

## Research Notes

# Countering Violent Extremism Globally: A New Global CVE Dataset

by Caitlin Ambrozik

### Abstract

*Following 9/11, the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan reiterated the realization that terrorism could not be defeated solely by a military response. Instead, countries began to expand their counterterrorism toolkits by including “soft approaches” to counterterrorism also known as countering violent extremism or CVE programming. However, a global approach to CVE does not currently exist. Rather, countries have either chosen to pursue different CVE strategies or none at all. This paper asks, what CVE approaches are countries pursuing and how robust are domestic CVE programs? To answer these questions, this paper presents a new global CVE dataset that analyzes global CVE strategies across time. This Research Note finds that CVE programming is still in its infancy and more robust CVE strategies are needed to mitigate the various terrorist threats that countries face.*

**Keywords:** Countering violent extremism, preventing violent extremism, counterterrorism, terrorism

### Introduction

The rise of ISIS helped transform state responses to terrorism. Instead of primarily relying on military tactics to counter terrorism, states started to expand their counter terrorism repertoires to include non-violent and preventive responses to terrorism. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) refers to a set of non-punitive policies and programs that aim to prevent violent extremism by addressing its root causes.[1] The term applies to a wide range of programming most often associated with five types of programs: prevention, intervention, disengagement, deradicalization and reintegration programming. Prevention programming attempts to prevent violent extremism from surfacing. Intervention programs seek to provide assistance to individuals on the path towards radicalization. Deradicalization, disengagement, and reintegration (DDR) programs target individuals who already are engaged in violent extremism by providing these individuals with assistance in leaving violent extremism behind and reintegrating back into society. Consequently, CVE provides governments with options to tackle violent extremism besides solely relying on reactive strategies.

The United Kingdom was one of the first movers on the concept of CVE. The United Kingdom announced its broader counterterrorism strategy, known as *CONTEST*, following the 2005 London bombings.[2] The UK incorporated CVE, formally known as *Prevent*, into its broader counterterrorism strategy. In doing so, the UK uses a variety of programming to prevent individuals from joining or supporting terrorist organizations.[3] Since the beginning years of *Prevent*, other countries have followed suit.

A conglomeration of efforts at the international level accelerated the trend towards implementing CVE efforts in various countries. The United Nations issued a series of resolutions starting in 2014 that outlined the importance of CVE and encouraged Member States to engage in CVE efforts at the local level.[4] These resolutions culminated in 2016 with the United Nations Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism presented to the General Assembly. The Plan of Action called on Member States to develop comprehensive approaches to counter violent extremism. In response, the Assembly adopted a resolution that formalized the Secretary-General’s call for Member States to develop national and regional plans of action to prevent violent extremism.[5] The efforts of the United Nations were coupled with guidance from regional governing bodies such as the European Union. The European Agenda on Security followed the UN’s call to action with guidance issued in 2016 that outlined EU priorities for the prevention of radicalization.[6] To assist European countries

on developing approaches to counter violent extremism, the EU developed tools such as the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) to provide Member States a platform to share best practices on countering violent extremism.

Despite these efforts, a global approach to CVE does not exist. Moreover, a dataset to track global trends in CVE and the different approaches that states take also does not yet exist. In an effort to fill this void, in this paper I present a new global CVE dataset that serves as a first effort to outline global efforts to prevent terrorism. In the first part of this article, I provide an overview of the global CVE database, including the types of information I benchmark and the measurement procedures I use to do so. Next, I provide a broad overview of global trends in CVE to analyze how governments have responded to the push for CVE. The paper concludes with policy implications.

### ***Overview of the Global CVE Dataset***

The Global CVE Dataset provides researchers and policymakers with an overview of CVE efforts in countries across the globe. The dataset covers the CVE practices of 84 countries across seven years (2010-2017).

