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The Complexities in Jordan's Institutional Response to Violent Extremism

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Abstract: Violent Extremism (VE) in Jordan is mainly driven by structural factors on the community rather than individual level. This necessitates a multi-faceted services-oriented institutional response to VE. Instead, Jordan's response is marked by heavy securitization and a misplaced emphasis on religion as a driver of VE. To understand how and why these two characteristics have evolved, this article examines the effect of functional pressures, veto-powers, and the relation between trust and legitimacy through historical institutionalism. Building on insights from 25 interviews with government officials and non-governmental actors, the article argues that Jordan should reduce the veto-powers of security actors, encourage higher internal adaptability, and design Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) policies that address structural drivers of VE for Jordan's institutional response to VE to succeed.

Keywords: historical institutionalism, Jordan, extremism, securitisation, PVE

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Introduction

The literature on Violent Extremism (VE) in Jordan has generally focused on the drivers of VE among youth either as case studies of individual extremists, or studies that examined underlying socio-economic and political factors that explain the phenomena in Jordan (Gråtrud 2021).[1] The literature on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) is generally donor-funded and therefore focuses on preventative interventions through economic empowerment, political participation, and/or media literacy. Only one study by the project Contexts of Violent Extremism in MENA and Balkan Societies (2020) generally examined national approaches to VE in the country (Mhadeen, Feisal, and Štikovac Clark 2021). However, no study has systematically analysed the national response to PVE on the policy level from an institutionalism perspective.

This article examines Jordan's macro-level response to VE and it explores how this institutional response to VE has evolved. To answer this main question, the article further explores: How did the major shocks in the history of VE in Jordan affect its institutional structure? Who are the main PVE actors and how their different perspectives on VE affect PVE programming? What are the main characteristics of Jordan's national response to VE? How did the institutional relations, and citizens' trust in these institutions, lead to the rise in the main characteristics of Jordan's institutional response to VE? And what are the gaps in the state's institutional response?

In answering these questions, the article argues that Jordan's current institutional response to VE has emerged due to two key external shocks that consolidated the heavy reliance on securitisation as a preferred approach to response to VE threats. This control by security actor limits Jordan's institutional adaptability both within security institutions but also in other sectors, mainly due to the veto powers enjoyed by security actors. Jordan's response also relies heavily on emphasising religion as a driver since it conceals the government's responsibility leading to VE through its failures in economic and political sectors. This has clarified two key gaps in the institutional response: the need to reconceptualize the VE threat, and the weak coordination mechanisms between state institutions.

The following section situated this analysis in historical institutionalism and then clarifies the methodology. Section four analyses how the 2005 Amman Bombings and the killing of fighter pilot Al-Kassasbeh constituted turning points in Jordan's institutional response to VE. Section five then examines the two main PVE institutional actors and explores key diverging approaches to PVE. Section six unpacks the two characteristics of Jordan's response to VE: securitization and emphasis on religion as a driver of VE. Section seven discusses gaps in Jordan's institutional response before concluding the analysis.

1 For the seven drivers defined in the research framework of the CONNEKT project, also see the introduction to this special issue (Kapidžić, Hirkić, and Turčalo 2025).

Theoretical Framework

"New institutionalism" is a theoretical approach in contemporary political science. It identifies the rules, norms, practices, and relationships that influence patterns of behaviour in politics and policymaking (Cairney 2019) and considers institutions as the most important variable in studying political science (Bodnieks 2020). In this way new institutionalism can be compared to "old" institutionalism that characterises political science in the late 19th and 20th century and is defined by its focus on the role of law in governance (Bodnieks 2020). Although the term was coined by March and Olsen in the 1980s (March and Olsen 1984), previous work in sociology and political science has acknowledged the central role of institutions (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992). This includes Skocpol's (Skocpol 1979) and Schmitter's works (Schmitter 1974).

Despite several other variations (Bodnieks 2020), the literature on new institutionalism generally distinguishes three approaches: rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, and historical institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalism recognises institutions as norms and rules that offer opportunities and constrict actors' choices (Hoffmann 2000; Lecours 2005, 16). Institutions are used by political actors to achieve self-interest. Whereas sociological institutionalism is concerned with how institutions produce values and patterns of behaviour (Lowndes and Roberts 2013).

Scholars generally agree that historical institutionalism acknowledges both that human beings are self-interest rational actors and norm-abiding actors and explain that historical institutionalism focuses on current and historical relations between institutions to interpret political choices and changes in political life. According to Steinmo, it answers why institutional outcomes occur or why an institutional decision was made. Therefore, it stands between rational choice and "appropriateness" and argues that political outcomes are a product of contexts that shape interests and behaviour (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992).

It is worth pointing out that in new institutionalism, institutions refer to "state's long-term practice in relation to diplomacy, law, war, etc., not to bureaucratic structures," which are commonly referred to as "organisations" (Stivachtis and Webber 2014). March and Olsen developed the definition of institutions to include settings where actors act, and processes that either determine political impact or translate behaviour into structures and rules (March and Olsen 1984).

Historical institutionalism is also concerned with institutional stability. It, therefore, examines the impact of previous institutional choices on their evolution. It analyses past decision and their influence on institutional design and government systems (Bodnieks 2020). The focus on history in this branch of institutionalism enables researchers to dismiss the notion of variable independence and instead examine the effects of interdependence of causal variables (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992).

Two specific factors examined within historical institutionalism are of relevance to the analysis in this article. The first factor is institutional change and the role of external shocks in influencing change, an idea referred to as "punctuated equilibrium" by Thelen and Steinmo (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992). Lowndes and Roberts went to the extent of defining institutionalisation as a process of adaptation to external challenges (Lowndes and Roberts 2013). However, Steinman details the criticism this focus on external shocks has received since it denies human agency in influencing change and argues that ideas shape institutional changes (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992). As he put it: "Institutional change comes about when powerful actors have the will and ability to change institutions in favour of new ideas" (Steinmo 2008, 113).

March and Olsen used the term "historical efficiency" to refer to how institutions adapt to their environments and achieve their optimal solution to surviving and thriving (March and Olsen 1984). Regardless of the main driver of this change, the rate of adaptation whether due to internal or external factors is always inconsistent with the rate of changes in the environment in which institutions operate (March and Olsen 1984).

However, one institution's ability to adapt is sometimes constrained by veto powers granted to other institutions. It is not uncommon for one or two state institutions to enjoy greater power than others. These are referred to as veto points (Cohn 1994), by which institutions with veto powers obstruct certain policy choices and determine available choices other actors can select from. This limits the historical efficiency of institutions and subjects them to the control of others. For this reason, veto points are considered in this theoretical framework as the second key factor in understanding historical institutionalism in relation to PVE in Jordan.

Historical institutionalism enables us to examine the dominant characteristics of institutional choices. It not only explains why institutional actors evolved in the way they did but also analyses what impacted institutional choices whether by history of previous experiences in Jordan, perspectives of different actors, and why the institutional response leaves important gaps, in the form of drivers of VE, unaddressed.

However, while analysing the data, historical institutionalism could not explain some underlying dynamics that have shaped Jordan's response to VE. To do this, the theoretical framework in this paper builds on Flatøy's thesis examining the relation between terrorism and political trust (Flatøy 2019). His starting point is that terrorist events cause "functional pressure" that can lead to loss of trust (Flatøy 2019). Scott also adds that it leads to de-institutionalisation (Scott 2019). Therefore, Flatøy argues, terrorism forces political institutions to act since they reflect "collective will" (Flatøy 2019). Trust in political institutions is mainly affected by citizens' perceptions on the capacity of political institutions to handle terrorism.

