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STREET GANGS AND VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATIONS

LEARNING ACROSS FIELDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Street gangs and violent extremist organizations (VEOs) exhibit many similarities: both groups use violence to achieve their objectives, engage in the illicit economy, draw membership from a similar population of marginalized youth, and rely on personal connections for recruitment. Parallels suggest significant potential for cross-disciplinary learning. Yet the groups differ in notable ways, including their goals, targets of violence, relationship to political actors and geographic focus. In terms of membership, key differences include the relevance of family instability, early aggressive behavior and insecure neighborhoods, which are important influences on gang involvement but less important for VEO involvement. At the same time, political drivers and an increase in religiosity are important for VEO involvement but not gang involvement, and there is a broader range of risk factors for and profiles of people involved in VEOs.

This paper aims to identify applicable lessons and programming recommendations that can be translated across the two domains. Understanding where street gang and VEO characteristics converge and diverge is important in order to apply learning cogently from one field to the other. With points of convergence and divergence in mind, we examine the programming approaches used in each domain to discern more specific recommendations for CVE and gang prevention efforts. As the more mature programming area, gang prevention offers a greater number of lessons for CVE than the reverse. The following recommendations for programming emerge from this comparison:

Regarding *CVE programming*:

- Develop methods to better identify and support specific at-risk individuals. In addition to more targeted risk assessment, this should include adopting the kind of tiered prevention programs that gang work currently employs. Such an approach allows for more directed community and individual intervention as risk factors increase. Most CVE projects prioritize community or group-level interventions.
- Incorporate appropriate rule of law interventions, which have characterized gang prevention programs to date – such as juvenile justice systems, community-police partnerships or crime observatories – but have not been part of most development programs designed to counter violent extremism.
- Support good governance which works both to prevent the growth of VE groups and their membership and to respond effectively to their presence once active.
- Focus on individual behavior, rather than identity. Gang work initially attempted to tackle both, but has found greater success with behavioral change.
- Distinguish activities designed to work with individuals who are forced or coopted to join from those who join willingly, particularly with respect to criminalization and disengagement.

Regarding *gang prevention programming*:

- Address the larger conflict context through an expanded understanding of the drivers of violence.
- Expand intervention efforts with individuals already engaged in crime and violence.

Regarding *both gang prevention and CVE programming*:

- Mainstream successful practices by ensuring that multi-stakeholder partnerships, engagement of respected community leaders, parental involvement and trust building are consistently incorporated in project design and implementation.

Regarding *program objectives and metrics*:

- Ensure that metrics are more directly tied to project objectives and specific activities. Many CVE projects measure individual-level outcomes but activities are designed to affect community-level indicators.
- Include crime prevention indicators for CVE efforts in communities that are beset by violence.

Regarding *diagnostic frameworks*:

- Consider development of a CVE diagnostic framework focused on individual risk to guide secondary and tertiary prevention services.
- Consider development of a CVE diagnostic framework focused on community risk that incorporates new learning and is presented in a similar format to the CVE diagnostic framework focused on individual risk.
- Review benefits of including some factors currently included in the SAVRY framework into the YSET framework (i.e., exposure to violence, early childhood stress and protective factors)

The recommendations underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to gang prevention and CVE. While some entail a long-term perspective to improve good governance and the rule of law, other recommendations call for more immediate and focused interventions to work with at-risk individuals and communities. Achieving an appropriate mix in any context requires good assessment tools and ongoing learning. For the CVE field, development of a diagnostic framework focused on individual risk to guide secondary and tertiary prevention services is a priority as is refinement of the diagnostic framework for the gang prevention field. For both fields, research and continued emphasis on specific interventions to support at-risk individuals are warranted. Across all interventions, practitioners should take care to incorporate best practices identified in this review, namely ensuring that multi-stakeholder partnerships, engagement of respected community leaders, parental involvement and trust building are consistently integrated in project design and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Street gangs and violent extremist organizations (VEOs) exhibit many similarities: both groups use violence to achieve their objectives, engage in the illicit economy, draw membership from a similar population of marginalized youth, and rely on personal connections for recruitment. Parallels suggest significant potential for cross-disciplinary learning. Yet the groups differ in notable ways, including their goals, targets of violence, relationship to political actors and geographic focus. In terms of membership, key differences include the relevance of family instability, early aggressive behavior and insecure neighborhoods, which are important influences on gang involvement but less important for VEO involvement. At the same time, political drivers and an increase in religiosity are important for VEO involvement but not gang involvement, and there is a broader range of risk factors for and profiles of people involved in VEOs. This paper aims to identify applicable lessons and programming recommendations that can be translated across the two domains. Understanding where street gang and VEO characteristics converge and diverge is important in order to apply learning cogently from one field to the other.

This research considers street gangs and VEOs as two types of non-state armed groups composed primarily of young men who engage in violence, largely in a group context.¹ Defining them is challenging, however, as there is no single, universally accepted definition of a street gang or VEO. We use the Eurogang definition of youth street gangs,² which defines them as durable over time, street-oriented, composed of youths, involved in illegal activity, and with an identity based on street codes and illegal acts.³ While this definition does not refer to their motives, street gangs generally function to provide solidarity among peers and exert control over local turf. We use USAID's definition of VEOs, which defines them as organizations that advocate, engage in, prepare or otherwise support ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.⁴ For comparison purposes, this study focuses on the subset of VEOs that are most analogous to street gangs: those that are recruited and operate locally – most often in an environment defined by insurgency or separatism – and whose membership is primarily composed of youth aged 15 to 24. This subset is predominantly comprised of religious extremist groups, but could also include right- or left-wing movements. They might be standalone groups, such as Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, or local chapters of a multinational or multi-front organization, such as the Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM). The focus is on organizations and does not include lone actors. These definitions are intended to inform the comparison rather than to stand as a definitive description of street gangs and VEOs.

The paper is divided into two sections. Section one provides an analytical comparison of the motives, methods, membership dynamics, and organization of each group to help move our understanding beyond surface-level comparisons. The second section offers specific programming recommendations based on current practice. Gang research and programmatic engagement comprise a more established discipline with a significantly longer history than corresponding research and programming with VEOs. As a result, most of the recommendations offered here describe how this learning from research on gangs experience can be translated to help counter violent extremism.

¹ Other non-state armed groups include organized crime groups which are focused on making money, and insurgents which are focused on seizing political control of a territory.

² For convenience, this paper will use the terms *gangs* and *street gangs* interchangeably.

³ Malcolm Klein and Cheryl Maxson, *Street Gang Patterns and Policies* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

⁴ Adapted from US Agency for International Development, *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency* (USAID, September 2011), 2.

GROUP MOTIVES AND METHODS

This discussion presents overall similarities and differences in gang and VEO motives and methods, recognizing that there is variation within each group and that methods and motives may shift over time for any given organization, as discussed below.

Group Motives

As organizations, street gangs and violent extremist groups have different motives. Notably, street gangs function to provide solidarity among peers and exert control over local turf. To varying degrees, they may also fulfill security and economic objectives for gang members, especially where youth face high levels of violence in their community and limited economic opportunities. For example, the South African New Yorker gang began as a means of defending members against harassment but evolved into drug dealing as a means of generating income.⁵ By and large, gangs do not pursue ideological or political objectives. As Decker and Pyrooz note, “most gang members are characterized by the lack of a political or religious orientation.”⁶ They tend to respond to the immediate issues of discrimination, violence and limited opportunities at a local level, rather than aiming for broader systemic change.

Violent extremist groups, on the other hand, exist foremost to pursue ideological or political goals. They strive to advance a particular cause, often in response to perceived grievances. Violent extremism may stem from political ideologies as disparate as fascism (e.g., White Supremacists) or communism (e.g., the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)). It may have religious roots, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Sri Lankan Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena, or the Christian Antibalaka in the Central African Republic. In many cases, groups purportedly driven by religious objectives also seek political recognition, power or territory. According to the Global Terrorism Database, more than half (60 %) of all fatalities from violent extremism and terrorism in 2014 took place in Iraq, Nigeria, and Afghanistan by the Islamic State, Boko Haram and the Taliban – all groups that fuse an extreme religious narrative with territorial ambitions.⁷ While at least a portion of individuals joining VEOs lack a clear ideological or political orientation themselves,⁸ as discussed under “Motivations and Risk Factors” below, the motivations of the group are political.

Levels of Violence

Levels of gang violence vary across regions, and generally reflect the availability of firearms. North and South America (except Canada) and Africa have higher levels of gang violence, whereas Europe and Asia-Pacific have lower levels.⁹ Levels of gang violence also reflect the organization of gangs, with more organized gangs generating more violence.¹⁰ A gang’s involvement in drug trafficking or other criminal markets may lead to higher levels of violence arising from turf disputes and the resources to buy firearms. Instability in illicit markets may trigger a surge in violence as rivals press for dominance.

⁵ Steffen Jensen, “Intimate Connections: Gangs and the Political Economy of Urbanization in South Africa,” in Jennifer Hazen and Dennis Rodgers, eds. *Global Gangs: Street Violence Across the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

⁶ Scott Decker and David Pyrooz, “Gangs, Terrorism, and Radicalization,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011):156.

⁷ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2015* (November 2015), 16.

⁸ James Khalil, “Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions Are Not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture Between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of Our Research into Political Violence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37:2, 2014 available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.862902>

⁹ Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz, “Gang Violence Worldwide: Context, Culture and Country” in *Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups, and Guns* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145.

¹⁰ Scott Decker and David Pyrooz, “Street Gangs, Terrorists, Drug Smugglers, and Organized Crime: What’s the Difference?” in Scott Decker and David Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

Crackdowns by law enforcement may also trigger a corresponding surge in violence as gangs fight back or law enforcement actions remove key players and create instability in markets.

Levels of VEO violence vary with their political objectives. VEOs with more circumscribed political objectives, such as influencing or joining the political process, may be more discriminating in their use of violence than those motivated by religious or insurgent ends. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, has a history of vacillating between extreme and moderate positions depending on the political context. By contrast, groups seeking independence or an end to military occupation, such as Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, the Irish Republican Army, or ISIL, are more likely to use indiscriminate violence. Among the most prevalent motives for large-scale violence among VEOs is opposition to military occupation, even when the presence of national or international forces is to provide humanitarian assistance.¹¹ The survival of some VEOs may be a direct result of the amount of violent attacks it perpetrates.¹² The use of violence may help attract new members and differentiate groups from competitors operating in the same space.

