



Reporting about Violent Extremism and P/CVE Challenges for Journalists – Recommendations from Practitioners

Authored by **Alexander Ritzmann**, RAN Expert Pool Member,
and **Fabian Wichmann**, RAN C&N Co-Leader

Radicalisation Awareness Network



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Summary

- Terrorism is the most **extreme form of communication**. It aims at drawing attention to the political messages of the perpetrators by violently and publicly harming their victims. Terrorism is even more about propaganda and manipulation than it is about the violent act itself.
- Journalists are seen as propaganda tools by terrorists, who even **orchestrate their violence** in a way that it can be best “reported” by the media. For terrorists, there is no such thing as “bad press”, every mention of their existence, ideology and actions is being enthusiastically shared and celebrated in their own communication channels and beyond.
- Careless reporting on extremism and terrorism may lead to **unintended consequences** like the stigmatisation of societal (minority) groups and might limit the effectiveness of preventing and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) activities and projects.
- Journalists should **explain the functionality of terrorism as manipulative communication** and its desired effect on their audience to inoculate them from **overreacting** (see the circle of terrorism and overreaction below).
- Journalists should not exaggerate **the objective threat** by terrorists, otherwise solidarity effects may occur or a preliminary interest may be developed by previously uninterested individuals.
- Journalists should provide audiences with **context** — what the story is behind the event and explain the **complexity** of the situation.
- Journalists should **respect the rights and dignity of victims** and give them a voice if they would like to be heard.
- Journalists should check the credentials and the level of **specific subject matter expertise** when working with **terrorism experts**.
- When reporting on P/CVE, journalists must bear in mind the **balance** between the **general personal rights** of the person concerned and the **public interest** in comprehensive reporting. The protection of personal rights also concerns P/CVE **practitioners** and their relatives. The safety and security of frontline practitioners should also be taken into account. Talk to them about their risk assessments and concerns.
- The **involvement of experts** from the P/CVE field can broaden the perspective and can help assess and classify important contextual factors. Establishing a working relationship trumps ad hoc contacts in moments of crisis.
- When reporting on P/CVE, for proper fact-checking it is necessary to **involve (in-house) specialist journalists** who are familiar with the P/CVE scene and who can professionally assess the respective activities and responsibilities of the various P/CVE actors. Journalists must **double-check information** and further investigate if there are any doubts or inconsistencies.
- Journalists should be aware of **false/disguised compliance by individuals** participating in exit/rehabilitation programmes and to what extent clients were actually involved in a given programme (e.g. London Bridge attacker 2019 and Dresden attacker 2020). P/CVE practitioners are repeatedly confronted to this complex phenomenon.
- P/CVE actors who are **working with (former) extremists** on their deradicalisation and rehabilitation are aware that this is a **complex and often non-linear process**. When reporting on P/CVE projects, particularly exit programmes, it is important to **assess** the projects thoroughly and to take different professional insights into account before reporting about individual cases.

Intro and recommendations

Reporting about extremism and terrorism poses major challenges for journalists on different levels. This paper will address some of the most relevant challenges by introducing key insights and recommendations on how to follow a “do no harm” approach when informing the public, and particularly when reporting about violence. The role of civil society organisations working on P/CVE will also be highlighted.

According to EU law ⁽¹⁾, terrorist offences are acts committed with the aim of:

- seriously intimidating a population;
- unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act;
- seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.

Terrorism is the most extreme form of communication. It could be described as a deadly performance that aims at drawing attention to the political messages of the perpetrators by violently and publicly harming their victims. Terrorism is therefore even more about propaganda and manipulation than it is about the violent act itself. Put differently, without detailed media coverage about a terrorist attack, there might be no international terrorism, just local violence.

On the other hand, journalists have the obligation to inform the public about relevant events, particularly those involving politics and violence. The business models many media outlets and journalists operate with sometimes incentivise fast coverage of an event over providing context and reflection about the intended and unintended consequences of how a (supposed) terrorist attack is being reported.

It is important to highlight that the media and journalists are often seen as propaganda tools by terrorists, who sometimes even orchestrate their violence in a way that it can be best “reported” by the media. The media department of the so-called Islamic State as well as several violent right-wing extremist “lone actors” serve as examples here.