#### *Scope:*

The Dataset includes eight indicators to track global CVE efforts, including:

1. *CVE National Strategy*: An indicator of whether a country has a national CVE strategy in place as either a separate strategy or part of a larger counter-terrorism strategy.
2. *CVE Programming*: An indicator of whether a country has implemented any CVE programming.
3. *Type of CVE Programming*: The type of CVE programming implemented within a country is disaggregated amongst four sub-categories. This measure captures whether a country has prevention, intervention, counter-messaging or deradicalization/disengagement/reintegration programming.
4. *Role of Religion*: An indicator for whether the CVE programming is religiously focused.
5. *Civil Society Participation*: An indicator for whether the civil society within a country is active in implementing CVE programming.
6. *Government Participation*: An indicator for whether the government within a country is active in implementing CVE programming.
7. *Relevance/Specific CVE Programming*: An indicator for whether the CVE programming is CVE-relevant or CVE-specific.
8. *Concern About CVE Efforts*: An indicator for whether the CVE programming threatens religious freedom.

Given the variety of information captured in this dataset, the data allows for the exploration of a variety of different research questions, such as what countries have national CVE strategies? What types of CVE programming do countries implement and why? What types of actors are active in the CVE environment within a country? How has CVE changed over time? Does CVE programming threaten civil and social human rights? Why do countries implement CVE programming? How does the type of government impact a country's CVE strategy? And how does guidance from international organizations impact state CVE strategies?

#### *Data Sources*

To create the dataset, I employ content analysis of qualitative material that describes state CVE practices. Measuring global efforts to counter violent extremism requires systematic qualitative information over time. Thus, I utilize the only data source that provides such information, the annual *US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism*.<sup>[7]</sup> When coding the national strategies of European countries, I crosscheck the information with

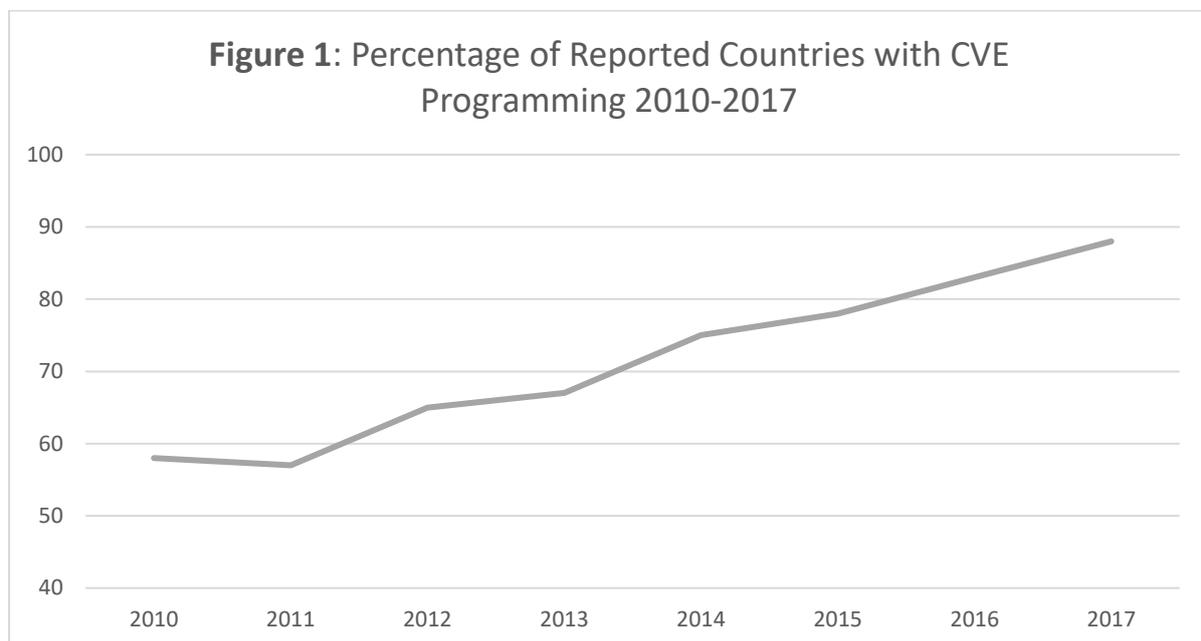
the European Union's repository of national CVE strategies for Member States.[8]

Variables are categorical to complement the extent of the source information.[9] Due to national security sensitivities, many countries are reluctant to expose the true scope of CVE efforts. Additionally, multiple actors are involved in implementing CVE programming ranging from state and local actors to international development organizations. Thus, information on the exact numbers of programs is rare.