Levels of VEO violence may vary in response to shifts in the group's political positions, the degree to which its members are targeted by security forces, or the availability of financing and other resources. A hierarchical organizational structure can facilitate the moderation of violence for political or other purposes, such as adhering to cease fire agreements. In 2008, for example, Hamas was able to reign in its own forces in support of a cease fire with Israel, but not those of other factions or splinter groups operating independently.

Nature and Targets of Violence

The violence committed by both gangs and VEOs tends to have a highly public character. Gangs use violence, including assaults and homicide, to mark territory and express dominance, which has more impact when it is felt widely in a community. As *Small Arms Survey* notes, "it is the public nature of gang violence that, for many communities, defines the 'gang problem,' fueling fear and intimidation in many parts of the world."¹³ By the same token, VEOs seek publicity for their cause through violent acts, including suicide attacks, bombings, assassinations, hijackings, kidnappings, hostage taking, armed assaults and facility attacks. VEOs may employ violence to achieve a variety of goals including influencing government or international decision-making; seeking retaliation or retribution; inspiring fear; securing dominance over the people and territories they control; goading government officials and security forces to react or overreact; gaining wider attention and support; differentiating themselves from other radical organizations; freeing prisoners; or persuading foreign or national government to reduce their presence.

Generally, gang violence is interpersonal: it is usually community-based between individuals who may or may not know each other. Gangs target rival gang members, as well as law enforcement, local business owners, and youth of other ethnic origins, but victims of gang violence are predominantly gang members. VEOs also target rival groups, but their primary targets are state and security sector officials, civilians, and symbolic sites or events. VEO targets vary according to group objectives and circumstance. Extremist groups with separatist ambitions may target symbols of authority – key government leaders, military and police or government offices, including banks and national airlines. Ideologically-driven extremists may add sites of religious significance, such as churches, mosques, or icons and monuments. The Taliban's 2001 destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, for example, demonstrated the group's intolerance for what it considered idolatry. VEO violence is often designed to have psychological impact beyond the immediate victims or targets.

¹¹ Elliot Balch, "Myth Busting: Robert Pape on ISIS, Suicide Terrorism, and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Chicago Policy Review* (May 2015).

¹² Joseph K. Young and Laura Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest: Why Terrorist Groups Endure," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 8, No 2 (2014).

¹³ Decker and Pyrooz, "Gang Violence Worldwide," 145.

Illicit Economic Activities

Both gangs and VEOs may engage in illicit economic activities. Gangs' illicit economic activities may encompass theft, armed robbery, drug sales, prostitution, extortion rackets, loan sharking or assassination for hire. They constitute the primary source of income for gangs, although not all gangs participate in the illicit economy. Gang involvement in illicit economic activities increases levels of violence due to the violent aspects of the activity itself (such as armed robbery or extortion rackets), fights over turf, or increased resources to buy firearms. Especially among less formal gangs, gang members may engage in criminal markets independently of their gang and not share profits with the group.

By contrast, illicit economic activity is one of multiple sources of financing for VEOs, along with state sponsorship, charitable donations, legitimate enterprise and, for organizations with control over territory, taxation. VEOs often enjoy financial or other support from foreign government sponsors (such as Iran or Sudan) when their motives or operations simultaneously advance goals shared by those governments.¹⁴ Hezbollah's capabilities were greatly enhanced, for example, through its collaboration with Iran in the execution of significant terror campaigns, such as the Khobar Tower bombing. In recent years, criminal activity has become an increasingly important source of financing for VEOs. Globalization has unleashed a surge in illicit operations, providing new opportunities for extremist organizations to access related profits.

Working on their own or partnering with organized crime groups, VEOs may engage in a range of criminal activities to support their objectives. For example, Al Qaeda has engaged in credit card fraud in Europe, Hezbollah has smuggled cigarettes in the U.S., and Boko Haram has committed kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria in order to finance their operations.¹⁵ Just as street gangs sometimes demand money from citizens in exchange for security guarantees, VEOs may sometimes exact tolls to provide security to organized crime groups operating in their territory, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) taxing drug traffickers.¹⁶ Often, alliances between VEOs and criminal groups are short-lived matters of convenience.¹⁷ The attractions of economic gain may pull some extremist individuals and organizations away from their original motivations. At the same time, a growing preoccupation with illicit profits may delegitimize the organization and push some members to disengage.

Relationship to Political Actors

Gangs have varied relationships with political actors. Many are neutral toward the political system and seek to remain under the radar of law enforcement. Others openly challenge police officers, judges and prisons officials and can pose a clear threat to the ability of the government to impose law and order, even while they do not seek to overthrow the government, such as MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang in El Salvador. Other gangs may have ties with corrupt officials to facilitate illicit economic activities or may be protected or paid by politicians in exchange for delivering votes, intimidating opponents, or allowing access to their neighborhood.¹⁸

VEOs tend to have an oppositional relationship to political actors as they challenge the state's monopoly of violence in their efforts to bring about change. Some organizations are more oppositional in this

¹⁴ See: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>

¹⁵ For more examples, see Louise Shelley, *Dirty Entanglements: Corruption, Crime, and Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Wolfram Lacher, "Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel -Sahara Region," *The Carnegie Papers* (September 2012).

¹⁷ Douglas Farah, "Terrorist-Criminal Pipelines and Criminalized States: Emerging Alliances," *PRISM* 2, no. 3 (June 2011): 15-32.

¹⁸ See John Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); and Hazen and Rodgers, eds. *Global Gangs*.

regard than others. On the one hand, those striving to abolish the state or its borders find themselves in a strictly adversarial position with government. In those cases, the government becomes “the other” against which the extremist organization identifies itself. Both individual political leaders and the government as a whole are demonized. Religious groups often paint political actors as apostates by imposing religious imagery on government repression. On the other hand, groups with more limited goals may find engagement with government counterparts possible and desirable. Notably, 43% of terrorist groups existing between 1968 and 2006 have adopted nonviolent tactics and joined the political process.¹⁹ Groups such as the Maoists in Nepal or the Salvadoran FLNM negotiated political agreements and evolved into political parties that remain actively involved in governance today.

Despite this broadly oppositional relationship, VEOs sometimes have collusive relationships with government officials. Some VEOs have benefited from the clandestine patronage of government agents or agencies. State officials may be sympathetic to a given organization’s objectives and either turn a blind eye to or actively facilitate their operations, such as the Pakistan government’s covert support of the Taliban and Lashkar-e Taiba. VEOs involved in illicit economic activities may also maintain corrupt ties with government officials. Trafficking, in particular, calls for corrupt arrangements with border guards, police, and/or military personnel to facilitate the movement of goods.

Relationship to the Community

Relationships between the two non-state armed groups and their communities can be quite complex. In some cases, gangs can provide services to community members especially where the state is largely absent. They may provide enforcement of contracts, protection of private property, enforcement of norms related to domestic violence or child abuse, and limited social support.²⁰ Rio gangs, for example, pay for funerals or throw parties for residents of their communities to help secure residents’ allegiance and support against the police or rival gangs.²¹ In other cases, gangs constitute a direct threat to citizen security, attacking individuals, businesses, and public services, such as buses. They may also provide security for the community as a whole, while posing a threat to community members who resist them.²²

Similarly, VEOs sometimes provide humanitarian assistance, security and justice to communities, which increases popular acceptance of the group. Through a robust social development program, for example, Hezbollah operates schools, hospitals, and agricultural centers as well as a host of charity organizations. Supporting illicit economies can also generate political capital for VEOs where the local population participates in them and the government represses them. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has gained the support of local populations by protecting poppy fields that government forces were striving to eradicate.²³ The Taliban has also provided justice in areas with minimal government presence.²⁴ Supporters may be active sympathizers, who may provide financial, material, political or logistical support but do not engage in violence directly, or passive supporters, who do not actively oppose VEO activity, even if they provide no direct assistance. Marginalized ethnic, sectarian or co-religionist communities are more sympathetic to VEO narratives that offer the possibility of righting perceived

¹⁹ See Seth Jones and Martin Libiki, “How Terrorist Groups End” (The RAND Corporation 2008), 18.

²⁰ Dennis Rodgers and Adam Baird, “Understanding Gangs in Contemporary Latin America,” in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*, 490.

²¹ Enrique Desmond Arias, “Gang Politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,” in Hazen and Rodgers, eds., *Global Gangs*, 248.

²² Jennifer M. Hazen, “Gangs, Groups and Guns: An Overview,” in *Small Arms Survey 2010*, 88.

²³ Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Counterinsurgency, Counternarcotics, and Illicit Economies in Afghanistan: Lessons for State-Building,” in Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer, eds., *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization* (The Center for Complex Operations, April 2013).

²⁴ Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, “No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan,” Chatham House, December 2010, available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/1210pr_afghanjustice.pdf.

injustices or grievances. They may be called upon (through coercion or circumstance) to provide more active support and may be a ripe pool for recruitment.

Geographic Focus

Street gangs tend to operate locally, while violent extremist groups often operate regionally, nationally or transnationally. Street gangs tend to form in poor, urban neighborhoods and their activities happen within a circumscribed geographic space.²⁵ Gangs maintain control of their territory through violence, which increases where rival gangs operate in adjacent territory.²⁶ For some VEOs, particularly groups with separatist or insurgent agendas, control of territory may be their primary motive and they will operate largely from their base in a specific area. For other VEOs, controlling territory is far less important than the ability to move freely and operate in numerous territories undetected. Organizations with expansive agendas, such as the creation of an Islamic Caliphate, will seek ways to expand their reach through media use and networks. Communications, including use of the media, is a recognized enabler of geographic reach. Flatter organizational structures, such as cells or networks, afford VEOs greater geographic reach than a traditional hierarchy. They also permit groups to act quasi-independently far from the group's physical center of gravity.

Shifts over Time

While this discussion points to overall similarities and differences between gangs and VEOs, it is important to bear in mind that motives and methods may shift over time for any given organization. These shifts can result from changes in economic or political incentives, government policies, or in the group itself, such as its capacity, resources, leadership, and goals. For example, a gang's involvement in drug trafficking will likely lead to more money, greater access to weapons and increased turf disputes, and may increase the levels of violence and orient the gang more toward economic gain. As Hagedorn stresses, gangs are adaptable and may transform into organized crime groups as well as militias or social movements.²⁷

Similarly, VEOs may shift motives and methods in response to new challenges or opportunities. In the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf originally aimed to establish an independent Islamic republic, but changed its tactics from widespread bombings to kidnapping for ransom, piracy and marijuana cultivation when it lost financial support from external patrons including Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah.²⁸ Since then, the organization has become primarily focused on its economic rather than political objectives.²⁹

MEMBERSHIP AND ROLES

This section examines the individual's role within the group, looking at membership dynamics and roles in gangs and VEOs. Generally speaking, much more is known about how gangs expand their ranks and organize themselves than VEOs. Comparatively little empirical data regarding roles and responsibilities or movement within extremist organizations exist. Research on both gangs and VEOs considers motivations or risk factors that render individuals vulnerable to recruitment and/or selection as a

²⁵ Beidi Dong, Chris L. Gibson, and Marvin D. Krohn, "Gang Membership in a Developmental and Life-Course Perspective" in *The Handbook of Gangs*, 91.