Another key challenge is that from the perspective of extremists and terrorists, there is no such thing as “bad press”. Those actors claim that they are fighting unjust and much more powerful enemies who control public opinion and the media. Hence, every mention of the existence of the extremist or terrorist group or of their ideology and “achievements” is often being enthusiastically shared, commented on and celebrated in their own communication channels and beyond. Being noticed and feared serves as public proof that they are legitimate political actors.

This functionality of extremist violence and terrorism from a communications perspective gives important insights for reporting on this topic. For reporting on extremism, terrorism and P/CVE that follows the “do no harm” principle, it is necessary to understand what makes propaganda potentially successful and dangerous. A better understanding of the underlying intentions and circumstances should help journalists not to inadvertently act as an extension of the communicative departments of these groups.

Manipulative function – Terrorism is the most extreme form of political communication. In this context, terror serves as a tactic rather than a strategy. It is a way to achieve a defined goal. Terror, understood as deadly theatre, only works if there is an audience for it and if it reacts irrationally or in the desired sense of the perpetrators. From the terrorists’ point of view, the counterpart (e.g. a state, government agencies, parts of the population) ideally overreacts and thereby “proves” their narrative of fighting an unjust enemy and maybe even out of self-defence. Thus, terrorists are not concerned with simply frightening their opponents. Rather, they want to manipulate society and government in certain directions, especially via specific communications through terrorist acts and accompanying narratives. Reporting about terrorism can foster this circle of terrorism and overreactions or help in breaking it.

(1) See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3A4322328>

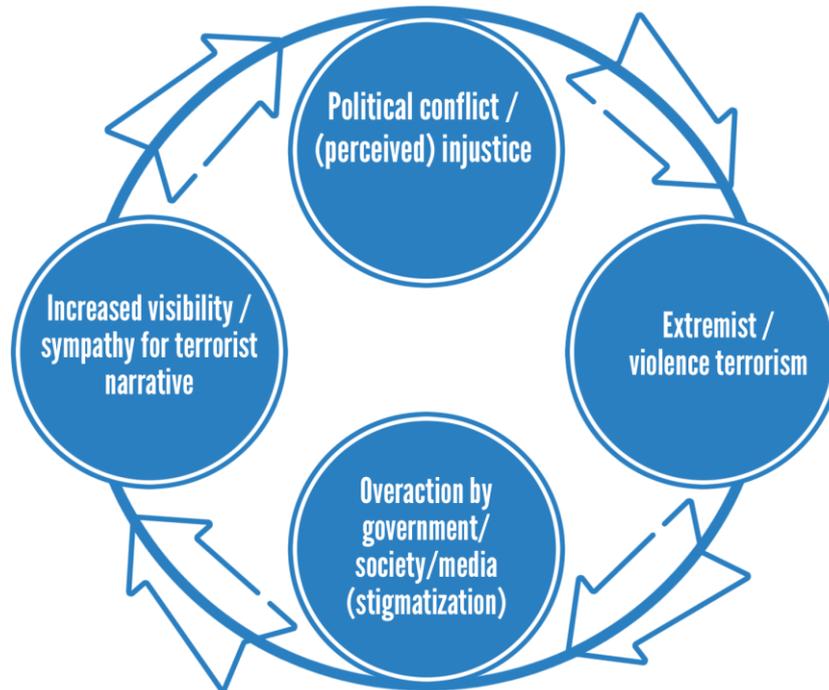


Figure 1: Circle of terrorism and overreactions, © Alexander Ritzmann

Demonstration function – Terrorist acts and their associated communication are also about the demonstration of power. The acts are shaped into a communicative to address different target audiences. On the one hand, the perpetrator(s) signals to their own in-group that they are powerful and resolute. On the other hand, this violence addresses the out-group(s) defined as the enemy; this could be those defined as enemies or those considered “undecided”. In this process, intimidation and uncertainty as well as aggressive reactions are part of the expected and desired response.