As an initial dataset, there are limitations to the data. First, given that the data source is from the US State Department, there is potential bias in the data to favor US allies. To account for this bias, I crosscheck the information with other data sources when possible. However, at this time, an additional systematic overview of global CVE efforts does not exist, which limits the ability to fully crosscheck all the information. Second, given the limited information that states provide on domestic CVE efforts, the full scope of CVE programming for all countries is unknown. Third, since the source of information is the US State Department, the dataset excludes information on domestic CVE practices in the United States given that this information is not collected by the State Department. Finally, this dataset only captures domestic CVE efforts and consequently excludes international CVE efforts pursued by states and international organizations. Despite these limitations, the database is a first step effort to outline global CVE efforts and provides information to track global CVE trends.

### ***Global CVE Trends***

The number of countries with reported CVE programming has grown since 2010. In 2010, only 58% of the reported countries in the State Department's Country Reports had some type of CVE programming. The number of countries with reported CVE programming has grown steadily over time culminating to 88% of the reported countries with programming in 2017. Figure 1 below displays this trend from 2010 to 2017.[10]



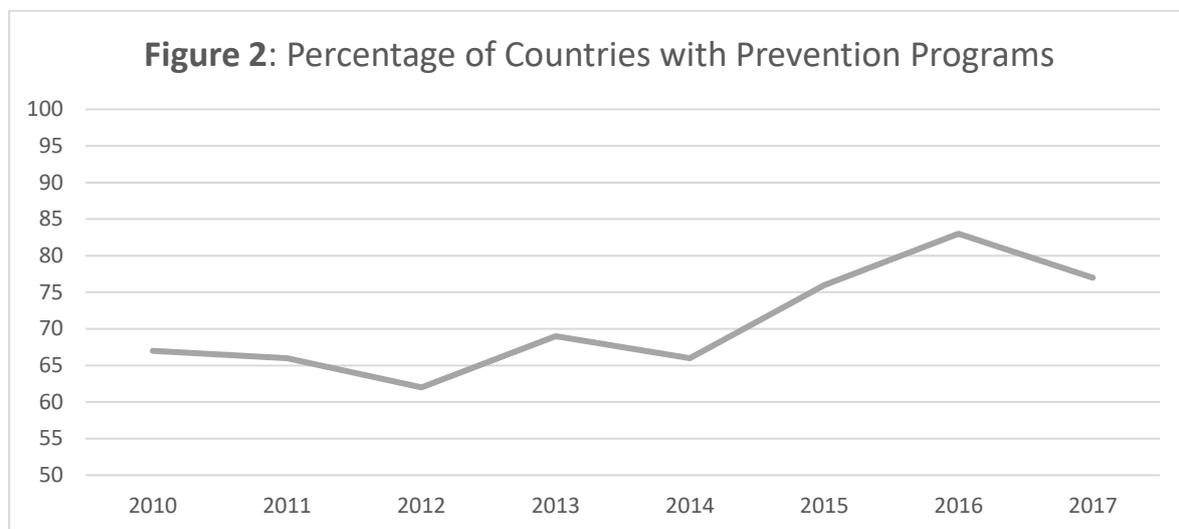
However, the percentage of countries with CVE programming can be deceiving given the broad scope of CVE and varying country definitions of what programs qualify as CVE programming. For example, a growing debate within the CVE field is whether CVE programming is or should be distinct from development projects. Some may argue that development programs can indirectly mitigate violent extremism by addressing social and economic grievances within a country.[11] The difficulty associated with determining what programs count as CVE led many to start distinguishing between CVE-specific and CVE-relevant programming.[12] As Romaniuk (2015) outlines, CVE-specific programming refers to “measures that prevent or suppress violent extremism in a direct, targeted fashion,” while CVE-relevant measures are broader in scope and attempt to in-

