

Call: H2020-SC6-GOVERNANCE-2019
Topic: SU-GOVERNANCE-10-2019
Funding Scheme: Research and Innovation Action (RIA)



Deliverable No. D2.3

Baseline study on Cluster B: Interactions between states and religious institutions

Grant Agreement no.: 870769

Project Title: Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA

Contractual Submission Date: 30/09/2020

Actual Submission Date: 27/10/2020

Responsible partner: FMSH



PAVE has received Funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 870769.

Grant agreement no.	870769
Project full title	PAVE - Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA

Deliverable number	D2.3
Deliverable title	Baseline study: interactions between state and religious institutions
Type	R
Dissemination level	PU
Work package number	2
Work package leader	TCD
Author(s)	Marie Kortam with support from case study country leaders
Keywords	Religion, sects, ethnicity, state, Christian, Shia, Sunni, violent extremism, vulnerability, resilience, civil society, territory, space, municipality.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870769.

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Acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
SOC	Serbian Orthodox Church
ICoS	Islamic Community of Serbia
ICiS	Islamic Community in Serbia
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
SISC	Supreme Islamic Shia Council
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
MERA	Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs
OSE	Office of Sunni Endowment
OSHE	Office of Shia Endowment
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
C/PVE	Counter/Prevent violent extremism

1. Introduction

Multiple factors and drivers enable, fuel and shape violent extremism. This phenomenon operates in a country-specific context at the macro, meso, and micro levels. Violent extremism poses a challenge for the relationship between individuals and institutions such as the family, religious or political state institutions, civil society associations and society at large. Individuals undertake a voluntary and radical rupture of the existing social contract while seeking links to a new community and a cause for commitment.

As a social phenomenon, violent extremism reveals a questioning of the traditional instances of socialisation that are supposed to frame and standardise the community of citizens, protect individuals, and create the conditions necessary for their development and fulfilment. Public authorities are hence doubly called upon in their efforts to prevent or push back violent extremism: firstly, to rebuild the bonds of trust that must exist in a political community; secondly, to promote or reinvent the sense of civic engagement in individuals replacing the prior commitment to an ideology of violence and exclusion. Combatting violent extremism by rebuilding trust in institutions in the form of civic engagement requires political leadership and education, but also enabling structures and mechanisms. Efforts to push back on violent extremism are more complicated in countries with a sectarian-based system where each community has its own privileges and social and religious institutions (as in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia, and Iraq) or sectarianism is the basis for the legal system (as in Lebanon). But in light of high levels of violent extremism, also republics like Tunisia face significant challenges.

While violent extremism in the Western Balkans (WB) and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has already been the subject of many studies, the interaction between state institutions and religious institutions and the shift towards violent extremism or its prevention has not yet been analysed. This baseline study contributes to the EU-funded PAVE project, which researches the drivers of vulnerability and resilience of communities towards violent extremism in the WB and MENA. The baseline study is the foundation of the research cluster on the interface between state and religious institutions in driving vulnerability or resilience in regards to violent extremism. The study hence will focus on drivers related to the interaction between state and religious leaders and institutions. It will explore various drivers of violent extremism by assessing the role of (or absence/lacunas/dysfunctions of) state and religious authority figures. In addition, it will explore the impact of multi-stakeholder cooperation between religious and state leaders on the strengthening of community resilience.

In the WB and MENA, Islam is not the only religion that could be interpreted as a trigger of violent extremism yet interpretations as used by the Islamic State (IS) have proven to be highly attractive particularly for youth as indicated by high numbers of enrolment. Christianity also contains push factors and ideology that can be used to promote violent extremism and is presented briefly in the baseline study but will be taken into further consideration in the forthcoming research on the cluster's five case study countries BiH, Serbia, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Iraq. In our five countries, there is a rise in the jihadist or extremist current, which opposes traditional Islam adopted by the states. The increase fits with the creation and financing of Islamist movements through transnational networks. In these countries, so-called "fundamentalist" Islam has gradually imposed itself by defining new dimensions of social, political, and religious normality. As a result, religious practice has become a complicated matrix of the actors' identity and social status. This situation has encouraged the rapid development of faith-based organisations which provide leadership and social welfare work instead of the state. Religious organisations are seizing the opportunity to establish their influence which creates a security challenge on states already weakened by severe economic and political circumstances that go far beyond their defense and security capacities. The vacuum left by the state, especially in the poorest neighbourhoods, could be exploited by violent extremist groups to infiltrate the communities.

Different studies show (Stojkovski & Kalajdziovski 2018, Turčalo, Veljan 2018, Jakupi & Kraja 2018) that the crystallisation of this dynamic is more visible at the municipal level. This means that violent extremism is inscribed in the space, such as territory and became territorialised, which means measured on a geographical level. Municipalities can share common socio-economic features (e.g. divided/polarised social space, high social cleavages, or high levels of economic deprivation) but are affected differently by violent extremism, as we will develop in the study. In this territorial space, several fields intersect, including the religious, political, and social fields. In these fields, education is the central pillar in the prevention or outbreak of violent extremism. Education, in a broader sense than just school, potentially touches the heart of the violent extremism problem. It is a factor for the collective construction, transmission and socialisation of values, insertion and inclusion as well as the learning of rules. Education takes place in both formal and informal settings, such as schools, neighbourhoods, mosques, religious schools, municipalities, and associations.

Both formal and informal state institutions and religious institutions, interactions, have an impact on education and the role it plays as driver or mitigating factor for violent extremism. One variable in this could be the state model, either republican, such as Tunisia, or sectarian, such as Lebanon and Iraq. The interaction between religious and state institutions is complex and variable based on the political system, constitution, and political context. It could be a form of collusion, co-option, or gaps. These different forms of interaction will be analysed in the study by taking into consideration the influence on the collective identity, narratives, and moral or legal behaviors. Firstly, on the collective identity level, religious institutions or leaders and state institutions can be a particularly effective tool when violent extremist groups are trying to recruit alienated or disaffected young people in settings where they have been blocked from successfully embracing other forms of identity (such as citizenship, ethno-national affiliations, or professional status). Secondly, on a narrative level, religion may help violent extremist movements to frame world events and political developments in ways that resonate with an individual's personal life experience. Thirdly, with moral or legal behaviors, religion or national belonging can legitimise extremist acts, including violence (Mandaville, Nozell 2017).

In the religious field, preaching, carried out by charismatic religious leaders, could help spread a rigorous and even violent vision of religion. Mosques and Koranic schools could also play an important role in disseminating these ideas, while mobilising against the state and the system. Individuals, in a process of radicalisation, could see this discourse in a positive light, which they justify as acts of distrust towards a system deemed unjust, in which the aspirations of the population are not supported by state policies. Violence is then seen as a means of pressure and assertion against the state (Mandaville, Nozell 2017). The state is perceived as a mere repressive entity, and religion as the only instrument of social regulation.

In the interaction between state and religious institutions, violent extremism is linked to complex forms of interaction between the religious environment and the political context of each state and society. Countries of the study are divided into two models: the ideologically polarised countries and societies, such as BiH, Serbia, Lebanon, and Iraq, and societies with a recent history of acute political and social upheavals such as Tunisia.

In Lebanon and Iraq, the root causes of violent extremism are fundamentally related to the absence of the state in a divided and sectarian society. In Iraq, the sectarian divide between Sunni and Shias has continued to exist after the fall of President Saddam Hussein with several Sunni leaders fearing a loss of power due to the sectarian policies of the Shia-based government (Juergensmeyer 2018). In Tunisia, youth are still expecting justice while still facing unemployment, barriers to civic involvement, and a lack of political freedom. They are disappointed by the post-revolution public policies to fight the dearth of economic opportunity, corruption, and harassment by security services (Ennaifer 2018, Hostrup et al. 2017).

In the Balkan countries, the political context is not that different from the MENA region. Domestic divisions and tensions remain acute and social, political, and economic conditions are ripe for the

spread of radicalism. Countries still struggle with the legacies of war, which continue to fuel ethnic polarisation through divergent interpretations of history, selective forms of remembrance, and different and contested notions of victimhood. Impoverished citizens were (and are) fed narratives of victimisation of their own ethnic group through the media controlled by the ethnic elites. A recent study highlights the need for focused research in divided cities to understand how inter-ethnic tensions particularly may be leading to increased support for religious-inspired radicalisation (Turčalo, Veljan 2018). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, people share a sense of defeatism and perpetual injustice within this fragile state under the control of corrupt politicians (Turčalo, Veljan 2018: 2). In Serbia “extremists were mainly part of various (para) military groups, while after 2000 and the beginning of the Serbian democratic transition, they morphed into associations and movements spreading the hate speech and being involved in violent incidents” (Petrović, Stakić, 2018).

To summarise, the study examines the impact of the interactions between state and religious institutions and the response of each one or both on violent extremism. This study questions the role of the key stakeholders such as the state, religious communities, and other non-state actors as drivers of vulnerability or resilience to violent extremism. It is interested in determining if the state intervenes just with a security approach limited to law enforcement agencies utilising mostly reactive and coercive measures, or if the state has a national strategy to prevent violent extremism. Also, regarding the role of informal religious institutions, do they have a role in fuelling violent extremism or do they have a counter-narrative and social and religious approach to prevent violent extremism?

Accordingly, this study consists of three main parts. The first one offers a mapping of the formal and informal religious institutions and leaders in the five case study countries. The second and third part will identify and analyse the main drivers and factors of vulnerability and resilience in interactions between state and religious institutions. For vulnerability, community drivers will focus on the absence, dysfunction, or mistrust of formal state institutions (e.g. city administration, education, and police) and how this used by or affects religious formal and informal institutions and actors in affected communities. Further drivers are the discourses and narratives propagated by different religious communities, and the role of informal authority figures (internal and external) in the fuelling of violent extremism. As for resilience, community drivers will focus on the different forms of relationships between the state, formal and informal religious institutions, and actors (e.g. city councils, education, police, imams and Islamic authorities, and clerics and Christian authorities) and their role in seeking to identify the types of common (or complementary) narratives and cooperation that are more likely to foster community resilience to violent extremism.