Recruitment and radicalisation function – Demonstrating power and strength through violence serves to radicalise the in-group but also to, in terms of radicalisation, encourage imitation. The act therefore serves as a role model. In case of a calculated violent reaction, the radicalisation of the opposing group creates legitimacy for the initial act and for further acts.

Finally, a particular challenge lies in the reporting of an unfolding or ongoing terrorist attack and its immediate aftermath. Here, reporting under pressure and with limited information on developing situations without making false assumptions or jumping to early conclusions, or even — in the worst case — unintentionally supporting the terrorist agenda, is essential. Careless reporting on extremism and terrorism may lead to unintended consequences like the stigmatisation of societal (minority) groups and might limit the effectiveness of P/CVE activities and projects.

Reporting responsibly on politically motivated violence therefore requires the understanding of the key challenges mentioned in the following section and should include key principles of “conflict sensitive reporting” and the “do no harm” approach.

Recommendation: When reporting during or after an attack:

RAN C&N Ex Post Paper – ‘Communications After an Attack’

Consider the RAN GAMMMA+ model, which provides a structured approach to think about the goal, audience, message, messenger, medium and call to action of your communications.

[Read more](#)

Reporting about extremism and terrorism: Dos and Don'ts

Terrorists strategically calculate and plan their media impact in advance. Hence, journalists face the challenging task of finding the right balance between their duty to inform the public and the danger of becoming a propaganda tool of terrorists. The following recommendations are designed to serve as practical guidelines for journalists.

Recommendations

Checklist for responsibly reporting on terrorism and violent extremism:

Dos

- Explain the functionality of **terrorism as manipulative communication** and its desired effect on your audience to inoculate them from overreacting.
- Provide audiences with **context**. What is the story behind the event? Explain the **complexity** of this conflict.
- Address **internal conflicts of terrorist groups**, double standards and inconsistencies, as this can develop further doubts and counteract heroisation.
- **Deconstruct and contextualise** terrorist narratives when appropriate.
- **Respect** the rights and dignity of victims.
- **Give victims a voice** (if they would like to be seen/heard and if ethically sensible).
- Treat all unverified **information** with extreme caution.
- Check the credentials and level of specific expertise when working with **terrorism experts**.

Don'ts

- Avoid making assumptions and unconfirmed **allegations**.
- Avoid exaggerating **the objective threat** by terrorists and terrorist attacks, otherwise solidarity effects may occur or a preliminary interest may be developed by previously uninterested individuals.
- Avoid provoking **panic** and/or anger.
- Avoid (inadvertently) **glorifying** terrorist acts.
- Avoid sensationalist **language**.
- Avoid the **unreflected** use of terms [[more](#)].
- Avoid heroisation; don't rush to **name** perpetrators.

Key challenges for journalists

When reporting on extremism, terrorism and P/CVE, journalists face multiple challenges that further complicate their work in addition to the immediate pressures experienced while reporting on a terrorist attack and aside from the challenge of not stepping into the attackers' communicative traps described in the introduction. It is important to be aware of the different interests, needs and requirements.