Flatøy argues that capacity perceptions are the link relation between trust and terrorism (Flatøy 2019), building on Christensen's argument on this (Christensen, Fimreite, and

Lægreid 2011). Christensen, Fimreite, and Lægreid define capacity as ability, competence, preparedness, and organisation (Christensen, Fimreite, and Lægreid 2011), and Flatøy defines perception as an individual's knowledge and feelings. Therefore, citizen's knowledge and feelings about political institution's capacity to handle terrorism influence their trust in institution(s) over time. Keeping in mind that when a terrorist attack takes place this undermines citizen's trust in these institutions (Flatøy 2019).

As a key variable here, trust is defined on two levels: general trust as a personality trait, and a relational trust. The former refers to a general belief in the good nature of humans. Relational trust is when actor A trusts actor B with respect to X in situation S (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2005). Relational trust is confined to certain aspects and is context determined as captured in variable S. In this way, trust shapes the capacity perceptions in institutions. Trust becomes crucial when facing serious threats like VE and shapes how citizens perceive and accept actors.

To explain, trust is linked to legitimacy, which is a process whereby behaviour, individuals, or organisations become accepted (Cook, Hardin, and Levi 2005; Lucas and Lovaglia 2006). People accept (legitimatise) what they trust. Citizens trust institutions when they believe they can rely on institutions and that the institutions have good intentions (Ferrin and Dirks 2003). As mentioned earlier, low levels of trust lead to de-institutionalisation. When examining the Jordanian context in this article, trust levels become a key variable on capacity perceptions and can explain why Jordan's institutional response to VE evolved in the way it did.

To summarise, the theoretical framework of our research builds on historical institutionalism to understand Jordan's institutional response to VE. The article examines the role of external threats/events to influence institutional change, and veto points that empower certain actors to determine policy choices available for institutions. In the Jordanian context, the role of citizens' trust in and capacity perceptions of institutional actors explains the two main characteristics of Jordan's institutional response to VE: a misplaced focus on religion as a driver of VE and heavy securitisation.

Methodology

The findings of this article were informed through consultations with 25 key stakeholders, who represent institutions of state (state institutions, governments, legislatures, municipal governments, and security institutions), and societal and international institutions (non-governmental organisations and civil society representatives, researchers, bilateral donors, and UN agencies). The stakeholders were nominated by their institutions after a stakeholder mapping of main actors involved in PVE policy design and implementation. This was combined with a snowball sampling.

Their insights and opinions were solicited through fifteen individual Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with eight participants, including eight females in total. FGDs and KIIs were conducted in May/June 2021. Except for two in-person interviews, online interviews were preferred due to restrictions related to the COVID pandemic. All primary data collected via Zoom[2] followed standard ethical guidance.[3] Respondents were presented with different sets of introductory and institutional interactions questions, in addition to questions assessing the macro-level drivers of radicalisation. The collected qualitative data was transcribed and analysed via the MAXQDA software, with data protection measures being applied throughout the process.

VE in Jordan Today: External Shocks and Functional Pressures

The threat of VE has been on the rise in Jordan since the early 2000s. Two external threats – the 2005 Amman Bombings and the brutal killing of Jordanian fighter pilot Al-Kassasbeh in 2024 – caused "functional pressures" that forced state institutions, particularly security actors, to modify their approach as they feared losing the trust and legitimacy among citizens. The two threats do not constitute a "punctuated equilibrium" in Thelen and Steinmo's expression (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992), because they have not led to institutional change. In fact, the underlying dynamics of VE remain mostly unchanged. The two events rather modified how state institutions approached the threat of VE in the country and the public's acceptance of heavy securitization.

Before 2005, Jordan's state institutions were engaged in countering VE threats (Jaradat 2007). For example, Jordan was a member of the global war on terrorism. It had launched the Amman Message in 2004 as a religious effort to counter VE. Jordan was also cooperating with regional partners to counter terrorist activities in Iraq. It was also committed to information-sharing mechanisms with Saudi Arabia and other international actors on terrorist threats in neighbouring countries. In addition, and since the early 1980s, the country's General Intelligence Department had established a directorate for countering terrorism that was mainly concerned with the Jordanian *Mujahidin* in Afghanistan. It

2 Conducing the interviews via Zoom could have affected the analysis results. Researchers were not able to discern body language at times when it could have indicated a chance for elaboration or countering the interviewee. Researchers also could not discern if government official's Zoom calls are recorded or monitored, although this is not a common practice in Jordan. Nevertheless, the researchers did not check on this, and it might have impacted levels of openness and transparency. But also on another level, using Zoom reduces levels of formality, and it might have encouraged officials to delve into criticisms they would not have otherwise voiced if met in their office rooms.

3 There is no institution that grants research ethics approvals in Jordan. The interviews were conducted as part of CONNEKT project. A special Ethics Committee was formed in Jordan for this project, which approved the ethical procedures and necessary forms of written consent.

operated without a clear strategy, and although it was known for their work involving a few security actors, the directorate operations focused on the monitoring of individuals.

On 9 November 2005, a series of near-synchronised bomb explosions went off at three hotels in the Jordanian capital Amman. Around 60 people were pronounced dead and 115 were injured (BBC News 2005). Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) claimed responsibility, and all attackers were identified as Iraqi nationals with clear links to the Jordanian Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. The perpetrators did not operate in a vacuum. AQI had gained significant momentum in the wake of the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq.

Originally founded by Al-Zarqawi in 1999, AQI commenced bomb attacks a few months after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2004. The group is considered the predecessor of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Initially known as Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad (JTJ), AQI was a major participant in the Iraqi insurgency against the US Invasion, before swearing loyalty to Al-Qaeda as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Mapping Militant Organizations 2019). As such, Jordan's journey with the fight against VE is neither recent nor linear. AQI represents but one benchmark of many that came before, including the experience with the Arab *Mujahidin* in Afghanistan (FAS Intelligence Resource Program 1994).

The 2005 Amman Bombings shocked the nation and caused a "functional pressure" that has influenced the long-term macro-level state response since then. The bombings consolidated resistance to serious institutional change in Jordan that has reduced the power grip of security actors. Many of the dynamics that influenced the bombings are still at play today. Despite growing frustrations in Jordan, these have not led to regime instability due to international support to Jordan as well as the convergence of interest of regional actors, that could have otherwise destabilised the state (Csicsmann 2022). The persistence of these dynamics almost two decades later questions the effectiveness of Jordan's institutional response to VE.

Three of these dynamics must be noted, with the common denominator of increased hostility towards the state and its institutions. First, the Jordanian national Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi provides an interesting case study for understanding the drivers of VE in Jordan. Ironically, his profile is similar to others who followed in his path, which questions the success and effectiveness of Jordan's efforts to prevent, prepare, and mitigate VE (Christensen, Fimreite, and Lægreid 2011). Al-Zarqawi's profile reveals a former criminal background, having been incarcerated in one of Jordan's biggest correctional facilities with initial charges of sexual assaults and the possession of drugs (Mapping Militant Organizations 2019). This profile is found in the 'newer generation' of radicals in Jordan; data suggests that most of the cases of individual radicals who were studied and examined did not hail from religious backgrounds (Mercy Corps 2015). Therefore, the ideology might not be a strong driver of extremism, or at best, its role comes after the contextual grievances have triggered the radicalization process. A key government research participant con-

firmed this, explaining how "ideology is just an umbrella through which the grievances are mainstreamed" (Interview 1, May 2021).

