UCL

The Moral Ecology of Extremism

A Systemic Perspective

Noémie Bouhana, PhD.

The Moral Ecology of Extremism

A Systemic Perspective

Dr Noémie Bouhana

University College London

Prepared for the UK Commission for Countering Extremism

July 2019

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

  – John Muir (1838-1914)

A fragmented knowledge-base

The question of what drives extremism has generated a wealth of observations, relating to the characteristics of people who adopt extremist beliefs and engage in extremist behaviour, and to the features of situations that encourage the adoption of such beliefs and the engagement in such behaviour.

Concerns about the harmful potential of new technologies have fuelled a renewed interest in the environmental drivers of extremism. Exposure to violence-supportive narratives, discrimination, migration, disinformation, cultural norms, the mobilisation of social identities by social movements – these are only some of the exogenous contributors hypothesised to play a part.

This multiplication of drivers begs the question of knowledge integration. How do they fit together? Are all individuals equally exposed and permeable to their effects or are some of us more 'at risk' than others? On what basis should we assess whether social, political, technological, economic or cultural change might suppress or support extremism?

This paper does not enumerate all possible contributors to extremism. Rather, it addresses some conceptual challenges in this problem space; namely, a lack of clarity as to problem definition, and the limited integration of individual and exogenous accounts of extremism. Inasmuch as these questions remain unresolved, they contribute to the persistence of the problem in and of themselves.

At the outset, the argument is made that the definitional problem is not trivial and that perpetually moving the goalposts risks turning extremism into an insoluble policy issue. As such, a case is put forward in favour of a narrower problem statement. The requirements of an integrative approach are outlined and an inference framework is used to structure current knowledge about the drivers of extremism, grounded in a functional account of morality.[1] The paper concludes that an effective counter-extremism strategy must adopt a systemic perspective to address the emergence of the moral ecologies that foster this phenomenon.

Beware wicked problems

Problems come in kinds. *Simple* problems are straightforward. *Complicated* problems have many moving parts, but the relationships between them are

knowable. These problems can usually be tamed, given an adequate commitment of resources. What sets *complex* problems apart are the non-linear relationships between their constituents.[2] They involve concepts that are fuzzily defined. They are embedded in systems with emergent properties, which interact in unpredictable ways. Programmes to tackle these problems tend to have unforeseen effects.[3]

Many social problems are complex.[4] Understandingly, it can be tempting to reframe them as complicated problems that can be solved if enough money and effort are spent. When this approach fails, we might choose to move the goalposts.

9/11, 7/7 were traumatic events. Their consequences were so staggering, while at the same time the parts implicated in bringing them about seemed so knowable (men directed by a terrorist organisation known as Al Qaeda), that a standard response to dealing with complicated problems was implemented: massive resources were invested to counter terrorism. Yet, framed as a military matter, the problem was ill-posed. When interventions abroad failed to quell terrorism, the problem was brought home and reinterpreted as one of *home-grown radicalisation*. A few iterations of the Prevent Strategy later, however, terrorism remained a threat and this was seen as evidence that the target had not been broad enough. The real problem was *extremism*, the "root cause" of many social ills, above and beyond terrorism.[5]

Once more, the goalposts shifted.

A complex problem becomes *wicked* when it is characterised by piecemeal, clashing, constantly changing requirements.[6] The perception of the problem itself is contentious and malleable: definitions are disputed or elusive. Because there are no boundaries, it is impossible to say where the problem stops and where the solution begins. Interventions have unintended consequences on other, interlocking problems. The very claim that there is a problem may be challenged.

This seems a fair description of the problematisation of extremism today.[7] At best, extremism is well on its way to becoming a wicked problem. At worst, it is one already.

Problematising extremism

Agreeing consensual problem definitions is difficult. Policy, the law, science, civil society at large each have their own requirements. Consensus may not even be desirable, because a definition is good in relation to its purpose, a point well-made by Lord Anderson of Ipswich in his recent Treasurer's Lecture on *Extremism and the Law*.[8] A good definition from the point of view of the law or policy may not be of service to science and vice versa.

How, then, to conceive of a (wicked?) problem like extremism for the purpose of uncovering its drivers, in order to inform a national strategy to counter it?

As a starting point, we can ask ourselves: what are the manifestations of the phenomenon, which we would like to suppress? We are concerned with extremism because it has harmful social effects, brought on by the actions of extremists, actions which contravene certain categories of moral norms and rules of conduct.[9]

It is worth returning to Lord Anderson, who made three very important remarks. The first is that most of the activities we think of as harmful extremist behaviour, from hate crime to terrorism, already fall under criminal law. The second is that we should resist policy change that "leaves citizens unclear whether their actions or projected actions will be judged to be objectionable", as this "risks undermining the rule of law."[10] The third remark, in the form of advice to the Commission for Countering Extremism, is that "[w]hen it comes to recommending new offences or other coercive measures, [the Commission should] work with the grain of what is already there: just because extremism is a word does not mean that it is a useful legal concept."[11]

Let us take on board the last remark, first: because a concept gains traction in some domain does not mean that it designates a phenomenon characterised by a coherent set of properties or a specific set of causes.

Next, if we are concerned with stopping citizens from engaging in certain harmful actions, then the first and best mechanism we have in place is clear moral guidance: explicit rules of conduct that state what is considered right or wrong to do, attached to unambiguous consequences should they be broken. In functioning societies, the law is the most effective crime prevention technology.

Lastly, if most of the extremist actions we wish to prevent are already criminalised, then reducing extremism to unlawful extremist actions would take into account much of what we find problematic about the otherwise amorphous

and ill-defined phenomenon. To establish what is extremist, "one requires a benchmark."[12] Arguably, the most explicit benchmark we have is the law.

Hence, in the interest of crafting a problem statement that is solvable, this paper concerns itself with explaining why some individuals *come to see committing acts of unlawful extremist behaviour as morally legitimate and choose to carry them out*.

This problem statement has a number of advantages.

1. It conceptualises extremism in such a way as to be applicable regardless of time period and jurisdiction: i.e. as the breaking of rules of conduct set out in the laws of a given society.[13]

2. It defines its object in terms of what is observable (unlawful actions).

3. It does not refer to any specific set of values (e.g. particular religious or political beliefs) leading to any specific set of violent or non-violent actions, which means that the ensuing discussion is relevant to all unlawful extremist behaviour, regardless of driving ideology. The actions considered do not have to be circumscribed to violent actions and the account remains applicable even if the legal definition of extremist behaviour changes over time. It is left up to society to define what specific actions are objectionable and should be lawfully proscribed, in the same way that any society – not its academics – decides what actions constitute any type of crime.

4. It does not refer to any state of mind required for an act to be considered extremist. In this way, the problem statement avoids the possible tautological pitfall of containing both the description of the object and its explanation. Extremist behaviour may be caused by particular social dynamics (e.g. perception of threat from an out-group)[14], states of mind (e.g. need for cognitive closure) [15] or motivations (e.g. desire for existential significance)[16], but prior to analysis, we do not know this. It is what we are trying to find out.

To sum up: extremism is, by definition, a relational term.[17] What a society perceives as extremist is subject to change and may differ widely from what another society would consider extremist. [18] What remains is that actions deemed extremist contravene a set of norms, both formal (legal rules of conduct) and informal (social norms), and that the most objective measure of the normative benchmark we have at our disposal is the law. Consequently, one

way to reduce extremism to a useful concept, *for the purpose of discovering its causes and in order to inform a national counter-strategy*, is to define extremist acts as what is deemed to be unlawful extremist behaviour in a given jurisdiction.[19]

Does everything matter?

A recent brief by the European Union's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) states that violent extremism is best understood as the outcome of a "kaleidoscope of factors", which create "infinite individual combinations".[20] While the document refers specifically to violent extremism, it is fairly reflective of an approach to the explanation of extremist behaviour, whereby factors at various levels of explanation associated with the problem are described, but the question of their combined interplay is not addressed in detail.