²⁶ Arna L. Carlock and Alan J. Lizotte, "Gangs, Guns, and Violence Synergistic Effects," in *The Handbook of Gangs*, 180.

²⁷ Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*.

²⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, "Abu Sayyaf Group (Philippines, Islamist Separatists)" (May 27, 2009).

²⁹ Tamara Makarenko, "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism," *Global Crime* Vol. 6, No. 1 (February 2004): 129-145.

starting point of analysis. Both fields are also concerned with the social networks that facilitate recruitment as well as the factors that enable disengagement.

Recruitment

A comparison of recruitment patterns between street gangs and VEOs reveals more differences than similarity. Thanks to a systematic selection process, gang members must demonstrate their solidarity with the group. Those who join VEOs, by contrast, need not exhibit a priori allegiance. Some members will seek out the group willingly; others will be persuaded, or even forced into joining. They may become radicalized through the recruitment process, by virtue of being part of the organization, or not at all. Gang selection is a highly local phenomenon, whereas VEO recruitment can be local, national or even transnational depending on the group's objectives and bases of operation. To reach a dispersed audience, VEOs increasingly rely on media and the Internet to an extent that gangs do not. A key similarity is the degree to which both gangs and VEOs rely on social and kinship connections to expand their membership. While both groups target youth, the average age of VEO members is higher.³⁰

By and large, gangs are selective organizations. They want members who will contribute to gang activities, keep secrets from police or rival gangs, defend other members, and uphold the reputation of the gang for enforcing threats. They do not want members who are weak, dishonest or willing to put others at risk to save themselves. Consequently, they have a keen interest in guarding entry. As explained by Densley, gangs use signaling, screening and credible commitments to differentiate high-quality from low-quality candidates.³¹ Signaling, such as candidates' previous displays of violence and criminal credentials, indicates their commitment to gang norms. Screening includes information gathering on candidates and costly induction such as beatings, which indicates how tough a recruit is. Credible commitments such as gang-related tattoos, kinship ties with gang members or violent co-offending indicate a candidate's allegiance to the gang.

The process of joining a gang can take up to a year or more from the time of initial association. A youth typically begins hanging out with gang members, then becomes an associate member and eventually joins a gang.³² Some younger youth become involved in "starter gangs" initially, which are less serious and violent than established gangs. These may operate independently or be off-shoots of established gangs, referred to as "wannabes," "juniors," or "pee wees."³³

Recruitment to gangs tends to occur in neighborhoods and not via the Internet. However, the Internet plays a role in the transmission of gang culture generally and the promotion of specific gangs, and in that way can serve as a marketing tool for new members. Gangs with more organizational structure have a larger digital footprint, which may include having a website, posting videos and tweeting.³⁴ For youth interested in joining a gang, social media can play a role in signaling gang allegiance through such moves as following a gang on Twitter or liking them on Facebook.

VEOs use both selective and open recruitment to expand their ranks. Often, recruitment occurs through family networks, peers or social institutions, including universities or prisons. These

³⁰ In the U.S., for example, individuals linked to Islamic extremism in 2015 ranged in age from 16 to 47. The average age was 27 and the median age is 24.5. See Anti-Defamation League, "2015 Sees Dramatic Spike in Islamic Extremism Arrests" (February 2016).

³¹ James A. Densley, "Joining the Gang: A Process of Supply and Demand," in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*.

³² James C. Howell, "Why Is Gang-Membership Prevention Important?" in Thomas Simon, Nancy Ritter and Reshma Mahendra, eds., *Changing Course: Preventing Gang Membership* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice and National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, n.d.).

³³ James C. Howell, "Gang Prevention: An Overview of Research and Programs," *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (December 2010), 3.

³⁴ Decker and Pyrooz, "Street Gangs, Terrorists, Drug Smugglers, and Organized Crime."

connections theoretically ensure a greater level of fidelity to the group and serve as an informal vetting process. Membership and radicalization are not synonymous: individuals may come to the group with extremist views, become radicalized through group interaction, or never become radicalized at all. Individuals already engaged in violent extremism become compelling recruiters for their peers and relatives.

For groups that require foot soldiers or a large base of active supporters, recruitment may involve a public relations campaign, propagated increasingly through the Internet. Glossy videos, chat rooms and other interactive platforms provide an emotionally-appealing depiction of the narrative extremists groups seek to promulgate. Recruiters actively solicit potential members through sustained chats and exchanges, although selection and role assignments are ultimately done in person.

More targeted recruitment and screening enable groups to seek individuals with particular skills, such as previous military experience or capabilities in logistics, engineering, finance, or knowledge management. Recruitment and screening for these individuals may be done directly by assigned recruiters or outsourced to individuals affiliated with the organization. Veterans of foreign wars or separatist movements are particularly valuable recruiting targets.³⁵

VEOs also use force and trafficking to fill their ranks. Al Shabaab in Somalia, for example, seized recruits, mainly children, from mosques, schools and communities under its control.³⁶ Forced recruitment of girls for sexual servitude, marriage and potentially suicide bombing has been equally noted in the practices of Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, ISIL and other groups. Forced conscription often begins with indoctrination through religious instruction, military training or dehumanizing social experiments.³⁷

Of growing concern is the ability of VEOs to inspire lone actors to perpetrate violence in the name of the organization or the cause without having direct affiliation. According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index, "Lone wolf attacks account for 70 per cent of all terrorist deaths in the West since 2006."³⁸ These individuals are not recruited, but they directly affect the terrorist brand and influence.

Motivations and Risk Factors

Although there is some overlap in risk factors between individuals who join gangs and VEOs, there are also some decided differences. Risk factors related to peer groups and social networks may be the most comparable between gangs and VEOs since personal connections play such a strong role in recruitment for both. Individual risk factors, such as dissatisfaction with life circumstances, desire for revenge or status, and thrill seeking are also comparable across members of both groups. Other individual factors that correlate to gang membership, such as family instability or abuse, low levels of educational attainment, personality and psychiatric problems, drug and alcohol abuse, previous criminal convictions, or exposure to violence are not consistent risk factors for violent extremism, although individuals with criminal convictions comprise a sizeable subset of VEO members including prisoners becoming radicalized by other prisoners.³⁹ Risk factors are generally more predictive of gang involvement than VE

³⁵ Thomas Hegghammer, "Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. III, No. 4 (Winter 2006).

³⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office To Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2015* (July 2015), 37.

³⁷ Zeina Karam, "How ISIL Is Recruiting the Next Generation of Fighters," *Newshour* (Public Broadcasting System (PBS)), July 19, 2015).

³⁸ *Global Terrorism Index 2015*, 2.

³⁹ UK Home Office, Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, *Understanding Vulnerability and Resilience in Individuals to the Influence of Al Qa'ida Violent Extremism* (2011), iv.

acts and researchers stress that there is no single pathway from grievance to radicalization or from radicalization to violence.⁴⁰

Youth join gangs for a variety of reasons, including protection, status, power, money, belonging and excitement.⁴¹ These motivations differ for each person. To some extent, motivations are related to risk factors that make youth more likely to join gangs. For example, joining a gang for protection is related to the risk factor of living in an unsafe neighborhood. While risk factors also differ for each person, more risk factors increase one's propensity to join a gang.

Risk factors of gang joining are grouped in five domains of individual, family, peer, school, and neighborhood.⁴² Youth are at a higher risk of joining a gang who exhibit aggression at an early age, hold antisocial attitudes and experience early childhood stress; lack secure attachment to parents, are not adequately supervised and have gang members in the family; associate with delinquent peers; perform poorly in school; and live in neighborhoods where they feel unsafe and are exposed to gangs and criminality.⁴³ In addition to these risk factors, girls who join gangs are more likely to have a history of sexual abuse and trauma.⁴⁴

Risk factors for gang involvement tend to cluster in poor, marginalized urban communities. Poverty, lack of opportunity and discrimination limit the support provided to youth through formal institutions of society. When youth are socially and economically blocked, they may seek out social support in gangs.⁴⁵ While youth who grow up in disadvantaged communities are more likely to join gangs, it is worth emphasizing that only a relatively small proportion of youth in these communities join a gang. Protective factors for youth in high-risk communities include secure attachment, effective parenting and academic success.⁴⁶

Individuals who join VEOs come from diverse backgrounds and regions. There is no prototypical profile. Younger males generally constitute the majority, but females play increasingly visible roles and not all extremists are youth. Their socio-economic status and education levels generally reflect the broader population in which they live and thus vary significantly. A sudden increase in religiosity, even among those with secular upbringings, is common among Islamic extremists. Psychologically, individuals who willingly join extremist groups do all appear to be on a personal journey to seek identity, status, revenge or excitement.⁴⁷ This desire for something more makes them susceptible to messages about a better world divided between adherents and non-adherents, which in turn can justify violence in the pursuit of an absolutist worldview.

Grievances, particularly those that reflect relative deprivation, create an initial vulnerability that can be amplified and/or exploited.⁴⁸ Some of these factors include feelings of alienation or disenfranchisement; disillusionment with nonviolent methods of protest to produce change; personal victimization or empathy with victims; identity-seeking behavior; and social ties with those experiencing similar

⁴⁰ Randy Borum, "Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, American Psychological Association, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2015): 68.

⁴¹ Angela Higginson and Kathryn Benier, "Gangs in African, Asian and Australian Settings," in Scott Decker and David Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*; and Howell, "Gang Prevention."

⁴² Klein and Maxson, 139.

⁴³ Howell, "Gang Prevention"; Terence Dunworth, Dave Hayeslip, Morgan Lyons, and Megan Denver, *Evaluation of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program: Final Y1 Report* (The Urban Institute, October 2010); and Simon et al., eds., *Changing Course*.

⁴⁴ Simon et al, eds. *Changing Course*.

⁴⁵ Higginson and Benier, "Gangs in African, Asian and Australian Settings."

⁴⁶ Simon et al, eds. *Changing Course*.

⁴⁷ John M. "Matt" Venhau, *Why Youth Join al-Qaeda* (United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 8.

