

# **Norwegian research on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism: A status of knowledge**

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**(This is an abridged edition, translated into English)**

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**Note:** The (sub)chapters in *italic* are not translated into English and are not included in this abridged version of the study. These non-translated sections can be found in the full Norwegian edition of the report which can be downloaded from this link:

<http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/175025/browse?order=DESC&type=dateissued>.

Thus, the translated text is parts of the Introduction and the entire Conclusions chapter.

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# 1. Introduction

## Assignment and the topic of this study

In January 2015, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD) commissioned the Consortium for Research on Terrorism and International Crime, represented by the Norwegian Police University College and Tore Bjørgo, to prepare a knowledge summary of research on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism. The starting point of the assignment was the Government's Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism which was presented in June 2014.

### Measure 1: Research strategy

The development of strategies to improve and coordinate research efforts on radicalisation and violent extremism. There must also be strategic efforts to assess how the Norwegian research can be linked to international research, and also to assess whether Norway can initiate or take part in joint European or Nordic research projects. There is also a need for better systematisation of existing research in the field and a need to create closer ties between Norwegian and international groups.

The Letter of Commission noted that knowledge and information are an important prerequisite for a targeted effort and the development of effective, preventive measures against radicalisation and violent extremism. There are solid, established research groups in the field. However, there is a continual need to build up expertise as well as the systematisation and dissemination of the research. This includes general information about radicalisation and violent extremism in Norway and internationally, including radicalisation processes and motivating factors, effective prevention, and the importance of the internet and social media in the process of radicalisation

The assignment involves preparing a knowledge summary which systematises and analyses documentation and research by area, topic and problem. Furthermore, it involves assessing the status of the knowledge in relation to what can, should and will be necessary to know more about in order to be able to prepare effective measures to prevent recruitment to extremist groups. All forms of violent extremism must be included in the knowledge summary.

The objective of the knowledge summary is:

- Prepare an accessible overview of the content of existing research.
- Identify the topics about which knowledge is available.
- Identify knowledge gaps.
- Provide suggestions for possible continued studies in the field.

The Letter of Commission stated that the knowledge overview must place particular emphasis on the research that is taking place on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in Norway. It must state what the research defines as being the preventive phase in the work on preventing recruitment to violent extremism. In addition, it must identify the relevant research groups in the Nordic region and Europe. The knowledge overview must be made publicly available. The knowledge overview should concentrate on the following issues:

With Norway as the starting point:

- What research exists in the field of radicalisation and violent extremism?

- What knowledge exists about the causes of people becoming radicalised?
- What knowledge exists about preventive strategies and the effects of these?
- Where is new research required?

With the Nordic region and Europe as the starting point:

- Where do we find groups that research radicalisation and violent extremism?
- What topics do these research groups focus their research on?

A very short time frame was given for completing the assignment: The final report should be submitted to BLD on 27 April 2015. It was.

Researcher Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik was engaged to assist Tore Bjørgo in this work. She has principally been responsible for the overview of the research into militant Islamism.

## 7. Conclusions, knowledge gaps and needs for further research

This concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the research status within different forms of violent extremism, however makes no attempt to develop a synthesis of the content of the research. There is then a section about the types of expectations that can be had for the research being able to answer questions about "what works and what does not work" when concerning methods and measures for preventing radicalisation and extremism. In addition, there is a discussion of some principal issues regarding research ethics and restrictions in the type of data researchers can collect and systematise compared with what investigative journalists can do. The most important matter comes at the end: What do we consider to be the most obvious knowledge gaps in the research on preventing radicalisation and extremism and what issues do we propose that emphasis should be placed on in future research efforts in this field?

### Summary

A great deal of research has been conducted in Norway and Scandinavia concerning radicalisation and violent extremism of various ideological orientations. Most of the research has looked at the phenomena themselves without being particularly concerned with the preventive aspects or the possibilities of these. However, some of the research has described radicalisation processes in such a way that knowledge is provided about possible intervention points for preventive initiatives. However, only a small part of the research directly and explicitly addresses how to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism or assesses such efforts from a critical or evaluative perspective. This research that is relevant to prevention is also divided very differently among different forms of extremism and into different periods of time.

The most systematic research effort with the stated objective of producing knowledge for preventing violent extremism occurred in the period from 1991 until 2005, and this focussed on right-wing extremism, racial violence and gangs. A small group of researchers, with Yngve Carlsson and Tore Bjørge as the most active, was responsible for the majority of this research, with important contributions from several of their colleagues (including Katrine Fangen, Thomas Haaland, Herman von der Lippe, Inger-Lise Lien and Frøydis Eidheim). A feature of this research was close proximity to and knowledge exchange with practitioners in the government agencies and voluntary organisations who worked with implementing preventive measures. The researchers (particularly Yngve Carlsson and Tore Bjørge) assessed and evaluated preventive methods and measures that the practitioners had initiated and themselves provided suggestions for new methods and strategies. During this period, Norwegian researchers disseminated research-based knowledge to the rest of Scandinavia and to parts of Europe about how to prevent and combat right-wing extremist youths and gangs with "soft" methods such as the "Exit" initiative, parent network groups, preventive dialogue and guidance methods.

There is reason to believe that this research – in close collaboration with practitioners – contributed to the preventive apparatus becoming more knowledge-based, efficient and targeted in its efforts and that this in turn contributed to the violent, right-wing extremist youth groups being largely "dismantled" and disappearing as a problem in Norway during the

2000s. However, as the problem with right-wing extremist youths petered out, the relevant researchers moved on to other areas of work and other topics. In the period from 2005 until after the 22 July attacks in 2011 there was almost no academic research into right-wing extremism in Norway.

