, right? Why does he…why does Grandpa hate Jews?" Well, that's what we should ask him. Not just accept that he denies the holocaust. […] That passive racism is a huge thing. […] Like why do we accept that as humans? (Participant 2)

These participants added that, instead of assuming that their children can navigate such issues on their own, parents should develop – and sustain – a positive home environment in which open, critical and reflexive discussions are facilitated. When asked, for example, an interview question

about what could have been done to stop or slow their radicalization process, one participant who was in the right-wing extremist movement for approximately five years noted:

> if it was possible for me to ask the questions [at home] …like the politically incorrect, difficult, offensive questions that we honest to God just want to know, you know…if we […] had had a place where we felt we could ask those questions and get an honest answer without being told, "well you're an awful person for thinking this", then maybe I would have had a different path. (Participant 3)

Critical within this context – according to approximately half of the participants – is for parents to invest emotional time in, and be aware and conscious of, what is going on in their child's lives, regardless of whether or not they suspect their child is going down a path to violent extremism. Having said that, 80 percent of the study participants noted that their parents were largely unaware of the level of the violence associated with the extremist groups they hung around with. As a result, their parents oftentimes turned a blind eye on their child's involvement in violent extremism. As one example, in discussing their early involvement in violent extremism and how they were introduced to radical views and extremist groups, one participant described how he was oftentimes neglected by his parents – in short, they were in denial about his involvement in extremist violence. This participant further noted that: "If somebody had at least pretended they cared about my well-being…because it's not good for your well-being to join these groups. […] I think it was a little bit of them saying, 'well nah, it's just a fad. It will go away'" (Participant 2).

Four other interviewees, in sharing similar stories about their childhoods, described how family members should engage with their children by simply listening to them, free from judgement – unlike the family environment that they grew up in. To illustrate, when asked how

to prevent youth from going down the same path to violent extremism as they did, one participant noted that “the parents would have to be familiar with what’s going on [in their children’s life]. Gotta talk to them about it. But pay attention [...] and ask questions but don’t be condescending” (Participant 9). Similarly, another participant claimed that parents should “see how they’re [children]…they are doing. See if they’re being picked on. See if they’re being bullied. See if they feel disconnected. Teach the kids that there’s a better alternative to disassociating yourself from society” (Participant 5). Also expressed by six participants was the need for parents to simply accept their children for who they are, otherwise it may further isolate and push them further into violent extremism. As one participant explained it: “I would say for parents, definitely however your kid turns out…like sexuality, gender identity, personality and things like that, just accept them. Because if you try to change them, they’re going to rebel. They’re going to feel like you don’t accept them” (Participant 6).

Lastly, 80 percent of the study participants noted that it is critical for parents to be informed of the warning signs of their children going down a path to violent extremism in order to intervene. In discussing the ways in which families can identify the warning signs, these interviewees oftentimes discussed the signs that they showed when they were becoming more ingrained in violent extremism – from the attire they wore and the music they listened to, to their change in demeanour and whom they associated with. Seven interviewees, for example, explained that, as they became more involved in violent extremism, they became increasingly aggressive and anti-social, as well as withdrawn from their families and friends. Four participants also noted that they started to wear white power clothing and listen to white power music, as well as branded themselves with racist tattoos. In most cases, though, there were clear

indicators of their interest in an extremist ideology and/or a group. As one participant who was a member of one of the most violent right-wing extremist groups in Canada explained:

> If you're talking about parents and their kids, you know…you can…there are signs of…if their [….] child is starting to display behaviors that are…come into question, like wearing certain clothes or patches, or listening to certain kinds of music, or you know displaying flags, or even the way they talk, you know? Try and find those identifiers of behavior because that's where it starts! So, try to stop it before it grows because as I said, it is a process so, you know…potentially you could stop it before it got to…you know…full radicalization. (Participant 1)

Schools and Communities

In an effort to prevent disenfranchised youth from engaging in violent extremism, many of the abovementioned suggestions extended beyond the household, and into schools and into the local community. For the former, when asked how to prevent young people from joining violent extremist groups, half of the participants oftentimes spoke about their own experiences in schools, noting that they received little to no education on issues about racism and discrimination, for example. As one former extremist who spent more than 25 years in the right-wing extremist movement explained it:

> People need to understand that there should be some sort of curriculum in schools that talks about…you know…racism, or anti-racism training or these types of things. I think that should be in schools…high schools specifically. Even middle school, like grade seven and eight. They'll understand it. They just got to be old enough to understand what it means. So, there was none of that in schools when I was growing up, right? Obviously,

> there was that odd thing every year that had some anti-racism campaign for a couple of days, but then once that was over, back to normal, right? (Participant 9)