1. **Time pressure:** The time pressure and the unsecured information situation in the acute phase of reporting pose a significant challenge. The interest in information in this phase is at conflict with the accessible information. This is made more difficult by so-called alternative media that broadcast unsecured or false information, purposefully or unknowingly. This not only makes investigations more difficult or impossible but also the general assessment and classification of what has happened.
2. **Public interest and anonymity:** Reporting on perpetrators of terrorist attacks or crimes usually also has a significant impact on the professional and private environment of the person covered. Reporting on extremism and terrorism is always a balancing of personal rights versus public interest. It must be weighed which information about the crime and the perpetrator will be published. This involves victim protection, possibilities of reintegrating the perpetrator after a successful deradicalisation process, and the intended staging of the perpetrator via the attack and reporting. In each case, the different interests must be weighed against each other.
3. **Social media versus classic media:** The media compete with the flood of information in social media — especially in connection with extremism and terrorism. On the one hand, they compete in terms of speed and, on the other, in terms of interpretive authority. Incorrect information or information that is not intended for the public spreads on the internet at high speed. As a result, reporting by traditional media is sometimes judged to be slow, incomplete or incorrect. In the worst case, the traditional media react to this with click-baiting or the broadcasting of unverified or reduced information. Often enough, this leads to prejudices, false conclusions and distorted perceptions.
4. **Reciprocal media effects:** Reciprocal effects refer to a two-way effect that arises through media coverage. The effect describes the influence of media presence and how this influences those who are reported on. This effect is particularly important in the context of extremist violence and terrorism, since the act is also a communicative act and the perpetrator usually has a sense of mission. Therefore, every reporting raises the question of one's own role and what effect the reporting can have on the group of perpetrators or potential perpetrators.
5. **Reproduction of narratives in images and text:** Over and over again, when reporting on extremist violence and terrorism, downplaying or heroising images, terms or narratives are used. In some cases, images of the terrorist, video sequences, screenshots or terms such as lone wolf are used, up to narratives that directly or indirectly reinforce the staging of the perpetrators or were intentionally created by them for this reason.
6. **(Mis)Understanding P/CVE programmes:** In the case of recidivism of individuals who are or have been participating in P/CVE deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes, journalists might be confronted with different interests and perspectives of various actors, for example security services, policymakers and civil society organisations. In this context, it is often not easy to fully understand the contextual conditions and therefore to get a comprehensive overview of the individual and their situation. Without contextual knowledge of the situation, the likelihood of unjust treatment of all actors involved in P/CVE increases.

Communication from the perspective of the perpetrators and caveats for reporters

In reporting on extremism and terrorism, the media are confronted with the conflicting issues of the mandate to inform and the ethics of responsibility ⁽²⁾. The main question is how to report on extremist violence without unintentionally being the media arm of these groups or reinforcing and spreading corresponding narratives. In order to better understand the dangers in reporting, it is important to know the media strategies of those groups and to take a closer look at the responsibility of the media.

The perpetrator of the Oslo and Utøya attacks, who murdered 76 people, not only announced his act in advance, he also created a Facebook profile and filled it with information just a few days before the attack. His manifesto, '2083. A European Declaration of Independence', was emailed by him to American and European right-wing extremists as well as Norwegian media just hours before the terrorist act. In the

⁽²⁾ For example, Pürer, *Ethik in Journalismus und Massenkommunikation*.

manifesto, he had posed photos of himself, in an intentionally staged and heroic pose as a fighter, in uniform, with diving combat gear and wearing a gas mask, he provided the imagery for the media coverage. In 2019, a right-wing extremist attacker shot and killed 23 people at a supermarket in El Paso, Texas. Shortly before the crime, he posted a “manifesto” on the internet imageboard 8chan. The Halle bomber, who attacked a synagogue in Germany in 2019 with homemade weapons and murdered two people, targeted global audiences: his manifesto is written in English, and he also speaks a lot of English in the video feed he live-streamed during the attack. It becomes clear that all statements of the perpetrators are directed towards the public, with the aim of attracting attention and recruitment.

Media impact

The self-presentation of extremist violence has changed in recent years. In particular, the possibilities for self-promotion and the communication of their own narratives has become much easier through technological possibilities. Perpetrators create an audience for themselves. One of the pioneers of media criticism in connection with loud and sensationalist reporting was the terrorism researcher Bruce Hoffman. In his standard work, he wrote that the media react to terrorist stagings “with an almost unbridled readiness”⁽³⁾. As a result, they inevitably become part of the staging and therefore directly of the act. But one thing is certain: the perpetrators should not be given a stage, instead they must be critically reported on and the public informed about them.

“Journalists need to resist the urge to sensationalize events in their interest to attract the eyes, ears and clicks...”

UNESCO Guidelines on reporting on terrorism and violent extremism

- The first task of the media must therefore be not only to show what happened but also to explain the context. This requires in-depth study of the subject and a certain expertise.
- This advice may sound well-founded, because many editorial offices see themselves in a competition with social media when it comes to live reporting.
- It is therefore essential to refrain from inappropriately sensationalising violence, brutality and suffering in order to avoid indirectly making oneself a tool of perpetrators of crime.