At the same time, the actual phenomenon changed considerably. The new "anti-Jihadi movement" was no longer a phenomenon associated with marginalised youths, but rather often well-established adults, and activism primarily took place on online social media, not on the street. The preventive methods that had proven to be effective for socially marginalised youths in the right-wing extremist groupings in the 1990s and early 2000s were no longer as relevant for completely different target groups and phenomena. Following the 22 July attacks, some research into right-wing extremism in Norway has again commenced. However, there are very few Norwegian researchers who have addressed how to confront this new form of right-wing extremism. The most important exception is Lars Gule (2012) who has written a book about how to counter these activists on the internet and in social media. Anne Birgitta Nilsen (2014) has also contributed to demonstrating how to counter hate speech.

There has also been little research into hate crime in Norway, particularly when compared with Sweden. In the 1990s, a great deal of research was conducted into racist and xenophobic violence (particularly by Tore Bjørgo). The most important Norwegian research group studying hate crime is presently at the Norwegian Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities. In addition, some research is conducted at the Norwegian Police University College in connection with hate crime against LHBT people and threats against politicians. Research into hate crime is much more comprehensive in Sweden than it is in Norway.

Research into left-wing extremism in Norway has been rather limited and has largely been concerned with the maoist AKP (the Workers Communist Party) phenomenon and how Norwegian youths could support this type of totalitarian movement. The more street-oriented, militant activism has not been a focus of academic research to any great extent. Some of those who have researched right-wing extremists groups (Katrine Fangen, Yngve Carlsson and Tore Bjørgo) have also written about how violent attacks from anti-racists were counter-productive and contributed to strengthening the cohesion and extremism of the right-wing extremist youth groups. However, other than violence during demonstrations and clashes with ideological opponents, violent left-wing extremism has generally constituted a rather limited problem in Norway, particularly compared with the situation in Sweden and Denmark. Therefore, it is perhaps not so surprising that there has been no demand for research into the prevention of left-wing extremism. However, there is still a need for new research into militant anti-racism and the dynamic that is created between them and their enemies on the far right. This research should preferably have a broader Scandinavian or European perspective since these movements have a high degree of transnationalism.

In Norway, comprehensive research has been conducted into militant Islamism: The leading player here in Norway has been the terrorism research group (the TERRA project) at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) which, since being founded in 1999, has quickly established itself on the international research front in this field. They have focussed their efforts on terrorist players linked to or inspired by Al-Qaida. Most of their research has concerned militant Jihadism in the Muslim part of the world. However, they have also contributed with important research into Jihadism in Europe and Scandinavia (and more recently Norway), including topics like radicalisation, local activists' links to global Jihadist networks and foreign fighters. The TERRA researchers have not focussed much on

prevention and combating, however the project they have commenced concerning (Norwegian) foreign fighters will direct a considerable amount of attention towards prevention, rehabilitation and other countermeasures.

In addition, other Norwegian researchers and academic groups have worked with militant Islamism and Jihadism, but have not looked at prevention to any great extent. However, two new research projects have been commenced which will focus more explicitly on preventing radicalisation. One is the "Searching the unknown: discourses and effects of preventing radicalization in Scandinavia (RADISKAN)" project, financed by the Research Council of Norway's Research Programme on Societal Security and Risk (SAMRISK). The project is based at FFI, focusing on discourses and effects of preventing radicalisation in Scandinavia. The second and most practice-oriented project concerns "The Role of municipalities in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism", financed by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security as part of the Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism. This is a collaborative project between the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). The two principal questions in the project are: What challenges do municipalities and local communities face when concerning radicalisation and violent extremism? How can this be prevented and combated locally? The study examines the organisational forms and measures used by the municipalities and how these measures work.

Terrorism research in Norway has been rather extensive and diverse and has prominently asserted itself on the international research front. The principal research groups in Norway have been at FFI, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), the Norwegian Police University College and the University of Bergen. Much of the research has been associated with specific forms of political extremism, particularly militant Islamism and right-wing extremism. The terrorism research that is more relevant to prevention has looked at societal causes of terrorism such as the types of driving forces and circumstances that form the basis for individual radicalisation and recruitment to violent activism. Some of the research has also addressed measures and countermeasures against terrorism, including preventive, controlling and repressive measures, partly from a critical perspective.

## **What works and what does not work? What research can (or cannot) provide the answer to**

There are, at times, unrealistic expectations of the research being able to produce results that clearly demonstrate the types of measures that work and do not work in preventing radicalisation and extremism. The idea is that, based on research results, politicians and policy-makers will be able to focus on "evidence-based" measures and avoid wasting resources on measures that do not work. An important school of thought within evaluation research, the Campbell Collaboration, which is represented in Norway through the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services, has been a strong advocate of this. They are of the view that only evaluations that are based on an experimental methodology with test groups and control groups can claim to produce evidence-based knowledge about the measures that work and that do not work and that this in turn will provide guidelines for policy and practice. However, these types of evaluations of preventive measures against violent extremism and radicalisation have shown to produce very meagre results. Very few evaluations of relevant measures are based on these types of controlled tests.

This is clearly stated in a Norwegian overview study (Johansen, Wollscheid & Einagel 2014) concerning "Preventing ideological radicalisation - a systematic literature search with sorted

list of references". It was the Welfare Services Unit at the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services that was commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) to carry out a systematic literature search with the subsequent sorting of possible relevant studies. The assignment was to identify empirical studies that examine the effect of and experiences with measures that have the objective of preventing radicalisation, preferably among youths. The researchers had the following summary:

The search resulted in a total of 13,511 references. Of these, 18 studies were found to have possible relevance in accordance with the inclusion criteria. We identified two possible relevant systematic overviews of measures against religious radicalisation. We identified two controlled studies (an RCT and a non-randomised controlled study). These studies examined the effect of promoting victim awareness and knowledge about human rights and the effect of training in improving relations between different (cultural) groups. We identified eight qualitative studies that researched experiences with different preventive measures against radicalisation. The other studies had case study design, mixed methods design or had unclear study designs.

We have only identified two small controlled studies that measured the effect of two different preventive measures against radicalisation. There is therefore no empirical basis on which to prepare a systematic overview of the effect of preventive measures against radicalisation (Johansen, Wollscheid & Einagel 2014: 2).