This testifies to the government's poor capacity to handle extremist threats by addressing the contextual political and socio-economic drivers before individuals turn to ideology. However, as research findings proved that radicalisation was initiated in prisons for many (Cook 2010), Jordan started separating prisoners on extremism charges from other prisoners (Interview 2, June 2021). Al-Zarqawi was introduced to radical ideas when he met Al-Maqdisi, a leading ideologue of VE, while in prison.

Second, the Amman Bombings offer a reference point for comparing shifts in the target groups of VE attacks in Jordan. These bombings targeted civilians, which was in line with AQI's doctrine that Al-Zarqawi cemented. In contrast, the perpetrators of ISIS's attacks in Jordan, including the attacks conducted in Irbid, Karak, Baqa'a, Fuhais, and Salt, have made it clear that their primary target was the state and its security personnel (BBC News 2016a; 2016b). The Baq'a (BBC News 2016b) attack was carried out by a lone gunman with an automatic weapon killing five security personnel, and in the Karak attack (Jordan Times 2016) perpetrators actively refrained from shooting civilians within their range and instead killed eleven General Intelligence Department members of different security forces (as well as three civilians). This shift by ISIS in targeting the security sector signifies an attempt to delegitimise and de-institutionalise the institution that not only manages the struggle against VE in Jordan but is also the most trusted actor by citizens in Jordan. This is a tactical shift that threatens the legitimacy of Jordan's core institutional actor in countering VE, as will be discussed later.

An additional shift in the patterns was noted in relation to the horizontal spread of VE activities. In the past, those involved in or affiliated with violent extremist organisations (VEOs) were mostly individuals who did not enjoy the support of their families. However, the recent wave of VE activities in Jordan reveals a shift from an individualistic to a family pattern of radicalisation whereby radicalisation of closely-knit family members, cousins, and in-laws is noted, which, according to research participants, has made the fight against extremism in Jordan all the more complex, for such close family networks are more difficult to penetrate and trace by law and security establishments (Abu Rumman and Shteiwi 2018).

Third, both the 2005 Amman Bombings and the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq reveal the transnational influence, which was captured in the impact of regional instability on Jordan's own internal security. The 2003 US Invasion of Iraq, causing instability and lawlessness in parts of Iraq and creating a breeding ground for groups such as AQI to recruit and exercise combat, was mirrored a decade later by the Syrian conflict which brought ISIS elements in proximity of the Jordanian borders (Khalid bin Al-Walid army, for instance) (BBC Arabic 2016), and allowed for some ISIS acolytes to carry out attacks within the Kingdom (BBC News 2016b). Additionally, the transnational influence meant that Jordan had to take security and military measures outside its own borders to pre-empt potential

threats to its internal security. These measures came with a heavy domestic implication, as was seen by the capture and tragic death of Jordanian pilot Moath Al-Kasasbeh, who was burnt alive by ISIS while standing in a cage, after he was captured in one of the air-strikes Jordan was conducting as part of the international coalition against ISIS. His brutal killing was filmed and disseminated by ISIS (Smith-Spark and Martinez 2015; The Royal Hashemite Courte 2015).

The death of Al-Kasasbeh marks a second "functional pressure" that had a significant impact on bolstering citizens rallying behind state's institutional response to VE, including the increased securitisation of PVE space. Likewise, analysts noticed a parallel decrease in citizens' support to VEOs in Syria (Al Balad 2015). The death of Al-Kasasbeh brought the threat closer to home and, that instead of forcing an institutional change, it changed citizens' perceptions of VE. The state's subsequent narratives capitalised on the tragedy to rally support for its VE legal and security tightening. Citizens accepted this due to the shock of his brutal killing, despite the impact of state measures on their freedoms. This second "functional pressure" triggered changes in society's perception of institutions and the acceptance of their roles, a point of particular concern to sociological institutionalism.

While in the literature "functional pressures" can cause loss of trust in a state's capacities, the Amman Bombings and the killing of Al-Kasasbeh aligned citizens' priorities with the state's securitisation approach to prevent and pre-empt. Since both events are external shocks to state institutions, theoretically both should have acted as punctuated equilibriums pushing state institutions to adapt to changes. The adaptation came in the form of emboldened security sector that tightened its legal and operational grip on citizens instead of addressing structural drivers of VE (political, economic, and social).

Key Considerations in Jordan's VE Environment

Jordan's response to VE differs in how securitisation has manifested compared to its neighbours, who have resorted to hard security measures against extremists and all other political groups. Jordan's heavy security, however, is mainly against Jihadi Salafis. Jordan sought to maintain institutional stability and legitimacy in responding to VE challenges without alienating other segments of population.

This analysis adopts a clear distinction between violent extremists and political Islam actors. The latter are political movements and parties that adopt an Islamic religious outlook to political life, but who are legitimate political parties that are governed by partly politics and mechanisms in Jordan. Scholars refer to Jordan's Islamic political actors, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, as "loyal opposition" (Köprülü 2017). The relation between the state and Islamists in unique, whereby Islamists are allies in the country's stability and have respected the Palace's red lines (Ryan and Schwedler 2004). Six Islamic political parties which operate in Jordan have all stemmed mainly from the Muslim Brotherhood with different genealogy but similar dynamics with state institutions (Abu Rumman and Abu

Hanieh 2013). Managing a tactful relation with all opposition groups, often playing them against each other, has long been a survival strategy by the state in Jordan (Ryan 2018). As pointed out by Beverley Milton-Edwards:

> The very sovereignty and survival of Jordan depends on recognizing the importance of manifestations of Islam to the state's rulers and citizens, and the utilization of such manifestations in politics. Jordan and its allies need policies that counter the real threat posed by Salafi-jihadi groups. (Milton-Edwards 2017, 4)

Several scholars have analysed state relations with different segments of the population. Joseph Masaad analysed Jordan's national identity and examined the turbulent relations between trans-Jordanian and Jordanians of Palestinian origins. The legacy of Black September in 1979 has affected identity formation in Jordan, but has not affected the state response to VE, which focuses on Jihadi Salafists as a group and as lone wolves.

Of all Islamic groups active in Jordan, only the Jihadi Salafists (one branch of Salafism) (Abu Rumman 2014, 44–51) are largely considered a VE threat. Although security forces in the state where monitoring and responding to the threat, this threat of Jihadi Salafists became clearer to regular citizens in April 2011 when Jihadi Salafists organised, protests calling "God's sovereignty" and demanded the release of 300 Jihadi Salafi prisoners (Gavlak 2011). Although April 2011, does not mark a "functional pressure", it further consolidated heavy securitization against Jihadi Salafists. It is important to note that this came within Arab Spring protests in Jordan, that were mainly handled with soft security. The state did not want a major escalation with youth and political groups. The soft security approach was a tactic to maintain the state's stability at a key transitional moment in the region.

More broadly, Milton-Edwards argues that "to ensure its security and stability, Jordan's response must also include 'soft' approaches to preventing and countering extremism … [by utilizing] Jordan's strong and inclusive social fabric" (Milton-Ewards 2017, 4). This approach is not new to Jordan. Security actors have often reasserted the common national identity with citizens to contain tensions (Schwedler 2005). But this now needs to extend to recognizing Jordan's PVE efforts cannot succeed without capitalizing on this social fabric and non-governmental actors.

The Main Institutional Actors and Diverging Perceptions on Drivers of VE

Jordan has solidified national institutions to cement a social contract with segments of population that depends on employment in the public sector (Al Barari 2018). As a result, governmental actors have emerged over the years as the main actors for policy design and implementation, including those related to PVE. Coordination between governmental

actors is marked by perceptions of institutional autonomy (March and Olsen 1984), resulting in imperfect and unclear or overlapping institutional roles obstructing successful implementation of policies. While governmental actors are the most capable compared to others, there are divergent trust and legitimacy parameters defining people's perceptions of the capability of government actors in PVE.