directly reduce vulnerability to extremism.[13] Consequently, I also coded for whether the reported programming can be considered CVE-specific or CVE-relevant based on Romaniuk’s definitions. Since 2010, countries are reportedly expanding their CVE repertoires to include both CVE-specific and CVE-relevant programming. In 2010, 33% of reported countries had what I deemed as CVE-relevant programming, 33% of countries had CVE-specific programming, and 34% of countries had both CVE-specific and CVE-relevant programming. In 2017, 33% of reported countries continued to only have CVE-relevant programs and 15% of countries only had CVE-specific programs. However, 47% of reported countries incorporated both CVE-relevant and CVE-specific programming in their efforts to counter violent extremism. These findings suggest that CVE programming is still in its nascent stages. Despite the increase of countries with reported CVE programming, many countries still have programs that only indirectly attempt to prevent or counter violent extremism.

The dataset is further categorized by the type of CVE programming implemented within a country. I distinguish between prevention, intervention, counter-messaging, and DDR programming. Below is an overview of the types of programs and examples of common programs found across the globe.

### *Prevention*

As mentioned, prevention programming aims to address the root causes or grievances that lead to violent extremism. However, there is not a consensus on what factors “cause” violent extremism. In fact, studies have found that often times it is a multitude of different factors that leads an individual to support or join a violent extremist group.[14] Given this, prevention programs are broad in scope and vary across countries and even within countries. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, prevention programs are consistently popular across countries. Figure 2 below displays the percentage of countries with reported CVE programs that have prevention programming.



Depending on the preferences of the program developer, prevention programs can range from focusing on economic or social grievances that align with development objectives to training programs that aim to raise awareness of violent extremism. For example, in Burundi, the State Department reported that international organizations in Burundi implemented vocational training and economic development programs as a means to counter violent extremism.[15] Other countries, such as France, reportedly use integration policies as a means to counter violent extremism. According to the State Department, “France considers its integration programs for all French citizens and residents a major tool in countering radicalization and extremism.” [16] Other countries take a more direct approach to countering extremism by offering training programs to frontline workers and the public in an effort to inform the public on the dangers of violent extremism. For instance, using funds from the European Union, the Hellenic Police—Greece’s national police service—organized training on radicalization to violence for frontline workers including police, prison guards, and customs and immigration officials in 2016.[17]

*Intervention*

Unlike prevention programs that can be both CVE-specific and CVE-relevant, intervention programs almost always are CVE-specific programs. Intervention programming attempts to prevent individuals from joining a violent extremist group by offering an individual an “off-ramp” from the path towards radicalization.[18] Despite the direct link between intervention programs in countering violent extremism, intervention programming is rare at the global level given that only a handful of countries have implemented intervention programs. Even in 2017, the State Department only reported six countries with intervention programs: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.[19]

The limited number of countries with reported intervention programs can be due to a number of reasons. For instance, intervention programs may be difficult to develop and implement due to the sensitivity of working with individuals who may show signs of radicalization. It is also possible that intervention programs are informally implemented within a country rather than institutionalized, which can make the identification of these programs difficult to capture. Nonetheless, intervention programming is still an option that countries can use to counter violent extremism.

*Counter-Messaging*

The dataset also captures any reported counter-messaging programs or campaigns within a country. As argued by others, messaging campaigns are needed to counter terrorist propaganda.[20] Following the rise of ISIS, governments increasingly pursued counter-messaging campaigns against the group in an effort to condemn the group’s actions and prevent individuals from traveling to Iraq and Syria to become foreign fighters. In the height of ISIS’s reign of terror in 2015, 72% of reported countries with CVE programming had an institutionalized counter-messaging campaign. However, global counter-messaging efforts have dropped since then. In 2017, only 60% of reported countries with CVE programming had counter-messaging programs.