2. Mapping Religious Institutions

Government regulation of religious space is a delicate issue in sectarian or republican systems. Regarding violent extremism, this state power is incorporated mainly into security sector institutions, in addition to municipal institutions on the local level. The religious sector is vast, deep, and complex. Although, traditionally we associate religious influence and authority with public figures with official titles (bishop, mufti, etc.) or with specific organised institutions (churches or madrasas), these are not always the most relevant religious interlocutors for a given community. Formal religious interlocutors are often controlled by the government and use official political-religious narratives. They are based on modern institutional legitimacy within a normative framework and are supported by the state structure (Ansart, 1999). Formal institutions are necessarily legal and official. However, in the religious sphere there exist informal and unofficial religious leaders and institutions. These can be legal or illegal meaning officially registered as NGOs, companies etc. . They influence individuals and groups who are dissatisfied with formal institutions and are in search of alternative narratives which are often extremist. Such informal institutions are based on traditional or charismatic legitimacy, more than legality. The distinction between legal and illegal, formal and informal is not always clear cut, gray

zone can exist when for example, religious institutions created by the state are managed by intermediary actors, which are unofficially controlled by national or foreign governments and exist outside of the state's sphere of influence .

An understanding of the religious sector is provided by a mapping of most important institutions in BiH, Serbia, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Iraq. Going beyond the formal religious authorities and formal institutions allows discernment of a much more complex religious landscape, populated by a much more complex range of actors, voices, and different narratives. As in many communities and societies religious leaders' roles transcend spaces, activities, and institutions conventionally demarcated as religious and a deeper understanding of their roles beyond religion will be key. They are social actors who have influence in a broad range of sectors including governance, human development, economic growth, conflict resolution, and peace building. They are likely to be more trusted and to have a more granular understanding of the specific challenges facing their communities and institutions of religious higher learning closely associated with or regulated by the state. They, clearly, play a significant role in shaping societies and political structures in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Iraq, and Tunisia. The first section highlights major formal religious institutions and the second is concentrated on the informal religious institutions or groups in these countries.

2.1. Formal Religious Institutions

With the exception of Tunisia, all countries of the study are religiously mixed, most especially with the monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Depending on the country, every religious community has formal (as defined above) institutions and is officially represented. In BiH, Serbia, Iraq, and Lebanon, the constitution is shaped by religion. It differs between ethno-nationalism in WB and sectarianism in MENA. Therefore, religion plays an essential role in the Western Balkans and MENA culture.

2.1.1. Religious institutions in the Western Balkans

Radicalisation in the Western Balkans is more embedded in the experience of violence and ethnic cleansing during the recent wars of the 1990s than in any other factor typical for Western Europe or the USA (Perry, 2019). Therefore, the Western Balkan region is not confronting some sort of 'new violent extremism crisis' that started after the outbreak of wars in Syria (2011) and Ukraine (2014). Instead, it is dealing with various manifestations of the socially embedded 'culture of extremism' - primarily a consequence of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and events that followed it.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In BiH, the state has served the ruling political elites in generating a climate of mistrust, nationalism, and insecurity creating a space for the development of endemic corruption and stagnation in political, economic, and social reforms. On the other hand, the historical and present role of formal religious institutions in BiH is visible through shaping everyday activities and life in general. There are four types of formal institutional religious structures in BiH, related to three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In addition, there is the Interreligious Council founded after the war to resolve ethnic and religious problems.

Christian institutions are divided into: The Serbian Orthodox Church and The Bishops' Conference for Catholics. The majority of these churches and religious communities self-finance through membership fees, donations, and voluntary contributions. However, some research shows that public budget allocations have increased in recent years primarily for the traditional religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Jewish community depends on The Jewish Religious Community, which is affiliated with the World Jewish Congress and the interreligious council. Over the centuries, numerous Sephardic Jews settled

in Sarajevo and later were joined by Ashkenazi Jews from Central Europe.¹ The Jewish religious community is organised through the Jewish Municipality Sarajevo.

The Islamic Community is considered “the sole and unique community of Muslims living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandžak, Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia, and Muslim Bosniaks living outside their homeland and other Muslims who accept this community as their own”². Through the election of the first Rais-ul-Ulama (the supreme religious authority), the Islamic Community in BiH took on its current institutional form in 1882. In official terms, the work and structure of the Islamic Community in BiH are defined by the Constitution of the Islamic Community in BiH, and its highest-ranking bodies are the Council, Rais-ul-Ulama, Council of the Muftis, and the Constitutional Court. Rais-ul-Ulama represents the Islamic Community in BiH. The interpretation of faith and performance of Ibadah Islamic duties in the Islamic Community of Bosnia is founded on the application of se Maturidi aqaid and Hanafi madhhab³. The Ilmijje Association of the Islamic Community in BiH is a legal entity which gathers “employed and retired people and people employed by or retired from other organisations and institutions whose employment or termination of service requires a proposal or consent by a body of the Islamic Community”⁴. The Islamic Community in BiH is self-financed with its own budget.

The Interreligious Council was a unique result of post-war BiH in which polarisation was projected along ethnic (religious) lines with a lack of institutional capacity to resolve problems. It was founded by a group of religious institutions in 1997, and is a non-governmental organisation with the objective of building a civil society in which the influence of churches and religious communities is inviolable.⁵ Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is polarised along ethnic (religious) lines with not only a lack of mutual trust, but also a lack of institutional capacity to resolve these problems. It is the first body of its kind in the world. However, Tzvetkova and Mancheva (2019) show that despite the positive role, there exist certain deficiencies with respect to insufficient communication of the clergy or promotion of positive values at local levels. In their research, Tzvetkova and Mancheva (2019) emphasise that, despite the positive examples and statements by the leaders of religious communities, the power of religion in promotion of tolerance and peace has not yet been sufficiently utilised. The authors particularly underline the still existing links between religion, ethno-nationalism, and the political structures of the state.

Serbia

In Serbia, religion was the main factor in shaping the constitution; therefore, religion plays an essential role in the Serbian culture since it was - as a constituent factor of nationhood - often the main diacritic between the warring parties of the 1990s. As Perry (2019, 34) argues, the case of Serbia is ‘a tale of two extremisms’: far-right nationalism and Islamist extremism. Both forms of extremism are affiliated with religion, although that is less obvious in the first case. While the Islamist extremism stems directly from specific interpretations of Islam, relations between far-right nationalism and Orthodox Christianity are not as apparent, apart from some far-right clerical organisations (Bakić 2013). This report includes the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and two Islamic communities in Serbia since there are no records of involvement of any other formal religious community into activities related to radicalisation or violent extremism in Serbia (see for instance Perry 2019 or Petrović and Stakić 2018).

The Christian community is represented by the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) with the Patriarch being the head of the church and the governing bodies are the same as in BiH with 30 dioceses. The

¹ For more on the history of Jews in BiH, see <https://www.jews.ba/Menu/4/JC-Sarajevo>

² For more on the Islamic Community in BiH, see <https://english.islamskazajednica.ba/the-islamic-community/modules-menu>.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Statute of the Ilmijje Association of the Islamic Community in BiH (<http://ilmijja.ba/akti/>).

⁵ For more on the Interreligious Council in BiH, see <https://www.mrv.ba/lat/o-nama>

SOC is in charge of church property, funds, and endowments and controls its own revenues and expenditures⁶. Almost 85% of the population of Serbia are Orthodox Christians, 4.97% are Catholic Christians, and 3.1% are Muslims (Đurić et al. 2014). A Law on Churches and Religious Communities adopted in 2006 recognises five traditional churches and two traditional religious communities in Serbia: Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Islamic Religious Community, and Jewish Religious Community, while the Register of Churches and Religious Communities counts 34 of them.⁷ The Law states the exceptional historical and civilisational role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in shaping, preserving, and developing the Serbian identity.

Two formal religious institutions represent the Islamic community: The Islamic Community of Serbia (ICoS) is the legal Islamic community defined by the Ministry of Justice and represented by the Grand Mufti (Rais-ul-Ulama); and the Islamic Community in Serbia (ICiS)⁸. Some of the reports on violent extremism in Serbia mention parajaamats in Sandžak (BIRN 2016; Petrović and Stakić 2018), though this issue is still insufficiently researched. Parajaamat or parajamaats are formal institutions established by traditionalist groups in the Balkans, but not legally recognised by ICiS. They advocate for a conservative interpretation of Islam and formation of parallel institutions, literally parajamaats, and do not recognise the authority of legal ICiS. Petrović and Stakić (2018: 13), in their report concluded there were at least three extremists' masjids in Novi Pazar, related to Al-Furqan and Al-Tawhid (an Islamist brigade involved in the Syrian Civil War). According to some of their interviewees, there were Salafi mosques (masjids) in almost every neighbourhood of Novi Pazar, although not all of them were necessarily a threat. Some of the Salafi masjids were parajaamats, but some of them were organised by the Islamic Community (ICiS) (Petrović and Stakić 2018, 14-15). A parajaamat used for recruiting members of the Roma population for the Syrian Civil War was also discovered in the Belgrade suburb of Zemun (BIRN 2016). In 2017, Serbian authorities demolished a religious building in Zemun, which officially belonged to ICoS, under the explanation that it lacked a building permit. It remains unclear whether the real reason for the demolition of this improvised mosque was its utilisation for recruiting Islamist fighters (Smailović 2017). This example represents the tension between formal institutions but illegal, such as parajamaats, which have existed formally for many years in Serbia and BiH and legitimised by the ICoS but are considered illegal by the state and the ICiS.

Both Islamist and far-right extremists from Serbia trace their ideological beliefs to the religious and war narratives. The ideology of Islamist extremism first came to Serbia (Sandžak) mostly as a consequence of the presence of jihadis in the Bosnian war (Perry 2019). Almost all of the far-right nationalist organisations emphasise the religious elements of Serbian identity in their political programs (Bakić 2013; Stakić 2015).

2.1.2. Religious institutions in the MENA

With multiple similarities between Lebanon and Iraq on the political-religious level, Tunisia has a very unique civil-religious system in this study.

Lebanon

In Lebanon, different types of religious extremism based on a sectarian system can be observed. The Lebanese constitution enshrines the representative role of the formal religious leaders of all eighteen

⁶ For more information on SOC, see www.spc.rs/eng/church.

⁷ For more information, see https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_crkvama_i_verskim_zajednicama.html and <https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/registar/1138/spisak-crkava-i-verskih-zajednica-.php>.