Four participants similarly also noted that providing youth with education in schools about the dangers, consequences, and long-term impact of joining violent extremist groups may prevent them from joining. Such education, according to five participants, may have altered their pathway into violent extremism. As one participant explained it:

> If only I had had some education beforehand about, you know, what a hate group was [and how] it just…it profoundly alters you as a person and not in any good way, and it can put yourself and your family in danger, and there's huge personal risks involved. If I had had some kind of education […] I would have been able to look at it […] with at least a little bit of sophistication instead of just like, "this is the greatest thing I've ever seen", then maybe I might have had a different path. (Participant 3)

Three participants shared similar views, but based on their experience in violent extremism, they believed that the focus of the preventative measures should be on the dangers of joining violent extremist gangs first and foremost. As one participant recommended: "go into schools […] but talk about staying out of gangs […] Try to convey that message, 'cause […] if you're in a gang, you're more likely to get in a fight or do something stupid and get hurt or die, or go in jail" (Participant 9).

Three-quarters of the interviewees believed that those who are working in schools, as well as in local communities, must be able to identify the signs of someone going down a pathway to violent extremism in order to intervene, or as one participant – who was in the right-wing extremist movement for over 20 years – noted: "there should have been some manner of intervention. I gave off all the signs. Like all the signs were there. Somebody really should have

got in to me at the ground floor" (Participant 7). Commonly expressed by study participants, however, was that those who show signs of adhering to radical views should not be met with hostility. This type of reaction, according to 80 percent of the study participants, was very common when they were involved in violent extremism, not only from their teachers and classmates but from members of their communities as well. When asked, for example, if someone had ever tried to prevent them from joining a violent extremist group, as one participant noted:

> Quite a few people, but the thing is a lot them had come at me with aggression, like "oh my God, how could you believe this?" And I remember […] a sit down with the cop [where] he talked to me in this really patronizing way, like "oh you're a young little girl, you don't know anything" kind of bullshit. But I think some of that was his ego. (Participant 6)

Eight participants oftentimes discussed how these types of aggressive, judgemental responses further pushed them into violent extremism and, as a result, they feared that similar reactions would push others in similar directions. Five of these participants noted that it is important, then, for people to simply listen to these disenfranchised youth, or as one participant explained it:

> If you're a kid, you don't listen to an adult, you know? […] As an adult, I'm trying to talk you out of it [violent extremism]. And if you wanna get in, you're gonna get in. If I try to talk you out, that's gonna make you go in more. And even…you know…with my experience, I don't have an answer. […] But I'd say pay attention and just listen. I guess just listen to what they have to say and maybe that might help – not responding negatively, you know? (Participant 9)

Three participants further added that, if members of their local community are quick to judge and chastise people who do not share similar views as them, doing so may have unintended consequences: furthering the divide between those who hold left-wing and right-wing views. One of these participant, for example, noted that when “you get people and it’s like if you disagree with something, then you’re evil. […] For me, that’s what promotes it [radicalization to violence]. Just that whole thought process of ‘you have to think this way or you’re evil’” (Participant 9). Another interviewee echoed similar sentiment:

> The rhetoric on the left normalizes what should be an extreme position. […] Because the rhetoric is pushing people who are marginally or […] people who are center-right and beyond. You’re pushing them farther out, creating an antagonistic environment where it’s the extreme right versus everybody left of center. (Participant 10)

Law Enforcement Officials

Approximately three-quarters of the study participants noted that law enforcement officials may assist in the process of preventing youth from joining violent extremist groups. All of these interviewees, however, were rather cautious and, in some cases, skeptical about making this claim. Four participants, for example, noted that, when they were in the violent extremist movement, they had experienced a number of negative interactions with law enforcement and, to this day, still struggled with trust issues. When asked, for example, what advice they had for law enforcement officials to prevent violent extremism, one participant noted: “Well, they would never listen to me anyway. […] I would have zero advice” (Participant 4). Three other participants shared similar views, noting that the violent extremist groups that they were

affiliated with were, by and large, rooted in anti-law enforcement principles. As one participant explained it:

> When someone's getting involved [in violent extremism], they're usually gonna hate the cops. You know, like the big slogans ACAB [all cops are bastards]. The...and especially if they're […] hanging out with gang people. A cop trying to approach them and talk to them is not a good idea. It's...they're going to get a negative reaction. (Participant 9)

Four study participants further described the challenges that law enforcement may face if they approach a young person who they believe is going down a path to violent extremism, noting that the mere presence of them communicating with police may be seen by the group as suspicious. One participant, as an example, described a situation in which the group he was part of saw him communicating with law enforcement and

> everybody was like […] "You're hanging out with the cops!?" So that's creating dissension right there…so everybody thinks I'm a snitch type thing. […] Yeah, it's...that's a struggle for the cops. […] If you're a skin [racist skinhead], you're not going to want to be seen talking to a cop. (Participant 9)