Reporting as a stage for the perpetrators

An analysis in the *New York Times*⁽⁴⁾ of recent terrorist attacks found that at least one third of violent right-wing extremist terrorists since 2011 have been inspired by others, particularly the Oslo and Utøya attacks (2011), and use similar tactics to execute their terror. The Christchurch, New Zealand, attacker even stated that his act was inspired by those of the Norwegian attacker.

The imitation effect as a consequence of unreflected reporting of suicides is considered a scientifically proven phenomenon⁽⁵⁾. Reporting on terrorism faces a similar challenge based on the fact that sometimes terrorism may be understood as an act of perceived self-empowerment. In addition, Daesh has implemented a system allowing attackers without formal or known connections to the organisation to claim allegiance shortly before an attack, which legitimises them and their act as part of something bigger and increases the appeal for individuals to follow in their steps.

⁽³⁾ Hoffman, Inside Terrorism.

⁽⁴⁾ Cai & Landon, Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing.

⁽⁵⁾ Nacos, B. L. (2009). Revisiting the Contagion Hypothesis: Terrorism, News Coverage, and Copycat Attacks. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 3(3), 3-13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26298412>; Stack, S. (2003). Media coverage as a risk factor in suicide. *Epidemiology & Community Health*, 57(4), 238-240. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech.57.4.238>

“It’s kind of like a knighthood when you’re portrayed as violent ...”

Former extremist, interview, Neumann & Baugut, 2018

By closely studying media coverage of their acts and developing strategies for optimal self-representation, extremists are taking care not to leave anything to chance or random interpretation. Neumann and Baugut’s work on reciprocal media effects shows this very clearly. The authors studied the media use and media staging strategy of German neo-Nazis. They conclude that “right-wing extremist leadership groups are enormously strategic in their self-staging in order to appeal to potential recruits in their respective target groups. In order to achieve their desired presentation ...” ⁽⁶⁾.

One interviewee makes the strategic approach to extremist violence very clear: “Mass media act as a tool of dissemination. Just imagine that some right-wing extremists paint a synagogue with blood, then smash a pig’s head into the window, and mass media then act as a medium to be propagated. (...) So it’s not just about threatening individuals, but also about creating a setting of violence and appearing threatening” ⁽⁷⁾. It also becomes evident that different approaches, with different focuses and target groups, are implemented: “It’s kind of like a knighthood when you’re portrayed as violent, because you know: that attracts an extremely large number of people who are willing to do anything” ⁽⁸⁾.

Out of a fear of copycats or of pointing out her own failings, the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1985 prompted the media to stop reporting on terrorism. From her perspective, the perpetrators should be deprived of the “oxygen of publicity”. On the one hand, this statement illustrates the interaction between terror and the media; on the other hand, it highlights the uncertainty in dealing with religiously and ideologically motivated violence and terrorism. In various countries (e.g. France, Germany, New Zealand), some media outlets have committed themselves to not report details about the attackers ⁽⁹⁾. No photos, no life story, no indirect fame is the intention behind this approach. Most media continue to argue their duty to inform the public. In any case, not reporting is not a solution, since interested parties already have partly direct access to propaganda via social media.

In principle, the media can contribute positively to preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism by giving space to more moderate media voices and alternative narratives. Reporting on positive examples of people who were threatened by radicalisation and yet chose a different path or on those who successfully exited can contribute to this while also serving as a potential impetus for change.

To avoid falling into the terrorists’ trap, it is important to work with sources directly linked to them with particular care or to refrain from doing so at all.

- **Texts / manifestos:** Texts, manifestos or other written sources published in connection to the attack by the perpetrator or the group should never be published without contextualisation and in no case in their entirety. They are part of the production and serve only the purpose of disseminating the perpetrator’s ideology or narrative. For recipients who are critical of the perpetrator’s narratives, these admissions have no informational value. For people who follow similar narratives or might be vulnerable to such ideas, these products have a strengthening effect and can contribute to further radicalisation or imitation.
- **Naming:** To publish the full names of attackers is a contentious issue. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, commented on this after the Christchurch attack and announced that she would no longer mention the name of the perpetrator. She said to name the victims and not the perpetrator. In contrast, there is a perception that this approach may be perceived as inappropriately protecting the perpetrator. Perpetrators are celebrated as heroes or ‘saints’ in extremist groups and amongst supporting environments and serve as role models. In the case of the anti-Semitic attacker of Halle, the perpetrator’s

⁽⁶⁾ Baugut & Neumann, *Durch Medien radikalisiert?*, p. 68.