⁸ For more information on ICiS, see <https://mesihat.org/mesihat/o-mesihatu2/>

recognised Lebanese sects, including the Maronite patriarchate that considers itself the founding catalyst of “Lebanon” (articles 9, 10 and 19 of the constitution⁹). This official status treats the religious groups with the same rank as governmental entities, from their prerogative to appeal before the Constitutional Council, to their financial expenses, whether as a regular fund or tax exemption. Their internal regulations are ratified by the parliament, to the extent that the Islamic religious council, Houses of Fatwa, and religious courts are placed under the mandate of the presidency of the Council of Ministers. Consequently, the formalisation of structures and electoral and legislative councils of the religious leadership within the Lebanese state was largely shaped by political interests. As an example, the electoral councils of the Muslim religious institutions are occupied by current and former Muslim parliamentarians and ministers. Even though the religious leaders are not appointed directly by the government, their selection is connected and affiliated with the political elite of their respective communities.

Four formal religious institutions are most influential in Lebanon, Dar Al-Fatwa, Supreme Islamic Shia Council, Druz Council, and the Maronite Church.

Dar Al-Fatwa¹⁰ is a government institution established in 1922, and is the Islamic religious authority that sponsors, directs, and manages religious and endowment affairs in Lebanon. Due to its national position and role, it participates with other Islamic and Christian authorities to preserve national unity. Four categories of institutions are affiliated with Dar Al-Fatwa: health, social, educational, and media.

The Supreme Islamic Shia Council (SISC) established in 1967 by Sayyid Musa-Al Sadr is the supreme body and the official entity of Lebanese Shiite population meant to give the Shia more influence in government. The SISC was established to decrease the poverty and deprivation of the Shia community in Lebanon. Particularly the SISC deals with supporting southern Lebanon, acquiring development funds, constructing and improving schools and hospitals, and providing more proportional representation in the government (Esposito 2004: 307).

The Druz Council, presented by the Akl Sheikhdom presides over the supreme spiritual and social services of the Unitarian Druz Community by virtue of the laws in force, which have consolidated their full autonomy in their own religious affairs and charitable endowments. Their institutions are in compliance with the spiritual provisions of the community and are legislated by the Sheikhdom.¹¹

The Maronite Church is officially known as the Maronite Syriac Antioch Patriarchate. The Patriarch is elected by the Maronite bishops and is recognised as the head of the church and the leader of the community. Only the Pope who is acknowledged as the supreme Head of the universal Catholic Church is awarded a higher position. The Vatican is intricately involved in church affairs including patriarchal elections.¹² Like other religious institutions, the church has its own health, social, and educational institutions.

⁹ For more information on the constitution, see:

<http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/LebaneseSystem/Documents/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A.pdf>

¹⁰ For more information on Dar Al-Fatwa, see <https://www.darelfatwa.gov.lb/>.

¹¹ For more information on Druze, see <http://mouwahidoundruze.gov.lb/haykaliya/33/1>.

¹² In order to gain legitimacy, the Patriarch must receive ecclesiastical communion from the Pope. The Vatican must also be informed immediately of a vacant patriarchal see and subsequent elections. Although canon law may suggest that solely the Synod of Bishops elects the patriarch, it is evident that the Vatican exercises strong influence on this issue).

Iraq

In Iraq, the collapse of the central government in 2003, during the invasion of the United States, led to the rise of the patrimonial identities. Prior to 2003, the government controlled most of the Islamic endowments in Iraq through the Ministry of Endowment and Religion Affairs (MERA).¹³ All religious acts by imams and preachers were supervised and controlled by MERA through appointing administrators to follow their behaviour to the extent that imams and preachers were state employees or licensed by MERA (Hasan 2019). From July 13th, 2003, to June 1st, 2004, the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) was the provisional government of Iraq. It was established by and served under the United States-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The IGC consisted of various Iraqi political and tribal leaders who were appointed by the CPA to provide advice and leadership of the country. It was composed of the Office of Sunni Endowment (OSE), the Office of Shia Endowment (OSHE), and the Office of Christian, Ezidian, and Sabeian Mandaean Endowments (Foxnews 2007). In June 2004, the transfer of sovereignty was conducted from the IGC to the Iraqi Interim Government. A year later it was replaced by the Iraqi Transitional Government in May 2005.

Tunisia

The Tunisian model is very unique and differs from the other cases examined in this study. It is a republican system established by Habib Bourguiba. Bourguiba was concerned with empowering the state over religion. The Tunisian constitution (Article 1, 2014)¹⁴ declares Islam the official religion for the country in the framework of a civil state. According to the constitution, the Ministry of Religious Affairs manages all religious institutions in Tunisia (mosques, imams, endowments etc.). After the fall of the autocratic regime of Ben Ali in 2011 and the weakening of the state in the ensuing interregnum, multiple changes have taken place in Tunisian society.

The fall of the autocratic regime in Tunisia contributed to the emergence of a new socio-political context, being characterised by freedom and extremism. New political and religious organisations emerged, in addition to new discourses and practices Islamism extremism. These new appearances could be divided into three categories:

- A party-structured political Islamism, that while adhering to the democratic process, does not oppose a potential Caliphate and the application of Sharia law eventually.
- A mystic Islamism, which while keeping to this very objective, does not partake in the race for political power.
- An extremist Islamism, which oscillates between radical discourse and violent, even terrorist action, with a view also to re-establishing a Caliphate.

In the end, all governments mentioned above take religious diversity into consideration by putting in place rules and official institutions or ministries to control communities. Many of them have created diverse social bodies to synthesise community needs in different areas, such as education, health, and endowments. However, in wars and crises, traditional social and political structures weakened in favour of greater religious control from outside the state. This is reflected in the diversification of religious communication channels (community radios, the internet, mosques, churches, etc.). Weakened social and political structures combined with economic crisis, political oppression,

¹³ On the Baathi government's religious policy, see Samuel Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam and, the Roots on Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁴ For more information on Tunisian constitution, see:
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf

demographic explosion, and impoverishment in urban areas has accelerated the establishment of informal religious institutions, groups, and leaders.

2.2. Informal Religious Institutions

Regarding Islamic community, informal groups are divided between Salafis and jihadists in all countries. For Christians, an exposure to informal churches in WB can be noticed.

2.2.1. Informal institutions in the Western Balkans

Available research indicates that there are, in addition to the traditional, i.e., registered churches and religious communities, certain informal faith-based communities or groups. According to Bećirević, Halilović & Azinović (2018), the main causes of emergence of informal religious groups or communities relate to the war and post-war period in BiH.

In that respect, many researchers (Becirović, Jusić, Azinović, 2018) agree that the radicalisation processes and the establishment of the Salafi structure in BiH is related to the arrival of foreign fighters during the war (1992-1995) and financing by Islamic charities. As for the non-traditional and informal forms of Islamic religious practice, the most developed is Salafism, whose followers contest the traditional Islam of BiH. According to a report of the Islamic Community in BiH, originally there were a total of 64 parajamaats, and later this number was reduced to 38 with 14 of those 38 congregations signing the Protocol to join the IC BiH (Turčalo, Veljan 2018). The remaining 24¹⁵ refused the integration and the IC BiH protocol in 2016. These groups use 29 facilities for prayers which are not registered by the IC BiH¹⁶. Jusić (2017) identifies four Salafi groups. “The Taqlidiyun” group advocates for a conservative interpretation of Islam and the formation of parallel institutions (parajamaats) and does not recognise the authority of IC BiH. “The Sahwa” Salafi movement enjoys the greatest support in BiH and has a network of news portals and other multimedia content. They emphasise disagreement on many religious issues, but essentially respect the decision of IC BiH and the intention to integrate parajamaats into legal frameworks. “Jihadists” are the militant wing of Salafism and some of their followers from BiH became foreign fighters in the Syrian civil war as members of units of Ahrar-Al Sham or a wing of Al-Nusra Front in Syria. “Tahfirs” are the most extreme form of the Salafi movement; some groups accepted the agreement with IC BiH, while others rejected it (Jusić 2017: 47-50). The author also underlines that besides Salafis, there are other groups in BiH that operate outside the framework of the IC BiH. They include: Ahmadiyyas, various Shia groups, neo-Naqshbandi Turkish Tarigats, as well as other groups and individuals offering interpretations of Islamic thought (Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi and Sufi Tarigats). Some of these groups, such as the Ahmediyya and Baha’i movements advocate the peaceful dimensions of Islam; they even tried to register with the competent institutions in BiH (Jusić 2017).

On the other hand, parajaamats of the Islamic community, in Sandžak carry out violent extremism in Serbia. Some research on violent extremism in Serbia mention parajaamats in Sandžak (BIRN 2016; Petrović and Stakić 2018), though this issue is still insufficiently researched. Petrović and Stakić (2018, 13), in their report from 2018 concluded there were at least three extremists’ masjids in Novi Pazar, related to Al-Furqan (CSO) and Al-Tawhid (Islamist brigade involved in the Syrian Civil War). According to some of their interviewees, there were Salafi masjids in almost every neighbourhood of Novi Pazar,

¹⁵ Some of the groups were: Cazin-Stijena; D.Vakuf-Brežičani; Kakanj-Hodžići; Sarajevo-Briječće brdo II and Kasindolska; Zenica-Gornja Mahala and Strnokos; Zavidovići- Kuljani; Maglaj-Ošve; Tuzla-Kula, Kalesija-Dubnica. (Source: Radio Free Europe; <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/terorizam-hap%C5%A1enja-akcije-sud-odstete-tuzlastvo-bih/29754411.html>).

¹⁶ For more information see: <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/aktivnosti-reisu-l-uleme/23739-rijaset-predstavio-izvjestaj-o-razgovorima-sa-paradzematima>.

although not all of them were necessarily a threat. Some of the Salafi masjids were parajaamats, but some of them were organised by the Islamic Community (ICiS) (Petrović and Stakić 2018: 14-15). A parajaamat used for recruiting members of the Roma population for the Syrian Civil War was also discovered in the Belgrade suburb of Zemun (BIRN 2016). In 2017, Serbian authorities demolished a religious building in Zemun, which officially belonged to ICoS, under the explanation that it lacked a building permit. It remains unclear whether the real reason for the demolition of this improvised mosque was its utilisation for recruiting Islamist fighters (Smailović 2017).

The practice of the Orthodox faith in informal groups in BiH occurs, according to some claims, among the “Zealots” – members of the canonically unrecognised Serbian True Orthodox Church in the small town of Čelinac, close to Banja Luka¹⁷. According to some investigative texts, “the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) claims that the Zealots are schismatic, heretical, belligerent and exclusive”. Their motto is “Orthodoxy or death”. The Zealots, in their own words, “fight for the purity of the Orthodox faith”¹⁸. This group is also present in Serbia and led by the Former Bishop of Razka-Prizren who established what is called a “parallel church”, considered to be an extremist sect by the SOC and the state of Serbia.

