UNCTC

United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee

Homegrown Violent Extremism

Overview

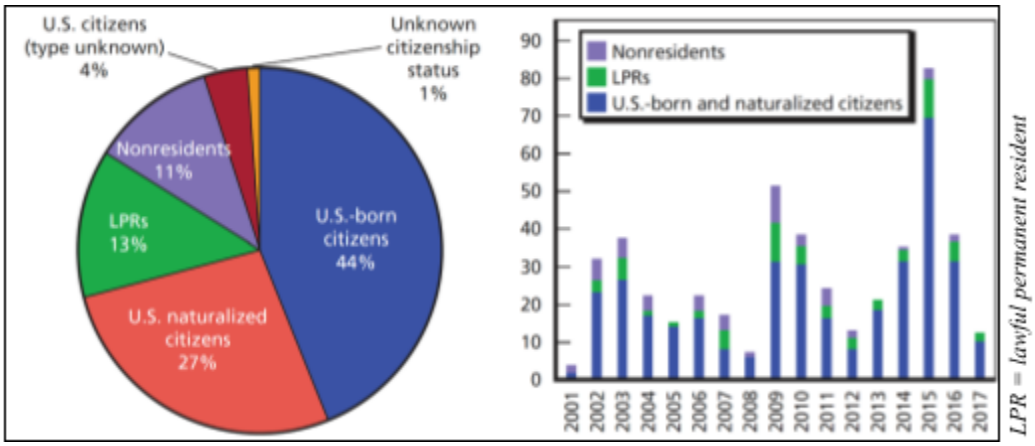

Figure 1: Total Percentage and Annual Number of U.S. Jihadist Terrorists by Citizenship Status (2001–2017)

Due to certain consistent traits unique to terrorism, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "the unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims"[1]; nevertheless, the United Nations has not yet established a comprehensive definition of terrorism. The UN cannot begin discussing specific branches of violent extremism if there is not even a clear understanding of what it is; thus, comprehensively defining this term is crucial. Moreover, it is important that this definition be comprehensive, as to ensure that all facets of HVE have been addressed, so that Member States know how to respond to each type of terrorism.[2]

Similarly, homegrown (also called domestic) violent extremism (HVE) does not have a clean-cut definition either,[3] but many nations and scholars understand it as "acts of violence against targets [in] countries in which the terrorists themselves have been born or raised".[4]

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[1] "Terrorism, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, 2011, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/199608?redirectedFrom=terrorism#eid.
[2] United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime. "Counter-Terrorism Module 4 Key Issues: Defining Terrorism." Counter-Terrorism Module 4 Key Issues: Defining Terrorism, July 2018, https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-4/key-issues/defining-terrorism.html.
[3] Southers, Erroll. Homegrown Violent Extremism. Routeledge, 2017.
[4] Precht, Tomas. Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe. Danish Ministry of Justice, 2007, http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Arbejdsomraader/

Williams et. al., authors for RAND (a research corporation funded by the United States Armed Forces) and who published Figure 1 in *Trends in the Draw of Americans to Foreign Terrorist Organizations from 9/11 to Today*, define an American *homegrown violent extremist* as "an individual inside the United States who plotted or conspired to conduct a terrorist attack domestically but who was not explicitly directed to do so by an [foreign terrorist organization]," and a *jihadist terrorist* as "someone who professes a general cause of jihad [or] individuals associated with Islamist groups."[5] Figure 1 illustrates that in the United States alone, 44 of 100 jihadist terrorists are born in the United States. However, HVE is not restricted to the United States: in 2006, the best-known case of Canadian homegrown terrorism is known today as *Toronto 18*, where 18 Canadians were plotting multiple attacks in Ontario.[6] In late 20th-century Europe, most terrorists were also born in the same country they attacked.[7] In 2016, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was responsible for 94% of attacks that occurred in Iraq; these attacks count as homegrown terrorism, as the people who are responsible for them are native to the same country in which they occur.[8]

Much of the research accumulated on HVE pertains to the United States, but this does not mean that domestic terrorism does not exist elsewhere; in fact, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) is a homegrown terrorist group in Northern Ireland, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna is a HVE organization in Spain, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is one in Turkey.[9] In 2022, the CTC held an open meeting on "Countering terrorist narratives and preventing the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes", specifically discussing proactive methods to combat incitement with an emphasis on collaborations with social actors to promote tolerance and positive behaviours and visions of the future.[10] The common misconception that most violent extremism is the fault of foreign fighters who come from another country to commit terror attacks. It is

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Forskning/Forskningspuljen/2011/2007/Home_grown_terrorism_and_Islamist_radicalisation_in_Europe_-_an_assessment_of_influencing_factors__2_.pdf.