One possible interpretation is that the researchers who work with the prevention of radicalisation and extremism generally lack expertise in research methodology and particularly within evaluation methodology. A more obvious explanation is that the prevention of radicalisation and extremism is a field in which the methods are normally (and even necessarily) such that it is extremely demanding and most often impossible to evaluate the effects through controlled experiments.<sup>1</sup>

Some prominent evaluation researchers are sceptical of this orthodox and narrow use of experimental research designs to guide policy and practice within the field of criminology. Among the most prominent critics are Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley (1997) with their book *Realistic Evaluation*. They claim that this experimental methodology does not necessarily assist us in determining whether programmes and interventions have intended and unintended consequences because insufficient allowance is made for the context in which a measure is used. A specific measure can have strong positive effects in one social context or towards one specific target group and no effect or strong negative adverse effects in a different context or towards a different group. Pawson and Tilley claim that meta-studies based on comparing different experimental tests with the same measure will, almost out of necessity, end up with diverging or weak results. The reason for this is that such studies are not interested in how the contextual factors play a part, something that masks interesting and relevant differences and is therefore of little assistance to policy-makers (Pawson & Tilley 1997: 30-54).

Therefore, it cannot be established with certainty whether a measure is effective or not and whether the same measures will always give the same results, which is something the orthodox experimental evaluation tradition appears to require. Pawson and Tilley (1992) claim that the effect of a measure is completely dependent on the social context and the circumstances under which it is implemented. Something that has the intended effect in one context, will not necessarily work in a different local community or with a different target group. While the traditional experimental school of evaluation is concerned with what works,

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<sup>1</sup> The following text in this sub-chapter was taken from Bjørge (2015) *Forebygging av kriminalitet*, pp. 259-274.

those inclined towards realistic evaluation would rather ask the question of what works in what context (Pawson & Tilley 1997: 55-82).

The key question for evaluation research is to determine how and under what conditions a certain measure will have an impact (on a problem). Sometimes the effects will of course be undesired, sometimes they will be desired and sometimes there will be a combination of desired and undesired effects. Equipped with an understanding of how measures give different results under different circumstances, policy-makers and practitioners will be better able to make decisions about the measures they should implement and the conditions under which these should be implemented (Tilley 2000: 4).

Preventive dialogue (also conversation intervention or empowerment conversations) is an example of a measure that appears to have very different levels of effect on youths who are involved in different types of violent extremist groups. This dialogue was developed into a more systematic methodology by the prevention unit at Manglerud Police Station in the mid-1990s in connection with their work with right-wing extremist youths and was later standardised by the National Police Directorate (Politidirektoratet 2011).<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) used the methodology with good results against right-wing extremist youths (particularly Vigrid) in the first half of the 2000s. PST themselves believe that this intervention contributed to the majority of those who were exposed to it deciding on the spot to break away from the extremist groups. Therefore, there was good reason to believe that this would also be an effective method for Muslim youths who were radicalised and joined groups that supported Jihadist extremism and terrorism when this started to become a problem in Norway from around 2010 and after. However, the results of these efforts have not been equally encouraging as with the right-wing extremists. The police have had difficulties getting these Muslim youths (and young adults) to talk and have had much less success in convincing them to withdraw from the militant Islamist groups or preventing them from travelling as foreign fighters to Syria. This is not because the measure itself is poor, but that the conditions for it being able to work are less favourable for this target group. The reasons for this can certainly be complex. Among other things, it is most probably easier for the police to establish a certain degree of trust and understanding in their relations with ethnic Norwegian youths than with Muslim youths with immigrant backgrounds who often have a poorer relationship with the police and less trust of and weaker bonds to societal institutions. Preventive players other than the police can probably have better prerequisites for succeeding with this measure, for example, youth workers, religious leaders, respected elders from their own minority community, or people who themselves have an extremist past. Regardless of this, it would be useful to obtain more systematic knowledge of why a method such as preventive dialogue works better in some situations and for some target groups than others and how the implementation of this measure can be adapted in order for it to function better for more target groups. It is also important to obtain better knowledge about what may make some preventive players more effective in implementing this type of measure than others and the importance personal qualities and relations have for the effect that is achieved.

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<sup>2</sup> No comprehensive academic evaluation has been conducted of this method, however several internal and external evaluations point in the same direction (Carlsson & Haaland 2004: 95–102; Winsnes 2005; Olsen 2011), - that preventive dialogue was a highly effective method for Norwegian youths who were involved with right-wing extremist groups.

However, at present, little evaluation research has been conducted to obtain this type of practically applicable knowledge about preventive dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

One dilemma when evaluating preventive efforts against radicalisation or violent extremism is being able to isolate the effect of a specific measure from the effects of other measures that have also been instigated to combat the same problem. It is this problem that one attempts to solve through controlled experiments in which attempts are made to isolate the effect of a measure by keeping other factors as constant as possible. This can be a very powerful method to produce knowledge although it has its limitations. These types of experimental situations are usually rather artificial and only certain types of interventions can be isolated in this manner. Many measures are used in situations in which it is either practically impossible or ethically indefensible to establish realistic control groups.<sup>4</sup>

Another challenge in the extension of this is to evaluate preventive efforts that are based on an holistic strategy in which an extensive range of measures is used. One must then either evaluate the total result, however without being able to know for certain what methods made the strongest contribution to the result, or one must evaluate as many of the individual measures separately in order to obtain the best possible picture of the measures that gave largely positive effects or predominantly negative adverse effects. However, it is still challenging to see how the different measures interact with, strengthen and complement one another.<sup>5</sup>

## Restrictions and paradoxes relating to research ethics

In working with this knowledge overview it has been a paradox that academic researchers have had to abide by some restrictions which journalistic non-fiction writers have not allowed themselves to be restricted by. Strict frameworks for research ethics have meant that researchers have not been able to make use of data that journalists have obtained access to. This was particularly conspicuous in the Breivik case and in connection with Norwegian foreign fighters.