It is noteworthy that there are several rightist organisations or groups that base their platforms on certain religious components, such as: the Bosnian Movement of National Pride¹⁹, and some Serbian and Croatian groups led by ethnic nationalism, or Orthodox and Catholic extremism (Bećirević 2018).

2.2.2. Informal institutions in the MENA

Lebanon

In Lebanon, no informal Christian groups have existed since the end of the civil war, since all the Christian militias have become legitimate and play the role of official political parties in the Lebanese political and religious field. The balance between the Shia and Sunni religious-political communities was maintained after the war until the assassination of PM Rafic Al-Hariri. Since then some groups in the Sunni community felt a sense of injustice and didn’t expect more from Dar Al-Fatwa. This is when the Lebanese League of Muslim Scholars first appeared representing the most important example of informal religious institutions. It was created during the Syrian uprisings and filled the void left by the Sunni community of Dar Al-Fatwa, which had internal disagreements. Its objective was to act as a Sunni authority composed of Lebanese Sunni scholars in Islamic law. It united members of the Jamaa-Al-Islamiya, the Salafis, and some disillusioned clerics from Dar Al-Fatwa (Lefèvre 2015).

Iraq

In Iraq, the reality is completely different with Sunni groups organised by opposition to the power of the state. The indiscriminate implementation of the law of de-Ba’athification left thousands of civil servants jobless. In addition, the abolition of the old army by Paul Bremer, the US civil ruler in Iraq (2003-2004), caused hundreds of military officers to lose their job and dignity. Hence, the Sunni resistance against the American occupation began only a few months after the fall of the Ba’ath regime. To counterweight US power, the Iraqi Sunnis and foreign jihadi groups joined forces in the battle against the American troops and the government forces (see above). With a weak central authority, these circumstances sectarianised the Iraqi society and gave birth to new Shia militia forces such as the Al-Mahdi army of the Shia cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr. It pursued this end with ethnic cleansing against the Sunnis in Baghdad and elsewhere. The civil war ended with the establishment of the Sunni

¹⁷ For more information, see <https://www.atvbl.com/ziloti-stigli-u-celinac>.

¹⁸ For more information, see <https://www.srbijadanas.com/clanak/ko-su-pravoslavni-ziloti-12-08-2014>

¹⁹ For more, see <http://bosanskinacionalisti.org/pokret/>

awakening forces (Sahwat) in 2007 which included some of those who actually fought alongside ISI against American troops and Iraqi security forces. Hopes for national reconciliation were expressed, but as soon as ISI was defeated, the United States stopped paying the tribal fighters in the Sunni awakening forces and demanded the Iraqi government to include them on the government payroll instead. The American rationale was that those fighters were Iraqi citizens, and they helped establish peace and security. However, Prime Minister Maliki (in office 2006-2014) refused to include those fighters on the Iraqi payroll.

Tunisia

Tunisia provides a framework for a civil state based on citizenship, the will of the people, and the supremacy of law (Tunisian Constitution, Article 2). In Tunisia, civil society, before 2011, was a model of independent social action in the country and for the region. However, since 2011 there has been an increase in the number of Islamist political parties and associations. There has been interference in a large number of ministerial departments in charge of social issues such as, some teachers in the Ministry of Education giving lessons in religious indoctrination instead of teaching the regular curricula; kindergarten teachers under the Ministry of Childhood taught how to dress; and the Ministry of Religious Affairs paying some sports teachers. This explains the domination of religious institutions over state institutions through the practices of the above ministries.

In the specific context of Tunisia, Tunisian Salafism is the product of dissension within the former Islamic Orientation Movement (nowadays *Ennahdha*). In the early 1990s, the founder of the Islamic Orientation Movement, Rached Gannouchi, established himself abroad, and called for jihad against the Ben Ali regime. After 1990, the Tunisian Islamic Front (FIT), a derivative of the Islamic Orientation Movement, dissolved itself due to the dispersion of its activists. Some of them exiled, others imprisoned, and the most radical among them left to join the Afghan and Bosnian Jihadists. Islam was under control during these years until the revolution.

After the 2011 Tunisian Revolution, either back from abroad or freshly released from prisons, activists have sought to reconstitute the Salafi movement in the guise of associations and/or political parties. Two phases can be distinguished in the uprising of informal jihadists groups. The first one is the establishment of new structures from 2011 to 2013. This period was characterised by the explicit and implicit coordination between the Salafi groups and *Ennahdha* party.²⁰ The fall of the Ben Ali regime, in 2011, gave rise to Islamist parties in several forms. Forty-seven political parties were legalised after the revolution, but only fifteen are represented in the Assembly of the Representatives of the people: *Ennahda movement*, *Nidaa Tounes*, *Long live Tunisia*, *Machrou' Tounes*, *Popular Front*, *Akef Tounes*, *Al-Irada*, *Democratic Current*, *People's Movement*, *Current of Love*, *Democratic Alliance Party*, *Farmer's Party*, *Movement of Socialist Democrats*, *National Front of Salvation*, and *Republican Party*.

From 2011, Salafism extended its grip on the Tunisian territory and became an integral part of the political context, assisted by the permissiveness of the *Ennahdha*-led government which considered

²⁰ March 1, 2011: Having been prohibited for a long time, the *Ennahdha* Movement became legalized by the government of national unity established after the Tunisian Revolution.

March 2011: The release of Saif Abdallah ben Hussein, known as Abu Iadh (a follower of the Muslim Brotherhood doctrine during the 1980s).

July 2011: Meeting of the "Islamist family" gathering the leaders of the *Ennahdha* Movement as well as their counterparts in the Salafist movement. Their objective was to agree on "the common denominators of Islamist action and to restore the rights of the different Islamist confluent to maintain their identity.

October 2011: Demonstration against the comic film *Persépolis* before the general elections of October 23, 2011.

April 2012: Abu Iyadh created *Ansar Al-Sharia* in Tunisia.

September 14, 2012: *Ansar Al-Sharia* was involved in the attack on the United States embassy.

the Salafi activists of *Ansar Al-Sharia* as companions in suffering and as victims of the oppression of the old political regime. *Ansar Al-Sharia* took advantage of the openness of the Tunisian government, mostly led by the Islamists after the Revolution, in order to strengthen the structures of its movement as well as its associative support network. It operates under several denominations offering various activities and services, some of which are totally illegal. Initially led by one Abu lyadh and the movement's spiritual leader Sheik Al-Idrissi, *Ansar Al-Sharia* witnessed a first deviation that consisted in bringing together a large number of people in the movement; those who share similar intellectual convictions and who could be converted into a driving force. But, Al-Idrissi distanced himself, allowing Abu lyadh, who gave preference to immediate action, to take hold of the movement alone and to widen the sphere of its influence even further.

The second phase is the classification of *Ansar Al-Sharia* as a terrorist organisation in the summer of 2013 up to early 2015. The assassinations on February 6th and July 25th, 2013, of two nationwide icons of the left-wing activism enflamed popular resistance to the ruling Islamist party. This resistance was essentially led by the different organisations of the civil society and the opposition parties. The resulting pressure was successful as it forced the *Ennahdha* government to classify *Ansar Al-Sharia* as a terrorist organisation. Thereupon, *Ansar Al-Sharia's* militants went underground or fled to Libya, before travelling to Syria. According to official Tunisian statistics, the number of Tunisians who volunteered in Syria/Iraq ranges from 3,000 in April 2014 to 6,000 in October 2015, but this Salafi movement left several dormant cells behind, like those who would perpetrate the terrorist attacks of 2015 in Tunisia. Because it had benefited from a large support of the *Ennahdha* government until 2013, *Ansar Al-Sharia* could indulge in numerous activities (congresses, requisition of mosques, outdoor recruitment tents, etc.). However, the new context of power alternations that has prevailed after the 2014 general elections seems to have discouraged Salafi groups from getting involved in the democratic process. This is to say that the correlation attributing radicalisation to dictatorship does not turn out to be plausible, and that emphasises the cultural content of the conflict would appear more reliable.

This mapping of the formal and informal religious institutions in WB and MENA allows us to understand, identify, and analyse the main drivers and factors of vulnerability and resilience in interactions between state and religious institutions. Based on this mapping, it will be easier to discover how formal or informal religious institutions, groups, or leaders could play different roles in multi-space levels, such as territory, institutions, or narratives in their interaction with the state. Part two focuses on interactions between the state and formal and informal religious institutions and actors in affected communities, and its absence, dysfunction, or mistrust in fuelling of violent extremism.

3. The main drivers and factors of vulnerability between state and religious institutions

In developing countries, violent extremism is increasing due to factors such as the fall of regimes, injustice, human rights violations, poor governance, social political exclusion, and corruption. Some of the factors that encouraged men and women to join extremist groups are the absence of the state, fragility of state institutions, lawlessness, and the predominant institutional anomie which intensified the feeling of victimisation in an unjust state. The post-war period and crisis in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Iraq strengthened those factors and influenced radicalisation and violent extremism. These countries lost the ability and power to administer their institutions and societies, which impacted the growth of radicalisation.

States share common political vulnerabilities such as, the polarisation of state identity in which each religious or ethnic group has its own expectation from the state. Often, communities experience the

abuse of political power and the denial of political rights and civil liberties resulting in mistrust in the state institutions. The power sharing between state and religious institutions in Lebanon, Iraq, and Tunisia and between state institutions and ethnic groups in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina has led to dysfunctional justice. In addition, the communities share common vulnerabilities in social and economic development due to the absence and fragility of state institutions. Lack of a unified educational system and unequal access to education contributed to increasing violent extremism and radicalisation especially in marginalised areas and groups. The five countries have overall become less effective in meeting the expectations of their citizens.

Serbia

Serbia still struggles with legacies of wars, but also with the aftermath of international isolation during the 1990s and late democratic and economic transition that started in 2000 after the fall of Milosevic. Conflicting historical narratives, competitive victimisation, and collective grievances combined with the poor economic situation, widespread corruption, and malfunctioning of state institutions that fuel ethnoreligious polarisation are the main drivers of community vulnerability to radicalisation and extremism.