[5] Williams, Heather J., Nathan Chandler, and Eric Robinson, Trends in the Draw of Americans to Foreign Terrorist Organizations from 9/11 to Today, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2545-OSD, 2018. (Figure 1.)

[6] McCoy, John, and W. Andy Knight. "Homegrown Terrorism in Canada: Local Patterns, Global Trends." Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, vol. 38, no. 4, 30 Jan. 2015, pp. 253–274., doi:10.1080/1057610x.2014.994349.

[7] Precht, Tomas. Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe. Danish Ministry of Justice, 2007.

[8] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. Annex of Statistical Information: Country Reports on Terrorism 2016. July 2017.

[9] "About the Counter-Terrorism Committee - United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee." United Nations, United Nations, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/about-us/.

[10] "Counter-Terrorism Committee - United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee." *United Nations*, United Nations, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/.

therefore crucial that the UNCTC proactively bring the topic of HVE to the table, considering that many terrorists are born in the same country they attack (although few specific statistics are available on this topic).

What is UNCTC?

Established after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNCTC) was put in place by the Security Council in accordance with the unanimously adopted resolution 1373. This committee is charged with overseeing the implementation of this resolution, which requires that Member States adopt "measures intended to enhance their legal and institutional ability to counter terrorist activities at home, in their regions and around the world".[11] In the past, the Security Council has, with the help of the CTC, released numerous publications that address various topics under the bigger objective of countering terrorism, which the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) helps implement. The CTED executes the CTC's decisions, performs expert assessments of every Member State, and helps make counter-terrorism technical assistance available to all nations.[12] Some of the reports published by the CTC that the CTED helps implement include reports such as S/2016/92 (a report on the threat posed by ISIS and what the UN can do to support its Member States in countering it), and resolutions such as S/RES/2255 ("Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts"), S/RES/2250 ("Maintenance of international peace and security"), and S/RES/2242 ("Women and peace and security").[13]

Radicalization Process

According to Tomas Precht's report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice in December 2007,

> home grown terrorism can be viewed as a sociological phenomenon where issues such as belonging, identity, group dynamics and values are important elements in the transformation process. Religion plays an important role, but for some it rather serves as

[11] "Document Search - United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee." United Nations, United Nations, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/resources/security-council-documents/.
[12] "Countering Violent extremism and Terrorist narratives." United Nations, United Nations, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/countering-violent-extremism-and-terrorist-narratives.
[13] Institute for Economics & Peace. "Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism." Global Terrorism Index, 2016.

> a vehicle for fulfilling other goals. A common denominator seems to be that the involved persons are at a cross road in their life and wanting a cause.[14]

No two people undergo the same radicalization process, but Fathali Moghaddam, professor of psychology at Georgetown University with numerous publications on the topic of terrorism and radicalization, explains in his *Staircase to Terrorism* how people transform into extremists. His model was outlined in a journal article published in 2005, and has been cited by numerous other scholars. Moghaddam's Staircase, as seen in Figure 2,[15] best illustrates the different levels of the radicalization process and where action needs to be taken to eradicate it.

According to Moghaddam, all members of society begin at the ground floor of the staircase; those who believe their living conditions to be fair will remain at that level, whereas those who detect injustice in their current condition will move on to the first floor.