Despite these challenges, approximately three-quarters of the study participants believed that police could play a role in preventing young people from engaging in violent extremism. But such an undertaking – according to these participants – would require that law enforcement be aware of the immediate challenges they will most likely face when confronting those who are going down a path to violent extremism and respond accordingly. Similar to how participants believed that families and their local community should respond to young people who are expressing radical views and/or drawn to violent extremist groups, four participants described a similar approach for law enforcement, where the interactions between law enforcement and

youth should be based on a level of respect, free from judgement. As an example, when interviewees were asked what advice they had for law enforcement officials to prevent violent extremism, one former extremist in the study provided a response that summed up the sentiment expressed by four other participants:

> I would definitely say don't start challenging people on their beliefs should you come across them 'cause that's just one good way to provoke them and it doesn't help matters at all. That one police officer that I had dealt with […] talked to me as an adult, didn't talk down to me like I was used to from other people outside of the movement, didn't challenge my beliefs, did ask me a couple questions the odd time about it [the radical beliefs]. So, he was almost talking to me like he was a friend of mine as opposed to this cop that was intervening on me. But regardless of what he thought about me, I still appreciated the fact that he did treat me with respect. (Participant 6)

Similarly, two study participants described how law enforcement will be effective if they approach an individual who is going down a path to violent extremism in a non-confrontational manner. One participant also noted that law enforcement would be effective in this regard if they approach a youth when he or she is away from the group or large crowd:

> But yeah, for the cops I guess not approaching hostile. But that's hard because how do you approach a gang? Because they're going to be on their toes, right? […] Instead, try to find…try to find guys when they're walking by themselves or just like one or two of them and just pull over and talk to them, "hey, what's up?" and try to be friendly. […] It's like give respect, gain respect type thing. (Participant 9)

Three study participants also encouraged law enforcement to engage in the community-based and educational side of preventing violent extremism, in which law enforcement could educate

people in the local community about how to identify signs of extremism in all its forms. When asked, for example, how law enforcement could prevent violent extremism, one participant noted that "…more [police] programs need to be happening around community engagement, trying to engage the community to learn about types of extremism, [and] warning signs…" (Participant 2).

Collaborative Efforts with Formers

Together, the most effective way of preventing violent extremism, according to 80 percent of the interviewees, is through collaborative efforts, which would consist of what one participant described as a "support network for everybody [where] everybody's equal. We all support each other, accepting of differences" (Participant 6). When asked what an effective prevention program would consist of, eight interviewees noted that responding to such a multi-faceted problem (i.e., violent extremism) requires a multi-faceted response. As one participant put it:

> There's a lot of factors [associated with why people join violent extremist groups]. So, if you're talking from my experience, the white power stuff, I think […] having formers, […] law enforcement, education, schools, communities [involved in the prevention program]. What you'd really have to do is get a lot of different people together and kind of pool your knowledge and resources of what's happening. Because there's so many levels to why this happens. (Participant 1)

Furthermore, in preventing violent extremism in all of its forms, these study participants consistently noted that former extremists should play a central role by working on the front lines with a number of key stakeholders, including parents, families, teachers and educators, and local communities. Again, when asked what an effective prevention program would consist of, one former extremist in the study noted:

> I would probably have a team of formers, right? […] And you'd want a…you'd want to have an academic research department [and] you'd want to have community groups involved. […] You need to have…just a multi-dimensional approach, right? And then, lastly if we could…I don't even like to say this but there's got to be a law enforcement thing […] So, how do we streamline that information to the law enforcement? Not investigation. Just…obviously if there's a safety thing, we need to look at that, right? So, how do we do that? There'd have to be a department that looks at that. (Participant 2)

Lastly, 90 percent of the study participants believed that former extremists could provide key stakeholders with advice on how to prevent violent extremism, ranging from information on what draws youth into violent extremism and how to identify signs of risky behavior to ways of communicating with the youth. When interviewees were asked why former extremists should play a central role in preventing violent extremism, one participant noted that: "Because we were all in! We're the ones with all the experiences. As painful as some of the memories are, I think it's important to share them" (Participant 6). Eight interviewees further explained that much can be learned from former extremists about how to prevent violent extremism, as formers have insider knowledge about what draws people into violent extremism and "can help steer these kids on the…you know, better direction. […] They can stop other people from going down the same path and making the same violent mistakes" (Participant 5).