The “Republic of Serbia is a state of Serbian people and all citizens who live in it, based on the rule of law and social justice, principles of civil democracy, human and minority rights and freedoms, and commitment to European principles and values” (Serbian Constitution, article 1).²¹ Albanians and Bosniak minorities and the Serbian majority all consider themselves victims of injustice. The Serbian youth is convinced that minorities enjoy greater rights than the majority. Lack of trust in government contributed to a shift from one form of extremism, either far right or Islamist, to cumulative extremisms where in a mutually beneficial process, extremisms were feeding upon each other and far-right extremism was used “as a country-specific driver of Islamist extremism” (Petrovic and Stakic 2018: 7). This lack of trust in institutions is closely connected to low interpersonal trust in Serbian society.

A 2017 survey showed that 41% of Bosniaks in Serbia are primarily concerned with corruption and crime, and 27% with poor governance. In addition, they have the least trust in state institutions and religious institutions are the most trusted organisations. This illustrates how corruption has penetrated Serbia’s society and is a daily life experience in public administration, education, and healthcare.

The identity problem appeared in the light of dysfunctional institutions when a survey from 2016 showed that 87% of Sandžak youth are highly religious and recognised their affiliation to the Islamic world (Ilic, 2016). Poor governance allowed the younger generations to accept radicalisation and violent extremism where poor quality education and lack of critical thinking were the main drivers. Lack of political will to manage job opportunities and to incubate the youth widened the gap with the state institutions.

All those aspects are more visible and registered in the territory of Sandžak, where the absence of the state led to marginalisation. Sandžak is an internal region of Serbia with a majority of Muslims (over 50%). Islamist extremism is mainly connected to them. The conflicts and tensions in the 1990s in Sandžak led to the establishment of the Independent Government of Sandžak and resulted in the complete isolation of the region (Corovic 2017). However, the region did not experience any armed conflicts. This was an indication of political violence and suppression (Perry 2019). Through isolating the Sandžak region, the Muslim community experienced religious and political polarisation that led to

²¹ For more information, see the Serbian Constitution:

<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/74694/119555/F838981147/SRB74694%20Eng.pdf>

political instability and radicalisation of the population. Sandžak is one of the least economically developed regions in Serbia with a very young population (over 50% is younger than 30) and high unemployment (around 50%) and poverty rate. In addition, it has serious infrastructure and investment problems (Kisić 2015). Those unsolved economic problems caused a lack of trust in state institutions that increased the problem of identity and support for local government. In addition to poor quality education and lack of critical thinking, grievances were exploited by extremist groups (Petrovic and Stakic 2018).

The political division of the Muslim population in Serbia is also directly affected by the division of the Islamic community into two competing organisations: ICoS and ICiS. A new vulnerable driver in the Muslim population towards radicalisation and extremism occurred due to the rise of political and religious division in Sandžak, which allowed the emergence of external fundamentalist influences. In Serbia, the division of the Islamic community succeeded in promoting the new *Serbian Islamic community* in Belgrade led by Mufti Hamdija Jusufspahic and considered a political tool by the Sandžak elite. A new Law on Churches and Religious Communities adopted in 2006, identified Belgrade based Islamic Community as the only legitimate. After a few unsuccessful efforts to unite the two Islamic Communities, in 2007, Zukorlić decided to form the ICiS, operating under the auspices of Sarajevo. This split continues despite various attempts to reconcile the two Islamic Communities, including the mediation of Turkey between 2010 and 2014. Although there is no official data, it is commonly understood that the ICiS enjoys the loyalty of most of the approximately 250 mosques in Serbia (the majority of them is located in Sandžak) (Perry 2019; Kisić 2015). The Islamic Community of Serbia (ICoS) is represented in all major Serbian cities in a juridical structure divided into regional (muftiate and meshihat) and municipal (majilis) levels²². ICoS is represented in all major Serbian cities including Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac, and in Sandžak (Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Prijepolje) and Albanian-speaking Preševo Valley (Preševo, Bujanovac, Medveđa) as well.

The ideology of Islamist extremism first came to Sandžak in 1997, mostly as a consequence of the arrival of jihadis to the Bosnian war, but also from the students who were able to study in the Middle East, where they had an opportunity to learn about different approaches to Islam (Morrison 2008; Perry 2019). Some of the Sandžak Muslims attended extremist camps in Bosnia (Gornja Maoča) to learn the principles of Takfirism. According to some of the experts on these issues, ICiS supported or tolerated these individuals and groups until the final split in the 2000s, when the Salafis/Wahhabis became more visible and influential (Kladničanin 2013; Ćorović 2017). Financial support to Salafis in Sandžak increased through the Al-Furqan and Tawhid mosques to facilitate the spread of radical Islam to increase the number of youths in joining ISIS (Ćorović 2017). Unemployment, lower education, poverty, and identity issues facilitated the recruitment process by targeting the younger population to join ISIS and Salafi organisations.

According to the 2018 survey on religion, 34% of Serbian citizens consider religion very important, which puts Serbia in ninth place among 34 European countries (PRC 2018). Two surveys conducted among the mostly Muslim youth population in Serbia emphasize the role of the religion even more. “Survey of the drivers of youth radicalism and violent extremism in Serbia” (CeSID 2016) shows that 65% of young Bosniaks and 62% of young Albanians consider themselves true believers and accept all the teachings of their faith, while respectively 70% and 54% of them think that the influence of the religious community in their area is either great or great but not decisive. Another study of youth population attitudes in Sandžak (mostly Muslims) from 2016 supports these results, showing that 61.9% of examinees declared themselves true believers that accept all the teachings of their fate (Ilić 2016). Therefore, the control of religion in Sandžak launched a more conservative Islam and the whole

²² For more information on ICoS, see <https://www.rijaset.rs/index.php/rijaset>.

region of the Western Balkans became more moderate and flexible, in a Turkish-style Islam (Perry 2019).

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The particular vulnerability of today's multi-confessional and multicultural society in BiH is the product of the war waged against Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995. Moreover, war remnants still burden mutual interactions making the entire society "especially vulnerable to ethno-nationalism, political radicalism, and ideological extremism" (Turčalo and Veljan 2018:2).

The interaction between the state institutions and the religious communities is overloaded by ethno-political privacy and the fragility and complexity of state institutions, which is often visible in the superficial support of stakeholders. The constitution declares, "Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be a democratic state, which shall operate under the rule of law and with free and democratic elections" (Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution, article 2).²³ The constitution does not specifically mention the representation of religious communities, though the peoples (Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks) registered in the constitution belong to specific religions.²⁴

This was well illustrated through the empowering, in 2004, of the Rule of Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches²⁵. Allocations through the Public Interest Advocacy Center revealed, in 2015, a total budget of 5.1 million euros for financing traditional religious communities. The law modified the legal status of religious communities and ensured equal rights for all religious communities.²⁶ It envisioned that churches and religious communities may issue agreements with the Presidency of BiH, the Council of Ministers of BiH, or entity governments to regulate their matters. This shows a clear advantage for religious institutions over state institutions. Despite the rights given to the religious institutions and communities, non-governmental organisations revealed discrimination with respect to religious education and the construction of new religious buildings. This law increased the fragility of the state institutions and weakened its authority over its own territory.

Despite the Dayton peace agreement signed in 1995, BiH experienced the absence of the state, in terms of dividing the state into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska. Instead of acting with social cohesion, the three primary ethnic communities competed for power and further fragmentation took place on the subnational level that divided the Federation of BiH into 10 cantons. This action raised the problem of identity and belonging. Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs²⁷ are identified in the constitution while all other citizens are categorised as 'others'.

²³ For more information on the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ba/ba020en.pdf>.

²⁴ For more information on this issue, see BiH International Religious Freedom Report (online: https://ba.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/270/2018_BIH_IRF_Report_BOS.pdf), (2018)

²⁵ For more information on Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Status of Churches and Religious Communities in BiH, see (<http://www.mpr.gov.ba/biblioteka/zakoni/bs/ZAKON%20o%20slobodi%20vjere.pdf>).

²⁶ In the foreword to the book "Crkva i država u BiH" (Church and State in BiH), Tomo Vukšić underscores that "the great novelty and result of the aforementioned legislation consists primarily in the fact that religious communities and their numerous institutions, which have in formal terms been outside the law before this legislation, have acquired legal subjectivity in the state law and have been placed under public law. This ensures that each of them can, as a recognised legal entity under public law, claim their rights and agree and regulate matters with the state as a legally recognised legal entity in the society and a formal partner to the state government" (Source: <https://www.bkbi.ba/info.php?id=6>).

²⁷ Therefore, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs are defined as constituent peoples that participate in the executive and the legislative branches. For example, Article V of the Constitution of BiH reads: "The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall consist of three Members: one Bosniak and one Croat, each directly elected from the territory of the Federation, and one Serb directly elected from the territory of the Republika Srpska". This discriminatory

In addition, ethnic control of the state institutions from the constituent peoples increased tensions and the feeling of discrimination and injustice between the different communities in BiH (Beridan, Smajić and Turčalo 2018).

Polarisation of the three ethnic (religious) communities highlighted the lack of mutual trust and inability to resolve these problems institutionally. The decentralised structure of the police and security sector, in which 16 police agencies are scattered between state, entities, and cantons, weakened the sense of belonging and the capacity to combat corruption and crime. It, also, weakened the judicial institutions' ability to implement the rule of law (Gordana 2020).

In this conflict situation, Islamic and Christian extremist groups emerged. The first is due to the arrival of Salafis to BiH during the war (1992–1995) financed by Islamic charities. This was the main cause of the expansion of the informal religious groups or communities. In addition, the Serbian Orthodox Church claims that, the Zealots are the most belligerent and exclusive, they “fight for the purity of the Orthodox faith”.²⁸ It is noteworthy that there are several right wing organisations or groups that base their platforms on certain religious components, such as: the Bosnian Movement of National Pride²⁹, and some Serbian and Croatian groups led by ethnic nationalism, or Orthodox and Catholic extremism (Bećirević 2018).