⁴⁸ See Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* (USAID, February 2009) for a detailed description of potential grievances.

dissociation.⁴⁹ When presented with the opportunity to fight for sacred values, individuals with these grievances feel empowered to defend or advance these values through extreme actions.⁵⁰

The radicalization process fuses an individual's sense of identity and belonging (generally expressed through grievances) with an extremist belief system and values (ideology) and an active peer group (mobilization and socialization). Through this interplay, beliefs become hardened through actual or virtual group engagement. There are multiple theories that attempt to unpack radicalization. Some analysts envision a linear radicalization process whereby grievances are hardened through ideology and then exploited through networks. Others imagine a multi-causal process. Regardless, most analysts agree that commitment to an extremist organization and its ideals is process driven and interactive and not fully explained by individual risk factors.

Just as individuals become more radical, so too can the groups with which they affiliate. Groups may be radical from the onset, or may become radical over time in response to different stimuli. Potential pathways to group radicalization include polarization within the group; group cohesion around an extreme position in response to an external threat or as a result of in-group rivalries; competition with other extremist groups; or retaliation against state-sponsored violence.⁵¹ The general public is also susceptible to radicalization in support of a particular cause or grievance. The interplay of individual, group and mass radicalization processes can produce a toxic blend of motivations and risk factors.⁵²

Organizational Structure and Roles

For both gangs and VEOs, group structure varies considerably. There is no uniform size, organization or modus operandi. The organization's motives – be they protective, criminal, far left or right, religious, racial or ethno-nationalist – help determine the structure most suited to achieve these goals. Roles within the organization are highly dependent on overall structure. Given the paucity of empirical research on roles within VEOs, it is challenging to offer direct comparisons to those filled by gang members. Nonetheless, the main similarity is the transitory nature of belonging to these groups.

Gangs show considerable variation in their organizational structure. Most gangs operate as peer groups with a loose organizational structure. Leadership is situational, formal gang practices are rare and membership is transitory.⁵³ Gangs made up of younger youth are particularly unstructured, with “fluid boundaries and frequent member turnover mak[ing] it difficult to determine who is in a gang and who is not.”⁵⁴ Many gangs last only a few years. For example, in a survey of middle school students in nine U.S. cities, students noted that 25 percent of gangs had existed for less than 1 year, and only 10 percent had existed for more than 10 years.⁵⁵

Some gangs can be highly organized, however, with leadership roles, age-graded levels of membership, regular meetings, and written rules. The organized structure enables gangs to define and achieve group objectives, such as running drug rings or extortion rackets. The Black Kings of Chicago, the MS-13 and

⁴⁹ Kris Christmann, “Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence” (Youth Justice Board, 2012), 33.

⁵⁰ Scott Atran, “Here’s What the Social Science Says About Countering Violent Extremism,” *The Huffington Post* (April 25, 2015).

⁵¹ See Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 415-433, for additional reading.

⁵² Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵³ Decker and Pyrooz, “Street Gangs, Terrorists, Drug Smugglers, and Organized Crime.”

⁵⁴ Densley, “Joining the Gang.”

⁵⁵ Howell, “Gang Prevention.”

18th Street gangs in Central America and Rio de Janeiro's drug factions exemplify more organized gangs.
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Adversaries play a central role in gang cohesion and institutionalization. Gangs often define themselves in opposition to rival gangs or authority. Conflict strengthens the bonds between gang members and solidifies the boundaries between gangs.⁵⁷ Moreover, violence and the threat of violence prompt the emergence of structures within gangs. As Cruz argues, "Salvadoran gangs transformed into more hierarchical and organized groups, capable of setting complex extortion rackets on the population, as a result of their need to face consequences of government crackdowns."⁵⁸

Gangs tend to be comprised of youth in their teens or early twenties. In the U.S., the most common age for joining gangs is 13 to 15 years old,⁵⁹ and the age range within gangs tends to be less than 10 years.⁶⁰ Gangs with younger members tend to be less structured and engaged in less serious and violent offenses.⁶¹

Members can be more or less connected to their gang, with more peripheral and more core members. In a survey of U.S. middle school students, 17% reported lifetime involvement in a gang, but only 2% considered themselves core members.⁶² Core members tend to exercise more leadership in gangs and commit more offenses (see Figure 1). Because they are more embedded in the gang, core members are less likely to leave a gang.⁶³

Like gangs, VEOs may fall anywhere along a spectrum from simple groups to complex organizations. The structure of the group – hierarchy, cell, or network – influences how it operates and the level of violence in which it engages.⁶⁴ Such arrangements are not static as Al Qaeda demonstrated by evolving from a small cell to a hierarchy to a network. Groups merge, splinter or affiliate to sustain themselves and advance short-and long-term goals. Different types of organization allow for more security (e.g., clandestine cells) or greater efficiency and control of action and messaging (e.g., hierarchies).

⁵⁶ Decker and Pyrooz, "Gangs, Terrorism, and Radicalization"; and Hagedorn, *A World of Gangs*.

⁵⁷ Michael Sierra-Arevalo and Andrew Papachristos, "Social Network Analysis and Gangs," in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*.

⁵⁸ José Miguel Cruz, "Maras and the Politics of Violence in El Salvador," in Hazen and Rodgers, eds. *Global Gangs*, 124.

⁵⁹ Simon et al, eds. *Changing Course*.

⁶⁰ Decker and Pyrooz, "Street Gangs, Terrorists, Drug Smugglers, and Organized Crime."

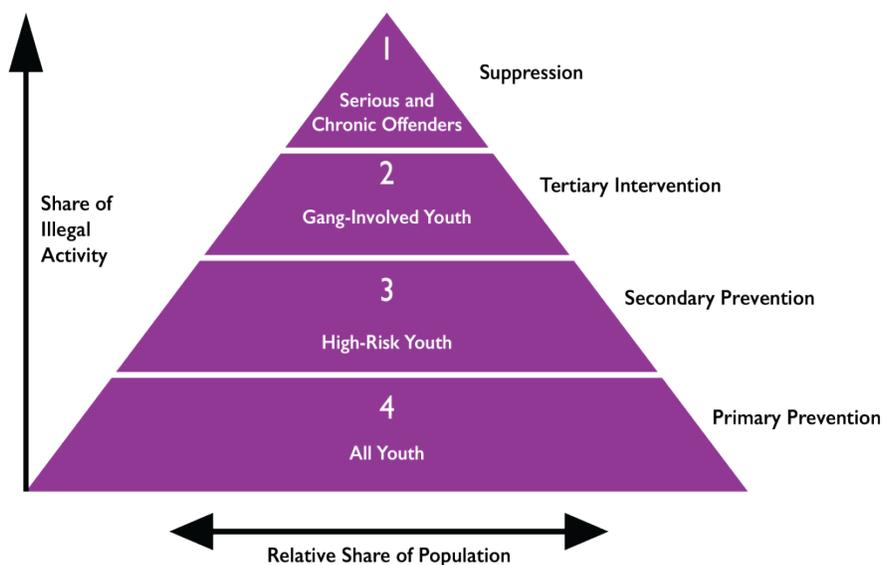
⁶¹ Howell, "Gang Prevention."

⁶² Shytierra Gaston and Beth Huebner, "Gangs in Correctional Institutions," in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*.

⁶³ Sierra-Arevalo and Papachristos, "Social Network Analysis and Gangs."

⁶⁴ See Gina Scott Ligon, Pete Simi, Mackenzie Harms, and Daniel J. Harris, "Putting the 'O' in VEOs: What Makes an Organization?" *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 6, no. 1-3 (2013): 110-134.

FIGURE I. GANG RESPONSE AND INVOLVEMENT PYRAMID



BASED ON: Phelan Wyrick, Ph.D. Gang prevention: How to make the “front end” of your anti-gang effort work, *U.S. Attorneys’ Bull.* 2006; 4(3):52-60.1’

Hierarchical VEOs mirror formal organizations with leadership, management and operational levels. At the senior-most levels, ideology and combat leadership may overlap or be vested in separate individuals, which may be expressed with separate political and military wings and leaders. Hierarchy facilitates overall coherence and political activity. It also offers a centralized negotiating body for cease fires or other agreements. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) operated under this kind of pyramid, and ISIS has used a variant of this structure – the multidivisional-hierarchy form of management (or M-form) – with top leaders focused on strategy and oversight and semiautonomous, regional divisions focused on day-to-day operations.⁶⁵

Cells act independently but generally receive direction from a higher headquarters. Information may pass along a chain from one cell to another or via a hub. Cells may be redundant or have specialized functions and responsibilities. The FARC in Colombia is ostensibly hierarchical, but is largely composed of cells (called fronts) that operated independently in their region.

There is insufficient evidence to identify with precision specific roles within a VEO. Clearly, not all adherents will engage in violence. Aside from operational roles, organizations require individuals capable of information and intelligence gathering; recruitment and management of personnel; and procurement of material and financing. There is some evidence that key individuals, emboldened by operational success, are able to transition to other roles, such as financing or advocacy, particularly within organizations that establish a political wing. In smaller organizations, individuals may fulfill more than one function at any given time. Some research on disengagement suggests that rather than leaving the VEO altogether, individuals may shift responsibilities, thereby maintaining their ideological affiliation but reducing the likelihood that they would engage in violence directly.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Cam Simpson, “The Banality of Islamic State: How ISIS Corporatized Terror,” *Bloomberg Business*, November 20, 2014 available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2014-the-business-of-isis-spreadsheets-annual-reports-and-terror/>

⁶⁶ See John Horgan and Max Taylor, “Disengagement, De-radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research,” in Rik Coolsaet, ed., *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences 2nd Edition* (London: Ashgate, 2011), 182.