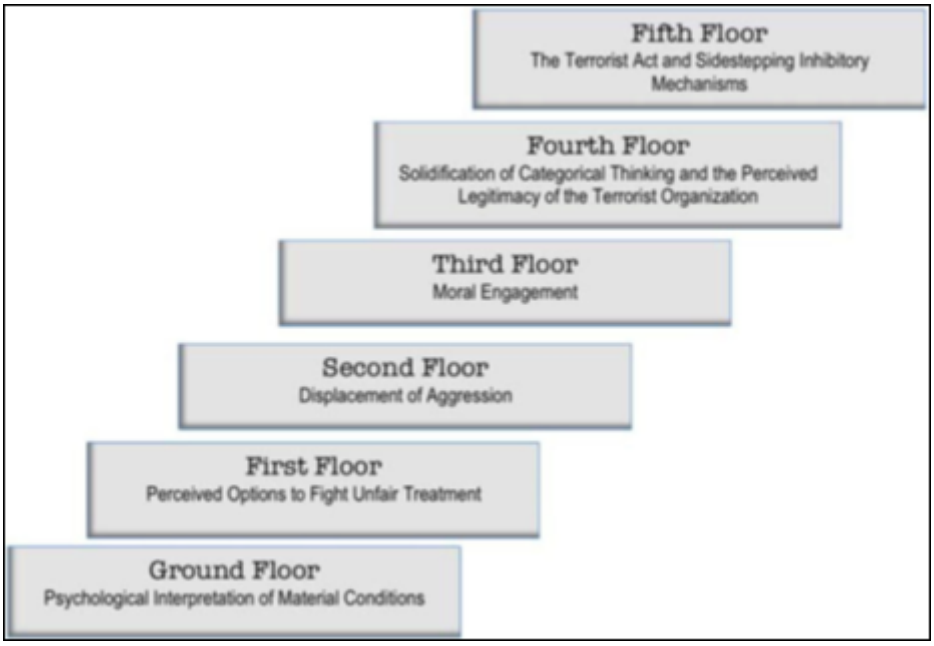

Figure 2: Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism

On the first floor, people begin to consider ways to improve their supposedly unfair conditions. If they succeed in, for instance, influencing those in power to invoke change, they will not move forward. If, however, they are not satisfied, they will ascend to the second floor.

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[14] Precht, Tomas. Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalisation in Europe. Danish Ministry of Justice, 2007.
[15] Borum, Randy. "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research." Journal of Strategic Security, vol. 4, no. 4, 2011, pp. 37–62., doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.2. (Figure 2.)

Once a person moves on to the second floor, they are angry and prone to aggressive behaviour. They search for a scape goat to blame for their current condition. If they find someone towards whom they can redirect their aggression, they continue to the third floor.

Violent extremist organizations jump on people who arrive at the third floor, because these individuals are ready to commit violent acts and therefore fit the profile for potential recruits. In these terrorist groups, violence is acceptable and even encouraged. A person on the third floor is thus offered the opportunity to develop a new identity where they can bring their interpretation of justice to the world through violence by joining a radical group. If a person finds this offer appealing, they ascend to the fourth floor.

On the fourth floor, the "us" versus "them" ideology is further emphasized. The recruit is separated from their family and friends, they are bound to secrecy, and the organization's legitimacy is promoted. Those who are members of the radical organization are perceived as capable of seeing "truth", and all those who remain outside the terrorist group are seen as blind, and therefore as oppositional infidels. Once on this floor, people seldom exit the staircase alive; should the opportunity present itself, they will move on to the fifth floor.

On the fifth and last floor, the violent act is carried out in the most efficient way possible. To encourage efficiency, the recruit must overcome all inhibitions about murder and/or suicide.[16]

The people who make it to the fifth floor of Moghaddam's staircase have very different personalities, which makes it difficult to construct the psychological profile of a homegrown terrorist. Some are highly intelligent, yet not many have a family history of extremist ideologies. Some have apocalyptic world views and a predisposition for violence; others have only one of those traits or neither. Few tend to have a history of mental illness or adolescent misconduct, yet several have undergone ideological changes in their past.[17] In short, the motivating factors and personality composition is different for each homegrown violent extremist, and prevention strategies must therefore consider different approaches to adapt the measures they implement.