Countering Violent Extremism

When study participants were asked a series of questions about countering violent extremism specifically, the focus of the discussions were almost exclusively on the development of exiting strategies, with formers as the most suitable actors in helping people leave violent extremism. In

particular, 80 percent of former extremists in the study described, at great lengths, how the most central actor in helping people who want to leave violent extremism should be those who have first-hand experience in a violent extremist movement or, as one participant put it: “someone who’s actually […] walked the walk, talked the talk” (Participant 5). Accordingly, one participant noted:

> That would be formers – someone…someone who knows what’s going on in the movement and [knows] how to talk to them [people who want to leave extremism]. Because you can’t just have…can’t just have a random person go up that doesn’t know shit about anything. That’s not…you know, you’re going to look like an idiot. But for the conversations of getting out [of violent extremism], it might be a former. (Participant 9)

In discussing the role of former extremists in countering violent extremism, seven interviewees described the need for an infrastructure to be put in place for formers to help others leave extremism. Here they described this arrangement as one that should consist of two key components: (1) a team of ‘credible formers’ who were willing to put in the time to interact, one-on-one, with those who wanted to leave violent extremism, and (2) a team of key stakeholders assisting ‘credible formers’ in helping people leave violent extremism.

Credible Formers

Seven interviewees oftentimes noted that, for adherents who, on the one hand, wanted to leave violent extremism and who, on the other hand, were seeking support from a former, it was essential for them to know that the former, first and foremost, is deemed ‘credible’. One participant, for example, used a scenario to describe how he would view a former if he were still

involved in violent extremism but wanted to leave and was seeking support from a former. He noted that:

> You can't be fake. I…I would sense it. "This guy's paying lip service to…to some ideology." […] I would definitely have seen right through that crap. […] And he certainly should have lived the life too – like not a guy that wore a bomber jacket for three months and then watched two of his friends get beat up then he grew his hair out. It should be somebody who was actually…had their fuckin' nose in the dirt. (Participant 7)

Five participants further claimed that a 'credible former' was someone who was active and spent time in the movement because, as one interviewee put it: "they'd had their emotional time invested in the movements, they'd left the movement, and they know what path they've gone down." (Participant 5). Interestingly, this "emotional time" was seen by approximately three-quarters of the interviewees as a form of 'credibility' – adherents could relate to formers (and vice versa) because of their invested time in extremism. Three participants also noted that such credible voices could encourage others to re-think their involvement in violent extremism. As one former in the study explained it:

> Well I think it's clear that the people who can help the best are the people who were in it [violent extremism] and who have left. […] Because I think when people see that these people have the courage to leave and then they kind of…explain their motivations for leaving, I think that might encourage a lot of people to say, "you know, maybe this isn't the right thing. Maybe...maybe I should consider getting out of this or at least think about it." Hearing from someone who hasn't been in it, it doesn't really hold as much weight because they don't really...they don't know. But coming from someone who lived it and was actively a part of it, I think that just…you have a lot more clout. (Participant 1)

This “clout” – according to five participants – was a characteristic that adherents could easily relate to during their disengagement process.

Four interviewees consistently noted that ‘credible formers’ must also put in the time to interact, one-on-one, with those who want to leave violent extremism. In other words, formers who would be involved in helping others leave extremism should be those who can commit to the oftentimes very intimate and personal process of leaving violent extremism. In describing how formers could help others leave, one participant, for example, noted that they should be:

> someone who has the time to actually sit and talk and listen and spend time because, you know […] telling anti-racist activists that they need to be compassionate and open-hearted to racists to help them leave is kind of bullshit and an unfair ask. […] And, you know, for the people who feel that they can do that, and if they want to do that, you know that you can’t just have one phone conversation and think that’s going to do it. Like you need to have repeated interactions. (Participant 3)

Oftentimes discussed within this context was how, when the study participants themselves were leaving violent extremism, they were apprehensive about who they would ask for help. Consequently, all four interviewees believed that, while the relationship between the adherent and former may be developed to suit the needs of the individual leaving extremism, the intervention itself should be done face-to-face, on a consistent basis, and free from judgement. The purpose here was to build a level of trust between parties. As two study participants explained this type of interaction:

> I might have first looked at him [the former] like he was really weak for leaving, you know? Back then, that’s how I…I probably would have thought that at first, but if I was

> given that…that controlled environment where it was him and I, really sitting down and talking, […] him and I one on one, well... (Participant 7)

> If a person is hardcore in [a violent extremist group], then they're hardcore in, you know? If there was a time when someone approached me and they full-out said, "hey, you need to get out", or some of the other guys, if you tried to approach them, they're gonna get knocked out! It has to be...it has to be at a time and a place and a certain scenario for that to happen. Like […] a former could help, but it would […] be a slow process. Just…you know talk to him. And I think you'd have to let them bring it up though, 'cause […] a lot of the guys I hung out with you can't just walk up to them and try to engage that conversation. It's gonna be a negative...a negative outcome. (Participant 9)

Worth adding here was that such interventions were largely unavailable to all study participants when they were in the process of leaving violent extremism. In fact, little to no exiting programs were available to them at all. Instead, 80 percent of the interviewees noted that they had to seek out support from others – primarily family members and/or friends. These were the central figures who, on the one hand, the formers respected and trusted, and on the other hand, were those who would not criticize them about their radical view and instead would simply listen to them and communicate, free from judgement.