The different framework conditions and methodologies of the different professions mean that after major events such as the 22 July attacks, journalists are often much quicker to provide

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<sup>3</sup> One of the few studies that, based on theoretical and practical knowledge, analyses how dialogue can be more effectively used to make extremists cease their activities, is Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen's (2013) "Promoting Exit from Violent Extremism: Themes and Approaches." The study examines in detail the requirements for being able to influence extremists into changing their behaviour and she also discusses situations in which it is difficult to achieve behavioural changes. However, the study is based on theory, not empirical evaluation. However, in addition to being a researcher, Dalgaard-Nielsen has also been head of the Preventive Security Department at the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) and her writings are therefore based on solid, practical experience.

<sup>4</sup> An example of experimental studies for which control groups are both ethically and methodologically problematic is evaluation of exit programmes, particularly when the intervention is based on the defector him/herself taking the initiative to contact the programme to obtain assistance in escaping that environment. It would therefore be directly unethical to reject every second person who asks for help in order for them to serve as a control group. In addition, this type of rejection would most likely negatively affect their exit process and there would be an increased chance of them returning to the extremist environment than if they had been given assistance. This would therefore also influence the result of the experiment. Pawson and Tilley (1997: 36) also noted that many preventive efforts precisely require self-selection and motivation from the participants in order to be effective and that control groups therefore do not function as evaluation methodology.

<sup>5</sup> The problem concerning the evaluation of holistic efforts for preventing violent extremism (and crime in general) is discussed in more detail in Bjørge (2015) *Forebygging av kriminalite*, chapter 7 (the English edition, *Preventing Crime: A Holistic Approach*, will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in November 2015).

information and analysis than researchers. Academic research is based on more time-consuming methodology and, not least, more laborious approval processes and referee processes relating to research ethics. Non-fiction writers/journalists Aage Borchgrevink (2012) and Åsne Seierstad (2013) have in their books made comprehensive use of confidential documents (including reports from the National Centre for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and police interviews) which they obviously must have obtained access to through leaks (most probably supplied by some of the many lawyers who were involved in the 22 July court case). For example, in her epilogue Seierstad states that she used both confidential psychiatric reports and police interviews from the case.

Reports from the National Centre for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry were an invaluable source of information about Anders Behring Breivik's childhood. I also talked to professionals who observed him in that period. My view is that this case is of such major public interest that it has been justified to obtain information from confidential reports. [...] I have also made use of police interviews in the case. Among other things, I was also able to read through tens of thousands of pages of interviews, evidence and background documents. In some instances, I have used direct quotes from the police interviews. [...] I have elected to make use of these documents that are not publicly available because I consider it justified by the vital importance of casting light on this terrorism case (Seierstad 2013: 526-527).

Academic researchers cannot do the same without facing strong sanctions from the research system. In autumn 2012, I (Tore Bjørge) together with Cato Hemmingby (colleague at the Norwegian Police University College), commenced the process of gaining access to the police interviews of Breivik in accordance with statutory procedures: Obtaining informed consent from Breivik, application for access to the Director General of Public Prosecutions, processing by the Council for Confidentiality in Public Administration and Research, notice to the Data Protection Official for Research, final approval from the Director General of Public Prosecutions, and request to Oslo Police District for delivery of the documentation. It was not until well into summer 2013, i.e. after almost nine months, that we finally received access to the interrogation documents. When I told this story to investigative journalist Kjetil Stormark, he had a good laugh and said: "You could have gotten that from me!" We probably could have. However, as researchers we could not use confidential documentation that had emerged through leaks and had to take the lengthier route. In addition, we would never have been given permission to use personally sensitive documentation such as leaked psychological reports from Child Services which Borchgrevink and Seierstad had used. Furthermore, the journalist Marit Christensen's (2014) methods of interviewing Anders Behring Breivik's mother for her book would never have complied with the research ethics requirement for informed consent. This illustrates some of the differences between what investigative journalists are permitted to do and the ethical frameworks and restrictions researchers have to abide by. It is primarily a good thing that researchers operate within strict norms for research ethics, even if the procedures can be unnecessarily protracted. However, it is a paradox that journalists, who generally appear to be much less concerned with privacy and anonymity, can make use of a much greater supply of sources than researchers.

Another field in which academic researchers meet much greater obstacles than journalists relates to the collection and systematisation of personal data. This has become particularly relevant when concerning Norwegian foreign fighters. A number of Norwegian media institutions such as NRK and TV2 have built up comprehensive databases containing sensitive information on persons that the journalist use to describe both general patterns and individuals who have become foreign fighters. In many instances they are identified by their full names or described in such a way that they can easily be recognised in their local

communities. In their methodological report to the Skup Conference for investigative journalism, TV2 journalists Ola Haram and Kadafi Zaman (2014) described the methods they use for collecting personal data about foreign fighters and the ethical assessments they make with regard to identifying them:

*Identification:* TV 2 is the media outlet that has identified the most IS fighters by name and picture and we were the first to do so. Identification has been important for the editors. We wanted to bring the term "foreign fighter" down to a local level and give the Norwegian Islamists a face. If someone is part of the world's worst terrorist organisations and has either been charged for this or brags about it in closed or open profiles on social media, the starting point for TV2 is that we identify the person by name and picture.

Those we have not identified are primarily in the following categories:

- Those for whom we do not have at least three sources confirming them fighting for either IS or Jabhat al-Nushra.
- In cases in which there has been information about the person wanting to return to Norway or the person is back in Norway.
- We have not identified the at least five Norwegian women who, according to their families, are being held in Syria against their will. We believe that identifying them would place their lives at risk in Syria and make it more difficult for them to get out. [...]

In each instance, the editors have made the decision about whether to publish the name and picture. We know that this is very difficult for the families in Norway and have therefore spent a great deal of time explaining this to the relatives who have wanted to talk with us about why we identify these people.<sup>6</sup>

The NRK journalists responsible for their database of Norwegian foreign fighters have also prepared a methodology document in which they describe their methods of data collection, development of a personal database and ethical assessments for when they publish names of specific people (Aardal and Svensen 2014). NRK appears to be more restrictive than TV2 concerning providing full names (only four people), however the information they publish most often makes these people easy to identify in their local areas.