Among those who began disgruntled by the perceived injustice they felt at the ground floor of the staircase, as Moghaddam shows, very few people actually make it all the way up the

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[16] Moghaddam, Fathali M. "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration." American Psychologist, vol. 60, no. 2, 2005, pp. 161–169., doi:10.1037/0003-066x.60.2.161.

[17] Armstrong, Gaylene, et al. Characteristics of Homegrown Violent Extremist Radicalization. National Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events, 2019, Characteristics of Homegrown Violent Extremist Radicalization, https://sci.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CREATE-Characteristics-of-Homegrown-Violent-Extremist-Radicalization.pdf.

staircase to the point of committing the act of terror. However, because their psychological profile is impossible to standardize, it would be impossible to implement general plans of action at the fifth floor, as confirmed by Armstrong et. al., who compartmentalize personalities of violent extremists into five distinct categories.[18] In other words, if the UN and its Member States wanted to impose counter-terrorism action plans, they would need to be tailored to each specific terrorist, because each one has their own personality, grudges, and motivating factors—naturally, it is impossible to devise distinct action plans for each individual extremist. Therefore, Moghaddam argues that "the best long-term policy against terrorism is prevention, which is made possible by nourishing contextualized democracy on the ground floor… only by reforming conditions on the ground floor can societies end terrorism;" this way, disgruntled people don't even have the possibility of getting to the point where they become terrorists.

Moghaddam also puts forth alternative solutions, such as the implementation of procedural justice, "to enable greater legal opportunities for voice and mobility, as well as to influence perceptions of available opportunities;" this would stop those from ascending from the first to the second floor of violent extremism, as their perceived injustices would be rectified.[19] Although Moghaddam's Staircase clearly presents the development of radical ideologies, alternative models, such as Borum's *Four-Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset* exist as well.[20] No model is universally accepted, but they all suggest similar steps to get to the same end result.

Motivating Factors

The determinants that drive radicalization can be on a macro- or micro-level scale. *Macro* factors describe elements within the societal context that affect their society as a whole (the individual included), whereas *micro* factors describe the individual's context that affects themselves personally, not the rest of the people surrounding them.

As well, *push* factors describe a facet of society that drives people to join radical groups and include "marginalization, inequality, discrimination, the feeling of being persecuted, poor education, denial of rights, and other grievances," according to UNESCO. *Pull* factors, on the other hand, will attract individuals towards radicalization, providing an incentive for them to join

[18] Ibid.
[19] Moghaddam, Fathali M. "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration." American Psychologist, vol. 60, no. 2, 2005, pp. 161–169., doi:10.1037/0003-066x.60.2.161.
[20] Borum, Randy. "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research." Journal of Strategic Security, vol. 4, no. 4, 2011, pp. 37–62., doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.2.

extremist groups by offering people "services, revenue, and employment," which they could not otherwise obtain within their society. Pull factors can be religious or political in nature, and they claim to provide a "place of belonging" and an environment that is supportive.[21]

An example of a macro push factor would be that intermediate, or unstable, "levels of political freedom are often experienced during times of political transitions, when governments