The Role of Women

Females make up a larger portion of gangs than is commonly thought. In American gangs, the ratio of males to females is roughly 2:1, but the proportion that is female declines as individuals age.⁶⁷ In comparison to males, female gang members are involved in less serious crime, engage in violence less frequently and tend to use knives, stones, or tools over guns as their weapon of choice. Although males are more likely to be victims of gun violence, females are more likely to suffer sexual abuse both within gangs and in the home.⁶⁸

Most female gang members are part of majority-male gangs. Females in majority-male gangs have the highest frequency of offending, followed by females in sex-balanced gangs and then in majority- or all-female gangs. Females in female gangs tend to emphasize the relationship benefits of gang membership, whereas females in male-dominant gangs tend to emphasize the status or economic benefits of gang membership, much like their male counterparts⁶⁹ Machismo stereotypes tend to prevail in gangs. While some girls support them and “play submissive roles, others assert their equality by engaging in riskier ‘male’ behavior such as excessive drinking, drug dealing and violence.”⁷⁰

Women’s roles in extremist organizations reflect the group’s ideology. Leftist organizations have had female leaders, but leadership positions are generally not open to women in religious groups. As with general recruitment, female engagement traditionally has been driven by family ties. Women have the ability to reach out to other women as recruiters and to infiltrate locales unavailable to male counterparts. In January 2015, ISIL released a manifesto on women’s roles which limited them largely to the household, unless they are already doctors, lawyers or religious scholars.⁷¹ In parts of the Middle East and North Africa, men who are unable to procure brides on their own are lured to VEOs by the prospect of wives and sex.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

The preceding comparison of the motives, methods, membership and roles of gangs and VEOs helps to clarify the appropriate approach for drawing lessons about programming from one domain to another. Where the features of these two types of groups are substantially different, caution is warranted about the extent to which best practice from one domain transfers to the other.

We briefly summarize key similarities and differences. In terms of group motives and methods, the primary similarities are their use of armed violence and participation in illicit economic activities. The primary differences lie in their goals, targets of violence, consequences of criminal activity for the group, relationship to political actors and geographic focus. In terms of membership dynamics and roles, both groups rely on personal connections for recruitment and both draw membership from marginalized youth who are dissatisfied with life circumstances. Key differences include the relevance of family instability, early aggressive behavior and insecure neighborhoods, which are important influences on gang involvement but less important for VEO involvement. At the same time, political drivers and an increase in religiosity are important for VEO involvement but not gang involvement, and there is a broader range

⁶⁷ Vanessa Panfil and Dana Peterson, “Gender, Sexuality, and Gangs: Re-envisioning Diversity,” in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*.

⁶⁸ Helen Moestue and Jasna Lazarevic, “The Other Half: Girls in Gangs,” in *Small Arms Survey 2010*.

⁶⁹ Panfil and Peterson, “Gender, Sexuality, and Gangs.”

⁷⁰ Moestue and Lazarevic “The Other Half: Girls in Gangs,” 189.

⁷¹ *Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade* (translation by Charlie Winter, analysis by the Quilliam Foundation, February 2015), 18.

of risk factors for and profiles of people involved in VEOs. Table I summarizes key differences between the two kinds of groups.

TABLE I. KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GANGS AND VEOs

	Gangs	VEOs
Group Motives	Security, solidarity, economic gain	Ideological and political goals
Targets of Violence	Largely interpersonal and transactional targeting other gang members, selected security sector officials and civilians	Largely strategic and collective targeting state and security sector officials, civilians, symbolic sites or events, rival groups
Illicit Economic Activities	Can make gang more organized and violent	Can delegitimize group but also provide means to sustain itself
Relationship to Political Actors	Neutral or oppositional when targeted by police; Collusive when protected or paid by politicians in exchange for votes, thuggery or access to neighborhood	Oppositional; Collusive when sponsored by specific agencies or actors
Geographic Focus	Local	Local, regional, national or transnational
Individual Motivations and Risk Factors	Family instability, early aggressive behavior, insecure neighborhoods	Political drivers, increase in religiosity Broader range of risk factors

PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

With these points of convergence and divergence in mind, we turn now to the programming approaches used in each domain to discern more specific recommendations for CVE and gang prevention efforts. We examine diagnostic frameworks, program objectives, metrics and programming approaches across the two fields. As the programming and research on gangs and CVE emerged from two different disciplines – the former from rule of law and the latter from conflict prevention – there are ample opportunities for cross-learning. As the more mature programming area, gang prevention offers a greater number of lessons for CVE than the reverse.

Diagnostic Frameworks

The diagnostic frameworks for gang and VEO interventions generally assess different levels and types of risk. Although there is assuredly overlap, the emphasis of each set of tools differs: gang frameworks tend to concentrate on individual risk while VEO frameworks prioritize at-risk communities. The newer VEO tools that do focus on individual risk confirm some of the variations between extremists and other violent offenders that have been highlighted in the report thus far.

While gang prevention assessments may examine macro-level influences on gang violence to inform broader programming strategies, the primary focus of diagnostic frameworks in gang prevention is on the individual. USAID missions in Latin America and the Caribbean have made use of two frameworks in particular: the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) and Youth Services Eligibility Tool (YSET) to identify youth who are eligible for violence prevention services.⁷² These tools capture the presence of risk factors that are related to gang involvement during early adolescence, when a young

⁷² USAID is using the SAVRY to guide secondary prevention programming in Grenada and the YSET in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Jamaica.

person is most likely to join a gang. The SAVRY includes ten historical, six contextual and eight individual risk factors in addition to six protective factors (factors that reduce the risk of joining).⁷³

TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN THE YSET, SAVRY AND VERA

YSET	SAVRY	VERA
Individual/Attitudinal Items		
Justifying delinquent behavior	Low empathy/remorse	Low empathy for those outside own group
Impulsive risk taking	Risk taking/impulsivity	
Delinquency or substance abuse	Substance-use difficulties	
	Anger management problems	Anger and frustration
Anti-social tendencies		Rejection of society and values
	Attention deficit/hyperactivity	Need for group bonding and belonging
	Poor compliance	Identity problems
	Low interest in school	Strong feelings of injustice and grievances
	Negative attitudes	Identified cause of injustice
		Attachment to ideology justifying violence
		Dehumanization of identified target
		Internalized martyrdom
		Need for religious/ideological cause
		Alienation from society
		Low self-esteem
		High need for approval and acceptance
		Desire for revenge
Contextual Items		
Peer delinquency	Peer delinquency	
Critical events (causing strain)	Stress and poor coping	
Weak parental supervision	Poor parental management	
Negative peer influence	Peer rejection	User of extremist websites
	Lack of support	Direct contact with violent extremists
	Community disorganization	Anger at politics, actions of country
		Community support for violent action
Historical Items		
	Exposure to violence in home	Early exposure to violence in home
Family gang influence	Parental/caregiver criminality	Family involvement in violent action
	History of violence	Prior criminal violence

⁷³ D. Elaine Pressman, "Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism" (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2009).

YSET	SAVRY	VERA
	History of non-violent offending	State-sponsored training
	Early initiation of violence	Non-state sponsored training/fighting
	Past intervention failures	Glorification of violent action
	Self-harm or suicide attempts	
	Childhood maltreatment	
	Early caregiver disruption	
	Poor school achievement	
Protective Items		
	Strong social support	Significant other/community support
	Pro-social involvement	Interest in constructive political involvement
	Strong attachment and bonds	Shift in ideology
	Positive attitude toward intervention and authority	Change of vision of enemy
	Strong commitment to school	Rejection of violence to obtain goals
	Resilient personality traits	

Key: Yellow highlighting denotes similarities across instruments.

The YSET identifies ten risk factors; a youth who is at-risk on any four or more factors is deemed eligible for services, regardless of which factors they may be.⁷⁴ A meta-analysis comparing the predictive values of nine risk assessment tools found the SAVRY produced the highest rates of predicting violence, although YSET was not included in the analysis.⁷⁵

By contrast, VEO diagnostic frameworks generally assess at-risk communities more so than at-risk individuals. USAID's *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* and related *Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming* examine socioeconomic, political and cultural drivers of violent extremism and are typically applied to help identify at-risk communities within a country.⁷⁶ One implementing partner developed a scoring system drawing from the *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* to identify communities eligible for programming.⁷⁷ For its part, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives conducts assessments of push and pull factors that help target the most affected communities in a given country. However, they recognize the imprecision of any targeting effort, and anticipate

⁷⁴ Different iterations of the YSET have made small adjustments to the risk factors, but programming and evaluation of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program in 2010/2011 serve as a good example. See Terence Dunworth, David Hayeslip, and Megan Denver, *Y2 Final Report: Evaluation of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2011).

⁷⁵ Jay P. Singh, Martin Grann, and Seena Fazel, "A Comparative Study of Risk Assessment Tools: A Systematic Review and Meta-regression Analysis of 68 Studies Involving 25,980 Participants," *Clinical Psychology Review* (2011).

⁷⁶ Denoeux and Carter, *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*; and Guilain Denoeux with Lynn Carter, *Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A Guide to Programming* (USAID, October 2009). The drivers include: social exclusion and marginality; societal discrimination; frustrated expectations and relative deprivation; unmet social and economic needs; proliferation of illegal economic activities; social networks and group dynamics supporting VE; denial of political rights and civil liberties; harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights; foreign occupation; political and/or military encroachment; endemic corruption and impunity; poorly governed or ungoverned areas; local conflicts; state support of VEOs; discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions; intimidation or coercion by VEOs; perception that the international system is unfair and hostile to Muslim peoples; Islam under siege; broader cultural threats; and "proactive" religious agendas.

⁷⁷ International Relief and Development developed this scoring system for the Peace through Development II (PDevII) project in Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso.

ongoing adjustments based on learning by doing.⁷⁸ USAID has not used a CVE diagnostic framework focused on individual risk.

Within the U.S. government, the National Counterterrorism Center has developed an analytical framework that diagnoses risk and protective factors for violent extremism at the community, family or individual level.⁷⁹ It aims to help practitioners determine where to deploy resources to help counter vulnerability to violent extremism, recognizing that some practitioners, such as a state agency, may be interested in using the planning worksheets at the community level, whereas others, such as law enforcement officers or social service case workers, may want to use the individual or family worksheets. Lower scores (meaning a score of 1 or 2 on a scale of 1 to 5) across any of the 35 risk and protective factors prompt a consideration of interventions to reduce those risks and increase corresponding protective factors. The community-level worksheet examines levels of safety and violence, presence of VE recruiters, discrimination, isolation, trust in public institutions, access to public services, and community networks and cohesiveness. The family-level worksheet examines the relationships among family members, the family's connection to an identity group, involvement in community activities, and level of economic stress. The individual-level worksheet focuses on witnessing, threatening and committing violence, experiences of trauma and loss, and feelings of hopelessness, isolation and injustice, among others.