⁽⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁽⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁽⁹⁾ For example, DPA. (2016, July 27). *Medien zeigen keine Fotos mehr von Attentätern*. Handelsblatt.

<https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/terror-in-frankreich-medien-zeigen-keine-fotos-mehr-von-attentaetern/13936012.html?ticket=ST-3207169-a3ab2vNwj6oCckGEtCqX-ap1>; Borger, M. (2020, July 22). *Eine Bühne für den Täter?* Deutschlandfunk.

https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/berichterstattung-aus-dem-gericht-eine-buehne-fuer-den.2907.de.html?dram:article_id=481031

instrumentalising approach to the media became especially evident. At court, he insisted on being published without pixelation and with his full name. Publicity and visibility were part of his calculation. Especially for the public, it is not a lack of information if they are informed about the crime but not about the full name of the perpetrator. It is therefore necessary to weigh up the arguments in favour of publishing the name. There are many good reasons against publication. On the other hand, not naming perpetrators could fuel conspiracy myths of government orchestrated “false flag” attacks, particularly if attackers would remain undisclosed due to the mentioned concerns of heroisation.

- **Images / visual language:** Even in the case of critical reporting, the images act as a multiplier of the idea. Therefore, care should be taken in the imagery not to reproduce the intention of the perpetrators or groups. Images should not only be used as graphic framing but should expand the content. Images that heroise or idealise the perpetrators’ actions or ideology should not be used. In particular, material that the perpetrator has produced themselves, for example when the perpetrator films or photographs themselves during the act, should not be used.
- **Ideological narratives:** Time and again, when reporting on extremist violence and terrorism, the use of trivialising or heroising terms or narratives are used. In this context, terms such as lone wolf and even narratives are used that directly or indirectly reinforce the staging of the perpetrators. In the case of media reports about the act, it is always a weigh up of how much of the perpetrator’s intended narrative can be adopted and how this can be critically classified and therefore go beyond the level of representation.

Recommendation

Guidelines for journalists: ‘Reporting on violent extremism and terrorism’

Guiding principles for journalists. Bullet points from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Conclusions from the conference “Media and Terrorism” in September 2018.

[Read more](#)

The voices of victims of terrorism

In the reporting on extremist violence, the perspectives of victims are rarely present. The basic principle is that the identity of victims must be particularly protected. Reporting on extremist violence is not fundamentally different from reporting on crime in general; here, too, the victims must be protected first and foremost. It is therefore particularly important to choose a sensitive form of reporting in connection with victims.

Reports on extremist violence and terrorism often focus on the perspective of the perpetrator, starting from the crime itself. With the aim of better understanding the crime and the person behind it, many details about the perpetrator and their narrative are included in the reporting. Although the offender perspective is interesting and important for prevention, from a research perspective and also for the conceptualisation of P/CVE measures ⁽¹⁰⁾, the information value for the general reader is limited. At the same time, it narrows the view and ignores the perspective of the victims.

- The name and photo (also applies to private photos from social media accounts) of a victim may be published if the victim or relatives or other authorised persons have approved the use, or if the victim is a public figure.
- Reporting requires ethics based on respect. Victims should be part of the focus of journalistic reporting. This is part of the duty to inform, but it must be strictly regulated so that victims and their friends and family are respected, especially since most people affected by an incident do not know how the media works.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Scrivens et al., *What can former right-wing extremists tell us about radicalization and counter-radicalization?*; Wichmann & Benneckenstein, *Einmal Nazi, immer Nazi?*

- Victims in particular have the right to refuse to be interviewed. If victims do so, do not offer a benefit in return to persuade them. Instead, interview experts or organisations to get the desired information.
- The impact of victims' photos and survivors' statements on their families must be considered in advance.
- Put a face on victims and tell their stories: The idea is to put a face, a personality, on the victim by highlighting a passion, hobby or philanthropic endeavour about which the person is visible.