In her review of research on home-grown radicalisation in Europe[21], Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen observes that explanations for violent extremism fall into three categories: sociological accounts, social movement and social network theories, and largely atheoretical, empirical individual-level accounts. She concludes that, while each category of accounts addresses important elements of the radicalisation process, all fail to tackle the problem of specificity.[22]

The Commission for Countering Extremism identifies this same problem in its Terms of Reference, when it states:

> There is [...] widespread academic disagreement over the drivers and causes of extremism. *It is also the case that the majority of people who share what are assumed to be drivers do not go on to engage in extremist activities or behaviour.* [23] (emphasis added)

Dalgaard-Nielsen suggests that the three types of accounts should be seen as complementary, rather than competing. In the same vein, Schmid[24] contends that radicalisation studies have put too much emphasis on the micro (individual) level of analysis, and that full explanations should integrate the meso (group and community) and macro (structural) levels.

How, then, should we carry out this integrative task, in order to make sense of the "infinite individual combinations" of factors implicated in the explanation of extremism?

Ours is not to reason why, but *where*

The fragmentation of causal accounts is a familiar problem to criminologists[25] and much recent effort has gone into developing empirically-grounded theories, which articulate the "rules of interaction"[26] between personal and external drivers of crime. A fundamental take-away is that much of the risk associated with this kind of complex social problem emerges from the interaction between individual and context. Whether someone will become involved in crime depends in a large part on their environment – where they are, as much as who they are.

Indeed, some of the strongest evidence available in criminology relates to the temporal and spatial concentration of crime, to the socio-physical characteristics of criminogenic places, and to the causal effects of place-based mechanisms on crime and criminal development.[27] It has also been observed that where crime concentrates, so do other kinds of disadvantage, like health problems and psychological distress.[28] The very notion of Prevent priority areas implies that radicalisation, too, is thought to concentrates geographically, and early research findings support this.[29]

If there is a way to address the problem of specificity with regards to extremist behaviour, it will require that we understand what kinds of individual drivers matter in what kinds of contexts, as well as understanding how these contexts emerge.

The S[5] inference framework

In 2010, ahead of the revision of the Prevent Strategy, the author and her colleague, Professor Per-Olöf Wikström, were commissioned by the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism to synthesise the knowledge-base on the causes of Al-Qaeda-influenced radicalisation.[30] As a point of departure, they took a theory of moral action and crime causation known as Situational Action Theory (SAT).[31] Since then, this work has been the foundation of several sophisticated studies on the individual and ecological causes of extremism,[32] and of a number of research projects on lone-actor terrorism risk[33] and the emergence of radicalising environments.[34]

To enable the integration of knowledge from other behavioural science domains and to support the operational and strategic analysis of risk associated with violent extremism, the original theory was developed into the S[5] inference

framework (Figure 1). Rather than enumerate all known drivers or possible risk indicators of extremist behaviour (a theoretically infinite, ever-changeable list), S[5] sets out how five key categories of determinants interact to generate or suppress the risk of extremist propensity development and extremist action.

Extremist propensity as moral propensity

To explain how an individual acquires an extremist propensity is to explain 1) how they come to see extremist actions as morally legitimate and 2) how they fail to develop, or do not make use of, their capacity for self-regulation, leaving them more likely to choose to carry out an extremist act, in certain situations.

Propensity is first and foremost a question of one's commitment to action-relevant moral rules of conduct, because much of human behaviour is guided by rules about what is right or wrong to do – acceptable or unacceptable – in a given context.[35] Evolutionary biologists hold that we developed systems of moral values in large part because of the need to choose the most advantageous between alternative courses of action, by anticipating their consequences, and because of the need to predict the behaviour of others to enable social cooperation.[36]

This functional perspective seems congruent with a number of observations, such as the fact that social identities appear rooted in specific sets of moral guidelines, values and judgements;[37] that individuals are more sensitive – to a stressful, physiological degree – to in-group moral disapproval compared to outgroup moral disapproval;[38] that groups act as "moral anchors" in competitive and conflicting moral environments, and that contravening group moral rules can have highly negative social consequences for their members.[39] Also congruent is research suggesting that claims of moral superiority in reaction to perceived threats to group social advantage are central characteristics of extremist belief systems.[40] This hyper-salience of morality may also explain why societies react to antinomian crimes – that not only breach, but aim to overthrow normative consensus (like violent extremism; terrorism; certain forms of paedophilia) – with acute disapproval and severity.[41]

At the individual level, recent experiments in human cognition indicate that morality constrains people's representations of what they think of as possible to do, to the extent that people tend to default to treating immoral events as impossible.[42] That is why understanding how people come to see extremist action as morally justified is so crucial for an account of extremist behaviour. In

a nutshell: to see extremist action as morally legitimate is to see it as *something that one could possibly do*.

But while extremist moral change, commonly known as radicalisation, raises the potential for future action by making extremist actions appear as possible, it does not necessitate it. To explain how an individual actually engages in extremist *action* is to explain how they find themselves in a situation that 1) motivates them to act; 2) leads them to perceive extremist action as a legitimate and advantageous alternative in the circumstances; and 3) leads them to choose to carry it out then and there.[43]

Both processes – radicalisation and action – should be explained independently, because it is possible (in fact, likely) for a radicalised individual never to choose to carry out an extremist action, *and* it is possible for an individual who is not radicalised to carry out an act of extremism in certain situations, such as, for example, intense peer pressure or coercion.

People and contexts

Four of the five levels of analysis of the S[5] framework are concerned with context, meaning that exogenous drivers are seen as fundamental contributors to the explanation of extremist behaviour. Even at the individual level, it is those factors that impact the degree to which an individual is susceptible (or not) to salient contextual influences, which are theorised to matter most.

To explain why some people and not others, who can appear similar in many ways, acquire an extremist propensity or engage in extremist behaviour is effectively to explain why certain kinds of people find themselves in certain kinds of contexts at certain times.[44]

The main purpose of S[5] is to guide the formulation of inferences about *what kinds of people* in *what kinds of contexts* at *what times* should be considered 'at risk'.

In the remainder of this paper, the role of each key category of determinants is outlined and plausible contributions for some of the factors and processes reportedly associated with extremist behaviour are inferred on that basis. As stated, the aim is not to enumerate everything, but to structure thinking about the role of suspected contributors.[45]
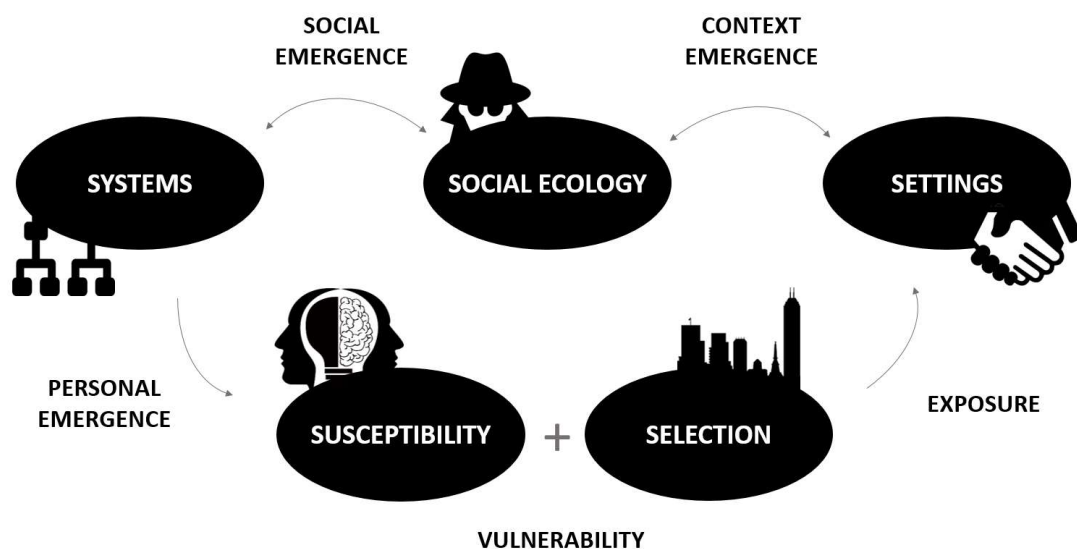
Figure 1. The S^5 inference framework

A multilevel analysis of extremism

Susceptibility

At the individual level, the key determinant is *susceptibility to moral change*. Evidence of differential susceptibility – the notion that some individuals are more susceptible to environmental influence than others [46] – has been documented in several domains. Most importantly for us, there is reason to think that individuals differ in their susceptibility to 1) the extremist socialising influences in their environment; and 2) situational features that support the emergence of the motivation and choice to engage in extremist behaviour.