The ability of journalists to collect and systematise personal data about foreign fighters is in stark contrast to the restrictions that apply for researchers. In September 2014, the TERRA Project at FFI was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to write a report about Norwegian foreign fighters. This research project was one of the measures in the Government's action plan to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism (from June 2014). To even be able to conduct an empirical-based analysis of the people who become foreign fighters and why, FFI researchers were dependent on being able to collect a certain amount of biographical information about foreign fighters and to organise this information. FFI therefore wanted to be able to cut and paste news articles (from, for example VG.no) referring to Norwegian foreign fighters into a Word document, sorted according to name. This type of basic aggregation of information from completely open sources currently requires a license from the Norwegian Data Protection Authority. The project was supposed to have commenced in September 2014, however as of April 2015, FFI has still not received

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<sup>6</sup> The Extremist Islamists – A methodology report from Ola Haram and Kadafi Zaman, TV 2. <http://2014.metoderapporter.skup.no/41%20-%20%20De%20ekstreme%20islamistene.pdf>. The methodology report also contains a great deal of other interesting information about the work methods used by journalists to collect personal information and how they use this data in news reports.

a response to its application from the Norwegian Data Protection Authority and has therefore not been able to start its research work. The result is that, four years into the war in Syria, Norwegian authorities currently do not have any systematic, research-based knowledge about Norwegian foreign fighters. Therefore, the authorities also have no empirical data on which to base potential measures, other than the classified information the intelligence services may supply them with and that which can be found in the Norwegian news media.

This is in stark contrast to what researchers in other countries can do. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College in London is a world-leader in research of foreign fighters. They have built up comprehensive databases of foreign fighters and their activities. Among other things, they have collected social media profiles of 600 Western foreign fighters who have been involved in conflicts in Syria/Iraq. About 80% of these profiles are of foreign fighters who are believed to be actively affiliated with IS. ICSR collects data on 78 variables (data points) for each foreign fighter. There is comprehensive data (more than 2/3rds of all data points have been filled in) for approximately 15 percent of these people. ICSR also has a collection of thousands of screen shots and pictures, dozens of videos and tens of thousands of tweets from foreign fighters. ICSR researchers have also carried out more than 50 online interviews (using, among other things, Skype) with foreign fighters and several of these could be followed through repeated interviews over an extended period.<sup>7</sup> This type of personal data provides the possibility of developing systematic knowledge regarding the background, motives, motivation and patterns of behaviour for those who travel to become foreign fighters and has strong relevance for the development of more targeted preventive measures.

It is obvious that the collection of this type of personal data raises dilemmas relating to research ethics. However, it is also a paradox that if researchers are not able to collect this type of data, journalists will do it instead without the same restrictions as researchers, but with much less emphasis on ethics, anonymity and privacy than what researchers would have ensured.

As this report goes to print, the research group at FFI has just been granted authorisation to build up a database of Norwegian foreign fighters. However, there is the requirement that the "Norwegian Defence Research Establishment must send the Norwegian Data Protection Authority confirmation that those registered have been informed of the processing of personal data in accordance with Section 18 and 19 of the Norwegian Personal Data Act". It is highly unclear whether it is practically possible to communicate such information to people who are in a civil war zone. What happens in instances in which the people in question cannot be contacted and provided with the information that research is being conducted about them? And what if they have died? The Norwegian Data Protection Authority does not stipulate the requirement to obtain active consent, however Section 19 of the Norwegian Personal Data Act also states that "...it is voluntary to divulge information", something that could mean that foreign fighters can object to information about them being used for research. At the time of writing it is uncertain whether the FFI researchers will attempt to carry through with the project or whether it will simply be shelved.

## **Knowledge gaps and needs for further research**

There is no definitive answer to what are the most important knowledge gaps within the field of "prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism". However, here is our attempt to list

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<sup>7</sup> For information about ICSR's research on foreign fighters see <http://icsr.info/projects/western-foreign-fighters-syria/>

some subject areas which can, with more research, contribute to creating a better basis for developing more successful measures.

### **Radicalisation, recruitment and rehabilitation of violent activists and foreign fighters**

In order to develop empirical-based research about what makes individuals and groups become involved with violent extremism and terrorism, it is difficult to implement this without carrying out the systematic collection and analysis of information about events and individuals. It is, for example, not possible to obtain actual knowledge that can be used to prevent young people from Norway becoming foreign fighters without collecting and systematising available knowledge about the people who have actually left as foreign fighters from Norway. This obviously entails some challenges relating to research ethics and there will no doubt be strong restrictions imposed by regulatory authorities.

There is a clear need for obtaining more knowledge about what motivates people from Norway to become foreign fighters in Syria, Iraq, Somalia and other countries affected by civil war and conflict. The Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism has a separate measure for this and places particular emphasis on the need for knowledge about the extent to which returned foreign fighters may represent a threat of actions being carried out here at home. The TERRA project at FFI has been commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (in connection with the Action Plan) to conduct such a study, however is having problems obtaining authorisation from the Norwegian Data Protection Agency to collect available knowledge about individuals in a research database.

One aspect of the foreign fighter issue that creates astonishment is converts (people who are not born and raised as Muslims) who travel as foreign fighters to fight with Jihadist groups. In many instances it appears almost incomprehensible to the people who know them that relatively normal people would make these types of life decisions. Media reports indicate that these are largely people who are not quite able to cope with their lives and who failed at school and in the job market. This is a description that matches tens of thousands of young people. However, what makes these particular people choose to convert to Islam and leave as foreign fighters is a major question for which systematic research based on assessing their life situation could perhaps bring us closer to an answer, and perhaps also indicate in the direction of some relevant measures. This undoubtedly involves some difficult considerations concerning research ethics that relate to issues of privacy, personal data registers and consent.