Countries also took different approaches to countering terrorist propaganda. Counter-messaging efforts range from efforts that directly confront terrorist propaganda to efforts that aim to promote a specific narrative. One notable program that directly confronts terrorist propaganda includes a joint initiative between the United States and United Arab Emirates known as the Sawab Center.[21] Additionally, in Pakistan, the government through its Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the military’s Inter-Services Public Relations, used strategic communities to build support for counterterrorism initiatives and to counter radicalization.[22] Rather than creating counter-messaging centers or directly confronting terrorist propaganda, some countries monitored sermons and formed their own religious narratives by promoting religious moderation to mitigate extremist content from reaching the public. For example, the Moroccan government promoted the teaching of moderate Islam and developed educational curriculum to foster religious moderation.[23] Despite the variations in approaches, all of these efforts attempt to counter violent extremism through the use of strategic messaging.

*DDR*

Finally, the dataset also captures deradicalization, disengagement, and reintegration/rehabilitation programming, known broadly as DDR. Although these programs are distinct, DDR programming targets individuals who already support or have joined violent extremist groups. One of the most well-known program in this category is Saudi Arabia’s deradicalization program that is part of the Kingdom’s prison system.[24] Other DDR programs are also implemented within government prison systems including programs in European countries such as Italy.

DDR programs have become slightly more popular over time. In 2010, 41% of countries with reported CVE programs had DDR programming and this increased to 46% in 2017. Although slight, the increased popularity of DDR programming can possibly be attributed to the return of foreign fighters from conflicts in Iraq and Syria. However, as with intervention programs, DDR programming is complex and requires proper resources and professionals to implement. This could also explain why DDR programming is less popular compared to

other types of programs such as prevention and counter-messaging efforts.

### *Mixed Programming*

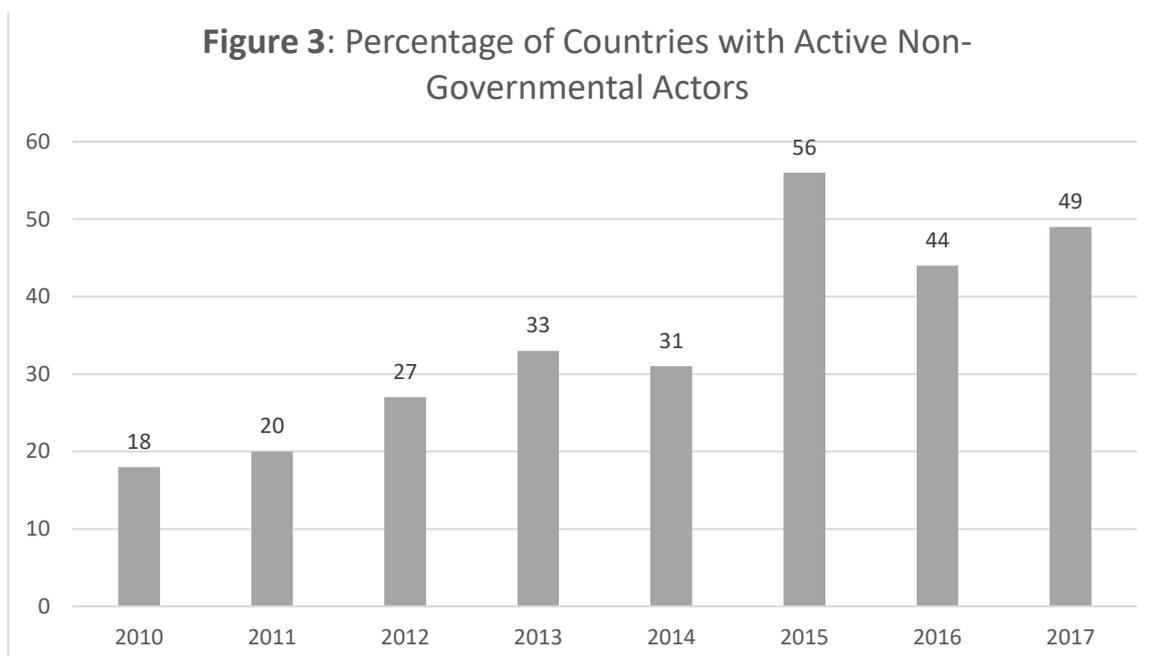
Although there are some countries with only one type of CVE program, other countries do have mixed approaches to CVE. Governments and non-governmental actors are increasingly diversifying the types of CVE programs that are implemented within their countries. In 2010, only approximately 40% of countries with CVE programming had more than one type of CVE program. However, by 2017, 64% of countries with CVE programming had implemented more than one type of program. These statistics suggest that countries are utilizing the multitude of programs associated with CVE including programs to prevent and intervene in the radicalization process by either offering individuals an off-ramp or helping those already radicalized with a way out.