Differential susceptibility to crime has been studied at length. The main determinants have been identified as weak commitment to law-relevant morality, inappropriate moral emotions, poor self-control, and several neuropsychological characteristics, such as impulsivity, thrill-seeking, poor affect regulation, cognitive rigidity, attention deficit and other evidence of poor executive functioning.[47]

Given difficulties associated with research on extremism, findings are somewhat less robust, but they suggest similar processes may be involved in individual susceptibility to extremism. In a large survey of young Belgian adults, low self-control had the strongest direct effect on self-reports of political aggression,

regardless of ideological leaning.[48] Cross-sectional research looking at the link between extremism and common mental illness finds that past criminal convictions are a key risk factor among White British and Pakistani populations in England, alongside comorbid anxiety and depression. The authors interpret this to mean that receptivity to extreme ideologies is related to poor self-regulation.[49] Most recently, psychological experiments have suggested that cognitive inflexibility is a reliable predictor of extremist attitudes, including endorsement of violence and willingness to die for a group.[50]

Regarding the common roots of criminality and extremism, analysis of data from a large longitudinal study suggests that people who already see violence and rule-breaking as justifiable are more vulnerable to involvement in violent extremism, especially when they live in environments characterised by conflict, repression, or social and economic strains.[51] No other measure, whether related to generalised trust, parental involvement, deviant peer group or violent media consumption proved a better predictor, with the exception of gender. Further longitudinal research has found that both non-violent support for a right-wing extremist ideology and the potential for violent extremism are associated with weak commitment to law-relevant morality and a poor ability to exercise self-control.[52] Additionally, a recent examination of men convicted of violent hate crime has found that these individuals have extensive criminal careers involving a wide variety of criminal offences and tend to be even more criminally prolific than other (non-hate crime) violent offenders.[53]

These findings are not surprising, if we consider that many extremist actions are criminal in nature. Much has been made of a new nexus between crime and violent extremism, because a significant number of individuals implicated in terrorist offences have criminal antecedents.[54] Given the above, more than a crime-terror nexus we might speak of a crime-*crime* nexus, inasmuch as the same susceptibility appears to be a driver for both types of offending.[55]

The existence of a differential susceptibility to unlawful extremist behaviour, rooted in weak commitment to context-appropriate rule-guidance, and compounded by poor executive functioning,[56] makes sense of conflicting findings as to the importance (or lack thereof) of a host of exogenous factors, such as exposure to extremist content online and offline, individual and collective strains (e.g. those related to loss of personal significance or to perceived threats to sacred group values), influence of extremist peers, social disintegration, community polarisation, declining perceptions of legitimacy, collective anomy, migration experiences, and so on.[57] Their effect, if any, are likely to be conditioned on the susceptibility of the individuals exposed.

Crucially, however, susceptibility is *a dimension*, not a category. People who have exhibited heightened susceptibility in the past (e.g. criminals) might be, in a manner of speaking, the 'canaries in the coal mine': people especially reactive to moral strain, attracted to groups claiming that commitment to their moral system will reduce the cognitive pressures these individuals are often ill-equipped to handle, and will lead to more advantageous action choices than these individuals have made in the past (and which, on occasion, have landed them in prison). That is not to say that no one else can be susceptible.

In order to explain why some susceptible individuals end up adopting extremist beliefs and engaging in unlawful extremist actions, while other susceptible individuals do not, *or* why some individuals, who, on the face of it, do not seem as susceptible are nevertheless drawn into extremism, we must turn to the role of context, which is where the other four levels of explanation of S[5] come in.

Selection

When we think of vulnerability to extremism, we might think first of all about the sort of susceptibility previously discussed: characteristics which make some people more susceptible to extremist influence. Yet, to be truly vulnerable to something, one needs to be at risk of coming into contact with it. In other words, one needs to be at risk of *exposure*.[58] Much as we need to understand why people vary in their susceptibility to extremism, we need to understand why they vary in their risk of exposure to extremism-enabling environments. We need to understand *selection*.

Briefly put, *social selection* operates on the basis of social forces that encourage or compel, or discourage or bar, certain categories of people from taking part in particular kinds of place-based activities.[59] Residence and socio-economic status are some of the most common factors of social selection. Living in a particular neighbourhood or belonging to a particular social group (ethnic group, religious, professional, and so on) affects the chance of exposure to certain places and the participation in certain activities. If these place-based activities lead to contact with extremism-supportive influences, then social selection becomes a factor in the explanation of why some people rather than others become extremists.[60]

If social selection sets the stage for exposure, people also choose to spend time in particular settings as a result of personal preferences acquired over their lifetime. This we can call *self-selection*.[61] If I am barred from taking part in a political rally because I am a woman, I am subject to social selection on the basis

of gender discrimination; if I choose to attend the meetings of a local women's group because I prefer the company of other women, I am enacting self-selection.

Selection is the bridge between individual and environmental levels of explanation. Given the way social life is organised (its routines; its structures; its norms) and given where extremism-enabling settings are found, some categories of people will be more at risk of exposure compared to the rest of the population. This may be why, at different times and in certain places, individuals who belong to certain group – young people, residents of particular neighborhoods, criminals, students, the socially disadvantaged, inmates, certain social media users, and so on – have been (reportedly) over-represented among extremists.[62]

Selection is likely the key process which explains why it is possible to find statistical profiles of extremists in particular places at particular times, yet a stable, general profile remains elusive.[63] In any given environment, extremism-enabling, place-based activities will select for similar kinds of people. But these activity settings differ across environments and can displace over time, so the kinds of people selected for exposure and the kinds of moral systems they are exposed to will also vary.

Selection is also likely to be part of the explanation why individuals who do not seem especially susceptible to moral change end up adopting extremist beliefs. They may possess characteristics that select them for *habitual* exposure to extremism-enabling settings. Even if their susceptibility threshold is relatively high, sustained, effective exposure could result in moral change over time.[64]

Vulnerability to extremism, then, is context-dependent, because it combines individual susceptibility characteristics, which may be relatively stable, and selection susceptibility characteristics, which are likely to vary across place and time.[65]

Settings

People are socialised and act in *places*, even if these places are virtual, so what makes an extremism-enabling place? Observations would suggest that settings which enable the acquisition of a morality supportive of extremism are characterised by certain socialising affordances.[66]

Cognitive affordances

Reportedly, extremism-enabling settings have features that can bring about cognitive states which make people more amenable to the adoption of new moral beliefs, such as features that mobilise their attention and foster cognitive receptivity. [67] Various types of perceptions have been associated with this process, such as loss of effective control, feelings of insignificance, fear, and more generally any features, which provoke experiences that threaten one's confidence in their own rule-system as the best guide for advantageous action – such as perceived injustice, alienation, loss of relative social status, or threat to survival.[68]

Cognitive affordances do not have to foster only negative perceptions. Cognitive ease, [69] if associated with extremist discourse, may support extremism-enabling learning. Also relevant here are those features that can bring about habituation by encouraging repeated exposure to the setting (such as addictive features),[70] or otherwise heighten the intensity and effectiveness of exposure (such as discouraging exposure to counter-opinions).[71]