Other countries have applied a CVE diagnostic framework at the individual level, especially in prison and policing applications.⁸⁰ One such tool, the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA), includes fifteen risk factors related to attitudes, four related to context and six related to history in addition to five protective factors. A comparison of the VERA risk factors to those in either the SAVRY or YSET reveals notable differences as shown in Table 2. For example, only 28% of the items in the SAVRY that measure an individual's propensity for gang joining are relevant to measuring an individual's propensity towards violent extremism.⁸¹ The creator of VERA posits that violent extremists, in contrast to ordinary violent offenders, are characterized by deep conviction and moral justification for their actions; exhibit purposeful not impulsive behavior; have selective empathy, rather than an absence of empathy; and are generally not uneducated or unemployed, more prone to mental illness, or necessarily from broken or abusive homes.⁸²

This examination of diagnostic frameworks suggests possible areas for improvement in each domain. To the extent that USAID's CVE efforts may support secondary and tertiary prevention services targeted at the individual, development of a diagnostic framework focused on individual risk would serve as a useful guide. The framework should be adapted for local applications, much like USAID missions are adapting the YSET and SAVRY tools for their programming in Latin America. While highlighting the role of psychological risk factors, such a framework should also capture the role of group affiliation and processes, such as family and clan dynamics, that can pull individuals into VEOs. At the same time, development of a CVE diagnostic framework focused on communities incorporating new learning from the burgeoning field and reflections on VE trends would be a useful companion piece to a CVE diagnostic framework focused on individual risk, ideally in a similar format. In the gang prevention domain, USAID should review the usefulness of the YSET and SAVRY and consider the benefits of the

⁷⁸ Phone conversation between Phyllis Dininio and Sara Reckless, Transition Advisor, USAID/OTI, March 28, 2016.

⁷⁹ National Counterterrorism Center, "Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Practitioners and Analysts" (2014).

⁸⁰ This includes the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the UK Prevent Programme, The Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice, and government entities in Germany, Switzerland and Belgium.

⁸¹ D. Elaine Pressman, "Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism" (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2009), 19.

⁸² D. Elaine Pressman, "Risk Assessment of Radicalization to Violence: Applications of VERA-2 in Prisons" (Netherlands Institute of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, Ministry of Security and Justice and International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, Council for Penological Co-operation: 11th Working Group Meeting, January 11, 2016).

additional factors identified in the SAVRY such as: exposure to violence, which motivates a desire to protect self and family; early childhood stress, which can lead to cognitive impairment and difficulties in school; and protective factors such as strong attachments and social support.

Program Objectives

A review of program documents suggests that program objectives for gang and VE interventions often diverge.⁸³ Gang interventions tend to focus on reducing violence and crime whereas CVE programs tend to focus on reducing new recruits and community support for VEOs and reducing VEOs' freedom of operation. Put another way, gang interventions tend to focus on behavior whereas CVE programs tend to focus on the organization's strength. Nonetheless, program elements in support of those gang program objectives may overlap with CVE objectives. For example, the mission of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program is to reduce violence, but key components of its strategy include prevention and intervention services to prevent youth from joining and to help gang-involved youth to exit gangs, which constitute a focus on the organization.⁸⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to judge the merits of these divergent objectives, but worth noting that a broader focus on violence reduction may encourage a wider array of interventions than a focus on the organization.

Metrics

Relatedly, metrics for gang and VE interventions diverge for top-level objectives but have many areas of overlap for lower-level results. Metrics for top-level objectives tend to look at violence and crime statistics for gang interventions, but support for extremist views or groups for VE interventions. For other results, the metrics across the two fields have much in common, and include perceptions of security, attitudes toward government, community resilience, and individual resilience. The sample metrics in Table 3 show representative metrics pulled from multiple programming documents to convey similarities and differences across the two fields: it is neither definitive nor authoritative.⁸⁵

TABLE 3. SAMPLE METRICS FOR GANG AND VE INTERVENTIONS

	Metrics for Gang Interventions	Metrics for VE Interventions
Violence and Crime Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of reported homicides • Number of reported robberies • Number of reported cases of extortion • Number of reported gang fights 	
Support for Extremist Views or Groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of target group supporting VEO • Percent of target group believing use of violence by VEO is justified • Percent of target group who find peace and tolerance messages attractive

⁸³ Regarding USAID's approach to these interventions, see Susan Berk-Seligson, Diana Orcés, Georgina Pizzolitto, Mitchell Seligson, and Carole Wilson, *Impact Evaluation of USAID's Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach in Central America: Regional Report for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama*, the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) (Vanderbilt University, October 2014) for an overview of gang interventions in Central America; and Lynn Carter, Keith Brown and Guilain Denoeux, *Africa Bureau – Counter Terrorism and Development Assistance Programming: The Results Frameworks* (USAID, December 21, 2007) for an overview of CVE programming.

⁸⁴ Dunworth et al., "Evaluation of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program: Final YI Report."

⁸⁵ This review of metrics draws from Berk-Seligson et al, *Impact Evaluation of USAID's Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach in Central America* and for gang interventions; and Carter et al, *Africa Bureau – Counter Terrorism and Development Assistance Programming* and U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism, "Countering Violent Extremism Program Illustrative Indicators Exemplar," n.d., for VE interventions.

	Metrics for Gang Interventions	Metrics for VE Interventions
Perceptions of Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of people who feel safe • Percent of people who avoid walking through dangerous areas • Percent of people who perceive youth loitering as a problem • Percent of people who perceive youth in gangs as a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of people who feel insecure due to VE presence • Percent of people who believe that VE actors are not constrained by government • Percent of people who have experienced intimidation by VEO in the last three months
Attitudes toward Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of people who trust the police • Percent of people who are satisfied with police performance • Percent of people who are satisfied with democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of target group who trust government officials • Percent of target group who are satisfied with access to services • Perception-based corruption scores • Participation in elections of target group, compared to population
Community Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of people who trust their neighbors • Percent of people satisfied with community organization to prevent crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of target group who agree with notions of civil responsibility • Percent of target group who participate in community activities • Percent of target group who feel their group is marginalized
Individual Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment rate of target group relative to national average • Per capita income of target group relative to national average • Percent of target group enrollment in secondary or tertiary education relative to national average • Percent of target group helped by counseling and mentoring services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average number of hours that target group reports free time per week • Percent of target group who feel their economic opportunities have improved • Percent of target group who believe they will meet their life objectives • Percent of target group feeling capable of leading their peers

Cross-Discipline Programming Approaches

This section explores the overlap between the two programming domains and applies potential learning from one domain to the other. It discusses shared good practices as well as opportunities to learn from each discipline.

Shared Good Practice

At the programmatic level, there is a fair amount of shared good practice between the two domains. Both fields seek to create alternative pathways for youth through psycho-social and educational support and social integration activities. Both incorporate community-based programming and multi-stakeholder partnerships; both engage respected community leaders and parents; and both foster trust between target populations and interveners. To elaborate, shared good practices include:

- *Youth Programming.* Gang prevention programs historically employ a spectrum of interventions from early childhood onward. Specific activities include early childhood development programs, parent training, school enrichment programs, mentoring, counseling, social skills development, job training, extracurricular and recreational activities, and leadership development, among

others. Similarly, recognizing youth vulnerabilities to violent extremism, CVE projects consistently engage youth in communities at risk. Many CVE projects seek to empower and engage youth through activities such as youth associations, sports, theater, civic education, or faith-based events. A growing area of emphasis is enabling youth participation and voice in community affairs.

- *Social Cohesion.* Rebuilding social cohesion is especially important in societies affected by violence. Doing so requires reducing disparities and exclusion while simultaneously strengthening social capital and relationships. From a violence prevention standpoint, social networks among diverse groups increase acceptance and tolerance, dampening the impact of divisive events and making it more difficult for groups to spread an “us versus them” mentality. CVE projects, such as Peace through Development II, and crime prevention efforts, such as the U.S.-Mexico Merida Initiative, both promote social cohesion as a means of building community resilience.
- *Partnerships.* Reviews of program interventions point to the importance of partnerships with members of the community and across government agencies as a critical element of success in both domains. An international review of comprehensive gang programs identifies community mobilization and interagency coordination as key features of effective programs. It recommends that comprehensive gang prevention efforts bring together community members, local officials and police in the planning and delivery of interventions.⁸⁶ Similarly, CVE programs that have been able to reduce recidivism share a common feature – they engage multiple stakeholders from a range of disciplines including law enforcement, health and education ministries, religious organizations, and community organizations and leaders. For example, for more than 30 years, the Danish Aarhus program has united police, social services and schools to counter the threat from far-right and far-left groups.
- *Credible Intermediaries and Faith-Based Organizations.* Respected community leaders, both secular and religious, have proven to be key advocates and intermediaries. One of the most compelling figures in Los Angeles gang prevention, for example, is Reverend Gregory Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries, the largest gang rehabilitation program in the U.S. Given their trusted and authoritative status in the community, religious leaders have played key mediating roles in gang prevention work, such as priests in the 2012 gang truce in El Salvador. The CVE repertoire is also replete with examples of the moderating roles that religious and community leaders and elders can play. As violent extremism can take root where conflict is present, the role of intermediaries in mediating larger conflicts over land or resources can help temper the growth of extremism.
- *Parental Engagement.* A somewhat underutilized, but critical component of successful gang and CVE projects is the inclusion of family members, particularly parents. A review of USAID-funded programs in nine Mexican communities concluded, “The lack of parent involvement, if not the outright parental opposition, undermined the effectiveness of many of the activities assessed in this report.”⁸⁷ Moreover, a review of the programs that have proven to work best towards preventing youth violence underscores the importance of family interventions from birth

⁸⁶ James Howell, “The Legacy of Irving A. Spergel,” in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*.

⁸⁷ Democracy International, n.d.

through adolescence, which can improve child-parent connectedness and help reduce delinquency and crime. In fact, including parenting training in early childhood development programs “has been singled out in evaluations as being one of the most important factors in reducing youth violence.”⁸⁸ A DOJ report echoes this sentiment: “because families are a consistent influence on children’s development over time, family-based programs should be a high priority.”⁸⁹

Parental engagement is also considered an important factor in effective CVE. Qualitative and quantitative data relating to programs that incorporate parental engagement suggest that it has a significant impact on preventing youth involvement in extremism. A 2015 RAND study found that while peer groups may be part of the radicalization process, “family influence appears more likely to dampen a propensity toward violence.”⁹⁰ Empirically, projects in which parents play a constructive role have demonstrated some success. Norway’s EXIT program, for example, includes structured conversations between youth, their parents and professional counselors. These meetings help parents better understand their children’s situation and help develop alternative pathways going forward.

- *Trust.* All successful prevention programs credit trusting relationships between the target population and the interveners. Participants must believe that their mentors are operating in good faith and that there will not be unintended negative consequences for themselves or their cohort. For this reason, prevention and intervention efforts, both for gangs and violent extremism, should be staffed by local personnel. It may also mean that civic organizations need to balance their partnership with law enforcement to ensure that cooperation does not lead to increased arrests. Vanderbilt University’s impact evaluation of USAID’s crime and violence prevention programs in Central America, for example, found: “Several community development association leaders...were willing to share intelligence about various neighborhood issues with police officers only if they knew them personally and trusted them.”⁹¹

Lessons for CVE

Three program approaches from the gang prevention field offer particular value for CVE projects: the comprehensive violence prevention model; rule of law; and good governance.