### *Actors Involved*

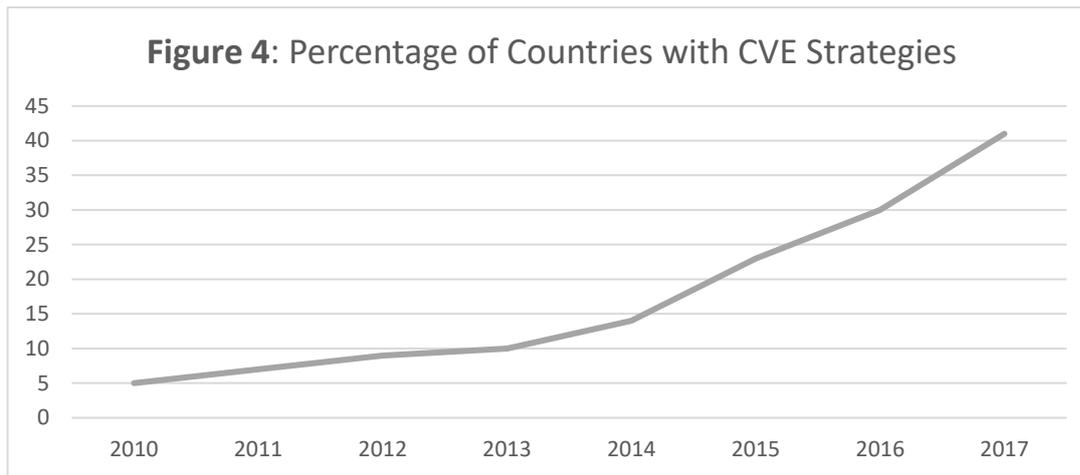
Given the multitude of programs associated with CVE, CVE programming can be implemented by a variety of actors. The most obvious actor is the government, but non-governmental actors such as organizations, religious institutions, or even private citizens can develop and implement CVE programming. The dataset includes a measure to outline what actors are actively involved in developing and implementing CVE programming within a given country. According to the State Department's Annual Terrorism Reports, governments were the most active in developing and implementing CVE programming across time. In 2017, all of the governments in countries with reported CVE programming were active in developing and implementing the programs. As depicted in Figure 3 below, the involvement of non-governmental actors in CVE has fluctuated over time. Although CVE programming is likely to remain dominated by government involvement, community involvement will likely continue to increase given efforts by international organizations and governments to encourage community-led CVE initiatives.

## **Global CVE Strategies**

As mentioned in the introduction, in 2016, the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action called on Member States to develop comprehensive national and regional strategies to counter violent extremism. However, formalized national CVE strategies remain rare. As depicted in Figure 4 below, in 2017, the State Department only reported 41% of all countries within the report had a national CVE strategy in place. Although this number has slowly increased since 2014, the majority of countries do not have a national strategy in place. This statistic suggests that CVE remains in its nascent stages when comparing CVE efforts globally.