Governmental Actors

The most important distinction to clarify here is between security actors and other government bodies/institutions. Although technically security actors are part of the government, they follow different institutional procedures and structures that sets them apart from other government bodies/institutions. The term government in this article refers to non-security related government bodies. The government is widely untrusted and perceived incapable, whereas the security actors are trusted and perceived to be capable. This has created a clear fault line between the government and security actors, marked by citizens' (mis)trust.

The structure of security actors deserves clarification. In addition to the army, the security sector in Jordan includes the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the General Intelligence Department (GID). In the formal institutional structure, the MoI currently controls the police, the Civil Defence Department, and the Gendarmerie, whereas the GID comes under the Prime Minister's office. In practice, however, the GID operates independently. Analysts describe GID to have an "oversized" role, whereby it acts with full autonomy disregarding the formal structure that binds it to the Prime Minister's Office (Milton-Edwards 2017). GID heads are appointed directly by the King and are accountable to him. Other units formally under MoI also enjoy various degrees of autonomy. Significantly, it is the GID that controls the struggle against VE in Jordan and generally enjoys wide power over other governmental actors in all sectors. The veto power that the GID holds significantly shapes PVE policy design and implementation by all other actors. This confirms Schwedlers' assessment of Jordan as a security state, but with a new form of non-democratic governance that is liberal economically, but authoritarian politically (Schwedler 2012).

Two elements are clarified through consultations with governmental actors. First, there are parallel and unclear strategic priorities to prevent the VE in Jordan. Second, there is an acknowledgement on the limits of a security response to VE. However, this acknowledgement does not result in changes to the heavy securitisation of PVE scene in the country.

The parallel and inconsistent institutional strategy, or rather strategies, of PVE in Jordan confuse all actors. The first strategy was launched by Jordan's National Policy Council in 2014/2015, under the official title of "The National Plan to Counter Terrorism—TNPCE." Upon its dissemination in 2016, the strategy was met with criticism based on it being "shallow", without clarity on, or sufficient depth to, the proposed measures considered to be effective in prevention of VE (Al Sharafat 2018). A respondent recalled how the

strategy recommended that the Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and Islamic Affairs "creates its website." Such a recommendation should be an internal initiative in the context of a more effective public sector rather than a measure aimed at combating radical thought (Interview 3, May 2021).

The second PVE strategy was developed in the period 2017–2018, by the P/CVE Unit which itself was established in November 2015 (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac 2020). That strategy, however, was not disclosed to the public and is yet to be officially presented and adopted by the government; and to date, there is no confirmation as to whether this strategy will be revealed publicly – as some respondents voiced during this research, it is not known "whether this will happen at all" (Interview 4, May 2021; Interview 5, June 2021). This second PVE strategy is treated as strictly confidential, with only a handful of actors having had an opportunity to consult it – mainly international non-governmental actors, as reported by respondents (Interview 6, June 2021).

Governmental actors included in this research explained that this latter strategy was quietly substituted with a National Action Plan – NAP produced in 2019, but which is still undergoing changes in light of the COVID-19 as well as the evolving nature of VE in Jordan. These officials argued that the NAP is kept 'low profile' due to its sensitive nature and to avoid it being accessible to radical individuals and groups (Interview 6, June 2021). Within these discussions, other local actors expressed their frustration at being 'left out' of the discussions about the NAP (Interview 4, May 2021; Interview 8, May 2021). In explicit terms, most respondents expressed frustration with state entities, such as the P/CVE Unit.

The P/CVE Unit at the Prime Minister's Office is the official government entity responsible for coordinating the P/CVE initiatives in Jordan. Although the Unit should coordinate directly with GID, this is not the case. This is due to GID's preference to address VE threats largely as a security concern. The Unit directs international stakeholders and donors towards the government's priorities as far as P/CVE is concerned, to ensure relevance of such projects. The stakeholders noted the lack of communication and coordination on behalf of the Unit, leaving a gap regarding the Unit's engagement of local actors. According to our interlocutors "there is no communication with and between institutions working on VE" (Interview 4, May 2021), and there is a significant "need to have a direct line of communication between institutions and the government" (Interview 7, June 2021), as the efforts in dealing with VE should not only be coordinated but transparent and complementary. The frustrations with the Unit contribute to the poor capacity perceptions among stakeholders, that is, they do not trust the Unit and do not consider it a capable actor to shoulder this responsibility.

Some participants countered this criticism by citing the Unit's "lack of manpower and resourcefulness" as a hinderance to more effective communication with a broad audience of PVE stakeholders in Jordan (Interview 6, June 2021). Further, during its inception and then in the early years of its operations, the Unit had gone through changes of its lead-

ership and a frequent transfer of mandate between different ministries (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac Clarck 2020). These frequent changes limited the Unit's ability to initiate and strengthen coordination between different actors, which is the Unit's official mandate (Interview 9, May 2021).

These parallel strategies, unclear institutional priorities and structures, and the fluidity of actors who are either included or excluded from developing national strategies testify to an institutional gap in how the PVE scene is conceptualised at the macro-level. Therefore, it is no surprise that all stakeholders, whether governmental and non-governmental, implement their self-prescribed PVE roles independently and without a clear institutional coordination mechanism.

The second element with regards to government actors is the acknowledgment of how ineffective relying on securitisation alone has been to counter VE. Many respondents hailed this acknowledgment by the government as a positive development (Interview 1, May 2021; Interview 2, June 2021; Interview 3, May 2021; Interview 4, May 2021; Interview 10, May 2021), arguing that an effective PVE strategy should go beyond security to address other drivers of VE, including structural grievances (Interview 1, May 2021; Interview 2, May 2021; Interview 14, June 2021).

Research has shown that VE is mainly driven by structural factors in Jordan including economic deprivation, marginalization, and political repression (Yom and Sammour 2017; Bondokji, Wilkinson, and Aghabi 2017). Addressing these drivers requires a PVE response that works towards economic prosperity and social and political integration. Relying on hard security measures has increased alienation and frustration among vulnerable communities, which can lead to radicalisation (Bondokji and Harper 2017). Recognizing that government structural failure on economic and political development and integration, is partly responsible for the rise of VE in Jordan, is a necessary cornerstone for shaping Jordan's institutional response to VE. The security threat started with governance failure that must be addressed to counteract the negative capacity perceptions citizens have towards the government.

Despite the welcome acknowledgement by government actors of the shortfalls of heavy securitisation, there is little evidence on the ground to prove practical steps to introduce institutional change. Similarly, and as discussed earlier, the external shocks did not constitute a strong "punctuated equilibrium" to force an institutional change in priorities or in altering institutional relations. Security actors, as government actors, continue to enjoy unparalleled power and control over the PVE scene.

Non-Governmental Actors

Non-governmental actors have emerged slowly and steadily in Jordan, mainly in the development and humanitarian sectors. Lately, they have become involved in PVE pro-

gramming. Non-governmental actors include local civil society, community-based organisations (CBOs) on the local level, and INGOs. Their efforts complement national institutional efforts, albeit after permissions and approvals from institutional actors. PVE policy design and implementation, thus, remains mainly in the realm of governmental actors.

This research started with an assumption that the experiences of INGOs is different from that of local NGO actors. Contrary to expectations, the discussions with both groups revealed no major differences in their experiences and perspectives. Their views are captured through three developments in their work on PVE.