Moral affordances

By definition, these settings allow for exposure to extremism-supportive moral norms. They offer discursive opportunities to promote ideas, which characterise extremist behaviour as morally legitimate[72] and extremist moral systems as the best possible guide for action. Depicting particular group values and commitments as morally superior is one way of achieving these effects.[73] This may be conveyed through narrative devices, which can be broadly characterised as transcendental (about 'meaning of life' stuff), categorical ('black-and-white') and prescriptive (action-orientated).[74]

The prescriptive, action-orientated dimension of extremist narratives (giving people 'things to do', not just 'things to believe') is likely a key feature of successful extremist socialising discourse. [75] Together, these characteristics contribute to the entativity of moral systems promoted by extremist groups, making the extremist ideology seem clear and actionable for individuals who might otherwise struggle with the cognitive cost of uncertainty.[76] Repeated exposure to such settings may result, over time, in normalisation – the perception that a moral commitment, which may have been considered 'outside of norms', is now the acceptable standard. Algorythmic technologies, to the extent that they contribute to the emergence of moral "filter bubbles" have been hypothesised to be one such normalising feature.[77]

Attachment affordances

Socialisation operates within a web of micro-interactions. For most people, the agents of socialisation with the greatest influence are their parents or guardians. Effectiveness of family socialisation practices is in large part conditioned by the strength of the child's attachment to his guardians. That attachment, in turn, is a function of the caregiving relationship between child and guardians. Humans tend to get attached to the people who provide for their physical and emotional well-being. Eventually, people form other attachments with peers, teachers and spouses, who care for them and who come to have their own socialising influence.[78]

Hence, extremism-enabling settings are likely to be effective to the extent that they foster attachment to individuals who already hold extremism-enabling moral beliefs.[79, 80]

Social control affordances

Lastly, settings that support extremist socialisation are characterised by ineffective law-relevant social control. It may be that individuals with regulatory authority over the setting lack the means or the willingness to enforce pro-legal norms, or that extremism-supportive individuals have asserted their own control over the space.[81] In that case, formal and informal mechanisms for behavioural monitoring support the extremism-enabling moral context, rather than suppress it.

Discussions about Internet governance and extremism revolve increasingly around the idea that certain online settings, given what new technologies afford, are beyond the reach of state enforcement and deterrence, or that they foster a breakdown of informal social control on the part of private citizens, contributing to the normalisation of extremism-supportive discourse.[82, 83]

Social Ecology

Extremism-enabling settings are not equally distributed in space and time. Online, they are associated with particular platforms, forums or websites. Offline, some streets, neighbourhoods, boroughs, cities, societies, even some countries have more of these kinds of settings at particular times.[84] Claims that there are 'hotbeds' or 'hotspots' of extremist activity are a mainstay of the conversation on extremism.[85] Concern about prison radicalisation flares up periodically, but

even then the problem is not evenly spread out across the penitentiary system.[86]

The observation that extremist settings concentrate suggests that there are processes at work in certain contexts, which encourage (or fail to suppress) the emergence of such settings.

If we hold that:

- extremism is characterised in relation to other moral norms and rules of conduct;

- unlawful extremist behaviour is an instance of moral action;

- individuals with a weak commitment to law-relevant moral rules of conduct are more susceptible than others to developing an extremist propensity;

- extremist moral systems are attractive to individuals experiencing moral friction and perceived loss of advantageous moral rule-guidance (i.e. moral strain);

- perception of moral superiority is a key feature of extremist normative systems and groups;

- particular moral contexts are determinant characteristics of extremism-enabling settings

then, to understand the conditions from which extremism emerges and upon which it thrives, we should focus on those factors that shape *moral ecologies*.

In thinking about these factors, the following rule-of-thumb applies: to anticipate or evaluate the impact of any given social ecological (broadly speaking, community-level) feature, we can ask ourselves how that feature could support or suppress the emergence, convergence and maintenance of the aforementioned *cognitive*, *moral*, *attachment*, and *social control affordances*.

Research on social ecological processes of social disorder, as well as work on extremist 'hotspots', points to several plausible processes. [87] At this level, attention should be paid especially to changes – including technological innovations – which affect social segregation (keeping people apart on the basis of ethnicity, religion, culture, and so on) and foster perceived group competition; increase social disorganisation and disadvantage; undermine levels of trust in legitimate authorities; undermine trust between pro-legal community members and impair community resourcing; compromise law enforcement effectiveness, as well as the effectiveness of informal deterrence; damage perceptions of procedural justice; afford unchallenged propagation of

extremist group norms and unmonitored exposure to radicalising agents; determine the selection of certain (susceptible) populations for exposure to criminogenic settings; and lead to collective and individual experiences of hardship, absent effective social support.

These factors, especially to the extent that they occur in combination, are likely to contribute to the emergence of extremism-enabling social ecologies.

System

Logically, at the whole-system level, the focus should be on factors that promote the emergence of extremism-supportive moral ecologies. Once again, the most effective approach is to identify the key processes that systemic drivers might shape, rather than try and enumerate all possible drivers.[88]

Norms

Unsurprisingly, given the functional importance of morality, systemic processes which influence moral norm-making, promotion or suppression will play a key role in the emergence of extremism-supportive moral ecologies. Returning to Lord Anderson's recent remarks, the law is democracies' most effective and consensual normative instrument. Hence, the importance of *explicitness* about what a society considers unacceptable extremist actions and what condemnation it associates with these actions cannot be understated, as is the importance of the fair application of the law and of effective procedural justice to citizens' perception that these rules are legitimate.[89]

On the flipside, mechanisms that contribute to the *normalisation* of extremist values, norms and behaviours are particularly salient.[90] To the extent that they are not systematically associated with clear and immediate negative social consequences (i.e., that they are depicted as ignorable or tolerable; that they are not received with explicit sanction and disapproval, especially from moral authorities), habitual representations of extremist beliefs and behaviours permeating people's social ecologies – through mainstream and social media, political discourse, cultural products, and so on – may result, over time, in the normalisation of extremist moral systems.

In sum, the role of norm formulation, diffusion and endorsement at this level cannot be underestimated, as it sets the conditions for the emergence of moral contexts for whole populations.

Governance

The moral context as it is perceived by citizens is made up of moral norms and rules of conduct, *and* of the mechanisms of their formal (e.g. courts and police) and informal (social control by other citizens) enforcement. Any systemic change which impairs the effectiveness of formal and informal governance can be determinant, in that it will shape, very concretely, the micro situations individuals experience.[91] Changes which affect the organisation of social life in general, or trust between citizens, and between citizens and public authorities in particular, can impair governance and through it the controls that suppress extremism-supportive moral contexts. For example, economic hardship can re-order citizens' priorities and deter them from participating in the life of their community, which includes demonstrating their disapproval of others' behaviour. Perception of loss of political representativeness can damage citizens' perception of the legitimacy of state representatives, to such an extent that citizens undermine the representatives' authority or fail to report breaches of conduct. Indeed, anything that brings on a loss of trust in moral authorities (public servants, but also experts, religious elites or other 'thought-leaders') may have the same effect.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes in governance experienced in our societies in recent years is the outsourcing of the regulation of public social settings to private owners of online platforms on the one end,[92] and to the users to which these owners have delegated some of their governing responsibility by providing powerful (and poorly evaluated) mechanisms of informal social control on the other.[93] It is reasonable to think that we do not yet understand the full impact of these changes on the perception of behaviourally-relevant moral contexts, on the perceived legitimacy of public and private authorities to regulate these settings, on the exposure to extremist moral systems, and on the emergence of extremism-enabling moral ecologies in general.

It is also with regards to governance that system interconnectedness and permeability may be the most salient. Authorities are limited in the extent to which they can affect the governance of other systems and their own efforts (or lack thereof) to suppress the emergence of extremist moral ecologies.