Recommendation

'Handbook: Voices of victims of terrorism'

This handbook is a compilation of experiences shared during the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) meetings of the Voices of Victims Working Group (RAN VVT). The RAN VVT Working Group considered how testimonies from victims of terrorism can work as a powerful narrative in countering violent extremism.

[Read more](#)

Reflection on P/CVE programmes and recidivism

When reporting on extremist violence and terrorism, journalists often encounter P/CVE activities and projects. These projects can offer journalists helpful access to relevant insights into the field. On the other hand, P/CVE projects are confronted with high, often even unrealistic, public expectations of their activities, especially in the case of recidivism of former participants of deradicalisation or rehabilitation programmes. Recidivism rates in the field of politically/ideologically motivated violence are very low compared to other forms of crimes⁽¹¹⁾. However, in the case of such an incident, practitioners often become the focus of interest and also of criticism despite the fact that P/CVE interventions, like any other type of intervention, can never provide 100 % security — and never claim to do so. Even expert counsellors cannot fully comprehend the (hidden) motivations of the individuals they work with and in some cases are confronted with the fact that a person instrumentalises participation in a P/CVE programme for their own purposes (false compliance). One reason for this might be, for example, hopes for an early release from prison with the intent to commit an attack. Biographical distortions, traumata, and psychological and psychopathological factors can also play a role. However, these are not always obvious or known and are sometimes hard to detect, even in cases with a long-standing working relationship. In order to gain a comprehensive and comprehensible picture of the situation, practitioners directly involved as well as external professionals and experts have to be included in order to shed light on the background and contextual factors.

Especially in the aftermath of attacks, policymakers and the public expect answers and attributions of responsibilities, which are sometimes rushed and made unfairly. Merely reporting that the perpetrator was "taking part in a P/CVE programme" and jumping to questioning the overall *raison d'être* of said programme is not sufficient. It is therefore important to evaluate the work of P/CVE actors carefully and sensibly and to analyse the situations properly as well as the different roles and responsibilities of all actors involved. Additionally, the question of how to handle anonymity of perpetrators constitutes a sensitive issue. While the need for protecting victims is often understood and accepted, this is not the case for (former) offenders. But anonymity is in some cases a precondition for a successful rehabilitation and stabilisation process after serving a sentence. Additionally, the safety and security of frontline practitioners should also be taken into account. Speaking to them about their risk assessments and concerns is highly recommended.

There are many challenges related to the need to react quickly to developing situations, without making false assumptions or jumping to early conclusions, or even — in the worst case — unintentionally fuelling terrorist propaganda. Some of these challenges and topics that journalists as well as practitioners face will be discussed here from a practitioner's perspective.

⁽¹¹⁾ Hodwitz, *The terrorism recidivism study*; Renard, *Overblown*; Wright, *An examination of jihadi recidivism rates in the United States*.

- **Personal rights / need for security** – A balance must always be struck between the general personal rights of the person concerned and the public interest in comprehensive reporting. In the case of criminals or perpetrators, however, one generally assumes that the person is a so-called relevant person of contemporary history, which in principle justifies naming them. The role of the person, the degree and nature of the crime, and the time of reporting are relevant. But in principle, extensive public reporting on the crime, its context and consequences or the fate of the victims is possible even without identifying the names and ages of the perpetrators.

The protection of personal rights also concerns the practitioners involved and their relatives. Particularly in the event of recidivism in a case they are accompanying or have accompanied, there is a need to protect them, as they may also be traumatised or suffer from severe stress due to the situation, or they might come under attack from members of the public or other extremist groups who unjustly blame them for the attack.