Seven study participants did, however, claim that exit programs or formal support may have helped them leave extremism and when asked what would have been the most helpful for them during their process, all seven noted that communicating with a former would have been beneficial. One interviewee further noted that, for formers who would be willing to do outreach work and help others leave extremism, such efforts

> need to be structured. […] You need to have…there needs to be a voice…somebody relatable and somebody who can…who will…one on one, talk to these guys, you know, whether they're young kids or full-grown men. […] [I]t's not going to be a YouTube video of somebody who's famous telling people they should be cool to each other. It's…it's got to be more personal than that I feel. Like, all the slogans you can tout in the world would not have changed my mind [to leave violent extremism]. You need…I needed that personal interaction, that back and forth, that bouncing of ideas. (Participant 7)

Collaborations Between Formers and Stakeholders

The second pillar of the described infrastructure was the inclusion of key stakeholders and experts to assist formers in helping people leave violent extremism. In particular, four participants in the study discussed how formers, without the assistance of others, are not in a position to help others leave the movement. As one participant so candidly put it:

> we [formers] all have so much of our own baggage. Even if we've been out of the movement for a couple of decades, we might not be the best people […] for somebody to be taking life skills advice from. But I think…I think we could be a part of the team to help somebody. (Participant 3)

Having said that, brought up by eight participants was the belief that formers who help people leave extremism should collaborate with stakeholders and experts. In fact, these interviewees believed that, in helping individuals leave the movement, formers could not do it on their own. As one interviewee noted:

> I don't think that it…that a former extremist should be the full point of contact from somebody who's trying to get out [of violent extremism]. […] I would want to be doing it in conjunction with somebody who is, you know, like a trained psychologist who could, you know, make sure that the person is getting the support that they need, you know, beyond…just, you know, whatever I could possibly offer, 'cause I wouldn't want that responsibility. I wouldn't want to be the only person that somebody who's an extremist is talking to in trying to get out. Like that's a huge, you know, that's a huge thing. (Participant 3)

Three study participants provided more concrete examples about how various stakeholders could assist formers in helping people leave the movement. For example, one interviewee described this collaboration as a "multidimensional approach between actors", wherein formers should be involved in some form of community engagement and community outreach at the local level, working with "community engagement people that are practitioners in the community that are not law enforcement" (Participant 2).

Interestingly, Participant 2 brought up a point that was consistently raised by study participants: 90 percent of the interviewees believed that law enforcement should play a minimal, peripheral role in helping people leave extremism. Three of the interviewees were also hesitant about having law enforcement play any type role in peoples' disengagement process. Six interviewees, however, noted that law enforcement, in certain situations, can play a role in helping people leave extremism. Specifically, these interviewees noted that it was only when an adherent decides to leave and is seeking help from law enforcement that they may play a role in their disengagement process. Such efforts, however, depend on two factors: (1) the level of violence associated with the extremist group an individual is leaving, and (2) the extent to which

an individual needs protection against a particular violent extremist group(s). In other words, law enforcement may serve as protection if an individual is trying to leave a violent extremist movement who, in turn, may retaliate against them or their family. As two participants explained it:

> …so they know who they can go to and feel safe getting out of the movement. So, law enforcement could assist in that. Maybe they can be, sort of, part of that process. Just, maybe with the safety side of things so they feel...people…they don't feel like they're in danger if they leave. And in some cases, that might be the case with the more violent types of people. (Participant 1)

> a guy who's in, you know, the [name of extremist group removed]…when he's trying to leave, he might get nailed to some ply wood in the back alley and set on fire or something. For getting out of that, that might have to be the police or something, right? 'Cause if you're…if you're involved on that level, in that type of [violent] group, to get out of that…if you have a family, they would have to get moved too. So that would have to be a police level thing. […] If I [as a former] try to help a guy get out, I can just talk to him. But I can't really […] I can't protect him. So yeah, on that level... it would have to be a group effort. (Participant 9)

Such a process also requires what one participant described as a "give respect, gain respect" relationship between law enforcement and a movement adherent, wherein both parties treat each other with respect and dignity.

Discussion

In the past five years, it has become increasingly common for practitioners and policy-makers in the Western world to draw from the insights of former extremists to combat violent extremism.[23] Researchers too have shown a growing interest in drawing from the voices of former extremists to address key research questions in terrorism and extremism studies, including studies focusing on processes of radicalization to violent extremism[24] and processes of deradicalization and disengagement from violent extremism,[25] for example. Yet overlooked in this emerging area of work has been an in-depth look at how formers think that violent extremism should be prevented and countered. The purpose of this study was to address this gap by drawing from the voices of those who have engaged in hatred, namely, former right-wing extremists, asking them questions about how to combat violent extremism as well as leverage their lessons learned to develop empirically-driven strategies to build resilience to violent extremism. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study.