Segregation

As posited, moral rule-systems are core features of social groups that enable cooperation between members and advantageous selection of action alternatives. Perceived threats to the group's status – notably, in terms of relative social, existential, economic, cultural or normative advantage – can

result in the tightening of norms of conduct and a heightened commitment to the group's values, up to and including absolute claims of moral superiority. To remain attractive, groups need to assert that their system of moral rule-guidance will lead to optimal outcomes, offering their members greater control over their lives in general and the achievement of certain goals in particular.[94]

If it is so, then processes which induce effective or symbolic segregation between social groups are likely to contribute to the emergence of an extremism-supportive moral ecology.[95] This is true, in particular, of any process of segregation which heightens perception of social injustice in the form of group discrimination, favouritism, competition, polarisation on the basis of in-group and out-group, and so on.[96]

At this level, information technologies may do more than facilitate the propagation of extremist discourse: they expose groups of people to information about the existence and treatment of other groups, creating more opportunities for frictions (which weaken bonds) and perceptions of relative disadvantage (which heighten competition). By mediating the activities of certain moral entrepreneurs and by popularising certain frames, they can also entrench the association between specific social identity markers (e.g. ethnicity; nationality; sexual orientation) and given moral systems, reshaping and delocalising the groups that people choose as moral anchors.

In the past, friction between groups may have been tied to land and neighbourhood – the most salient moral competitor was the one next door, especially if they were noticeably *other*. With global awareness of other groups in distant places, this may no longer be the case, multiplying the sources of friction far beyond perceived competition for place-based resources, and fostering ties between ideologically proximate, yet geographically distant moral allies.[97]

Likewise, systemic processes that contribute to discrimination (exclusion from collective social identity and its material advantages) and social ostracism (real or perceived loss of group membership) may be determinant to the extent that they constrain some individuals without sufficient human or social capital to seek out new group membership and to display evidence of heightened commitment (e.g. willingness to participate in extremist action) to prevent the recurrence of ostracism. [98] In other words, such processes can affect mechanisms of selection for exposure to extremism-supportive settings, through individual segregation and lack of social integration.

Strains

Given the salience of group-threat perception and friction, and the nature of individual susceptibility to extremism-supportive moral change, systemic processes that result in (the perception of) either collective or individual strains are the last key category of systemic contributors, inasmuch as they have the potential to impact normative, governance and segregation processes, and to shape the experiences of individuals embedded in particular situations and social ecologies.

Processes which contribute to strains in the form of perceived or effective value violation, the unjust administration of justice and power imbalance have been more specifically associated with political violence, as well as crime.[99] Normative strain [100] has also been implicated in violent extremism. Some systemic processes in particular - such as migration or economic inequality – can bring about the conditions for these experiences. Feelings of unfitness and normlessness (marginalisation and insignificance) of some second and third generation immigrants have been documented.[101] These might be attributable, in part, to the perception that their parents' culturally-appropriate moral systems haven't provided adequate guidance in their present context (i.e. moral commitment hasn't resulted in positive outcomes and in some negative ones, such as discrimination), while barriers to social integration have made local moral systems inaccessible or unattractive. Experience of increasing, relative social disadvantage for some (non-migrant) social groups could have similar effects, leading some of their members to seek new moral anchors.

Cultures regularly exposed to acute exogenous strains have been shown to display tighter commitment to norms and to punish rule-breaking more severely, compared to looser, more liberal cultures, which have traded social order for adaptability and creativity, suggesting that normatively looser systems may struggle to suppress unlawful extremist behaviour without losing some of the benefits of liberalism.[102] It may be that 'tightening' the moral context to suppress extremism has a systemic cost for liberal democracies.

At the same time, sustained exposure to systemic strains (including, but in no way limited to, violent extremism), which have assailed a largely insulated middle social class, might contribute to the weakening of the heretofore relatively stable normative centre of liberal democracies. Commitment to historically-advantageous moral systems (liberalism, communism, socialism) is no longer perceived as delivering satisfactory outcomes. Trust in moral norms (traditional ideologies), their enforcers (the justice system) and their promoters (mainstream politicians) is eroding.[103] Social systems characterised by the

contradictory forces of hyperchoice and uncertainty are perceived as cognitively taxing, even for socially-advantaged citizens.[104]

To date such experiences of strain may not have resulted in a general shift to political or religious extremism for middle social categories, though changes in voting patterns towards extreme ends of the spectrum are seen as a growing trend. Yet, it may be that very similar processes of vulnerability, exposure and emergence taking place in different social ecological contexts manifest in moves towards other kinds of extreme moral anchors. One may think, for example, of the growing opposition to the previously consensual belief in the good of vaccination, with potentially dire systemic consequences.[105]

Conclusion

Extremism is, rightly, a central concern for our democratic social systems. However, when addressing it we should be careful not to create a wicked policy problem or to unwittingly contribute to the conditions that support the emergence of extremist moral ecologies, by feeding into, for instance, the perception of competition between moral groups.

Anticipating the unintended consequences of our own actions, as well as devising strategies to control the actions of others, requires a systemic approach. The evidence suggests that some individuals are more susceptible to the attraction of extremist moral systems and to engagement in unlawful extremist behaviour than others, but because there are 'canaries in the coal mine' does not mean others will forever remain impervious to the toxic effects of prolonged exposure. Supporting those we perceive to be most at risk is not enough. Changing contexts, rather than changing people, is the more effective strategy, because vulnerability is inherently context-dependent.

The word 'systemic' might strike fear in the heart of strategy designers. It may imply that anything and everything is involved in creating the problem, and that everything and everyone is a target or a potential lever. That is not the case.

Defining extremism as a relational moral concept; extremist behaviour as moral action; extremist susceptibility as susceptibility to moral change; the main appeal of extremist moral systems as one of moral entativity; extremist contexts as a matter of the emergence of extremism-enabling settings – all of this means narrowing our focus down to a set of specific mechanisms relevant to the emergence and maintenance of extremist moral ecologies.

While it makes no claim as to the problem being any less complex than it is, the proposed functional approach offers a systematic framework for the identification and organisation of counter-extremism strategic goals and the actions needed to achieve them. It roots the conceptual (extremist moral systems) in the material (places) and conceives of resilience to extremism not as a transitory, individualistic trait, but as an emergent social feature of functioning societies.

[1] As opposed to a normative or a moralistic account.

[2] Devaney, J. and T. Spratt (2009). Child abuse as a complex and wicked problem: Reflecting on policy developments in the United Kingdom in working with children and families with multiple problems. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(6): 635-641.

[3] Rutter, H., Savona, N., Glonti, K., Bibby, J., Cummins, S., Finegood, D. T., ... White, M. (2017). The need for a complex systems model of evidence for public health. *The Lancet, 390*, 2602-2604. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(17)31267-9.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] HM Government (2015). *Counter-Extremism Strategy. Cm 9148.* Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/gover nment/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_ data/file/470088/51859_Cm9148_Accessible. pdf

[6] Australian Public Service Commission (n.d.). *Tackling wicked problems: A public policy perspective.* Retrieved from https://www.apsc.gov.au/tackling-wicked-problems-public-policy-perspective.

[7] Recep Onursal & Daniel Kirkpatrick (2019): Is Extremism the 'New' Terrorism? the Convergence of 'Extremism' and 'Terrorism' in British Parliamentary Discourse. *Terrorism and Political Violence.* DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2019.1598391

[8] Lord Anderson of Ipswich. *Extremism and the Law.* Treasurer's Lecture. Middle Temple Hall, London. 18 March 2019.

[9] Inasmuch as we want to more firmly differentiate extremist behaviour from common-variety unlawful behaviour, it is the specific set of rules broken by extremists upon which rests the best hope of observable distinction.

[10] Lord Anderson, *ibid*, p.11.

[11] *Ibid,* p.14.

[12] Schmid, A. P. (2014). *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* The Hague: ICCT. Retrieved from https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Violent-Non-Violent-Extremism-May-2014.pdf, p.11.