First, the shifts in the patterns of radicalisation have pushed local actors to adopt different models of youth engagement. The key development is the moving away from a vulnerability-based approach, addressing negative push factors, towards embracing a resilience-based approach that capitalises on the existing positive skills and knowledge of youth (UNICEF 2020). One example is the Mercy Corps' use of the "science of resilience" by integrating neuroscience to understand and address the impact that long-term stress has on the emotional brain (Bourke 2020).

According to one INGO worker, the "shifting VE landscape" in Jordan has influenced their decision to reach out to new groups of beneficiaries, and with an increased predisposition that "alternative narratives work" (Interview 5, June 2021). They focused on how specific individuals and role models can be supported to make an impact within their communities, so this approach "engages with specific individuals who wield influence, access, and connectivity to local communities" (Interview 5, June 2021).

All research participants confirmed that the shift towards different models of youth engagement came about in response to shifts in the radicalisation scene that is no longer limited to hotspots. It was a proactive measure aimed at designing and delivering more effective PVE programming. Hence, some concerns were voiced on the sustainability of such development (Interview 19, May 2021), as non-governmental actors keep adapting to changes in the wider context. While these changes reflect institutional flexibility among non-governmental actors in adapting to the external environment, the change in external environment will always be faster than institutional changes in response to them (March and Olsen 1984). But at least non-governmental actors are able to showcase changes they are taking in their general approach, unlike governmental actors on the macro-level.

Second, local non-governmental actors changed their approach regarding target groups of their PVE activities. They became less inclined to target hotspots of radicalisation in Jordan (Interview 8, May 2021; Interview 14, May 2021). The extensive targeting of such communities had contributed to a high stigmatisation felt by the local population, and was, therefore, counterproductive to PVE efforts (Interview 19, May 2021; Interview 13, May 2021; Interview 8, May 2021). Instead, local actors started designing interventions that target youth in general, moving away from activities that are exclusive to vulnerable

or "at-risk" youth, but inclusive of those considered not to be "usual suspects" in terms of vulnerability (Interview 19, May 2021).

However, the earlier excessive targeting of hotspots has led to the mushrooming of local CBOs working on PVE, which "neither had the previous PVE expertise nor the level of sensitivity" needed to deal with such issue (Interview 8, May 2021). It is impossible to discern the impact of these efforts due to "lacking monitoring and evaluation protocols and general guidance and mainstreaming of PVE tools from the government" (Interview 12, May 2021). At the same time, there was no proper governmental guidance or supervision over the work of PVE actors because of the absence of clear, public national action plan / strategy in the first place (Interview 12, May 2021; Interview 6, June 2021).

Third, the terminology has changed. Local actors were reluctant to label their programmes as P/CVE and used labels such as "social cohesion" or "good / active citizenship" (Idris 2019). This relates to a "growing concern of the state" about Jordan's international image (U.S. Agency for International Development 2016). While VE is a real concern for the state, fears have risen around the disproportionality of its portrayal. From the state's perspective, the threat is not as widespread and excessive as reflected in the sheer number of PVE interventions implemented in the country. This view is consistent with that of citizens. In 2019, only two per cents of Jordanians considered extremism as the most important challenge, compared to 17% citing corruption, and 71% the economy (Arab Barometer 2019). This approach is problematic because it leads to poor and inaccurate monitoring and evaluation of PVE programmes. It also contributes to further misunderstandings of defining VE and its drivers.

When examined together, these three shifts (adopting a resilience-based approach, targeting youth in general not only those in radicalisation hotspots, and problematic terminology), reveal the limited scope of local organisations as actors in the institutional framework of PVE in Jordan. Their negotiating power is constrained by financial dependency and power deficiency. Although local actors exert some of their power in implementation choices such as selecting target groups or locations, the PVE interventions they implement are determined by the menu of available choices, to use Immergut's idea (Cohn 1994), made possible by GID.

This is not limited to PVE programmes; all programs implemented by NGOs need to be approved by the different government agencies. There is a hierarchy of veto powers in the institutional structure of PVE interventions in Jordan. Local non-governmental actors enjoy none. INGOs have some power due to their better financial standing and skills level, but they are still operating within the parameters dictated by the government, and more precisely security actors within or parallel to the government.

The Divergent Perceptions on Drivers of VE

When asked about the drivers of VE at the local level, local non-governmental actors unequivocally cited a range of contextual grievances: from issues relating to family dynamics/disintegration (Interview 4, May 2021), domestic violence, youths' idle time, marginalisation (Interview 8, May 2021), and lack of social justice to low levels of political participation (Interview 19, May 2021), and poor access to jobs and educational opportunities (Interview 12, May 2021). Ideology and religion, which have been at the core of the official state response and conceptualisation of VE in Jordan are seldom mentioned. This discrepancy in how different drivers are perceived clarifies the institutional cracks in Jordan.

The views of non-governmental actors echo findings in the literature. Although unemployment and poverty are increasing in Jordan (See Figures 1 and 2), it is the level of dissatisfaction among educated and employed youth that is driving the phenomenon (Abu Rumman, Gouda, and Bondokji 2022). There is no evidence on a direct causality between poverty and unemployment, and radicalisation. However, economic pressures coupled with perceptions on nepotism, corruption, and injustice push individuals to search for alternatives (Bondokji, Wilkinson, and Aghabi 2017). Repressions on civil liberties and political apathy, as reflected in the lowest level of election turnout in years at 29.9% in 2020 cycle (Al Khalidi 2020), contribute to youth frustration and rise of radicalisation (Yom and Sammour 2017).

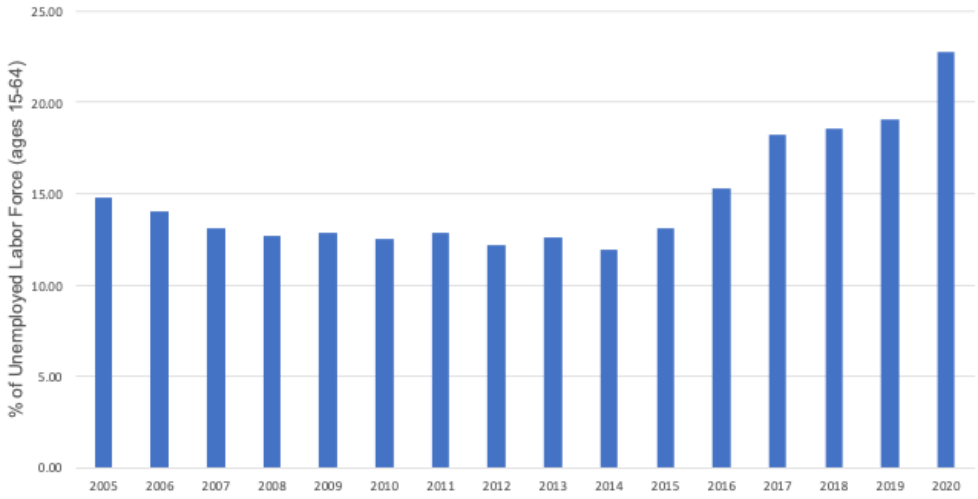

Figure 1: *Unemployed Labour Force in Jordan (2005–2020). Source: World Bank Group n.d.*

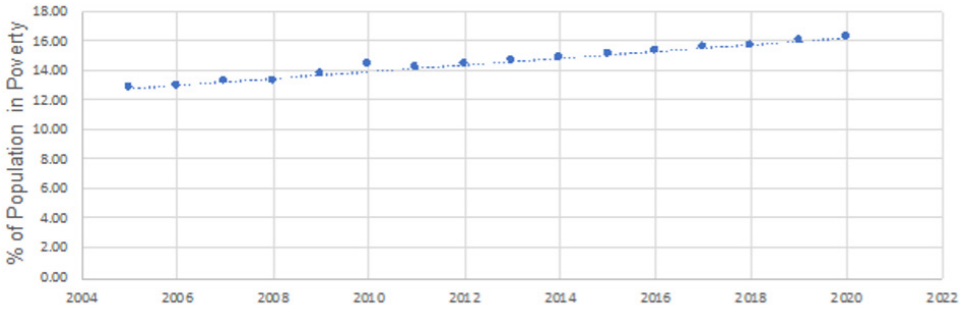

Figure 2: *Estimated Poverty Rate in Jordan (2005–2020). Source: World Bank 2009.*

Territorial inequality also contributes to VE. It instils a sense of marginalisation among citizens living away from the capital. While the government takes measures to bridge the development gap, the citizens' perceptions of marginalisation, inequality, and poor distribution of national wealth all contribute to the frustration of youth, their feelings of relative deprivation, leading to potential radicalisation (Abu Rumman, Gouda, and Bondokji 2022).