Of the countries that do have national CVE strategies, governments develop different strategies to tackle the problem. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, work closely with community stakeholders to counter violent extremism. The Netherlands' CVE approach falls under Prevent, one of the five areas of intervention associated with its National Counterstrategy for 2016-2020.[25] Prevent actions attempt to “prevent and disrupt extremism and to foil terrorist attacks.” [26] Although the strategy is centralized under the national government, the strategy calls on national authorities to work closely with civil society organizations and the private sector to take preventive actions. The strategy also outlines the need to take early and tailored actions against violent extremism because each case of radicalization is complex, unique, and dynamic. The Netherlands is not the only European country that pursues a multifaceted strategy and works with civil society; others include the United Kingdom [27] and Sweden, [28] to name a few.



Other countries pursue strategies that are primarily government-led. For instance, Serbia's CVE strategy outlines the responsibilities for all government agencies in implementing the strategy.[29] Although the strategy includes funding for the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society to strengthen communication and cooperation between the state and civil society, the majority of the strategy consists of government-led initiatives to counter violent extremism. This strategy is in stark contrast to many European strategies that place a greater emphasis on the involvement of civil society in the design and implementation of programs.

A country's strategy is not just dependent on the primary actors responsible for developing and implementing policy, but also the root causes a country decides to tackle. However, countries with formalized CVE strategies are increasingly developing multifaceted strategies that tackle a bevy of root causes. This approach corresponds to academic findings that individuals radicalize for a variety of different reasons.[30] Kosovo is one such country that takes this approach and in its National Counterterrorism Strategy, the government outlined the need for a diversified strategy that addresses multiple push-and-pull factors.[31]

#### *Concerns with CVE*

Although CVE programming is becoming an increasingly popular policy tool, CVE programming is not without controversy. Studies have identified various potential negative consequences associated with CVE programming including the potential for such programming to stigmatize certain communities.[32] The potential for CVE programming to be used by governments as a surveillance program is another common concern associated with CVE programs.[32] Consequently, it is important to note any misuse of CVE programming that can negatively influence or threaten human rights. Although the State Department's reports do not comprehensively outline all the possible negative consequences associated with CVE in each country and researchers should cautiously use this indicator, the reports do indicate when a country's CVE programs threaten religious freedom. For example, in 2012, Uzbekistan's efforts to curb violent extremism consisted of monitoring religion and published religious content. Consequently, the State Department flagged the government's monopoly over religious publications as potentially problematic. However, these cases remain in the minority amongst all countries involved in CVE efforts. In 2017, the State Department implied CVE programming was potentially problematic in only five countries.

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## **Conclusion**

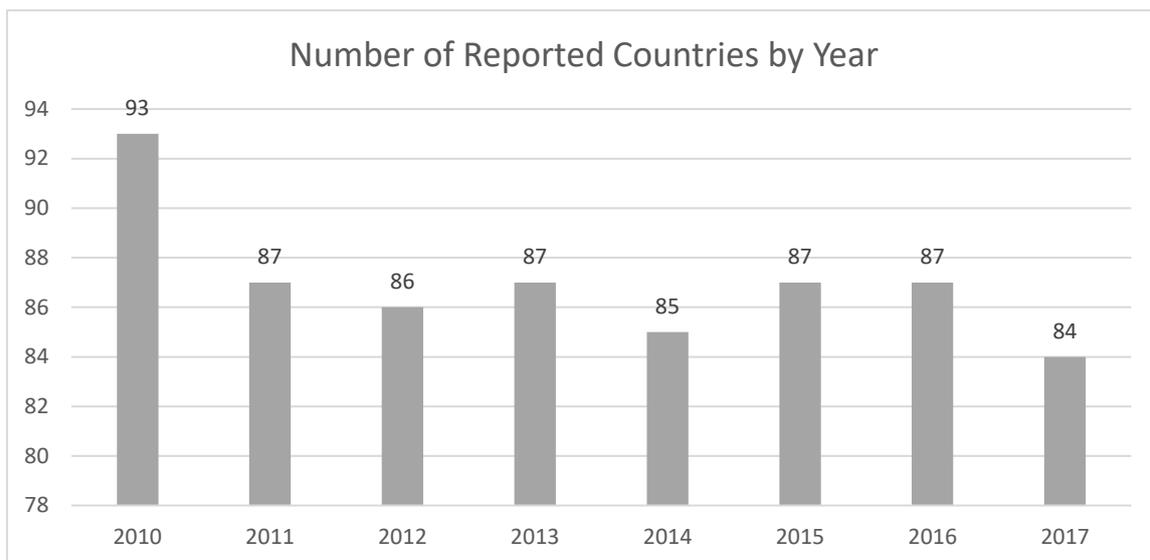
This article presented a new dataset on global CVE practices. The dataset is the first step in understanding global CVE trends in a systematic way. With eight variables, the dataset provides researchers a broad overview of CVE by country for the period of 2010 to 2017. The main data source, the State Department's Annual Country Reports on Terrorism, provides a consistent data source to track trends over time. However, the dataset is meant to be supplemented with more detailed analyses on country-level efforts to provide a more comprehensive overview of CVE efforts. Moreover, future efforts can crosscheck this information and expand the scope of the data.