Another issue which requires more knowledge is the handling of foreign fighters who have returned home and who subsequently represent an increasing number of people in Norway and the other Scandinavian countries. A small minority of these people represent a danger to the community since they are still very militant and could have both the intention and capacity to carry out terrorist acts in their home countries. It is unlikely that the vast majority constitute any such threat, however they still represent challenges when concerning how the community should treat them. The principal political decision is between whether the primary focus should be on prosecution or on rehabilitation. Here it is natural that the Scandinavian countries, which have a relatively similar philosophy regarding prevention and rehabilitation of criminals and extremists, combine their research resources, data on individual cases and experiences to build up a solid knowledge database for the best possible policy. Examples of this are the already established research-based knowledge about rehabilitation of other types of extremists, including about the various Exit programmes in the Scandinavian countries targeted at right-wing extremists (Norway and Sweden), gang members (Sweden and

Denmark) and militant Islamists and returned foreign fighters (Denmark). A major Scandinavian cooperative project should be organised for research on these topics.

However, we must not focus exclusively on foreign fighters. There is also a need for knowledge about violent activists who do *not* leave to become foreign fighters, but rather become involved in terrorist activities in their home countries. Examples of these types of "stay-at-home" terrorists are those who were responsible for the attacks in Copenhagen and Paris in winter 2015. At a seminar at NUPI with the Consortium for Research on Terrorism and International Crime on 12 February 2015, Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser from FFI noted that in the next 10 years we will most likely see an increase in sympathisers in Europe, i.e. people who do not leave as foreign fighters, but who are radicalised locally. For some of these, there could be a risk of them planning and implementing attacks in Europe.

### **Women in extremists groups**

An obvious knowledge gap when concerning research into militant Islamism in Norway is research of women in extreme Islamic groups, women who are foreign fighters (or travel to war zones to marry one) and their roles in extreme Islamic networks. There are strong indications that women are increasingly assuming active roles in Jihadist movements and there are examples of recruitment propaganda directed especially at women. At present, we do not know much about the effects this will have. There is therefore a need for more knowledge about the radicalisation and recruitment process for women and motivational and possible vulnerability factors that may play a part. We also require information about the roles and experiences women have in extreme Islamic groups and whether there is a need for specific prevention and rehabilitation measures aimed at women. There are increasing indications that it could be more difficult for women to disengage from Jihadist networks and be de-radicalised. In order to develop good strategies, comprehensive information-gathering is needed on women in extreme Islamic groups in Europe and specifically in Norway and the Nordic region – and in particular detailed information about the female foreign fighters. Some of this research should be based on qualitative data at individual level, first and foremost interviews with female activists.

Here it must be mentioned that Katrine Fangen (1999, 2001) conducted similar studies of females involved with right-wing extremist groups in Norway in the 1990s. It can appear that the development tendencies have certain similarities: In a militant environment that was originally strongly male dominated, women have increasingly demanded their place as activists in their own right.

There is also a need to analyse the activities of foreign fighters and extreme Islamic groups from a gender and masculinity perspective. For many male Jihadists there is an obvious fascination with weapons. Involvement in Jihad seems heroic, action-packed and the ultimate masculine way of achieving the forgiveness of one's sins. A number of these groups are characterised by hyper-masculine warrior ideals and where being a heroic foreign fighter or street fighter is a way of achieving these manly ideals. Masculinity within other types of extremist groups is also a topic that requires more research.

### **The relationship between the violent extremists and those that are not quite as extreme**

One of the debates within research into militant Islamism and Jihadism concerns the relationship between the ultra-conservative Islamist groups (for example, IslamNet and Hizb ut-Tahrir) which distance themselves from violence but promote an Islamic system of governance, on the one hand, and the extremist groups that explicitly support or participate in

acts of violence to establish Islamic control (for example, Profetens Ummah), on the other. The debate concerns whether these ultra-conservative Islamist groups constitute a firewall against or a conveyor belt to the violent extremist groups. The Norwegian IslamNet maintain that they play a preventive role in finding young, rootless people with radical ideas and correcting their incorrect understanding of Jihad, thus preventing them from ending up with the more extreme Profetens Ummah. At the same time, there are many examples of violent activists coming via these ultra-conservative groups. In order to obtain knowledge about the roles these groups actually play, it is probably necessary to have data at the individual level.

An equivalent issue concerns the relationship between right-wing populist parties (such as the Norwegian Progress Party, the Sweden Democrats and the Danish People's Party) on the one side and the right-wing extremist and violence-oriented groups (for example, neo-nazi groups such as the "Swedish Resistance Movement" or Breivik's imaginary "Knights Templar") on the other side. Some researchers are of the view that the right-wing populist parties primarily constitute a barrier by reducing the recruitment base for the militant groups and by providing a more moderate version of their ideals (Koopmans 1996).<sup>8</sup> Other researchers, including Sindre Bangstad (2014, chapter 4) claim the opposite and that the Norwegian Progress Party has strengthened and legitimised the use of racist language and contributed to facilitating more extreme activists. Once again, it is difficult to conduct good analyses of this exclusively based on aggregated data, which is what Koopmans did (and made conclusions with insufficient grounds). It is most probably necessary to investigate how individual, violent activists may have been influenced by more moderate movements and parties.

### **Right-wing extremism and hate crime**

There is clearly a need to obtain more up-to-date research into militant right-wing extremism and anti-Jihadism, both internationally and in Norway. Not least, it is important to obtain better knowledge about how local groups and individuals connect to foreign groups and international movements both in "real life" and using social media. There is also a need for more research into militant anti-racism and anti-fascist movements, preferably in a broader Scandinavian or European context.

In two feature articles,<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hegghammer noted that it has proven to be almost impossible to obtain financing for research into right-wing extremism in Norway, even after the events of 22 July 2011. It is a positive sign that the Norwegian government declared at the start of 2015 that there will be a funding for research into right-wing extremism with a new research center to be established. It is indeed important to obtain up-to-date, research-based knowledge about the present forms of right-wing extremism.