None of the national PVE strategies has acknowledged this driver, not surprisingly as it points to governmental failure in addressing development needs across the country for decades. Meanwhile, only one participant acknowledged that territorial inequalities within Jordan are a real concern (Interview 14, May 2021), which reflects limited understanding of how development discrepancies contribute to VE. Territorial inequality refers to injustice in distribution of wealth and services in a territory compared to other territories, leading to a situation of comparative redress (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac Clarck 2020). These observations attest to the institutional failure to assess why certain outcomes are taking shape in Jordan as a result of public policies. Government institutions continue to disregard key dynamics that shape VE threats in the country and are as a result incapable of meeting PVE policy needs.

This discrepancy between the government's response to VE and the perceptions of local actors point to institutional historical inefficiency in learning from adapting to continuous VE threats. Neither have governmental actors, including security, realized the significance of non-governmental actors, nor has the latter been able to adapt significantly enough to influence policy design within the former. Likewise, neither has been able to forge institutional coordination structures that take into account long-term PVE needs on a macro-level.

Understanding the State's Response to VE

Jordan's response to VE is characterised by heavy securitisation and a misplaced focus on religion as a driver of VE. These two characteristics stem from the diametrically opposite positions of governmental actors (non-security government actors and security actors).

Security actors are widely trusted by citizens. In 2018, 95% of Jordanians trusted the army and 90% trusted the police (Arab Barometer 2019). Security actors rely on this trust to strengthen their legitimacy, capitalising on the direct relation between trust and legitimacy (defined as acceptance of their role). This acceptance gives them broader ability to act on both the legal and operational aspects. With high trust, the questionable effectiveness of security measures and repression of citizens' freedom are tolerated by citizens. Interestingly, Jordan's score (0.718 overall) on World Internal Security and Police Index is highest on capacity (0.949) and lowest on process (0.524), but scores (0.733) on legitimacy (International Police Science Association 2023).

These results may raise scepticism among readers unfamiliar with the Middle East, where despite repression and authoritarianism, security forces enjoy high levels of trust, mainly due to the failure of other state institutions (Lotito 2018). As a result, armies and security actors are perceived to be the most capable state actors. For example, a survey found that Jordanians trust the army by 97% whereas they trust the government by 71%! The results for Jordan are similar to those in other countries in the region in the same survey (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2021). Jordanians also trust security actors because there is a perception that "security actors refrain from using excessive violence against the population. They are a loved institution" (Interview 15, May 2021).

In comparison, Jordanians' trust in the government has been dwindling since 2010. By 2018, trust has declined from 72% in 2010 to 38% in 2018. The increase in trust to 43% in March 2021 is mainly attributed to government's performance during COVID-19, and not general government performance (Arab Barometer 2019). In fact, perceptions on corruption offer an important insight. In 2019, 89% of Jordanians thought that corruption exists to a large or medium extent in state institutional and national agencies. This is a staggering increase of 10 points since 2016 and 23 points since 2010 (Arab Barometer 2019).

This trajectory of trust shapes Jordan's institutional response to VE in two ways. First, the high trust in and legitimacy of the security sector has emboldened security actors who have tightened the security in Jordan's institutional response to VE. Second, given the poor performance of the government and the unfavourable position it attains among citizens, it was strategic that the PVE response does not implicate the government further. The institutional response to VE largely blames ideology/religion and ignores the structural drivers of VE that are largely the result of the government's poor performance. Hence, the misplaced focus on religion. In this sense, blaming religion immunises the government from criticism of its failures.

Securitisation

To understand the rise of the state's security response and its continuity, the discussion here clarifies the legal and operational aspects of securitisation and then elaborates on trust in and stability of security actors.

Legally, significant amendments were incorporated since 2014 in the legal frameworks, such as the State Security Court Law, Counter-Terrorism (CT) Law (Refworld 2017), Cybersecurity (CS) Law, and the Prints and Publications (PPs) Law (Araz 2020). The ambiguity of these amendments, particularly on what constitutes a terrorist act or a show of sympathy towards VEOs has enlarged into "the circle of suspicion" to include simple acts like a Facebook like. These amendments also refer suspects to the State Security Court, a military court that should not prosecute civilians (Silva-Sánchez 2018). Alarmingly, the impact of such amendments and stricter security policies had been counterproductive, contributing to an increased sense of hostility towards the state and merging the clear distinguishing lines between the civil and military spheres (Bondokji and Mhadeen 2019; Interview 13, May 2021).

Jordan's response to the role of digitalisation in VE is mainly legislative. Three case studies demonstrate the potential and divergent impact of digitalisation on the radicalisation of youth in Jordan (Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, and Štikovac Clark 2022). But digitalisation was not recognised in the two P/CVE strategies of the country. This is shocking given that radicalisation in Jordan has taken new and different forms beyond joining VEOs (Interview 8, May 2021). These include the horrific mutilation crimes in different localities committed by and involving adolescents, gangs and family members (Al Arabiya 2020; Jordan Times 2019). In all these instances, social media played a key role in exposing these forms of radicalisation, and in providing a platform through which videos and photos of such patterns were circulated. This triggered an institutional response in the form of an extensive security campaign as a result (Council of Europe 2014), which demonstrated the "historical efficiency" of security actors (March and Olsen 1984).

However, this exercise of "historical efficiency" falls short of adapting to the level of changes in the external environment as is usually the case (March and Olsen 1984). As a result, this legal adaptability emerged as insufficient and intimidating to citizens. But it met the institutional goals of maintaining stability mainly by relying on levels of trust in security actors among citizens that propels them to accept restrictions on their freedoms. For security actors, this marks a success, regardless of the impacts on citizens.

Operationally, security actors have increased pre-emptive and preventive CVE measures over the past six years. This includes operations against VEOs or their affiliates in Jordan, which are valid and necessary measures. But routinely executed raids on, and arrests of, potential radicals are performed with excessive use of force and with reported constraints on freedoms of expression. Executed in this manner, these measures "reinforce the sense of marginalisation and alienation" among citizens (Bondokji and Mhadeen 2019), who,

nevertheless, continue to trust security actors considering these measures as necessary cost to maintain security in the country. However, in the long-run, these legal and operational aspects raise questions around their effectiveness, particularly that key structural drivers of VE remain unaddressed. This poses the question of how long will security actors be able to rely on this citizen's trust?