[13] The problem statement does not require that a judgement be made as to the justness or unjustness of the law (the benchmark), or, conversely, of the law-breaking behaviour, to define an act as unlawful extremist behaviour. Hence, the problem statement encompasses situations where the breaking of a law by so-called extremists may be perceived by many as morally just (for example, during the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa). For further discussion, see Bouhana, N., & Wikström, P.-O. H. (2010). Theorizing Terrorism: Terrorism As Moral Action. *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, 2(2): 9-79. London. Retrieved from http://www.ucl.ac.uk/scs/ downloads/research-reports/bouhana-2008; and Wikstrom, P-O. H. (2012). Situational Action Theory. In Wikström, Per-Olof, Dietrich Oberwittler, Kyle Treiber, and Beth Hardie, eds. *Breaking Rules: The Social and Situational Dynamics of Young People's Urban Crime.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[14] Berger, J.M. (2018). *Extremism*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

[15] Dugas, M., Schori-eyal, N., Kruglanski, A. W., Klar, Y., Touchton-Leonard, K., Mcneill, A., ... Roccas, S. (2017). Group-centric attitudes mediate the relationship between need for closure and intergroup hostility. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*. DOI: 10.1177/1368430217699462.

[16] Kruglanski, A., Jasko, K., Webber, D., Chernikova, M., & Molinario, E. (2018). The making of violent extremists. *Review of General Psychology*, 22, 107-120.

[17] Schmid, *ibid*.

[18] That is why, length constraints notwithstanding, no attempt is made here to enumerate the specific types of crime that might be considered extremist. That is for a jurisdiction to decide.

[19] There is nothing that precludes the framework presented here from being used to explain the breaking of informal (non-legal) moral rules of conduct. However, that demonstration would require more space than is available here; therefore, the claim is not put forward. That is certainly not to imply that the role of informal social norms and rules in defining what is considered extremist in a jurisdiction is not crucial.

[20] Ranstorp, M. (2016). *The Root Causes of Violent Extremism*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf

[21] Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). Violent radicalisation in Europe: What we know and what we do not know. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33(9), 797–814. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2010.501423.

[22] Sageman, M. (2004). *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

[23] Commission for Countering Extremism (2018). *Study into extremism: terms of reference*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742176/Terms_of_Reference_into_Extremism_Study.pdf, p.13.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Weisburd, D., & Piquero, A. (2008). How well do criminologists explain crime? Statistical modeling in published studies. *Crime and Justice*, 37(1), 453–502.

[26] Sullivan, C. J., McGloin, J. M., & Kennedy, L. W. (2011). Moving past the person or context: Thinking about crime as an emergent phenomenon. In *When Crime Appears: The Role of Emergence*. New York, NY: Routledge.

[27] Weisburd, D. (2012). Bringing social context back into the equation: The importance of social characteristics of places in the prevention of crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 11(2), 317–326. DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-9133.2012.00810.x

[28] Weisburd, D., & White, C. (2019). Hot spots of crime are not just hot spots of crime: Examining health outcomes at street segments. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*. DOI: 10.1177/1043986219832132.

[29] Bouhana, N., Marchment, Z. & S. Schumann (2018). "Ours is not to reason why, but where: Investigating the social ecology of radicalisation." *American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting*. Atlanta, GA. 14 November.

[30] Bouhana, N., & Wikström, P.-O. H. (2011). *Al-Qaeda-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory* (Occasional Paper No. No 97). London: Home Office.

[31] Wikström, P.-O. H. (2014). Why crime happens: A situational action theory. In G. Manzo (Ed.), *Analytical Sociology: Action and Networks* (pp. 74–94). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons; Wikström, P.-O. H. (2018). Situational Action Theory. In *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Oxford University Press.

[32] Pauwels, L. J. R., & Heylen, B. (2017). *Perceived Group Threat, Perceived Injustice, and Self-Reported Right-Wing Violence: An Integrative Approach to the Explanation Right-Wing Violence. Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. DOI: 10.1177/0886260517713711; Pauwels, L., & Schils, N. (2014). Differential Online Exposure to Extremist Content and Political Violence: Testing the Relative Strength of Social Learning and Competing Perspectives. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (July), 1–29. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2013.876414; Pauwels, L. J. R., Ljujic, V., & Buck, A. De. (2018). Individual differences in political aggression: The role of social integration, perceived grievances and low self-control. *European Journal of Criminology*. DOI: 10.1177/1477370818819216. Schils, N., & Pauwels, L. J. R. (2016). Political Violence and the Mediating Role of Violent Extremist Propensities. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 9(2), 72–93; Schils, N., & Pauwels, L. (2014). Explaining Violent Extremism for Subgroups by Gender and Immigrant Background, Using SAT as a Framework. *Journal of Strategic*

Security, *7*(3), 27–47; Perry, G., Wikström, P.-O. H., & Roman, G. D. (2018). Differentiating Right-Wing Extremism from Potential for Violent Extremism: The Role of Criminogenic Exposure. *International Journal of Developmental Science*, 1–11. DOI: 10.3233/DEV-170240.

33 See http://www.fp7-prime.eu/publications.

34 Bouhana et al. (2018). "Ours is not to reason why, but where: Investigating the social ecology of radicalisation." *Ibid.*

35 Bunge, S. a. (2004). How we use rules to select actions: a review of evidence from cognitive neuroscience. *Cognitive, Affective & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 4(4), 564–79. DOI: 10.3758/CABN.4.4.564

36 Ayala, F. J. (2010). The difference of being human: Morality. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *107*, 9015–9022. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0914616107.

37 Ellemers, N. (2017). Morality and Social Identity. In M. van Zomeren & J. F. Dovidio (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Human Essence*. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190247577.013.5.

38 Ellemers, N., Pagliaro, S., & Barreto, M. (2014). Morality and behavioural regulation in groups: A social identity approach. *European Review of Social Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2013.841490

39 Ellemers, N. & Toorn, J. (2015). Groups as moral anchors. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 6. DOI: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.018.

40 Doosje, B., Loseman, A., and van den Bos, K. (2013). Determinants of radicalisation of Islamic youth in the Netherlands: personal uncertainty, perceived injustice, and perceived group threat. *Journal of Social Issues*. 69, 586–604. DOI: 10.1111/josi.12030.

41 Cramwinckel, F. M., Bos, K. Van Den, & Dijk, E. Van. (2015). Reactions to morally motivated deviance. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *6*, 150–156. DOI: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.08.007

42 Phillips, J., & Cushman, F. (2017). Morality constrains the default representation of what is possible. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(18). DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1619717114, p. 4649.

43 On this account, one can explain similarly why an individual (for example, a member of the so-called Islamic State) commits a crime in a democratic society because they perceive the system's benchmark (the democratic rule-of-law) as illegitimate, and why an individual (for example, a member of a resistance movement) commits a crime in a dictatorial system, because they perceive the system's benchmark (the undemocratic rule-of-law) as illegitimate. Normatively, these actions are not in any way equivalent. Analytically, however, they can both be understood as actions shaped by the interaction between individual and contextual moral values and rules of conduct. The specific nature of the individual and contextual rules involved, and the specifics of persons and environments, can and will, of course, differ significantly.

44 For example, research on lone actor extremism shows that certain individual characteristics, notably related to mental health, can play different roles depending on context, increasing risk in some instances and decreasing it in others. See Corner, E., Bouhana, N. and P. Gill (2018). "The Multifinality of Vulnerability Indicators in Lone-Actor Terrorism." *Psychology, Crime and Law*. DOI: 10.1080/1068316X.2018.1503664.

45 An extended discussion of the framework is available in Bouhana, N., Thornton, A., Corner, E., Malthaner, S., Lindekilde, L., Schuurman, B., & Perry, G. (2016). *EU FP7 PRIME risk analysis framework*. Retrieved from http://www.fp7-prime.eu/deliverables/PRIME_D3.1_Risk_Analysis_Framework_Public.pdf.

46 Ellis, B. J., Boyce, W. T., Belsky, J., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., and Van Ijzendoorn, M. H. (2011). Differential susceptibility to the environment: an evolutionary-neurodevelopmental theory. *Development and Psychopathology*, 23, 7–28. DOI: 10.1017/S0954579410000611.