Tore Bjørge has advised the Research Council of Norway and the Ministry of Education and Research that it could be too narrow to limit such an initiative to right-wing extremism alone and that hate crime in a broader context should also be included in this research. A broader centre on extremism research, with considerable funding earmarked for research on right-wing extremism, would be even better. A great deal of hate crime is characterised by right-

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<sup>8</sup> Tore Bjørge (2003: 793–794) criticised Ruud Koopmans (1996) for his comparative analyses being based on figures of racist acts of violence from different countries, as the figures were based on very different selection criteria and were therefore not comparable. This does not necessarily mean that Koopmans' hypothesis was incorrect, but it was not proven with the data he used (based, among other things, on Bjørge's data from Scandinavia).

<sup>9</sup> See <http://forskning.no/meninger/kronikk/2014/01/hvem-skal-betale-forskning-pa-hoyreekstreme> and <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikker/Kronikk-Det-kom-aldri-noen-penger-til-a-forske-pa-hoyreekstremisme-etter-22-juli-7781798.html>

wing extremism, however the same forms of hate speech, violence and harassment can also come from completely different sources.

The Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO) (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet 2015) asserted in their report that there is inadequate Norwegian research into the types, extent and harmful effects of hate speech and strongly recommends focussing on research in this field. There is also a lack of knowledge about different groups' experiences with hate speech, who is behind this hate speech, and measures that could prevent and limit the extent of hate speech. LDO specifically recommends the following:

- Increased funding to research the types, extent and damaging effects of hate speech, characteristics of those who make extensive use of hate speech, and the measures required to prevent and combat hate speech.
- Funding towards preparing a knowledge overview of the media's experiences with measures aimed at limiting the extent of hate speech in public debate. The media's experiences with measures such as moderation, full-name policy etc. could be of great benefit to media players that do not have experience with measures for limiting the extent of hate speech.
- Representative national studies of the extent of hate speech are comprehensive and time-consuming projects. Because it is important that we are able to create a profile of the type and extent of different types of hate speech in the near future, the Ombud desires a time-limited monitoring mechanism of four months. The monitoring should focus in particular on hate speech in political debates and among important opinion formers, as well as hate speech in a few selected social media. This type of monitoring mechanism will make a positive contribution to the knowledge base required for the development of effective measures against the types, extent and harmful effects of different forms of hate speech (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet 2015, section 2.1).

With regard to hate crime, the Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (2015) also maintained that there is limited research into the extent, types and consequences of hate crime in Norway. The lack of this type of knowledge makes it difficult to develop reliable measures. It is therefore recommended that the authorities focus on obtaining more research into the types, extent and harmful effects of hate crime by allocating earmarked funds to Norwegian research that can respond to the lack of knowledge stated above.

We fully support these recommendations from LDO. There is clearly a need for more research of hateful rhetoric and threats on the internet and of hate crime more generally.<sup>10</sup> We require knowledge about who the players are and what motivates them, the content of their hateful rhetoric, who this hateful rhetoric is directed at, how this affects the victims and how a democratic society can combat this hateful rhetoric through counter arguments and relevant policing measures

There is also a need for more knowledge about the connection between hate speech and threats on the one hand and the actual committing of violent acts and other physical harassment on the other. It is primarily the police and security services that have the task of assessing whether threats that have been made constitute a real danger of actually being

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<sup>10</sup> See also the feature article by Anne Birgitta Nilsen: "Language must be included in the work against radicalisation". <http://forskning.no/meninger/kronikk/2013/11/sprak-ma-inn-i-arbeidet-mot-radikalisering>. Nilsen also strongly advocates an increased focus on research of hateful rhetoric on the internet as part of the work against radicalisation.

carried out and who may implement measures to prevent or stop people who receive threats from being exposed to physical attack. These types of decisions must often be made based on very limited knowledge and with a great deal of uncertainty. There is therefore a need for knowledge that can make the police and PST better able to assess threats and possibly intervene with slightly less uncertainty. This can involve better methods of analysis for differentiating empty threats from other behaviour that can signal actual intent. There is also a need for better knowledge about the effects of certain police methods, for example, preventive dialogue. When someone makes threats, the most common method of intervention is that the police have a serious talk to the person in question, partly in an attempt to clarify whether there was actual intent to harm behind the threats, and if so, to make the person refrain from continuing with these plans. More generally, the police also use these types of conversations to influence the person to stop making threatening and hateful remarks towards others. There is almost no systematic research of how this type of preventive dialogue actually works and what may make it work better.

### **Coordination and initiation of local efforts**

The main reason for preventing radicalisation and terrorism is that they constitute, literally, a "wicked problem". However, prevention of radicalisation and extremism also comes under the political science term "wicked problem". The term covers complex challenges in which no individual player has sufficient information and knowledge to be able to solve the problem, no one has an adequate enough overview to be able to formulate necessary methods and measures and none of the players have sufficient leeway to be able to manage the problem alone. "Wicked problems" are impossible to solve completely and can only be limited. As a general rule, the problem is linked to other problems that are impossible to solve and difficult to reduce, such as when extremism is linked together with social marginalisation and with conflicts that occur in other parts of the world, such as, for example, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There will therefore be many and varied viewpoints about how the problem can be reduced as well as the measures and players that should be prioritised in terms of resources.<sup>11</sup>

This knowledge overview demonstrates the complexity of the problem. Terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation are studied from many different perspectives and based on an almost infinite number of issues. It is therefore surprising that there has hardly been any focus on how such a complex problem may be prevented and faced, particularly at local and municipal level. Most prevention efforts must take place in a municipal setting and possible rehabilitation of extremists or foreign fighters must also occur in a municipality. With regard to prevention and rehabilitation, a number of players will be involved: from the municipality, county municipality (cf. upper secondary school), the labour and welfare administration, specialist health service, resource centres for violence and traumatic stress (NKVTS in Norway), the police, the security service and a number of civil players, from local mosques and congregations to local sports clubs and political youth organisations. This involves clarifying responsibilities between the central government, county, municipality and civil players, as well as preventing disclaiming of responsibility and attempts to push the problem over to other agencies. Efforts and measures have a professional aspect, however also involve local political prioritisation of resources whereby ineffective symbolic measures can appear