First, formers in the current study believe that disenfranchised youth, by far, are the most vulnerable of and susceptible to being recruited into violent extremism and, as such, they believe that preventative measures should target this population. These views align with empirical studies that claim that disenfranchised youths are vulnerable to extremist messaging and ideology.[26]

Second, formers believe that various key stakeholders – including parents and families, teachers and educators, the local community, and in some cases, law enforcement officials – play an important role in preventing young people from going down similar pathways that they did. In particular, formers suggest that parents and families can prevent their children from violent extremism if: (1) parents and families invest themselves in their child’s life and are aware of potential warning signs of their children going down a path to violent extremism, and (2) parents

and families facilitate an inclusive home environment, which includes discussions of polarizing issues. Similar recommendations extend to the school and community setting, wherein schools and, by extension, the local community must be one of inclusivity – individuals, even if they maintain radical views that are counter to the mainstream, should not be judged, otherwise they may be further pushed into violent extremism. Law enforcement, although they may face more challenges than the previously, can assist in preventing youth from engaging in violent extremism, but similar to families and their community should respond to young people who are expressing radical views and/or drawn to violent extremist groups, the interactions between law enforcement and youth should be based on a level of respect, and free from judgement. Indeed, many of views expressed by formers in the current study echo the findings in previous empirical work highlighting the importance of social and/or family support and awareness, paired with openness to critical discussions, all in an effort to prevent violent extremism.[27]

Third, in discussing ways to counter violent extremism, formers in the current study are largely concerned about helping others leave violent extremism, and they believe that formers should be the central actors helping individuals to leave – a finding that is largely supported by empirical research on the psychology of victimology and the process of deradicalization.[28] However, in discussing the role of former extremists in this regard, the need for an infrastructure be put in place was oftentimes discussed, which consists of (1) a team of 'credible' and 'dedicated' formers who are willing to put in the time to help people leave, and (2) a group of key stakeholders who can assist these formers in helping people leave. What formers are referring to here is what has been conceptualized in terrorism and extremism research as multi-sectoral approaches to combating violent extremism.[29] Indeed, violent extremism is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, grounded in both individual and social conditions. P/CVE

initiatives, then, must be multi-dimensional, building on the strengths and expertise of diverse sectors, including but not limited to local community organizations, police officers, and policy-makers. In other words, efforts to counter violent extremism cannot only be seen as a law enforcement or intelligence issue. It is a social issue. As a result, law enforcement officials should partner with various local community organizations, human rights activists, and academics, sharing knowledge and ideas for enhancing and/or developing P/CVE initiatives.[30]

Fourth and finally, formers in the current study believe that they are in a unique position in which they can educate stakeholders and experts, as well as the local community, about what draws youth into violent extremism, as well as the factors that give rise to and minimize violent extremism. Former extremists also believe that they can offer insight into the warning signs of individuals going down a pathway to violent extremism, and they believe that they can help others leave – provided they have the proper infrastructure. Together, the results of the study suggest that formers believe that combating violent extremism cannot be done without what they perceive as the appropriate actors at the table.

Limitations and Future Research

This study represents a first step in exploring how former extremists think that violent extremism should be prevented and countered. While this study is not without its limitations, they can be leveraged to generate new knowledge on ways to combat violent extremism.

First, the study sample consisted of a group of formers who were deeply entrenched in violent extremism for an extensive period of time. Indeed, their views about preventing and countering violent extremism may differ from those who were active in violent extremism for a short period of time. Having said that, future studies may consist of in-depth, life history

interviews with those who quickly "came and left" violent extremism, all in an effort to identify and unpick the factors that deterred them from going further into violent extremism and what made them leave extremism.

Second, the study sample was limited to former extremists who were from one country, were active in one type of violent extremist movement, and who may be deemed as the "older guard" of the Canadian right-wing extremist movement (i.e., adherents from the 1990s and early 2000s). Moving ahead, future research should compare former extremists' perceptions about combating violent extremism across movements (i.e., former Islamist extremists versus right-wing extremists versus left-wing extremists), across nations (e.g., the United States versus United Kingdom versus Europe versus Australia), and across time frames in which they were active in a particular violent extremist movement (e.g., 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, and now).

Third, some researchers and practitioners have raised concerns about including formers in CVE efforts, ranging from discussions about their reliability and credibility to questions about whether their inclusion could raise concerns in the public sphere.[31] Likewise, others have noted that little research has evaluated the effectiveness of formers in CVE initiatives.[32] Future studies, then, should conduct evaluations of mechanisms (e.g., an understanding of how these efforts have an effect on different stakeholders), moderators (e.g., the contexts in which they work best), implementation burdens, and costs[33] associated with formers working in the P/CVE space.