47 See, for example: Lynam, D. R., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T. E., Wikström, P.-O. H., & Loeber, R. (2000). The interaction between impulsivity and neighborhood context on offending: The effects of impulsivity are stronger in poorer

neighborhoods. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *109*(4), 563–574; Thomas, K. J., & McGloin, J. (2013). A dual-systems approach for understanding differential susceptibility to processes of peer influence. *Criminology*, *51*(2), 435–474. DOI: 10.1111/1745-9125.12010. Cauffman, E., Steinberg, L., & Piquero, A. (2005). Psychological, neuropsychological and physiological correlates of serious antisocial behavior in adolescence: The role of self-control. *Criminology*, *43*(1), 133–176. DOI: 10.1111/j.0011-1348.2005.00005. Wikström, P.-O. H., Mann, R. P., & Hardie, B. (2018). Young people's differential vulnerability to criminogenic exposure: Bridging the gap between people- and place-oriented approaches in the study of crime causation. *European Journal of Criminology*, *15*(1), 10–31. DOI: 10.1177/1477370817732477.

[48] Pauwels, L.J.R., Ljujic, V., & Buck, A. De. (2018). Individual differences in political aggression: The role of social integration, perceived grievances and low self-control. *European Journal of Criminology*. DOI: 10.1177/1477370818819216, p.14.

[49] Bhui, K., Otis, M., Silva, M. J., Halvorsrud, K., Freestone, M., & Jones, E. (2019). Extremism and common mental illness: Cross- sectional community survey of White British and Pakistani men and women living in England. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 1–8. DOI: 10.1192/bjp.2019.14.

[50] Zmigrod, L., Rentfrow, P. J., Robbins, T. W., & Clark, C. (2019). Cognitive Inflexibility Predicts Extremist Attitudes. Frontiers in Psychology, 10(May), 1–13. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00989.

[51] Nivette, A., Eisner, M., & Ribeaud, D. (2017). Developmental predictors of violent extremist attitudes: A test of general strain theory. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *36*(1), 1–36. DOI: 10.1177/0022427817699035

[52] Perry, G., Wikström, P.-O. H., & Roman, G. D. (2018). Differentiating Right-Wing Extremism from Potential for Violent Extremism: The Role of Criminogenic Exposure. *International Journal of Developmental Science*, 1–11. DOI: 10.3233/DEV-170240.

[53] Jolliffe, D., & Farrington, D. P. (2019). The criminal careers of those imprisoned for hate crime in the UK. European Journal of Criminology. DOI: 10.1177/1477370819839598

[54] Basra, R., & Neumann, P. R. (2017). Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe. *CTC Sentinel*, 10(9). Retrieved from https://ctc.usma.edu/crime-as-jihad-developments-in-the-crime-terror-nexus-in-europe/. Ljujic, V., van Prooijen, J.W., & F. Weerman (2017). Beyond the crime-terror nexus: socio-economic status, violent crimes and terrorism." *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice*, 3(3), 158-172. DOI: 10.1108/JCRPP-02-2017-0010.

[55] Such a susceptibility has also been linked to the adoption of conspiratorial beliefs and to conversion to fringe religions. It may also be part of the explanation for the comorbidity of psychological distress and the adoption of extremist beliefs, inasmuch as executive dysfunction has been implicated in both. See Bouhana & Wikstrom, 2011. See also Marchlewska, M., & Cichocka, A. (2018). Addicted to answers: Need for cognitive closure and the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*, 109-117. DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2308; Bhui et al., 2019; Malloy-diniz, L. F., Miranda, D. M., & Grassi-oliveira, R. (2017). Editorial: Executive Functions in Psychiatric Disorders. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*(9). DOI: 10.1177/070674371405, p.1.

[56] McGregor, I., Hayes, J., & Prentice, M. (2015). Motivation for aggressive religious radicalisation: Goal regulation theory and a personality × threat × affordance hypothesis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *6*(September), 1-18. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01325.

[57] Kruglanski, A., Jasko, K., Webber, D., Chernikova, M., & Molinario, E. (2018). The making of violent extremists. *Review of General Psychology*, *22*(1), 107–120. DOI: 10.1037/gpr0000144; Gómez, Á., López-Rodríguez, L., Sheikh, H., Ginges, J., Wilson, L., Waziri, H., ... Atran, S. (2017). The devoted actor's will to fight and the spiritual dimension of human conflict. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *1*(September). DOI: 10.1038/s41562-017-

0193-3; Pauwels L.J.R. and Hardyns W. (2018). Endorsement for extremism, exposure to extremism via social media and self-reported political/religious aggression. *International Journal of Developmental Science*, 12(1–2): 51-69; Shortland, N., Nader, E., Imperillo, N., Ross, K. and Dmello, J. (2017). The interaction of extremist propaganda and anger as predictors of violent responses. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. DOI: 10.1177/0886260517747599.

[58] Consider the following analogy: we are all susceptible to the Ebola virus. However, most of us will never be exposed to it. The virus is found in very few places and most of us have no reason to find ourselves there. Hence, while we are *susceptible* to the virus, we are not *vulnerable* to it. Unless something changes which increases our chances of exposure (the virus is introduced to the places where we spend time; there is now a reason for us to go to the places where it is found), we are not – meaningfully – *at risk* of contracting it.

[59] For a fuller discussion, see Wikström and Bouhana, 2017.

[60] Consider this example: a right-wing gang is active in a given neighbourhood. Some of its members attend college and they engage in proselytization at school. Other pupils are at risk of exposure to their influence and to the situations they provoke by sole virtue of living in that catchment area, compared to similar young people who live elsewhere.

[61] Self-selection is conditioned on agency. For example, adults are free to take part in many activities, simply because they desire to, in a way that small children, who are dependent on the will of their guardians, aren't. In some environments, some categories of adults (e.g. women) may face more constraints on their agency than others. Constraints on agency may also be barriers to getting away from an extremism-enabling setting (e.g. young children in an extremist household).

[62] Bouhana and Wikström, 2011.

[63] Horgan, J. (2008). From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalisation into Terrorism. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *618*(1), 80-94. DOI: 10.1177/0002716208317539.

[64] Sustained exposure to structured socialising settings is how, for example, military forces in most societies bring individuals to perceive lethal violence as a legitimate alternative for action, regardless of any moral beliefs or cognitive dispositions they possessed at the outset.

[65] Extremists themselves may target individuals for recruitment based on their own understanding of what susceptibility looks like, searching for "red flags", such as markers of economic and social strain. See Blazak, R. (2001). White boys to terrorist men: Target recruitment of nazi skinheads. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *44*(6), 982-1000.

[66] The term *affordance* is borrowed from ecological psychology, notably from the work of James J. Gibson, where it is understood as perceived action-possibility, which emerges out of the interaction between a particular person and a particular environment at a particular time. Affordance perception (selective attention) is contingent on an individual's needs, intents and capabilities.

[67] Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West.* Rowman & Littlefield.

[68] Doosje, B., Bos, K. Van Den, Loseman, A., Feddes, R., & Mann, L. (2012). "My In-group is Superior!": Susceptibility for radical right-wing attitudes and behaviors in dutch youth. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research.* 5(3), 253–268.

[69] Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

[70] Fox, J., & Moreland, J. J. (2015). The dark side of social networking sites: An exploration of the relational and psychological stressors associated with Facebook use and affordances. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *45*, 168-176. DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.083.

[71] Wahlström, M. & Törnberg, A. (2019). Social media mechanisms for right-wing political violence in the 21st century: Discursive opportunities, group dynamics, and co-

ordination. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-22. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2019.1586676.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] Doojse et al., 2012.

[74] Bouhana & Wikström, 2011.

[75] Something to keep in mind when crafting counter-discourses.

[76] Hogg MA, Adelman J. (2013). Uncertainty-identity theory: Extreme groups, radical behavior, and authoritarian leadership. *Journal of Social Issues*. *69*(3), 436-454.