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<sup>11</sup> There is a great deal of political science literature relating to "wicked problems". A standard article focussing on how such problems must be met with coordinated strategies is Roberts (2000). "Wicked problems" are also discussed in Lægred, Fimreite, Rykkja and Lango's (2014) book concerning "Organisation, Civil Protection and Crisis Management" (in Norwegian).

as convenient political solutions. With the exception of the above-mentioned and recently commenced research project on “The Role of municipalities in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism”, in the last decade there have not been any research-based descriptions, analyses or evaluations of local preventive measures, cross-agency and interdisciplinary coordination or of political strategies and dilemmas.

This type of "wicked problem" will most probably be best faced through cooperative strategies in which multiple players are involved such that they can all move in the same direction. To use the 22 July Commission's finding: The resources have to find each other. At the same time, it is clear that it can be complicated and time-consuming to achieve a mutual understanding and commitment whereby, in the next stage, the players contribute their resources in the correct order at the correct time. How best to manage this also requires research, i.e. descriptions of activities, analyses and evaluations of local work. This can occur in the form of extensive studies of how the challenge is managed in a specific local community, comparative studies of how this is managed in different local communities, and evaluations of more defined projects or methods (for example, mentor and exit work).

An important lesson for how Norwegian society managed the previous wave of right-wing extremism 15-20 years ago was that research played an important role at in the local communities where the challenges were occurring. This involved formative research that was close interaction with the local players and processes. Focussing on formative research that can increase the local ability to solve serious challenges, while at the same time being able to obtain experience and knowledge from the local learning arenas, should also be a sensible approach given the present challenges.

### **Databases and source data**

There is also a need to build up and maintain databases of terror-related incidents. Several researchers (including Jan Oskar Engene, Tore Bjørgo, Petter Nesser and Cato Hemmingby) have developed overviews of incidents that cover limited time periods or specific types of terrorism or political violence, however this spread data has not been collated in a manner that utilises the potential for longitudinal or comparative analyses, or other forms of analyses, to establish relevant patterns. Arrangements must be made for these types of databases and data sets to be able to be used by other researchers than those who originally collected the data, even if the original researchers must of course have a first right to analyse and publish the data.

An excellent example of researchers making their data sets available to others is Jan Oskar Engene and his TWEED-database (Engene 2007).

### **Ethical issues relating to research of radicalisation and violent extremism**

As discussed above, research into radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism involves major issues concerning research ethics. A central issue is the rules and restrictions that should regulate the collection of personal data about people who are involved in violent extremism. It is clear that normal standards for research ethics also apply in this field, however there are also many considerations that come into this picture and a number of different problems.

For example, we have seen that academic researchers, investigative journalists, political activists and analysts with the police and intelligence services conduct many of the same types of analyses. However, these different categories of analysts are also regulated by very different ethical frameworks and standards. Among other things, there are variations in terms

of the type of data they can use, the extent to which they have to obtain informed and voluntary consent from those they are studying and how they can publish their analyses. Some researchers may also have several roles simultaneous, by combining academic studies with being political activists or work with the police or intelligence services. For example, can the latter use data or knowledge they have obtained through their work with, for instance, the police, as part of academic work? Among other issues that should be clarified are: How far does the requirement for informed consent extend when research is being conducted about terrorists and violent extremists? Who is legitimate to interview? (What about Anders B. Breivik?) Can research into violent extremism be value-neutral? Who is the research being conducted for? And how strongly does the requirement for transparency apply to the objectives of the research? How far do the norms relating to confidentiality and anonymity extend when researching violent extremism?<sup>12</sup>

There has not been much discussion of these types of issues in relation to research ethics in either Norway or internationally. It would be useful to have an international research conference and an anthology of research ethical dilemmas and issues relating to research of violent extremism and terrorism.

### **The balance between prevention and freedom**

Absolute security gives no freedom, and absolute freedom gives no security. However, it is not the case that the less control and security we have the more freedom we are given - or less freedom, more security. If we cannot send spouses to work and children to school and also feel reasonably safe that they will return home alive, we do not feel that we have freedom. Furthermore, if we impose repressive security and control measures against specific groups in society, we will most probably create aggression and resistance and perhaps also recruitment to violent extremist groups. We would then undermine security. If we disregard all other considerations to prevent terrorism, then we create a society that we do not want to have. A good society, i.e. the best we can create in the real world, is probably located somewhere on the middle ground between freedom and security and not at one or either of the extremes. If we attempt to combat any form of control or impose any form of control, in both cases this will push us towards the edge and away from a good society. It is therefore an important issue to explore the balance between preventing terrorism and preserving a society that safeguards the rule of law and personal integrity of its citizens. This is an area in which a great deal of research has already been conducted, but it is a topic we will never be finished with and for which the answers must be continually challenged.

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These are our suggestions for topics and issues which we consider require more research. These are not definitive answers. However we hope that they can be the starting point for input from other researchers and from users of research concerning radicalisation and violent extremism.

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<sup>12</sup> Tore Bjørgo discussed these issues in his submission at a seminar on research ethics in connection with the 22 July case at Litteraturhuset (House of Literature) on 25 April 2014 and at the conference for the Society for Terrorism Research in Boston on 17–19 September 2014.

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<sup>13</sup> This bibliography covers a broader range of literature than what is the main topic of this report, which is “Research on *prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism: A status of knowledge*”. Thus, many of these publications are about violent extremism more in general and not necessarily about prevention. However, it gives an idea about the amount and diversity of research on radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in Norway (and to a more limited extent, in Sweden and Denmark).

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