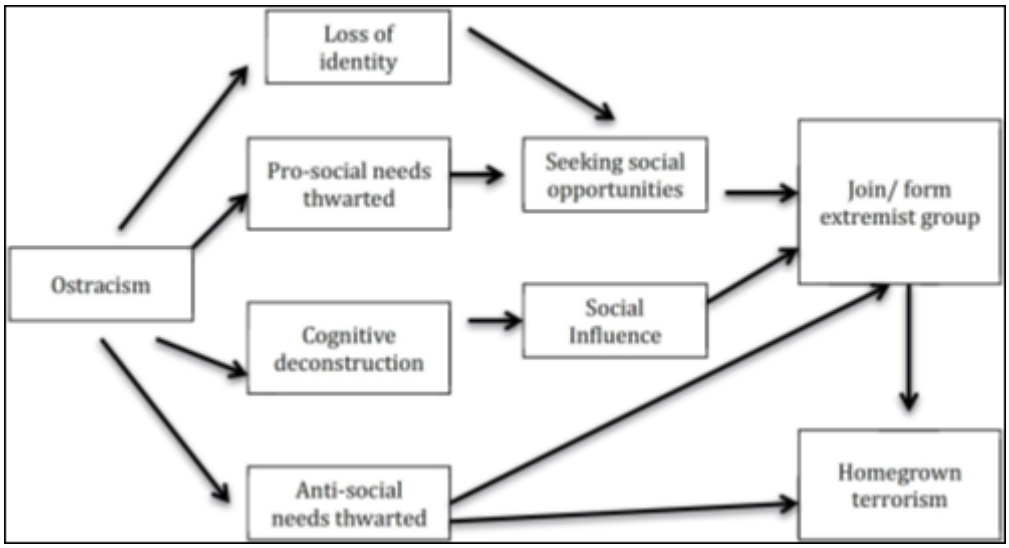

Figure 3: An Illustration of the Theoretical Framework of the Processes Influencing Ostracism and Homegrown Terrorism

are weak, political instability is elevated, so conditions are favorable for the appearance of terrorism."[22] For instance, MIT professor Alberto Abadie points out a sharp increase in deaths caused by terrorism in 1970s Europe during the period of democratic transition in Spain.[23]

Another example of a macro pull factor is the fact that certain terrorist organizations might offer services that the government does not, such as a job that will give them a sense of purpose or belonging, as well as income. In Somalia, many young Somalians joined al-Shabab, a radical jihad group in Somalia, because it offered them a paying job (these young men and women could not find sustainable employment opportunities elsewhere), so they could provide for themselves and their families.[24]

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[21] UNESCO. "Preventing violent extremism through education." Youtube.com. 19 Sept. 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79MTkVumCcQ.
[22] Abadie, Alberto. "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism." Oct. 2004, doi:10.3386/w10859.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Hassan, Muhsin. "Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of Al-Shabab and Somali Youth." Combatting Terrorism Centre, vol. 5, no. 8, Aug. 2012, p. 18.

Micro pull factors include ostracism and quests for significance. “When people perceive themselves as rejected, divested of control, or as victims of injustice, they feel belittled and disrespected; consequently, they are motivated to restore their sense of self-worth and meaning … the need for personal significance makes the occurrence of extreme behavior more likely.”[25] Members of the elite suicide bomber squad of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a militant organization in Sri Lanka, explained that a key motivating factor for their actions is their love for their all-powerful leader: a quest for approval that would in theory bring significance.[26] Figure 3 shows how ostracism can eventually lead to homegrown terrorism as well. People who feel left out of their community can develop several negative traits (like cognitive destruction), which can lead them to seek gratification for their behaviour and their ideologies elsewhere. As mentioned before, terrorist organizations prey on people seeking to rebuild their identity, so ostracism can eventually bring about homegrown terrorism. Holly Knapton, professor at Lund University and author of Figure 3, explains that ostracism leads people to strengthen needs that may have been threatened (e.g.: belonging, self-esteem, control or meaningfulness) during and after social exclusion. “This can also leave them with reduced cognitive regulation and a sense of a loss of identity, resulting in individuals who may be more vulnerable and receptive to social influence. These factors can make them desirable targets for radicalisation.”[27]

Social media serves as a modern tool for terrorist organizations. While it could further social isolation and create a platform for bullying, which are respectively pull and push factors as has already been established, it also simplifies the dissemination of hateful speech, which was one of the elements used by Robert Bowers and Cesar Sayoc, respectively responsible for the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in 2018 and for sending pipe bombs to democrats in 2018. In fact, Sayoc used Twitter and Facebook as a platform to spread right-wing conspiracy theories, while Bowers used Gab (another social media website that is less restrictive than Twitter) to spread his own right-wing narrative. “Sentiments shared online often spill into real world;”[28] These radical extremists used social media to spread their hateful narrative, thereby spreading his

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[25] Jasko, Katarzyna, et al. “Quest for Significance and Violent Extremism: The Case of Domestic Radicalization.” Political Psychology, vol. 38, no. 5, 2016, pp. 815–831., doi:10.1111/ pops.12376.