Lebanon

Lebanon is similar in regards to the weakness of the state institutions represented in the official constitution which gives the right to religious institutions to practice their role without intervention. Article 19 states in specific terms: “*The officially recognised heads of religious communities have the right to refer to this Council laws relating to personal status, the freedom of belief and religious practice, and the freedom of religious education*”.³⁰

Tax exemption for the religious institutions is considered a key factor to vulnerability, in addition to receiving grants for their institutions and personnel (Al-Haddad 2020). However, the general budget annually witnesses sectarian allocations which exceeded more than 28 billion Lebanese pounds in 2012 (Al-Haddad 2020). This is bestowed in terms of salaries, wages, allocations, management, supplies, support, family benefits, social protection, equipment, and office building maintenance to the Fatwa and the Sharia courts, Supreme Islamic Sharia Council (Sunni), the Supreme Islamic Shia Council, Ja'fari Sharia courts, Sheikh Akl of the Unitarian Druze Community, the Druze religious courts, and the Confessional Council of the Unitarian Druze Community. Similarly, the Christian spiritual courts' budget is taken from the budget of the Ministry of Justice.

These religious institutions also enjoy special treatment in terms of austerity policies. They are not subject to any decrease in their allocations and their revenues collected from religious community group members, which are “worth millions of dollars”, do not undergo auditing. They are not monitored and excluded from paying taxes. Instead, their health, social, and cultural care budget is discounted from the budgets of the Ministries of Health, Education, and Culture.

Political interests shape the electoral religious and legislative council leadership, and the selection of religious leaders is closely affiliated with the political elite with their respective communities. The parliament, and the Islamic religious council, House of Fatwa, approved placing their internal

provision made it impossible for citizens who do not belong or do not feel that they belong to one of the three ethnic groups.

²⁸ For more information, see <https://www.srbijadanas.com/clanak/ko-su-pravoslavni-ziloti-12-08-2014>.

²⁹ For more, see <http://bosanskinacionalisti.org/pokret/>

³⁰ For more information, see *The Lebanese Constitution*. Presidency.gov.lb. 1926. Retrieved 9 July 2020, from <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/LebaneseSystem/Documents/>

regulations and religious courts under the mandate of the presidency of the Council of Ministers. The official narrative of the state that declares “Lebanon is the final homeland for all its citizens” and the need to “adhere to mutual coexistence and civilian peace”³¹, has been consistently adopted by the religious elite. Thus, religious institutions have always used the discourse of religious literature in mobilising society during each social upheaval to prevent any constitutional changes. Religious institutions have always influenced government policy in Lebanon. For example, the attempt to neutralise the sectarian system that took place during the 1975–1990 civil war, and 1958 crises when Maronite Patriarch Boulos Meouchi agreed on the alliance with the Muslim Leftists against President Camille Chamoun. Additional attempts to protect the sectarian system were made in March 2011 and in May 2016 when the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rai challenged the traditional orientation within the Patriarchate. It mobilised the Christian political leaders against the presence of the Syrian army in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war that ended in 2005 (YaLibnan 2016). Moreover, Muhammad Rashid Qabbani (Sunni Grand Mufti) overstepped the Sunni consensus which is against Hezbollah and the Syrian regime, in 2012, by meeting with the Iranian ambassador (The Daily Star Newspaper 2010) and Hezbollah representatives (NOW Lebanon 2011). These religious leaders behave as supra-state actors to defend their positions in the sectarian system.

The confessional power sharing constitution calls for collaboration between the state and formal religious institutions that failed to promote a new constitution to change the national context. Political and religious polarisation is considered the main vulnerability driver in Lebanon that affects the political structure directly. This led to accepting external authorities to designate the head of Dar El Fatwa. For example, President Gamal Abdel Nasser approved Hassan Khaled as the Grand Mufti for the Lebanese Sunni Muslim community in 1966. Similarly, Muhammad Rashid Qabbani gained recognition by Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad. Abdul Latif Derian was selected through a bilateral agreement between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in 2014 (Lefèvre 2015). The Druze community shared the same fate; the Syrian regime had the authority in appointing Sheikh Al-Akl to counterbalance the leadership of Walid Joumblatt. Instrumentalisation and politicisation continued this religious interference. The Grand Mufti Qabbani participated in nominating the former president of the council of Prime Minister Najib Mikati in 2011. In addition, religious leaders were involved in the incidents that were portrayed as violent extremist acts, according to Radwan El-Sayyed (2018). Blurring boundaries between the state institutions and formal religious institutions broadened the gap between these establishments and their confessional constituencies. The adoption of the securitised approach and the instrumentalisation of the involvement of religious leaders in countering sect-based strains and manifestations of violent extremism, has impacted public confidence in religious leadership. According to Radwan El-Sayyed, a number of religious leaders were involved in data and intelligence gathering in the aftermath of incidents that were dubbed as violent extremist acts in Lebanon, particularly after 2011, when several rounds of violent clashes occurred between Sunnis in Bab Al Tabbeneh and Alawites in Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli; in addition to clashes between Sunni groups of armed fighters led by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir and Hezbollah forces in Saida. The Sunnis detained by the army in this conflict have yet to be put on trial. This encourages a discourse of victimisation and is perceived as grave injustice towards Sunni groups despite high-ranking Sunni representation in key law and order positions.

The fragility of state institutions led to the acceptance of formal religious actors and institutions as political actors. This became obvious when formal religious institutions were involved in regional and international polarisation. Religious leaders were appointed on the basis of regional agreements, and regional leaders are regular speakers in Lebanon.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Another vulnerability factor is the legitimacy of political representation. The dilemma of religious recognition within Lebanon's modern sectarianism points to the particular understanding that religious authorities are an outcome of a somewhat elitist clerical ranking. In this sense, such a particular form of representation can be comprehended as solely appealing to specific institutions more so than their greater communities. This crucial conception conveys that this process and system of designation and absence of representation is the rationale behind what creates such a group of non-charismatic leaders who lack a popular mandate, as well as authority and influence. This produces segments within particular communities who in turn become attracted to informal leaders who have the power and freedom to maneuver politically, as they are not limited by conditions of mutual interest and interaction with the political class. Such informal leaders carry on characteristics that are seen as progressive, populist, and radical. In some instances, they are more elevated in scholarly matters resulting in somewhat of a competition against the formal leaders, while simultaneously challenging the authority of the latter.

It is crucial to highlight that the electoral system of religious representation is commonly restricted to the male-influenced elite. Such exclusivity is built on the framework of bureaucrats that more often than not make up the middle or upper level civil workers, such as judges and administrators, among their specific sect's central clerical regime.

Religious leaders gained more legitimacy over state institutions during the Syrian war due to the expansion of regional polarisation. They gained trust and confidence through their local communities; thus, the role of formal leaders became ineffective. Such actions supported the rise of informal religious institutions and actors such as the League of Muslim Scholars (*Hay'at Al-Ulama Al-Muslimin*). The purpose of the League is to fill the vacuum and political opportunity left by Dar Al-Fatwa, but also to oppose Hezbollah interference in the Syrian war. In shedding light on the comparative distinction with Dar Al-Fatwa, the League has gained the capacity to provide aid and increase its influence in Tripoli. The league's former chief, Salafi cleric Salem Al-Rafei, along with a number of stronghold Sunnis, portray themselves as the final defenders for the resistance of Tripoli indicating the Beirut-based Abdel-Latif Derian's lack of popularity in the city. Such elements have been shown to have impaired Dar Al-Fatwa's support in the Northern Region of Lebanon, where the establishment has in many instances failed in satisfying their responsibilities. A senior bureaucrat mentioned in late 2014 that the establishment was only capable of administering a third of Tripoli's mosques, while the remaining were contingent on clerics who were short of any Islamic qualifications, and held close ties to radicals.

Iraq

As mentioned above, the abandonment of the Sunni fighters by the Americans and the Prime Minister Maliki allowed ISI to become those fighters' new source of revenue. The tipping point was the waves of Arab uprisings. Like elsewhere in the Arab MENA, the Sunnis installed sit-in camps in Anbar, Hawija, and other places to peacefully protest against Maliki's divisive and authoritarian policies and his government. By that time, Maliki had managed to strengthen his grip over the military and the state institutions following the United States withdrawal from Iraq. The legitimate demands of the protesters were denied, and the sit-in camps were destroyed. In addition to cracking down on the Sunni demonstrations, the court, politicised by Maliki, issued arrest warrants against prominent Sunni figures under the pretext of supporting terrorism. Disenfranchised, the Sunnis created inceptors for the jihadi groups in the Sunni areas, in an attempt to protect themselves from the tyranny of Maliki's army. Hence, as soon as the Sunni demands were neglected, the black flag of IS (ISIS back then) was seen in the sit-in in Anbar.

IS managed to regroup inside Syria by capitalizing on the civil war in the country following the protests in 2011. As soon as the rift between IS and Al-Nusra front in Syria (Jabhat Fatah al-Sham now), the group began to call itself the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Such discursive exercise of power

allowed the group to claim legitimacy in Syria and Iraq. As the flame of the civil war was heating up in Syria, ISIS began to wage attacks against the United States and Iraqi army inside Iraq. The decisive victory was the occupation of Mosul, the second biggest city in Iraq, in the summer of 2014 following the control of Fallujah and Ramadi. This incident marked the beginning of a long summer of Sunni discontent. The group declared the establishment of the Islamic State (IS), erasing for the first time the colonial borders between Syria and Iraq in late June 2014. During this uncertain situation, thousands of people left Mosul as soon as IS took control of the city. It is important to mention here that the causes of the mysterious collapse of four Iraqi military divisions remain unrevealed. To fill the man-power dearth and paint the battle against IS with an ideological brush, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani called for Shia Jihad against the Islamic State, which led to the establishment of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Having succeeded in erasing the Sykes-Picot borders between Iraq and Syria for the first time since the establishment of the modern Middle East, IS jeopardised the juridical sovereignty of the country. Iraq came to be known as Iraq before Mosul and Iraq after Mosul.

IS was driven out of Mosul in 2017, with the help of the United States-led coalition including the Iraqi army, the PMF, and the Kurdish Peshmerga. A few weeks later, the Kurdish President Masoud Barzani declared that Kurdistan region would hold a referendum regarding the negotiation of independence with Baghdad.