Lastly, while formers in the current study provided a number of broad yet noteworthy recommendations that may assist in the development of prevention strategies for combating violent extremism in various settings and contexts, several of these recommendations raise more questions than answers. How, for example, can many of the recommendations be implemented? Schools, for example, may not have the funding nor resources to host educational campaigns

about the consequences of joining violent extremist groups. Teachers require specific professional development which includes training on pluralism, inclusive dialogues as well as development of critical thinking and cognitive tools to discuss difficult topics like extremism, racism, discrimination and other forms of marginalization in society. Community groups may not feel comfortable working with former extremists (and vice versa) to combat violent extremism. Parents and families may not be able to create inclusive home environments that encourage discussions about polarizing issues. At the very least, however, our hope is that these recommendations spark the interest of those who are concerned with developing ways to combat violent extremism.

Notes

[1] See Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle, and Andrew Zammit, "What is Countering Violent Extremism? Exploring CVE Policy and Practice in Australia," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 8 (2015): 6-24; see also William Stephens, Stijn Sieckelinck, and Hans Boutellier, "Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Ahead of Print.

[2] See Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (London: Routledge, 2017); see also Marian Tapley and Gordon Clubb, *The Role of Formers in Countering Violent Extremism* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019).

[3] For more information on AVE, visit http://www.againstviolentextremism.org.

[4] For more information on LAH, visit https://www.lifeafterhate.org.

[5] A dedicated Redirect Method website is at https://redirectmethod.org.

[6] See Todd C. Helmus and Kurt Klein, *Assessing Outcomes of Online Campaigns Countering Violent Extremism: A Case Study of the Redirect Method* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018).

[7] Jacob Davey, Jonathan Birdwell, and Rebecca Skellett, *Counter Conversations: A Model for Direct Engagement with Individuals Showing Signs of Radicalization Online* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2018); Ross Frenett and Moli Dow, *One to One Interventions: A Pilot CVE Methodology* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Curtain University, 2014).

[8] Julie Chernov Hwang and Kirsten E. Schulze, "Why They Join: Pathways into Indonesian Jihadist Organizations," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30 (2018): 911-932; Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization Processes: The Formers' Perspective," *JEX Journal EXIT-Deutschland* 1 (2014): 307-377; Daniel Koehler, "The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet," *Journal for Deradicalization* 1 (2014): 116-134; Pete Simi, Karyn Sporer, and Bryan F. Bubolz, "Narratives of Childhood Adversity

and Adolescent Misconduct as Precursors to Violent Extremism: A Life-Course Criminological Approach," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 53 (2016): 536-563.
[9] Kate Barrelle, "Pro-Integration: Disengagement from and Life After Extremism," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 7 (2015): 129-142; Bryan F. Bubolz and Pete Simi, "Leaving the World of Hate: Life-Course Transitions and Self-Change," *American Behavioral Scientist* 59 (2015): 1588-1608; Froukje Demant, Marieke Slootman, Frank Buijs, and Jean Tillie, *Decline and Disengagement: An Analysis of Processes of Deradicalisation* (Amsterdam: IMES Amsterdam, 2018); John Horgan, Mary Beth Altier, Neil Shortland, and Max Taylor, "Walking Away: The Disengagement and De-Radicalization of a Violent Right-Wing Extremist," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 9 (2017):63-77; Pete Simi, Kathleen Blee, Matthew DeMichele, and Steven Windisch, "Addicted to Hate: Identity Residual among Former White Supremacists," *American Sociological Review* 82 (2017): 1167-1187; Steven Windisch, Gina Scott Ligon, and Pete Simi, "Organizational [Dis]trust: Comparing Disengagement Among Former Left-Wing and Right-Wing Violent Extremists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42 (2019): 559-580.
[10] Stijn Sieckelinck, Elga Sikkens, Marion van San, Sita Kotnis, and Micha de Winter, "Transitional Journeys Into and Out of Extremism. A Biographical Approach," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42 (2019): 662-682.
[11] Elga Sikkens, Marion van San, Stijn Sieckelinck, and Micha de Winter, "Parental Influence on Radicalization and De-Radicalization According to the Lived Experiences of Former Extremists and Their Families," *Journal for Deradicalization* 12 (2017): 192-226.
[12] Jerome Drevon, "Embracing Salafi Jihadism in Egypt and Mobilizing in the Syrian Jihad," *Middle East Critique* 25 (2016): 321-339; Koehler, "The Radical Online"; Inga Sikorskaya, *Messages, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan* (Bishkek: Search for Common Ground, 2017); Ines von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards, and Luke Gribbon, *Radicalization in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013).
[13] Pete Simi and Steven Windisch, "Why Radicalization Fails: Barriers to Mass Casualty Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Ahead of Print.
[14] Gordon Clubb, "'From Terrorists to Peacekeepers': The IRA's Disengagement and the Role of Community Networks," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37 (2014): 842-861.
[15] Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, eds. *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London: Routledge, 2008); Kurt Braddock and John Horgan, "Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39 (2016): 381-404; Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, *Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What are the Implications for Government* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2013); Tami Amanda Jacoby, "How the War Was 'One': Countering Violent Extremism and the Social Dimensions of Counter-Terrorism in Canada," *Journal for Deradicalization* 6 (2016): 272-304; Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, "Voices Against Extremism: A Case Study of a Community-Based CVE Counter-Narrative Campaign," *Journal for Deradicalization* 10 (2017): 147-174.
[16] Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*; Tapley and Gordon Clubb, *The Role of Formers in Countering Violent Extremism*.
[17] See Amy- Jane Gielen, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances, and How?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Ahead of Print.