- *Comprehensive Violence Prevention.* Research on violence and gang interventions suggests that a balance of prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts is important for success.⁹² Sometimes referred to as the four-legged approach, a comprehensive violence prevention program combines three levels of prevention with law enforcement. Comprehensive violence prevention programs owe much of their design and approach to antecedents in public health. It is now widely acknowledged that violence clusters, spreads and mutates in a manner that is

⁸⁸ Lainie Reisman and Gustavo Payan, “Turning Away from MS-13 and al-Shabaab: Analyzing Youth Resilience in Honduras and North East Kenya” (Education Development Center, 2015).

⁸⁹ Nancy Guerra, Carly Dierkhising, and Pedro Payne, “How Should We Identify and Intervene With Youth at Risk of Joining Gangs? A Developmental Approach for Children Ages 0-12,” in Simon et al., eds., *Changing Course*.

⁹⁰ Kim Cragin, Melissa A. Bradley, Eric Robinson, and Paul S. Steinberg, “What Factors Cause Youth to Reject Violent Extremism? Results of an Exploratory Analysis in the West Bank” (RAND Corporation, 2015).

⁹¹ Berk-Seligson et al., 52.

⁹² Howell, “Gang Prevention.”

similar to infectious disease.⁹³ As with epidemics and other public health challenges, violence can best be contained through individual and collective behavioral change. Most CVE efforts spearheaded by the development community already incorporate primary and secondary prevention, but stop short of intervention (tertiary prevention) and suppression.

The four elements of the comprehensive approach include:

- *Primary Prevention.* Much like vaccination campaigns, primary prevention is designed to reach the entire population in communities with large amounts of crime or VEO activity. Delivered by a range of public and community organizations, primary prevention might include public services, public awareness campaigns, community-based improvement projects, and school-based interventions.⁹⁴ Radio programming or modifying textbooks are examples of CVE efforts focused on primary prevention. Where governance and the rule of law are weak, efforts to strengthen them could also be part of primary prevention.
- *Secondary Prevention.* Secondary prevention refers to programs and services directed toward at-risk communities and individuals who display signs of problem behavior. Youth empowerment projects when directed toward at-risk individuals are examples of CVE efforts focused on secondary prevention.
- *Tertiary Prevention,* also known as intervention, provides intensive treatment services that attempt to disengage individuals who are already involved in violent behavior. Two CVE programs in the United Kingdom, Channel and Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET), employ this approach. Both programs provide a bespoke package of assistance to participants based on their personal circumstances. This might include counseling, faith-based guidance, civic education, family and peer group engagement, education, health services and even housing.⁹⁵
- *Suppression.* The targeted use of suppression to apprehend serious and chronic gang offenders as part of a larger gang prevention strategy has shown promising results in a number of U.S. cities. Suppression might include surveillance and intelligence gathering; aggressive patrol and arrest; and community meetings. As law enforcement efforts can spark community resistance, it is important to incorporate trust-building measures with community members into suppression activities.

Balanced, multifaceted approaches to gang prevention take many forms. The Comprehensive Gang Model, based on Spergel's work with gangs in Chicago and now promulgated by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), advocates five interrelated strategies: social intervention (outreach and education for all and at-risk youth), opportunities provision (education, employment training and mental health services for gang members), suppression (law enforcement), organizational change and development (interagency

⁹³ Deepali M. Patel, Melissa A. Simon, and Rachel M. Taylor, *Contagion of Violence: Workshop Summary* (National Academies Press, 2013). <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/13489/contagion-of-violence-workshop-summary>

⁹⁴ Howell, "Gang Prevention."

⁹⁵ Jack Barclay, "Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET): A Case Study in Government-Community Partnership and Direct Intervention to Counter Violent Extremism" (Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, December 2011), 5.

collaboration) and community mobilization.⁹⁶ USAID’s flagship violence prevention efforts in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala employ a similar package of activities including education and workforce development, economic growth and employment, public health, security and justice sector reform and governance to improve citizen security and reduce violence. Successful implementation of a comprehensive approach requires a strategy that unifies and integrates the multiple lines of effort.

Studies of the comprehensive violence prevention approach suggest secondary and tertiary prevention are the most important elements of program effectiveness. A survey of 254 gang program officials in U.S. cities with chronic gang problems identified provision of social opportunities – including education, employment training and mental health services – rather than primary prevention or suppression as the key to success.⁹⁷ In Mexico, a review of USAID-funded programs in nine communities concluded that the most effective crime and violence prevention interventions targeted individuals who were truly at risk of engaging in criminal behavior with secondary and tertiary prevention programs. These studies suggest that CVE activities should give more emphasis to those truly at risk, rather than to reducing conflict or promoting community resilience overall. Tightening the aperture to identify the right population may involve a recalibration of current CVE prevention efforts toward more individualized activities.

The mix of services offered through secondary and tertiary prevention efforts need to be tailored to local contexts and based on emerging evidence of what works. Life skills and counseling may be important elements of the services offered. A recent meta-review of violence prevention programs identifies cognitive behavioral therapy as a particularly effective approach to tertiary prevention. Cognitive behavioral therapy “focuses on changing the distorted thinking and behavior of offenders, including self-justificatory thinking, misinterpretation of social cues, displacement of blame, deficient moral reasoning, and schemas of dominance and entitlement, among others.”⁹⁸ By contrast, job training may have little impact on VE involvement as recent reports have suggested.⁹⁹

A growing, but still small, body of evidence suggests that targeting behavior is more feasible than targeting identity in tertiary prevention. For many former gang members, identification as a member of the group remains long after active participation in criminality ceases. In part, this is for practical reasons – former members may not have the resources to relocate; they may fear retaliation or victimization; or they may want to retain relationships with family or close friends still in the gang – but there is also respect and recognition for the security the gang once provided. Offending and group affiliation may wane, but the identity molded through membership may remain. Similarly for extremists, efforts to counteract the variables that affect behavior likely will bear more fruit than efforts to change identity.¹⁰⁰ The more extremists embrace the moral or religious values espoused by the groups to which they belong, the more

⁹⁶ Erika Gebo, Brenda Bond, and Krystal Campos, “The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Strategy: The Comprehensive Gang Model,” in Decker and Pyrooz, eds., *The Handbook of Gangs*.

⁹⁷ Howell, “The Legacy of Irving A. Spergel.”

⁹⁸ Democracy International, *What Works in Reducing Community Violence: A Meta-Review and Field Study for the Northern Triangle* (USAID, 2016), 21.

⁹⁹ See Keith Proctor, “Youth and Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence,” Mercy Corps, 2014, available at: https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/MercyCorps_YouthConsequencesReport_2015.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Canna, Carley St. Clair, and Abigail Chapman, “Neurobiological and Cognitive Science Insights on Radicalization and Mobilization to Violence: A Review” (Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office, 2012), 6.

difficult it will be for them to embrace a new frame or abandon their existing worldview.¹⁰¹ Although identity and ideology should not be conflated, research and experience also suggest that disengagement from extremist groups is a far more practical and manageable outcome than de-radicalization.¹⁰²

- *Place-Based Approaches.* A variant of comprehensive violence prevention is the place-based approach. Place-based approaches have been utilized across development disciplines to address complex challenges that require a coordinated response from actors intimately familiar with the local context. In the violence prevention field, a place-based approach recognizes that the incidence and causes of crime are not distributed evenly and focuses resources where they are concentrated. Activities range from simple strategies, such as concentrated patrolling in a micro-area, to more complex citizen security strategies targeting neighborhoods with the highest levels of violence (i.e., hotspots). Evidence obtained from a study of U.S. policing suggests that place-based approaches are more effective than offender-based models and offer the police greater freedom of movement in their operations.¹⁰³ One of the factors that made USAID’s experience with a comprehensive approach to violence prevention successful was community targeting and a place-based orientation. Treatment communities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador demonstrated “a significant reduction in the expected level of crime victimization and violence,” as well as a reduction in gang-related problems.”¹⁰⁴ A key benefit of the place-based approach to the CVE community is the degree of local investment and ownership it may engender. Caution is needed, however, to prevent a focus on a neighborhood or mosque from entrenching stereotypes and dividing communities.
- *Rule of Law.* Another area that has been largely absent from development approaches to CVE is rule of law programming. Yet violence prevention cannot be achieved without a functional justice system and culture of lawfulness. In many states, the processes and institutions that are necessary to uphold the rule of law are incompletely evolved, ineffective or corrupt. The absence of state and civic controls on behavior enables violent offenders to operate with impunity and perpetuates violence. While much can be accomplished through civic organizations, partnership with the security and justice system improves the sustainability and success of CVE interventions.

A defined role for law enforcement, however, should not equate to suppression-driven interventions. Experience suggests that criminalization alone does not yield anticipated results. “Iron Fist” policies in Latin America, for example, increased incarceration rates considerably, but did little to abate the gang problem. Gang injunctions and other efforts to criminalize gang behavior in the United States have proven equally ineffective at curbing violence. Similarly, some research suggests that arrests of VEO leaders and visible personalities may have the counter-

¹⁰¹ Scott Atran, “Countering Violent Extremism: Insights and Evidence from the Field” (presentation, U.S. Department of State Center for Counterterrorism and the Department of Defense Science Board, April 24-25, 2014).

¹⁰² For a discussion of disengagement vs. de-radicalization, see John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, “Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 267-291.

¹⁰³ David Weisburd, “Place-Based Policing,” in *Ideas in American Policing* (Police Foundation, 2008), 6.

¹⁰⁴ Berk-Seligson et al.

intuitive effect of increasing recruitment.¹⁰⁵ Harsh legal policies and procedures can increase feelings of victimization among the community-at-large that can be exploited by VEOs. Indeed, repressive police tactics have been singled out as a potential driver of extremism.

Criminalization of membership in an extremist group or gang may also backfire. While these individuals may indeed present a security threat, premature indictment may induce rather than prevent violence, particularly if they are sent to prisons which often serve as radicalization recruitment centers. In addition, there are unintended consequences of criminalizing association, such as the migration of the group to regions or countries with more permissive legal frameworks. Practically speaking, it also becomes much more difficult for external parties to engage in prevention efforts with convicts or individuals labeled as members of illegal groups. Moreover, the increase in government authority to investigate, arrest, detain and prosecute individuals affiliated with VEOs has tremendous human rights implications, including violations of due process and limitations on judicial oversight, which, in turn, can fuel further radicalization.