Nonetheless, the dataset reveals several important CVE trends. First, CVE is growing in popularity with more countries developing and implementing CVE programming. Prevention programming remains the most popular type of CVE programming and intervention programs the least popular. Despite the upward trends of CVE programming, many of the programs only indirectly prevent or counter violent extremism. Further, countries with CVE strategies remain the minority. These factors suggest that despite the progress, CVE still remains in its infancy.

These trends yield several policy implications. First, more effort is needed to encourage governments to develop diverse CVE strategies with CVE-specific programming. The data also suggest that countries need additional assistance in developing and implementing intervention programs. Finally, since some countries continue to use CVE as a means to restrict religious tolerance, there is a continued need to ensure that CVE practitioners share best practices and dissuade governments from misusing the programs for ulterior motives.

Besides expanding the dataset, future research can use this data to help explain the trends found in this article. Understanding why some governments develop strategies and programs while others do not will help policy-makers understand how to further expand CVE. Likewise, future research can explore why certain types of CVE programs are more popular than others. Altogether, this dataset provides researchers with a multitude of research avenues to pursue.

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**Appendix****Notes**

[1] George Selim, “Approaches for Countering Violent Extremism at Home and Abroad,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668, no. 1 (2016): 94-101.

[2] Paul Thomas. “Failed and Friendless: the UK’s ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’ Programme.” *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2010): 442-458.

[3] Home Office. Prevent Strategy. Cm 8092, June. London: TSO, 2011.

[4] United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2148, 2242, and 2250 encourage Member States to use CVE to address the foreign fighter threat and to increase women’s and the youth’s involvement.

[5] United Nations General Assembly. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Review, A/RES/70/291, 1 July 2016. Available at: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/ares70291>

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[9] For a detailed outline of the coding of the variables, please see the codebook.

[10] The number of countries reported in the State Department’s reports vary from year to year. Consequently, the charts are reported as percentages rather than actual numbers. Please see the appendix for a breakdown of the number of countries reported each year.

[11] See for example, William F.S. Miles, “Deploying Development to Counter Terrorism: Post-9/11 Transformation of U.S. Foreign Aid to Africa.” *African Studies Review* 55, no.3 (2012): 27-60. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002020600007198>

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[13] Romaniuk, 2015, p. 9.

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[25] The other areas of intervention include: procure, protect, prepare, and prosecute. For more information please see, National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2016-2020, July 2016. Available at: [https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/LR\\_100495\\_rapportage\\_EN\\_V3\\_tcm32-251878.pdf](https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/LR_100495_rapportage_EN_V3_tcm32-251878.pdf)

[26] National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, p. 4.

[27] Please see, HM Government, Counter-terrorism Strategy (CONTEST), 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018>

[28] Please see, Prevent, Preempt, Protect The Swedish Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2014, Government Office of Sweden, available at: [https://www.government.se/contentassets/b56cad17b4434118b16cf449dbdc973d/en\\_strategi-slutlig-eng.pdf](https://www.government.se/contentassets/b56cad17b4434118b16cf449dbdc973d/en_strategi-slutlig-eng.pdf)

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