[18] While certain terms, such as 'radicalization' and 'de-radicalization', were included in the initial interview guide, we were concerned that some of the study participants may be put off by these terms. Other participants may have been involved in violent extremism prior to such terms being used in the mainstream. As a result, our interview guide, while systematic, was also flexible and dynamic. As but one way to account for the above concerns, within our interview guide we included a side list of alternative terms and ways of framing the questions. For terms associated with 'radicalization', as an example, alternative terms included 'indoctrination' or alternative wording such as 'adhering to radical views' or 'thinking differently than other people.' For terms associated with 'de-radicalization', alternative wording included 'being open-minded' or 'thinking differently.'
[19] It is important to highlight that, while the interview guide consisted of a set of questions that corresponded specifically with the interview guide categories noted above (such as "how old were you when you were first introduced to radical beliefs), the guide also consisted of a similar and rigours set of questions within and across categories. For example, the guide included a systematic series of questions about friendship networks, belief systems, use of the Internet, and interactions with law enforcement (amongst many other topics of discussion) both before, during, and after being involved in violent extremism.
[20] See Perry, Barbara, and Ryan Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2019).
[21] See Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2006).
[22] Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act in Sociology* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).
[23] Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*; Tapley and Gordon Clubb, *The Role of Formers in Countering Violent Extremism*.
[24] Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization Processes"; Simi et al., "Narratives of Childhood Adversity and Adolescent Misconduct as Precursors to Violent Extremism."
[25] Barrelle, "Pro-Integration"; Horgan et al., "Walking Away."
[26] Demant et al., *Decline and Disengagement*; Melissa Finn, Bessma Momani, Michael Opatowski, and Michael Opondo, "Youth Evaluations of CVE/PVE Programming in Kenya in Context," *Journal for Deradicalization* 7 (2016): 164-224; Hwang and Schulze, "Why They Join"; Perry and Scrivens, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada*; Sieckelinck et al., "Transitional Journeys Into and Out of Extremism"; Simi et al., "Narratives of Childhood Adversity and Adolescent Misconduct as Precursors to Violent Extremism."
[27] Amy-Jane Gielen, "Supporting Families of Foreign Fighter: A Realistic Approach for Measuring the Effectiveness," *Journal for Deradicalization* 2 (2015): 21-48; Sikkens, et al., "Parental Influence on Radicalization and De-Radicalization According to the Lived Experiences of Former Extremists and Their Families"; Steven Weine, "Building Resilience to Violent Extremism in Muslim Diaspora Communities in the United States," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 5 (2012): 60-73.
[28] Pauline G. M. Aarten, Eva Mulder, and Antony Pemberton, "The Narrative of Victimization and Deradicalization: An Expert View," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41 (2017): 557-572.
[29] Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Countering Violent Extremism with Governance Networks," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10 (2016): 135-139; Jacoby, "How the War Was 'One'"; Macnair and Frank, "Voices Against Extremism"; Scrivens, Ryan, and Barbara Perry, "Resisting the Right: Countering Right-Wing Extremism in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 59 (2017): 534-558.
[30] See Scrivens and Perry, "Resisting the Right."

[31] See Radicalisation Awareness Network, *Dos and Don'ts of Involving Formers in PVE/CVE Work* (Bordeaux: RAN Centre of Excellence, 2017).
[32] See Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*.
[33] See Kate Bowers, Paul Gill, Ruth Morgan, Sarah Meiklejohn, and Shane D. Johnson, "Challenges for EMMIE as a Realist Evaluation Framework," in Graham Farrell and Aiden Sidebottom, eds., *Realist Evaluation for Crime Science: Essays in Honour of Nick Tilley* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 98-118.