When accompanied by broader reform efforts, rule of law programs can make a meaningful contribution to CVE efforts. Specific programs that have applicability to CVE include the following:

- *Security and Justice Sector Reform.* Police reform on its own may not yield the desired effects if other components of the security and justice system do not function effectively or accountably. Development assistance may be needed to strengthen relevant actors, institutions and legal frameworks both inside and outside the formal justice sector. This might include working with the ministry of justice, judiciary, prosecutors, legal defense, law enforcement, independent governmental institutions, professional associations and/or civil society. USAID/Honduras, for example, is working with the Ministry of Security, National Police, the Public Ministry, and the court systems to improve the manner in which they collect and examine evidence, prosecute crime, and administer justice with the overall aim of reducing violence and promoting citizen security.
- *Juvenile Justice.* As many gang members – and violent extremists – are not old enough to be held responsible for criminal acts, juvenile justice is a particularly relevant component of the rule of law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges states to establish a separate juvenile justice system for youth under the age of 18 that promotes prevention, diversion and community rehabilitation and that only allows detention as a last resort. Of particular import with respect to gang and VEO prevention is ensuring that juvenile perpetrators of minor crimes are not commingled with major crime offenders. Numerous community-based treatment programs have been found to be more effective than secure confinement in reducing the number of youth who reoffend. Juvenile justice programs that offer alternative pathways to incarceration may help inform the design and delivery of disengagement and/or de-radicalization initiatives.
- *Problem-Oriented Policing and Community-Police Partnerships.* Problem-oriented policing, which focuses on the underlying causes behind crime problems, and community policing, which emphasizes partnerships between police and community organizations such as schools, non-profit organizations, neighborhood associations and churches, are regarded as powerful

¹⁰⁵ Laurie Fenstermacher, ed., *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods & Strategies* (Air Force Research Laboratory, 2015), 9.

strategies for reducing youth violence.¹⁰⁶ Professional police organizations may be able to incorporate these new policies and practices with a small amount of technical assistance. Many others, however, will be ill-prepared to implement these complex, decentralized approaches. As a first step, police reform projects can enhance overall readiness and capabilities; improve accountability and management; and inculcate new community-policing policies – all of which ultimately leads to increased community respect for the police. USAID/Guatemala, for example, provides technical assistance to the national police (PNC) to establish a merit-based career path and to the police academy to support a new degree in community-based policing. In parallel, USAID is helping to improve trust between police and communities as part of its overall violence reduction approach.

- *Crime Prevention Committees.* These committees bring together stakeholders from the community, local government, universities, hospitals and the private sector to develop and oversee security and prevention initiatives. They serve several purposes: they help local leaders formulate and implement citizen security plans; they link decision-making processes to data; and they improve coordination across interested parties. Fundamentally, they empower local partners to assume ownership of their own safety and security.
- *Crime Observatories.* Across Latin America and elsewhere, governments and civil society have established information systems, referred to as crime observatories, that aggregate statistics from a range of sources to offer a more complete picture of crime and violence in a given region. Direct access to information helps crime prevention committees and government officials to design targeted, data-driven strategies for community security. For example, data showing increased criminal activity in a certain neighborhood might compel the committee to allocate additional police, refurbish dilapidated infrastructure, or create a ‘safe streets’ campaign. Enhanced data collection at the local level could provide CVE stakeholders with information about threats and risks related not only to violent extremism but to other forms of violence occurring in their communities.
- *Culture of Lawfulness.* In societies that promote a culture of lawfulness, citizens act in a manner consistent with the rule of law because they believe it is in the common interest, and that others will act similarly. This belief, once ingrained, acts as a natural constraint on illegal behavior. Culture of lawfulness projects encourage representatives from key sectors including public servants, law enforcement, mass media, education, business, and centers of moral authority to use their institutions and their influence to foster a culture supportive of the rule of law. Civic education is a key component of these programs. Promoting a culture of lawfulness could prove to be a potent antidote to the narrative espoused by violent extremists.
- *Good Governance.* Countries with ineffective government, corruption, and weak rule of law have a 30 to 45 percent higher risk of civil war and criminal violence.¹⁰⁷ Although noted as a key driver of violent extremism, good governance is rarely pursued as a significant component of CVE programs. Efforts to improve accountability and oversight, public policy, resource management, decentralization and/or public participation remain rare. Increasingly, gang

¹⁰⁶ See Reisman and Payan, “Turning Away from MS-13 and al-Shabaab.”

¹⁰⁷ World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (2011), 10.

prevention programs recognize that effective and accountable governance is essential to their objectives. Improved governance works both to prevent the growth of groups and their membership and to respond effectively to their presence once active. A recent study on organized crime in Nigeria found that improvements in local governance capacity, transparency and service delivery reduced incentives for people to be drawn into organized crime.¹⁰⁸ The same study found that ineffective governance and widespread corruption in Guatemala, which once helped fuel the civil war, now facilitates the growth of organized crime. Many governments have come to understand the importance of good governance in the fight against crime and violence. The Government of Jamaica, for example, recently implemented a 10-year strategy to prevent crime and improve community security using a new framework that marries risk reduction with good governance and knowledge-based policy making.¹⁰⁹

Lessons for Gang Prevention

- *Conflict Lens.* In many developing countries, violent conflict of the past is prologue for the proliferation of youth gangs today. Yet, most gang prevention projects do not incorporate a conflict lens. Conducting a conflict assessment could be a useful starting point to better understand structural and systemic drivers of crime and violence. This would replicate USAID best practice in the CVE domain. A recent conflict assessment of the Western Highlands of Guatemala did generate important insights for crime and violence prevention, noting: “Historical patterns of structural exclusion, internal armed conflict, and unresolved social conflict reinforce and intensify social inequality, discrimination, and violence in interrelated and systemic ways.”¹¹⁰ Understanding underlying conflict dynamics is particularly important in cases where gangs emerge as a means of informal governance absent effective state institutions or protections.
- *Opportunities for Tertiary Prevention/Intervention.* While gang intervention is becoming more common in the U.S., there are fewer examples of successful programs elsewhere. Intervention is without doubt the most complex layer in the prevention triangle, both for gangs and VEOs. Although the collective understanding about VEO disengagement is still nascent, existing research provides some valuable lessons that are equally applicable to gang rehabilitation. First, there is no-one-size-fits-all model; rather programs should be context- and country-specific and individualized. Second, the motivations for leaving the group no doubt differ from the factors that initially drove membership. As a result, a distinct assessment may be required to uncover and respond to a new set of opportunities and concerns. Third, disengagement does not necessarily equate to leaving the group altogether, but may connote a move from one position to another, such as from the front line to the back office. Fourth, an individualized package of incentives ranging from full amnesty to education and training to counseling likely will be required, must be tailored to the roles and functions that individuals filled (willingly or otherwise), and must be resourced sufficiently. In exchange, individuals may be required to make concessions related to their past behaviors such as public statements or reparations. Fifth,

¹⁰⁸ Management Systems International, *Organized Crime, Conflict and Fragility: Assessing Relationships through a Review of USAID Programs* (USAID, 2015), 27

¹⁰⁹ Government of Jamaica, Ministry of National Security, Crime Prevention and Community Safety Unit, “National Crime Prevention and Community Safety Strategy (NCPCSS)” (2010).

¹¹⁰ Democracy International, *Legacies of Exclusion: Social Conflict and Violence in Communities and Homes in Guatemala’s Western Highlands* (USAID, 2015), i.

disengagement generally occurs in small numbers without the consent of the group's leadership. In the instances where leaders support disengagement, such as in Northern Ireland or Egypt, the process may be more sustainable. Finally, as noted above, the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders, parents, peers and intermediaries, both public and private, is recognized as prerequisite for success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the following recommendations for programming emerge from this comparison:

Regarding CVE programming:

- Develop methods to better identify and support specific at-risk individuals. In addition to more targeted risk assessment, this should include adopting the kind of tiered prevention programs that gang work currently employs. Such an approach allows for more directed community and individual intervention as risk factors increase. Most CVE projects prioritize community or group-level interventions.
- Incorporate appropriate rule of law interventions, which have characterized gang prevention programs to date – such as juvenile justice systems, community-police partnerships or crime observatories – but have not been part of most development programs designed to counter violent extremism.
- Support good governance which works both to prevent the growth of VE groups and their membership and to respond effectively to their presence once active.
- Focus on individual behavior, rather than identity. Gang work initially attempted to tackle both, but has found greater success with behavioral change.
- Distinguish activities designed to work with individuals who are forced or coopted to join from those who join willingly, particularly with respect to criminalization and disengagement.

Regarding gang prevention programming:

- Address the larger conflict context through an expanded understanding of the drivers of violence.
- Expand intervention efforts with individuals already engaged in crime and violence.

Regarding both gang prevention and CVE programming:

- Mainstream successful practices by ensuring that multi-stakeholder partnerships, engagement of respected community leaders, parental involvement and trust building are consistently incorporated in project design and implementation.

Regarding diagnostic frameworks:

- Consider development of a CVE diagnostic framework focused on individual risk to guide secondary and tertiary prevention services.
- Consider development of a CVE diagnostic framework focused on community risk that incorporates new learning and is presented in a similar format to the CVE diagnostic framework focused on individual risk.
- Review benefits of including some factors currently included in the SAVRY framework into the YSET framework (i.e., exposure to violence, early childhood stress and protective factors)

Regarding program objectives and metrics:

- Ensure that metrics are more directly tied to project objectives and specific activities. Many CVE projects measure individual-level outcomes but activities are designed to affect community-level indicators.
- Include crime prevention indicators for CVE efforts in communities that are beset by violence.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations emerging from this comparison underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to gang prevention and CVE. While some entail a long-term perspective to improve good governance and the rule of law, other recommendations call for more immediate and focused interventions to work with at-risk individuals and communities. Achieving an appropriate mix in any context requires good assessment tools and ongoing learning. For the CVE field, development of a diagnostic framework focused on individual risk to guide secondary and tertiary prevention services is a priority as is refinement of the diagnostic framework for the gang prevention field. For both fields, research and continued emphasis on specific interventions to support at-risk individuals are warranted. Across all interventions, practitioners should take care to incorporate best practices identified in this review, namely ensuring that multi-stakeholder partnerships, engagement of respected community leaders, parental involvement and trust building are consistently integrated in project design and implementation.