[26] Kruglanski, Arie W., et al. “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism.” Political Psychology, vol. 35, 2014, pp. 69–93., doi:10.1111/pops.12163.

[27] Knapton, Holly M. “The Recruitment and Radicalisation of Western Citizens: Does Ostracism Have a Role in Homegrown Terrorism?” Journal of European Psychology Students, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 38–48., doi:10.5334/jeps.bo. (Figure 3.)

[28] Hennigan, W.J. “How Big a Role Does Social Media Play in Homegrown Terrorism?” TIME, 30 Oct. 2018, https://time.com/5438481/terrorism-social-media/.

violent sentiments and potentially influencing others. Propaganda can be easily spread through the Internet and those who feel lost might stumble upon it and begin to believe it.

Preventing Violent Extremism

According to the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674) put forth by the United Nations in 2014, "violent extremism undermines… collective efforts towards maintaining peace and security, fostering sustainable development, protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and taking humanitarian action."[29]

The UN encourages Member States to develop action plans for the prevention of violent extremism that encompass multiple actors, including but not limited to "law enforcement, social service providers and ministries of education, youth and religious affairs, as well as nongovernmental actors, including youth; families; women; religious, cultural and educational leaders; civil society organizations; the media; and the private sector." These plans of action should strengthen the social stance against terrorism by "promoting respect for the principle of equality before the law and equal protection under the law in all government-citizen relations, and developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, as well as ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making". The UN also requests that they address foreign terrorists; however, a large flaw with their action plan is that they do not make reference to domestic terrorists, which, as this background guide explains, is a dominating issue in many countries. Moreover, the UN has also suggested the implementation of numerous task forces, but none of the objectives outlined by this task force are specific to HVE.

Conclusion

Briefly said, the problem of homegrown violent extremism must be prioritized. The evidence shows that the majority of attacks are committed by terrorists who are domestic. Each one of these terrorists is defined by very different personality traits, and their choices are heavily influenced by several different push, pull, micro, and macro factors. As mentioned above, the United Nations has already composed a plan that urges Member States to take action against violent extremism; the UN has also suggested the implementation of numerous task forces, but none of the objectives outlined by this task force or action plan are specific to HVE. One of the

[29] "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism | Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force." United Nations, United Nations, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/planaction-prevent-violent-extremism.

main reasons why the UN has failed to discuss HVE in the past is because Member States cannot agree on a comprehensive definition of the term; this problem arises because many nations do not even have their own national definition of HVE.

Questions to Consider

1. Which elements of your country's history influence the amount of homegrown violent extremism that occurs within it? Consider the origins of your country's internal and external conflicts and how they could help explain the terrorism it experiences today. Homegrown violent extremism in your country:
    (a) How much of the terrorist attacks that occur within your country are a result of HVE and how much are a result of FF (foreign fighters) or other groups?
    (b) How frequently do acts of homegrown violent extremism occur in your country?
    (c) What motivates these acts of terrorism (e.g.: government, religion, etc.)?
    (d) Statistically, which demographic is most often responsible for these acts? Why?
    (e) Statistically, which demographic is most often affected by these acts? Why?
    (f) How does age, income, and socioeconomic status influence the rise of homegrown terrorism in your country and what has been done to stop it?
    (g) From cultural, economic, political, social, and humanitarian standpoints, how has HVE affected your country and what is your country doing to change it?

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1. How does your country understand the radicalization process of terrorists and how does their understanding of this process differ from Moghaddam's Staircase model?
2. Which push, pull, micro, and macro factors are present in your country? List some examples and explain why these issues are unresolved. How have they influenced the rates of HVE and what has your country done about them?
3. How has your country implemented the United Nations' Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism? Which policies of their own have they established already? What do they plan on changing or keeping the same in the future?
4. How have the trends in homegrown violent extremism changed since the development of social media? How does your country use, perceive, and control the media and social

media with respect to terrorism? How does your country ensure that propaganda, hate speech, and terrorist ideologies are not spread through the media or social media?

5. As an independent nation, has your country agreed on a definition of terrorism and/or homegrown violent extremism? If so, what is it? If not, why not and what temporary understanding of these terms is the government using?

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