The war on IS produced the PMF militia, which substituted for IS in threatening the central power of the state. Despite the heroic role played by this militia, it now poses a challenge to the legitimacy of the government. As of 2017, the militia constitutes 60 to 69 factions with a total of 140000 to 150000 men. It controls massive areas of Iraq, replacing IS as a non-state actor in the Sunni areas. Mostly importantly, it operates as a peace-keeping force in the Sunni areas, but it has already been accused of committing war crimes under the pretext of fighting terrorism. In addition, the PMF has also been accused of committing social abuses, conducting mafia-like activities, and being an obstacle to the return of IDPs. Doing so, it rapidly became a threat to Iraq's sovereignty, especially due to the fact that some factions within the PMF are backed by Iran such as Hezbollah Brigades, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Al-Najbaa, Al-Kharasani, Al-Bodala, Imam Ali, Jund Al-Imam, and Badr. Unlike IS, though, PMF is legally part of the Iraqi security apparatus. Members of this armed group dress in official uniforms, but they act outside the legal framework of the military regulations. The organisation enjoyed a \$2.16 billion budget in 2018-2019, which is two and half times higher than the budget of the Ministry of Water Resources, three times that of the valiant Counter-Terrorism Service, and 18 times that of the Ministry of Culture. Ultimately, the integration in the state's security apparatus politicises the formal army in favour of the Shia community.

Tunisia

Vulnerability factors in Tunisia are caused by internal and external issues. Internally, after 2011, the successive government has been influenced by corruption and the weak political system. While the uncontrolled area between Tunisia's southern border and Libya opened the way for Tunisian youth to join ISIS.

The spread of informal religious institutions in Tunisia after 2011 was demonstrated by: the large increase in the number of associations, the emergence of Islamists political parties, the openness of the country to regional military axes, and the governmental failure to combat corruption. The interaction between state and religious institutions passed from cooperation to a big gap and excessive divide. The number of Koranic schools increased even without authorisation while overlapping responsibilities in a large number of departments. The education system was affected by the new Salafist ideology; for example, some teachers in the Ministry of Education took advantage of their profession to give lessons in religious indoctrination instead of teaching the regular curriculum. In addition, some sports teachers received instructions from imams who were paid by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and students in kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of Childhood were taught

how to dress. This occurred after 2011 when many Salafi instructors returned after having been dismissed during the regime of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The new democratic context permitted citizens to discuss their ideological ideas openly, which often led to incompatibility involving teachers who bypassed the objectivity of the official curricula.

After 2011, the political structure remained unstable. According to Tunisian officials, transnational fighters volunteered to join ISIS. The presence of a large number of jihadists in Libya has created anxiety for Tunisians who may cross the border. Hence, while the country was in the midst of revolutionary turmoil, still hesitant about which new political system to adopt to replace the old regime, the jihadist groups began taking action. The first terrorist attack took place in Rouhia governorate of Siliana in Tunisia.³² Afterward, terrorist acts multiplied. These were comprised of the assassinations of political activists, the slaughter of soldiers, the execution of Anis Jlassi, an officer of the Tunisian National Guard, and entrenchment in the Chaambi, Mghira, and Semmama mountains, all of them located in the west of the country, in the governorate of Kasserine. There was also an abortive attempt to establish an *Imara* (principality) in Ben Guerdane, in southern Tunisia, 33 kilometers from the Libyan border.

To sum up, in this part, we identified and analysed the main drivers and factors of vulnerability in interactions between state and religious institutions. This interaction took multiple forms in different countries. The domination of religious institutions over state institutions is notable as is the interference of religious leaders and formal and informal institutions in different countries.

The relation between religious institutions and communities is well interpreted by the Law on Churches and Religious Communities in Serbia and BiH where the law legalises religious institutions. On the other hand, in Lebanon, Iraq, and Tunisia, the constitutions legalize religious institutions and endowments. Financial support to religious institutions increased the tendency to accept their presence without complications. Their role in organizing people's daily lives bypasses state institutions. Religious institutions penetrate all levels of societies and pave the way to accepting radicalisation and the recruitment of extremists to fight abroad. Ethnic or sectarian division in communities, the role of non-governmental organisations, tax exemptions for religious institutions, poor governance, and failure of the rule of law increase the tendency to have confidence in religious institutions as a source of resilience, since they operate on all levels of society. This resilience will be studied in the following part in co-optation interactions between state and religious institutions and actors related to violent extremism in different contexts.

4. The main drivers and factors of resilience between state and religious institutions

Religion has always been a major and significant factor in shaping the different societies of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Lebanon, and Tunisia. Three categories of stakeholders appear to work on resilience factors by preventing violent extremism: Religious institutions, governmental institutions, and acting as bridges between them, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). CSOs work to assure coordination and healthy and effective relationships. CS is composed of individuals or groups who are neither connected to, nor managed by the state, and work in social action. It is an organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which it plays the role of a mediator between public authorities and citizens. It includes different

³² Following that terrorist act, two perpetrators were killed as well as two soldiers and another one seriously injured.

kinds of organisations, such as: social partners (trade unions & employers' groups), NGOs, and grassroots organisations (e.g. youth & family groupings)³³.

With regard to resilience factors, the religious dimension is taken into consideration and integrated into a global approach to prevent violent extremism by Civil Society Organisations in countries like Serbia and Lebanon. With the CSOs' efforts and initiatives by international funds, governments developed a national strategy of P/CVE. Those strategies cover portions of their work to integrate women in a gender perspective. In other countries, such as BiH, this work is done by a non-government religious institution, the Interreligious Council, in a community approach, in addition to CSOs. While in Iraq and Tunisia, CSOs work on PVE programs with the complete absence of the state.

In Serbia, religion serves as a driver of solidarity. Particular emphasis is put on education reforms that would encourage young people to develop skills in civic engagement, critical thinking, and media literacy—all of these being necessary prerequisites to develop multi-cultural perceptions of the past, and tolerant, open-minded worldviews (Ejdus 2015). Although the state achieved some progress in countering terrorism and addressing the issue of foreign fighters, most of these initiatives, as pointed out above, came from CSOs and international donors. A report on "Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe" from 2016 does not observe any state or religious institutions-based initiative (Perry 2016), except for the "National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism." Although, most of them included representatives from these institutions as participants.

This strategy determines the national framework for P/CVE in Serbia. It recognises high standards of civil society, protection of minority rights, and religious tolerance as advantages for Serbia. While it identifies insufficient integration of some groups, the weakening of the role of the family, and the abuse of social networks as its weaknesses concerning preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism. The strategy names ethnically motivated extremism and separatist tendencies (particularly concerning Kosovo); activities of members and supporters of radical Islamic movements and organisations, propaganda activity of radical religious preachers, the return of terrorist fighters, and the danger of terrorist infiltration during a mass migration—as characteristics of Serbia concerning the terrorist threat. As the means of prevention, authors of the document suggest: 1- the development of security culture of the citizens (through formal and informal education and the training and spread of information); 2- early identification of causes and factors leading to violent extremism and radicalisation; 3- development of an environment discouraging the recruitment of youth; 4- building the resilience of digital networks and communication systems to counter the spread of violent extremism and radicalisation; and 5- the advance of skills of strategic communication (GRS 2017).

CSOs in Serbia started the first CVE program in 2012, supported by the US State Department. HCHR implemented this program in Sandžak, aiming to empower the youth to prevent radicalisation and build trust between the youth and the police by deconstructing stereotypes about the police, Islam, and youth culture. This initiative included activities such as youth seminars, open discussions between the representatives of the police and the youth, outreach events, and online activism (Kisić 2015). OSCE conducted a similar training of the multiethnic police in Preševo Valley (Perry 2016). Sandžak based CSOs implemented several P/CVE projects as well. They included research on risk factors affecting human security and assessments of public institutions' capacities to support it, aiming to increase the resilience of the local community and young people to security threats and risks, including radicalism and extremism.

³³ For more information, see https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/civil_society_organisation.html.

The research identified several risks: “economic insecurity (unemployment and poverty), institutional insecurity (lack of the rule of law), a constant feeling of deprivation and injustice, long-running and unresolved conflicts, divisions into “us” and “them” along political, religious, and ethnic lines that affect numerous spheres of public and private life, antagonism and hate speech, increased intolerance towards diversity inside the groups, with no room for the development of common interests and symbolic space for dialogue and exchange of opinions, normalization and legitimization of violence, lack of institutional mechanisms for the prevention of violence and its sanctioning, overall increase and acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of communication among the youth, social exclusion and isolation from the political, economic, social and religious life and an overall apathy” (Kisić 2015: 172).

Another notable initiative is the development of a Western Balkans Civil Society Hub. This aims to empower CSOs, including women, youth, and faith-based organisations to be more effective and accountable actors and improve their capacity to implement projects and dialogue with governments, influencing policy and decision-making processes as it relates to P/CVE in the region, etc. (DamaD 2015; DamaD 2018.)

Activities of these CSOs were mostly directed towards youth and state/local institutions, suggesting the following recommendations:

I—for youth:

- to create a space for an open dialogue about important issues—schools, universities, public discussions;
- to raise awareness of possible risks and threats related to radicalisation and extremism—through the media (including the internet), schools and universities, political parties, and religious institutions;
- to develop programs for promotion of culture of tolerance and peace—youth organisations, CSOs, schools and universities, etc.;
- to give more space for youth to develop and implement its activities;

II - for institutions:

- to raise awareness of the threats and risks of youth radicalisation;
- to increase accountability of the institutions for the overall security of the community;
- to raise awareness of harmful effect of hate-speech and antagonistic discourses among community representatives; to adopt a local strategy of security;
- to establish a referral mechanism for protecting vulnerable youth from being radicalised and to provide support for those already affected; to develop protocols for institutional responses to extremism and radicalism;
- to institutionalise the Vulnerability Assessment Framework for recognising youth at risk of extremism and radicalism;
- to develop support packages for prevention of extremism and radicalism with the specific aim to strengthen community cohesion;
- to destigmatise the communities and groups, promote tolerance and nonviolence, and deconstruct extreme ideological narratives, etc. (DamaD 2015.)

On the contrary, in BiH, the Interreligious Council serves as a specific driver of community resilience between local religious leaders and the community and their engagement against violent extremism and promotes positive values. The post-war period in BiH resulted in lack of mutual trust along ethnic (religious) lines and lack of institutional capability to settle these problems. However, promoting tolerance and peace has not been successful due to the still existing links between religion, ethno-

nationalism, and the political structures in the state, according to Tzetkova and Mancheva (2019). In Serbia, the Bosniak leader from Sandžak, reacted accordingly, and founded the Islamic Community in Sandžak nominating Mufti Muamer Zukorlic as the head. This is to illustrate that by dividing the Islamic Community, new religious communities and clerics emerged and gained responsibility and had a resilient impact on the communities.