On another level, the multiplicity of security actors on PVE causes confusion regarding the division of roles and responsibilities. Various regiments and units work on CVE under different Special Operations titles across the security sector, ranging from Jordan Armed Forces (JAF) and a specialised Public Security Directorate unit to a specialised and highly trained GID unit, etc (Interview 15, May 2021). In some cases, this multiplicity of actors and the confusion it creates came with "a high price paid by security actors who had lost notable and highly professional and trained officers" during operations (Schenker 2016; Roya News 2018). It is unclear how these experiences are shaping the institutional learning and policy design among security actors. As security sub-institutions, each is guided by self-interest, and it is unclear how institutional decisions were made and what has led to these losses. Lack of transparency in these regards, at least for civilians, restricts the analysis of Jordan's institutional response to VE.

No assessment of the effectiveness of Jordan's security approach to VE is complete without examining rehabilitation and reintegration at prisons. These efforts are an integral part of Jordan's security approach for they are run and managed exclusively by security actors. Several governmental actors referred to the "Dialogue with Takfiris Program" that was introduced in correctional and rehabilitation centres in the Kingdom (Interview 1, May 2021; Interview 3, May 2021). This approach was inspired by the Singaporean and Malaysian models that adhere to religious dialogue with radicals or to utilising ex-radicals and penitents in de-radicalisation efforts respectively. Research participants supported this approach even though it differs from the Saudi Munasaha programme (Cigar 2019) which relied on economic and financial incentives, and the heavy-handed Egyptian model of prolonged sentences and a harsh security grip and practices over prisoners (El-Said and Harrigan 2018).

No public information exists on the programme, but according to several respondents, the programme was introduced in 2008/2009 with the aim of opening channels of dialogue with prisoners serving sentences on charges of extremism to introduce ideological shifts as a way of rehabilitation. The respondents cited a high success rate of the programme of over 80 per cent and attributed this success in rehabilitation to several factors: the programme participation was completely voluntary; external experts and academics led dialogue sessions with prisoners; and the programme was built on a multidisciplinary approach integrating sociology, religious dialogue, and addressing grievances (Interview 1, May 2021; Interview 2, May 2020). No insights were shared on whether the programme, which ended in 2014, is still ongoing in a similar format or if it has been replaced by different type of programme(s).

Despite these efforts to integrate non-coercive measures, one crucial point deserves in depth analysis beyond available data. Respondents argued that most of those who were found implicit in carrying out VE attacks were at some point either on the radar of security forces or have served time in Jordanian prisons (Interview 1, May 2021; Interview 16, May 2021; Interview 15, May 2021). If this stands to scrutiny, it can undermine the trust in, and eventually delegitimise, state security actors. Building on Flatøy and Christensen et. al works, people accept (legitimise) what they trust. Trust is knowledge and feelings that an actor has the ability, competence, preparedness, and organizations to meet VE threats. The above-mentioned failure of security actors to prevent and contain the VE threat can delegitimise them and threaten their dominance in the PVE scene. Regardless of its factuality, the point above testifies to stakeholders' sceptical perceptions of security actors. Can security actors take for granted the high levels of trust reported in statistics is a legitimate question.

So far, security actors have relied on high trust to evade required institutional adaptability. Few new policies were designed and implemented, and the security sector remained resistant to large scale. "This is a crisis management approach," argues one respondent, "and it is unsustainable" (Interview 16, May 2021).

Emphasis on Religion as Driver of VE

The state's emphasis on ideology as the main driver of VE comes as a manoeuvre to protect the government. It diverts attention from its responsibility in driving VE through structural failures in economic and political spheres.

This focus on religion as a driver is evident in several initiatives. The most remarkable of these is the Amman Message of 2004, which presents a simple but precise statement for senior Islamic scholars worldwide, declaring "what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not" (The Amman Message 2006).

This emphasis on religion has prompted significant changes to the role of the Ministry of Awqaf (Endowment) and Religious Affairs, which attests to its "historical efficiency" by adapting to new external challenges. Most notably, the Ministry established the King Abdullah II Institute to Train, Qualify and Prepare Preachers in 2009, with the goals of building the capacity of religious leaders, setting clear rules and guidelines for preaching, providing practical training to religious actors, as well as enabling scholars and trainees to enhance their knowledge and communication skills (Ministry of Endowments, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places 2021).

Additionally, the Ministry launched a nation-wide programme to build the capacity of imams and female preachers, given the prominent potential role and influence they have in preventing radicalisation within their local communities (Jordan Times 2016). It of-

fered training to enhance their religious knowledge and competency at addressing religious questions and concerns (European Union 2017).

Other measures by the Ministry include introducing the unified Friday sermon for all the mosques in Jordan, whereby the Ministry writes one religious speech for over 7,000 mosques around the Kingdom, distributes it through the specific WhatsApp groups (Interview 14, May 2021), obliging the preachers to read it, with the aim of raising the level and quality of the sermon, introducing topics of interest to citizens, and promoting a culture of moderation. This step was highly criticised by the public as it demonstrated an attempt by the government to control the religious discourse of citizens (Al Shugairi 2021).

The effort in capacity building of religious actors was not exclusive to government institutions. Non-governmental actors also contributed to these efforts (Al Tal 2016), in close cooperation with the Ministry, and with approval from security actors. Nevertheless, this recognition of religion as a driver of VE raised the institutional awareness among both governmental and non-governmental actors on the role of mosques and imams/ female preachers, sparking a nation-wide discussion on how this role should be reimagined ((Interview 16, May 2021; Interview 14, May 2021; Interview 3, May 2021). This contributes to a broader level of "historical efficiency," whereby the "functional pressures" created by VE events has led to strategic adaptability in the Ministry's role and developing partnerships to meet emerging VE challenges.

However, even on the level of responding to ideology as a driver to VE, Jordan's institutional response is marked by a confusing multiplicity of actors. The Office of HRH Prince Ghazi bin Mohammad at the Royal Hashemite Court has engaged in the PVE response in Jordan. The Office is considered the expert entity that possesses greater flexibility than governmental institutions in regard to dealing with VE issues. Whilst little to no public knowledge exists on this Office's PVE work and the modalities it follows, several research respondents emphasised the Office follows a heavy religious/ideological approach to dealing with VE, referring to Moroccan imams and religious scholars who were brought to Jordan to support with the Office's religious dialogue programme (Interview 17, June 2021; Interview 3, May 2021).

Nevertheless, the state's substantial ideological framing and response to VE was, during this research, criticised for its "narrowness" (Interview 16, May 2021; Interview 12, May 2021; Interview 14, May 2021). According to relevant respondents, the role of mosques and imams is still short of addressing the VE threat. Preachers are still considered unable to engage with real-life concerns of citizens, never discussing current and modern topics such as globalisation, digital literacy, active citizenship, etc (Interview 8, May 2021).

Additionally, research participants voiced a concern about the current approach failing to address institutional gaps related to the insufficient number of imams, citing that over 2,000 mosques in Jordan operate without an officially appointed imam, and hence

are left to be run by volunteer informal imams (European Union 2017), with questionable qualifications, knowledge, and abilities.

Respondents also criticised the emphasis on religion as a driver of VE because it further implicates religion. For "moderation is a genuine characteristic of religion, and hence must not be thought of or used as a reaction to extremism" (Interview 16, May 2021). In the words of one respondent, "do not fight, and do not implicate, religion in your fight against extremism; [if you do,] you will instantly lose" (Interview 1, May 2021). Respondents largely agreed that religion must be used carefully to tackle PVE efforts as one potential driver of VE, not the dominant one.

But government actors know how poorly they are trusted. Therefore, it is in the government's interest to emphasise religion as a driver of VE, since it is not directly responsible for religious discourse and ideology. In this way, its efforts will be welcomed. In comparison, if the government acknowledges the prominent role structural grievances have in driving VE, and designs its response to VE accordingly, it will be admitting its own poor performance and weak capacities to address structural grievances. If the response to VE acknowledges these drivers, the government will be admitting its own failure and thus causing a further dwindling of citizens' trust. The government cannot afford this as it will lead to its de-institutionalisation following Locas and Lovagila's argument (Lucas and Lovaglia 2006).