[77] Comunello, F., Mulagia, S., & Parisi, L. (2016). The "proper" way to spread ideas through social media: Exploring the affordances and constraints of different social media platforms as perceived by Italian activists. *The Sociological Review*, *64*(2016), 515–532. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.12378.

[78] Wikström, P-O H. (2006). Individuals, settings, and acts of crime: Situational mechanisms and the explanation of crime. In P. H. Wikström & R. J. Sampson (Eds.). *The Explanation of Crime: Context, Mechanisms and Development* (pp. 61–107). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[79] Stein, A. I. (2007). Attachment, networks and discourse in extremist political organizations: A comparative case study. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 381. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.net.ucf.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304824892.

[80] Attachment to deviant peers (and lack of attachment to pro-legal others) has long been associated with criminal risk. See Yuksek, D. A., & Solakoglu, O. (2016). "The Relative Influence of Parental Attachment, Peer Attachment, School Attachment, and School Alienation on Delinquency among High School Students in Turkey." *Deviant Behavior*, 9625: 1-25. DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2015.1062683

[81] O'Hara, K., & Stevens, D. (2015). Echo chambers and online radicalism: Assessing the Internet's complicity in violent extremism. *Policy & Internet*, 1–22. DOI: 10.1002/poi3.88.

[82] Neumann, P. R. (2013). Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalisation in the United States. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *36*(6), 431–459. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2013.784568.

[83] A recent article on the so-called *incel* movement, for example, describes how the creation of an online forum which declined to police the contributions of its members laid the ground for the radicalisation of what had been, up to that point, a self-help community. See Beauchamp, J. (2019). "Our incel problem: How a support group for the dateless became one of the internet's most dangerous subcultures." *Vox*. 23 April. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/4/16/18287446/incel-definition-reddit.

[84] Coolsaet, R. (2017). *Molenbeek and radicalisation: A social mapping*. Brussels: European Institute of Peace. Retrieved from https://view.publitas.com/eip/eip-molenbeek-report-16-06/page/1; Weine, S., & Ahmed, O. (2012). *Building Resilience to Violent Extremism Among Somali-Americans in Minneapolis-St. Paul*. College Park, MD: START.

[85] Press Association (2019). "Christchurch terrorist was member of online 'hotbed for radicalisation'." *Irish Examiner*. 16 March. Retrieved from https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/world/christchurch-terrorist-was-member-of-online-hotbed-for-radicalisation-911307.html.

[86] Hamm, M.S. (2013). *The Spectacular Few: Prisoner Radicalisation and the Evolving. Terrorist Threat*. New York University Press: New York.

[87] Wikström, P.-O. H. (2007). The Social Ecology of Crime: The Role of the Environment in Crime Causation. In H. Schneider (Ed.), *Internationales handbuch der kriminologie* (pp. 333–358). Berlin: de Gruyter; Stephens, W., Sieckelinck, S., & Boutellier, H. (2019). Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2018.1543144; Grossman, M., Ungar, M., Brisson, J., Gerrand, V., Hadfield, K. and P. Jefferies (2017). *Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: A Standardised Research Measure*. Victoria:

Deakin University; Coolsaet, 2017; Weine and Ahmed, 2012.

[88] It is worth noting here that we should beware the risk of individualistic fallacy, which is to say that there are no logical grounds to draw conclusions about the processes that matter at the system and ecological levels from the characteristics of extremist individuals. For example, we cannot say that, because some extremists are from socially-advantaged backgrounds, systemic social disadvantage plays no part in extremism. Nor can we claim it does solely because some extremists are of lower socioeconomic status.

[89] Weak perception of procedural justice has been associated with extremist propensity in young people. See, for example, Schils, N., & Pauwels, L. J. R. (2016). Political Violence and the Mediating Role of Violent Extremist Propensities. *Journal of Strategic Security*, *9*(2), 72–93.

[90] Wodak, R.E. (2015). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage.

[91] An obvious example is civil war. The large-scale disruption to governance it provokes means that social control resources and priorities change across the system, and radicalising settings multiply as the moral context no longer suppresses extremism. This is where much of the concern about the relationship between violent extremism and failed states stems from. Higher levels of social disorganisation are associated with higher levels of political violence, and, arguably, nothing disorganises a society like civil strife. See Fahey, S., & Lafree, G. (2015). Does Country-Level Social Disorganization Increase Terrorist Attacks? *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *27*(1), 81–111. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2014.972156.

[92] Fishman, B. (2019, April 2). Crossroads: Counter-terrorism and the Internet. *Texas National Security Review*. Retrieved from https://tnsr.org/2019/04/crossroads-counter-terrorism-and-the-internet/.

[93] Williams, M., & Williams, M. (2007). Policing and Cybersociety: The Maturation of Regulation within an Online Community. *Policing & Society*, *17*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460601124858.

[94] Kay, A. C., & Eibach, R. P. (2013). Compensatory Control and Its Implications for Ideological Extremism. *Journal of Social Issues*, *69*(3), 564–585.

[95] Fiske, S. T. (2013). A millenial challenge: Extremism in uncertain times. *Journal of Social Issues*, *69*(3), 605–613. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12031.A.

[96] Doojse et al, 2013.

[97] Jipson, A. & Becker, P.J. (2019). White nationalism, born in the USA, is now a global terror threat. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/white-nationalism-born-in-the-usa-is-now-a-global-terror-threat-113825.

[98] Ellemers, N., Pagliaro, S., & Barreto, M. (2014). Morality and behavioural regulation in groups: A social identity approach. *European Review of Social Psychology*. DOI: 10.1080/10463283.2013.841490; Hales, A. H. (2014). *Ostracism and interest in extreme groups*. Open Access PhD Thesis. Purdue University. Retrieved from https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_theses/183/.

[99] Agnew, R. (2010). A general strain theory of terrorism. Theoretical Criminology, 14(2), 131–153. DOI: 10.1177/1362480609350163.

[100] We can think of normative strain as a lack of correspondence between one's own moral rules and commitments, and the exogenous norms of the ecology in which one is embedded.

[101] Lyons-Padilla, S., Gelfand, M. J., Mirahmadi, H., Farooq, M., & Egmond, M. van. (2015). Belonging nowhere: Marginalization and radicalisation risk among Muslim immigrants. *Behavioral Science and Policy*, *1*(2), 1–12. DOI: 10.1353/bsp.2015.0019.

[102] Gelfand, M., Nishii, L. H., & Raver, J. L. (2006). On the Nature and Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. DOI: 10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1225; Jackson, J. C., Gelfand, M., De, S., & Fox, A. (2019). The loosening of American culture over 200 years is associated with a

creativity-order trade-off. *Nature Human Behaviour*. DOI: 10.1038/s41562-018-0516-z.

[103] Fourquet, F. (2019). L'Archipel Français: Naissance d'une nation multiple et divisée. Paris: Seuil.

[104] Mick, D. G., Broniarczyk, S. M., & Haidt, J. (2004). Choose, Choose, Choose: Emerging and Prospective Research on the Deleterious Effects of Living in Consumer Hyperchoice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *52*, 207–211.

[105] Rahman, T. (2018). Extreme Overvalued Beliefs: How Violent Extremist Beliefs Become "Normalized." *Behavioral Sciences*, *8*(10). DOI: 10.3390/bs8010010.

About the author

Dr. Noémie Bouhana is Associate Professor in Security and Crime Science at University College London.

Most recently, Dr. Bouhana directed the €2.9M EU FP7 PRIME project, an international consortium of six European universities conducting multidisciplinary research in the prevention, interdiction and mitigation of lone actor radicalisation and attack behaviour. At present, she is principal investigator of the $1M project "The Social Ecology of Radicalisation", funded by the Minerva Initiative of the US Department of Defense.

Her previous research has been supported by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), Home Office, Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), MOD Counter-Terrorism Science and Technology Centre, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and the US National Institute of Justice (NIJ).