In addition to the IC, CSOs are considered to be a vital driver of resilience in fighting violent extremism. Despite the lack of specific references, it is shown that a number of NGOs play a constructive role through several activities in the society such as the Nahla Centre for Education and Research,³⁴ the Catholic organisation “Kruh Sv. Ante”,³⁵ and the Jewish humanitarian organisation “La Benevolencija” which is based on faith.

In Lebanon, the obstacles ahead of a potential constructive role that formal religious institutions could play are intense. Those obstacles prohibit the religious institutions and their leaders from acting as allies in addressing and preventing sectarian-incited violent extremism. Furthermore, the dysfunctionality between religious state institutions and other state institutions has practically paved the way to informality in the realm of religious institutions in Lebanon. However, religious leaders have been attenuating their share of the political game and mirroring the political leaders as they play the sectarian card in order to rally their sympathisers, given that they have to cater for any mounting sectarian affinity among their population. This dynamic comes from the fact that the formal religious chiefs are usually elected by politically appointed personalities. Even if they are shaped by the culture of the state for as long as they’ve been institutionalised, with the emergence of informal leaders, they demonstrate their interest in limiting the tension around sectarian lines, by their narratives and practices.

It became clear to the religious institutions that they need to play a role in consolidating the highly contested national statehood in both the Arab region and Lebanon. To this end, they have collaborated with donors and funding initiatives in developing a contemporary religious discourse aimed at reconciling religion with civic values such as citizenship, national unity, and co-existence. This change was seized by the CSOs, such as Berghof, to involve those formal religious leaders in capacity building programs and training on human rights values and international humanitarian law.

At first glance, it might be tempting to think of the previously elaborated interaction between policy-makers and state institutions on one hand, and formal religious institutions, on the other hand. This thinking is in terms of a “win-win situation”, where formal religious elites have an immediate value to offer in countering sect-based tensions and radicalisation. Despite the assumed mutual interest between the two entities in setting the basis for a nationwide discourse revolving around “moderation” and trans-sectarian values of citizenship, different factors prevent this interaction from playing an effective role in combating sectarian-based discourse and violent practices. Those factors are different from one space to another and from one given context to another. It will be important to study it deeply in a field-based research.

Similar to Serbia, to go beyond this political sectarianism, UN institutions funded by international governments, have overcome the vacuum and mobilised CSOs and the government on the policy level, to elaborate a strategy to prevent violent extremism. A national strategy of PVE³⁶ was elaborated in 2018, including different ministries and CSOs. In addition to UNDP, the Strong Cities Network (SCN) has also worked in partnership with the national PVE coordinator, drawing in particular on her work with the Local Prevention Networks. The SCN team explored various avenues of collaboration with

³⁴ For more on the centre, see: <https://nahla.ba/>

³⁵ For more, see <http://www.kruhsvetogante.com/>

³⁶ For the national strategy see : <http://pvelebanon.org>.

the PVE National Unit in Lebanon, including, but not limited to, organizing stakeholder consultations and workshops with local experts to feed into the PVE National Action Plan that was being developed by the Unit in collaboration with the British Council. Ongoing work was carried out to engage and align with the objectives and pillars of the National Prevention Strategy and ultimately to institutionalise prevention networks within the framework of the National Strategy. The SCN team and the national coordinator of the PVE unit of the Council of Ministers organised a consultation meeting with Lebanese mayors and local prevention networks in the cities of Saida, Tripoli, and Majdal Anjar (hotspot areas) on the national strategy to highlight the importance of integrating the strategy within the framework of all actors, stakeholders, practitioners, and local authority communities, with the participation of the UNDP, the European Union, the British Council, and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Iraq, the context is completely different. State officials helped to mitigate not prevent violent extremism. Each region is different, in Kurdistan, the state has the monopoly of the use of force. The traditional sources of legitimacy are incorporated into grassroots organisations, such as leaders of clans, tribes, and religious leaders; imams and sheikhs, who play the role of the state and deliver social and public services. At the same time, the political parties in elections, conflicts, campaigns, and referendums have utilised religious and tribal leaders. According to a recent report by United States Institute of Peace (USIP 2019), “Iraqi religious leaders are already engaging in efforts to promote reconciliation within their communities, and sometimes across community lines, drawing on religious ideas, practices, and rituals to do so.”

With an old trade union tradition, Tunisian society seems to be endowed with unique means of resistance to violent Islamist radicalisation. Tunisian authorities and communities do not have clear resilience towards religious institutions and actors, but they are trying to fight illegal organisations and dominate Salafists mosques. The resistance by the society to violent extremism and radicalisation is due to two main factors: the modernisation policy since the independence of the country in 1956 and the role played by the two big industrial unions which are the General Union of Tunisian Workers and the . The historical presence of labor unions in Metlaoui “gave the citizens an outlet for expressing their grievances and a mechanism for taking collective action to seek redress. As a result, resistance towards the state has historically been nonviolent.” In parallel, in other areas, i.e Sidi Bouzid, the absence of the unions led to grievances against the state being expressed with violent actions (USIP 2019:22). In addition to the unions, two other CSOs, the Human Rights League and the National Bar Association , play a role in a national dialogue held between the Islamists and the modernists including the political left.

Gender Dimension

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security which calls for women to participate in peace-building, be protected from human rights violations, and have access to justice. Serbia and Lebanon included this resolution and related activities in their PVE National Strategy.

Some of the P/CVE initiatives and reports in Serbia were mainly focused on the roles of women in supporting, joining, intervening in, and preventing violent extremism in Sandžak. These initiatives suggest that to challenge extremism, one must also challenge traditional gender roles that suppress the participation of women in private and public life (but to avoid causing a backlash of a conservative community), their financial dependency, poverty, and illiteracy (especially of those living in rural areas). Furthermore, it is highlighted that there seems to be a relationship between rising extremism and strict rules placed on women in Sandžak (Speckhard 2018; Speckhard and Shajkovci 2016).

The Lebanese strategy, according to the UN Secretary General’s Action Plan, has paid particular attention to women and gender considerations when developing the PVE strategy. The strategy includes a fifth pillar dedicated exclusively to “gender equality and women’s empowerment”; eight

ministries participate in the objectives of this pillar. The strategy has also ensured that the role and representation of women are effectively taken into account in the implementation of its various components.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, in our studied countries, traditional forms of religion and spirituality coexist and flourish with the modern state. Policymakers are targeting parts of their PVE strategy to directly work with religious partners, convening gatherings with various stakeholders to better understand whom to engage and how. Governments are considering the role of religion in various components of violent extremism and, in varying degrees and levels of effectiveness, recognise that the religious sector can play positive roles in PVE, especially on a local level. But for policymakers, government, and security actors to work effectively with religious actors, they must engage carefully and appreciate their unique, sometimes complex roles within their communities.

Two examples reflect the interaction between state and religious leaders. First, a government initiative may seek moderate religious leaders to offer counter narratives to violent interpretations of religious scripture, often offering to support the religious leader or organisation in various ways, including financially or through skills-based training. Secondly, when security officials instrumentalise religious actors and call on religious leaders to provide surveillance and report any signs of radicalisation among their community members, as has been happening around the world.

We identified the religious field by mapping it, revealing that the weakness of religious state institutions encourages new religious leaders to play a political role via the enrolment of young people in armed groups. A grey zone appears within this fragility, where formal and governmental religious leaders participate or create an informal space to discuss politics through religion. All of the above-mentioned countries face complex challenges in their fight against radicalisation leading to violent extremism. Common social, economic, and political issues were triggering factors for the increase of radicalisation in those five countries. Dysfunctional states, instability, ideologies, and external influences had significant impact on the spread of radicalisation. It impacted strongly on youths due to high levels of identification, unemployment, and social discrimination.

The different interpretations of the Islamic doctrine either through Salafism or jihadism are other key factors for the spread of radicalisation, inside or outside mosques or religious schools. This was illustrated in several areas where mosques and Islamic charities received funds from Gulf countries. The five countries display commonalities across the different communities; a deep polarisation into different cultural identities, conflictual issues between religious or ethno-political lines, and the absence of state institutions. Violent extremism as phenomenon is more prevalent in areas suffering from inequality and marginalisation. These “hotspots” are experiencing injustice and the absence of state institutions and development policy, which offers space for different informal leaders to fill the gap in service provision for these populations and to circulate radicalised ideas leading to violent extremism and enrolment in different armed groups.

External influences are clearly visible in both regions. On the one hand, Lebanon had to fight an incursion of extremism at its borders with Syria (mainly in Northern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley). With open borders to Syria, Iraq experienced the movement of ISIS between the two countries. According to the Tunisian statistics, the number of Tunisians who volunteered in Syria/Iraq ranged from 3000 to 6000 fighters in one year (2014–2015). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, external actors attempted to extend their influence through sponsoring radical elements. Gulf state investments, especially from Saudi Arabia, included mosque construction to supporting schooling for Bosnian religious students at conservative Saudi institutions. During the war Serbia attracted various foreign

fighters from Greece, Russia, and Middle Eastern countries, fighting respectively for Serbians or Bosniaks.

On a national level, firstly, religion is a driver of solidarity, protection, and prevention of violent extremism. However, relationships between state and religious institutions are complex, swinging between collusion, co-option, and gaps. Vulnerability is territorialised in “hotspots” whereas Lebanon is considered a ‘laboratory of vulnerability’ in real time – all drivers figure with regional specificities. Secondly, CSOs work hardly to prevent violent extremism by increasing resilience factors. In the forthcoming field research it will be useful to differentiate between ‘elite’ CSOs that receive international support and grassroots CSOs. Religious institutions and CSOs have both localised and transnational dimensions and both can compensate for the absence or weakness of the state.

Based on territorialising vulnerability and resilience factors, it will be interesting to study violent extremism in a complex spatial dimension: territory (local, regional), temporal, and institutional. By taking into consideration these dimensions, the forthcoming research could help us understand if vulnerability or resilience drivers in the interaction between state and religious leaders and institutions (formal and informal) are internal or external. Thus, if they are inscribed in local and national levels only, or in international and regional levels, i.e. the funding of Gulf states to Sunni groups to fight Iranian expansion in the MENA region. This understanding could help us to offer recommendations for the national level. The multi-scale approach allows us to study the specificity of each context; such as the republican model of Tunisia, where Sunni Islam in the Maghreb is contested between state and fundamentalist Islam, where they lost the opportunity for a moderate reference for Islamism; and the sectarian model in Lebanon.

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