Nevertheless, and despite its attempts, the government is de-institutionalising itself and undermining its own legitimacy, as explained by Lucas and Lovaglia (Lucas and Lovaglia 2006). Institutionalisation is a process of adaptation to external challenges (Lowndes and Roberts 2013). Failing to tackle structural drivers of VE attests to a lack of adaptability, which leads to de-institutionalisation. The combination of low trust levels, perceptions of illegitimacy, as well as failure to adapt will de-institutionalize the government. This will leave security actors to dominate the PVE scene in Jordan. One respondent summarizes this concern,

> What we are seeing is a systematic de-legitimization of state. Whether intentionally or un-intentionally. State actors working around citizen's lack of trust in the government, is by itself creating manifestations for extremism in different ways, whereby citizens are frustrated more and resorting to violence. (Interview 18, May 2021)

Gaps in Jordan's Institutional Response

These findings identify two important gaps on the macro-level: the absent conceptualisation of VE in Jordan and the absence of a coordination mechanism. The state's conceptualisation of VE defines it as an ideological concern and falls short of accounting for the arguably more pressing driver of VE: structural grievances. A national move to

re-conceptualise VE in Jordan is needed to push government actors to acknowledge their failure, and work on addressing structural factors.

Without this effort, government actors will not be able to adapt to the continuous "punctuated equilibriums" not only from VE threats but also from other structural pressures. The government's ability to adapt institutionally should be evident through policy design and implementation. This will allow the government to regain levels of trust and protect its institutionalisation. The security sector will perceive these efforts as threatening to its unequivocal trust and legitimacy among Jordanian citizens. However, the sector itself has started minor adaptive efforts towards cross-institutional cooperations to control the "functional pressures" of VE on its legitimacy.

One example towards in-house adaptability was the creation of the Strategic Communications Unit (SCU) in 2014, which continued to operate until 2018. No public data exists on its work, but two of its members interviewed for this research offered insights into the inner dynamics of the Unit's functions (Interview 2, June 2021; Interview 11, June 2021). SCU operated under the direct supervision of the Jordanian Armed Forces and offered guidance on the design and delivery of alternative narratives aimed at countering ISIS narratives and was responsible for crisis management and scenario planning. According to interviewees, the Unit's success is attributed to its structure and organisational capacity (having a flat structure; the constant capacity-building of SCU members; flexibility in carrying out the Unit's work; the political and security buy-in of relevant senior officials).

The SCU was also established in recognition of the need to go beyond the ideological and security responses to VE: It focused on alternative narratives, as opposed to counter narratives, offering no more than 10% of its content on ideology, while amplifying the social capital around the high levels of trust in Jordan's security apparatus (Interview 2, June 2021; Interview 11, June 2021). This recognition might be coming out of concern that security actors cannot/should not shoulder the weight of P/CVE alone. Likewise, the recognitions can be stemming from the comfort that the responsibility of success of PVE efforts will be dispersed among different institutions and shield the security sector from the consequences when their performance yields poor results. Governmental and non-governmental actors alike must capitalise on this recognition, but it remains sceptical whether the security sector will delegate any of its institutional powers and responsibilities to other actors.

This recognition also addresses the second gap: the stark absence of an effective coordination mechanism due to the perceived institutional autonomy of PVE actors in Jordan (March and Olsen 1984). This flawed perception of autonomy means there is "no one to go to" (Interview 2, June 2021; Interview 11, June 2021) if the stakeholders wish to present new information, findings, or discuss effective ways for designing better-suited PVE programmes. This mechanism should include a "repository to show who does what in PVE domain to ensure effective PVE efforts by state and non-governmental actors" (Interview 4, May 2021). On a macro-level, this means that the institutional response to VE

is fractured and, as evident in the sections above, limits adaptability to minimal in-house efforts. This resulted in weak coordination within the PVE landscape, in addition to the absence of an officially adopted roadmap for both governmental and non-governmental actors involved in the PVE (Interview 9, May 2021; Interview 4, May 2021; Interview 13, May 2022).

Both gaps are not new and have been long discussed in policy meetings on PVE in Jordan. However, the analysis clarifies what they mean from an institutional perspective. A clear conceptualization of VE will align institutional actors' efforts to address structural drivers of VE and therefore reduce the gap between non-governmental and government actors. In addition, it can balance the overtly negative trust levels in the government. Although it might not shift capability perceptions, but it is a step in balancing them. When this is achieved, this will push and/or encourage security actors to embrace higher levels of adaptability to introduce institutional shifts, ultimately, reducing their veto powers, or shifting power dynamics between institutional actors to reduce the heavy securitization.

Conclusion

This article has explored how Jordan's current institutional response to VE has emerged through historical institutionalism as a theoretical framework. In analysing institutional relations and power, the article examined the relationship between legitimacy, trust, and veto-powers in institutional settings. The article argues that Jordan's institutional response to VE is characterized by heavy securitisation of PVE efforts and emphasis on religion as the main driver of VE. These two characteristics emerged due to the influence of two major shocks – the Amman Bombings of 2005 and the killing of Jordanian Pilot Al Kassasbeh in 2015. This has also led to the emergence of security actors as the most trusted and capable actors in PVE despite their control and suppression of other governmental and non-governmental actors.

For PVE efforts to yield results, Jordan's policy makers should address three main policy concerns. First, the imbalance in institutional relations gives security actors and GID broad veto powers that limit the chances for necessary adaptability inside state institutions and in reshaping institutional relations between all relevant PVE actors. Second, policymakers and state institutions should refrain from exaggerating the role of religion as a driver of VE. This manoeuvre to protect the government from its failure in addressing structural drivers of VE is only widening the trust gap between citizens and the government. The government should instead admit its responsibility in the deteriorating structural indicators and develop a PVE strategy that tackles these structural drivers. This entails reconceptualising the VE threat in Jordan. Third, policymakers should strengthen the coordination mechanism between state institutions on PVE, which can better identify responsibilities and limit the control of security actors.

The analysis here offers insights on state approaches in responding to VE in non-democracies. It clarifies how Jordan has so far succeeded in containing the PVE threat compared to others in the Middle East. Although far from perfect, the analysis highlights how state institutions have adapted their response to the VE threat. It also highlights the imbedded challenges in this approach that make it unsustainable. Jordan cannot continue to empower security actors at the expense of other state institutions. At the same time, it shows how untrusted, and therefore illegitimate – governments continue to operation in a turbulent region.

Future research should further examine how relations between security actors and governments can be better structured in PVE contexts. Studies should also examine the impact of trust dynamics in empowering repressive and authoritative institutions, and the long-term impact on state stability.

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Interview 7. Online interview, male representative/governmental actor, June 7, 2021.
Interview 8. Online interview with male representative/local non-governmental actor, Amman, May 22, 2021.
Interview 9. Online interview with female representative/international non-governmental actor, Amman, May 20, 2021.
Interview 10. Online interview with female representative/governmental actor, Amman, May 31, 2021.
Interview 11. Online interview with male representative/local non-governmental actor, Amman, June 14, 2021.
Interview 12. Online interview, female representative/local non-governmental actor, May 22, 2021.
Interview 13. Online interview with female representative/local non-governmental actor, Amman, May 26, 2021.
Interview 14. Online interview with male representative/governmental actor, Amman, May 22, 2021.
Interview 15. Online interview with male representative/local non-governmental actor, Amman, May 27, 2021.
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