- **Collective memory in the media age - Obstacles to integration** – Reporting in the sense of legitimate public interest often conflicts with the possibilities of rehabilitation. As time passes and after the sentence has been served, the offender's interest in rehabilitation becomes increasingly important. Following on from this, the offender may be entitled to a right to be forgotten, which extends in particular to publications on the internet. Particularly in the case of activities aimed towards (re)integration into the employment or the social environment after release from prison, identifying reporting is a large barrier. Furthermore, the family or larger social environment of a given person might be easy to identify and suffer unjust societal, sometimes even violent, repercussions based on extensive reporting on an attacker's identity and biographical background. In cases of doubt, complete anonymisation should be an option. The subsequent changing of texts in the case of justified and comprehensible interest can be an option.
- **Context and ideology** – In order to understand the circumstances, thoughts, motives and ideological narratives that led to the acts, it is necessary to engage with the perpetrators and their biographies. This is beyond question and, if left out, would be understood as distorting or sparing the perpetrators. Nevertheless, in the context of extremist violence, the context of the ideological environment must also be illuminated.
- **Careless reporting** on radicalisation and P/CVE may, similar to careless P/CVE approaches themselves, lead to unintended stigmatisation of societal (minority) groups.
- **Comprehensive picture** – With reference to the respective individual, it is important to know the needs evaluated by the practitioner, as well as the context of the person in question, in order to know and evaluate the P/CVE measures. It must be noted that even the projects in this area do not always have all the necessary information that would allow a complete evaluation of the situation. Or, information is deliberately withheld and in some cases an intentional misleading of the practitioners can be assumed. This illustrates the problems practitioners are confronted with in their work. Furthermore, the individual development of the person is to be seen as a process and can only be understood in the context of his or her life reality.
- **Recidivism** is a part of the work in the field of P/CVE, even though it only concerns a fraction of the cases.
- **Stakeholder tensions** – The work in this field also moves in the area of tension between governmental and non-governmental programmes as well as between security and non-security actors. This often leads to role conflicts, discussions around necessary allocations of funds and further need for clarification between all actors. These surrounding processes also affect the work with affected individuals itself.
- **False / disguised compliance** – P/CVE actors are repeatedly confronted with “false / disguised compliance” in their work. This means that the individual creates the appearance of cooperating in order not to arouse suspicion and to allay the professionals' concerns. It is up to the P/CVE practitioners to identify this behaviour, which in turn depends on many factors, such as time, environment, transparency, situational information from other actors involved, etc. Not all of these factors can be influenced by practitioners.
- **Social desirability** – Social desirability is a special form of self-presentation, whereby a person strives to present himself in a way that corresponds to the real or presumed social expectations and norms of the environment. With their interaction, they want to live up to the supposed expectations of the other person and promise themselves advantages from this. In this context, journalists must bear in mind that

especially in prison contexts, the motivation of the client cannot always be fully clarified. This is especially important if clients expect to benefit from the intervention and want to use the services strategically. This affects the relationship as well as the setting.

- **Fact-checking – Four eyes standard** – When reporting on P/CVE, it is necessary for fact-checking to involve in-house specialist journalists who are familiar with the P/CVE scene thematically and professionally and can thus classify the activities and/or the organisation involved.
- **Voluntariness** – It is also relevant in which setting the intervention took place. Was it a voluntary participation or was there a coercive context that allows for different assumptions about the motivation?

Further reading

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About the authors:

Alexander Ritzmann has been working on the promotion of liberal democracy and the prevention of violent extremism for about 20 years. Alexander is a senior advisor to the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) on the effective countering of extremist/terrorist actors and content online. He is also a senior advisor to the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) where he particularly focuses on extremist ideologies, narratives and strategic communications. In this capacity, he co-developed the GAMMMA+ model for effective alternative and counter-narratives, which serves as a tool kit for practitioners all over the EU and beyond. At the German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP), Alexander co-develops and facilitates the InFoEx. He has received his master's degree (Diplom) in Political Science from the Free University of Berlin in 2000.

Fabian Wichmann has been working for the ZDK Gesellschaft Demokratische Kultur gGmbH / EXIT-Germany since 2006, in exit counselling, campaigning and social media management. He is co-initiator of the multiple award-winning initiatives Nazis against Nazis and #DonateTheHate as well as the Trojan T-shirt. Fabian Wichmann is co-leader of RAN's Communication and Narratives Working Group (RAN C&N).

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