Radicalisation and Resilience Case Study

France

Tina Magazzini

European University Institute

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This case study is part of a series of in-depth reports on religiously motivated violent radicalisation - and resilience to it - in 12 countries. The series examines periods in which religious radicalisation and violence has escalated and analyses relevant policy and political discourses surrounding them. While seeking to identify factors that drove radicalisation and violence in each country, the case studies also critically assess programmes of prevention and resilience-building, identifying good practices.
This series was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

Countries covered in this series:
Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, France, Germany, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Tunisia and the United Kingdom.

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The EU-Funded GREASE project looks to Asia for insights on governing religious diversity and preventing radicalisation.

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in over 20 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Racius from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

For further information about the GREASE project please contact: Professor Anna Triandafyllidou, anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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Introduction

This report aims to analyse in which ways, through what processes, and around which key events religiously-inspired (violent) radicalisation mounted and peaked in France. Having been at the epicentre of some of the most high-profile attacks carried out in Europe over the past decade, France has seen extensive media coverage, political debate, and academic scholarship look both into its governance of religious minorities as well as its security approach to terrorist attacks. While the country was not been the stage of the deadliest attack in Europe (which remains the 2004 Madrid train bombings, which killed 193 and was revendicated by al-Qaeda), the 2015 attack on the satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* by two French al-Qaeda members (7 January) and the coordinated attacks resulting in 131 fatalities at several locations in Paris 10 months later (13 November) claimed by ISIS have become two of the most mediatised and symbolic attacks in Europe's recent history, in France and beyond.

These violent attacks have also further polarised society on an already contentious topic, namely the degree to which the French state should accommodate religious diversity in general and Muslim minorities in particular. With the largest Muslim population in the EU, France continues to experience tensions around religious symbols in the public sphere, as attested by a rise in social hostilities related to religion from a moderate-low level in 2007 to a consistently high level in the past decade (see the Social Hostilities Index, Pew Research Center, 2007, 2010, 2015, 2017).

With its 'radical secularism' captured in the principle of *laïcité*, France has branded itself as a combatively secular state in which religion (often used as code for Islam) is portrayed as being fundamentally at odds with 'French society, whether it has to do with the foundational values of the social contract—the Republic—, with the principles of legitimacy of its political and moral organisation—liberal democracy—and the historical definition of its citizenship model, with the confinement of the 'religious' to the private sphere'. (Rougier, 2020: 8).

It bears noting, religiously inspired or attributed violent radicalisation should not be conceived as limited to Islamism-inspired ideology, and as a matter of fact Muslim individuals often and increasingly find themselves on the receiving end of violent acts; as the National Observatory on Islamophobia has warned, Islamophobic attacks in France rose by 54 per cent in 2019 (CCIF, 2020)[1].

However, given that the most significant changes in perception of the extremist threat in France, as well as in parliamentary debates, legislation and governmental actions have taken place in response to the 2015 attacks claimed by either al-Qaeda or ISIS. Thus, this report focuses on jihadism as the main kind of (violent) radicalisation that has shaped the terms of the French debate.

Methodology and outline

This report is based on a combination of first-hand data and desk research. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted between February and August 2020, mostly in Paris and via telephone in three cases. Interviewees were selected to reflect a range of stakeholders with expertise on issues of religiously inspired or attributed radicalisation in France from different perspectives, fields, and approaches.

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[1] For instance, in 2019 a former political candidate for the far-right party Front National tried to set fire to a mosque in Bayonne, southwest France, and then opened fire, injuring two.

Key actors include public intellectuals and researchers (interviews 5, 8, and 9), policy experts and practitioners from civil society organisations (interviews 2 and 6), as well as civil servants (at different levels of international/state/local administration, interviews 1, 4, and 7), and members of the media (interview 3). It is noteworthy that such roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and it is not unusual for radicalisation experts to 'wear many hats' or inhabit different spaces: while the table in the appendix captures the primary or official role of the interviewees, it is fairly common for public intellectuals or recognized academics in the field to also act as policy consultants on occasion, for researchers and activists to write for, or be interviewed by media outlets, or for civil servants or researchers to volunteer in social programs run by NGOs.

Because fieldwork was carried out in Paris, the focus is mostly on the capital, and some initiatives taking place in other regions might have been overlooked. However, since France is more centralised than most other European countries (Sealy and Modood 2020) – and providing a comprehensive inventory of all initiatives and measures taken in response to violent radicalisation is out of the scope of this report – the picture that emerges does provide an overview on how the matter is approached at a national level. The questions posed during the semi-structured interviews varied slightly depending on the role of the interviewee, but roughly followed the same guideline, asking about the interviewees' experience in the field, about changes in the past years regarding religiously-attributed violent radicalisation (in both concrete activity and public perception), about radicalisation drivers and prevention, as well as counter-radicalisation measures.

To unpack the relevant events and the narratives and policy measures taken in response to this phenomenon, the report is structured in the following way: after providing a brief country background, which sketches France's colonial history in North Africa and simmering tensions around inequality and diversity building throughout the 2000s, the country case studies are presented. These are located as the attacks carried out in Toulouse and Montauban in 2012, and the multiple attacks carried out in Paris in 2015 (*Charlie Hebdo* in January; the Bataclan concert hall, various cafes, and public spaces in November). The next section on conceptualisation includes some considerations on how the French terminology differs and/or mirrors terminology used in other countries, and examines the national narrative that underpins such conceptualisation. The section on the drivers of religiously-inspired radicalisation explores the two main schools of thought and interpretations of how (violent) radicalisation can be explained in the French context, an ongoing debate that raises important practical as well as theoretical issues. The focus then shifts to how the threat of religiously-attributed radicalisation in France has been dealt with through a mix of security and preventive approaches, and the narratives associated with each. Finally, the report takes stock of past and current practices, and closes with some reflections on the lessons that can be learned from the French experience.

Country Background

For the purpose of this report, the periodicisation of events tied to violent radicalisation in France can be divided into four main periods, of which the latter two constitute the 'crisis events' that triggered the most significant reactions in recent years:

-   Before the 1990s: the period following the second world war is eventful and changing, but one in which violent attacks are not yet framed as tied to a religious minority.

- From the late Nineties to 2011: a decade in which the narratives and legislation around violent radicalisation (often phrased as 'terrorism') gains ground; there is an increasing policing of Muslim minorities, supported also by symbolic measures such as the 2011 ban on face coverings.
- From 2012 to 2015: the attacks carried out in 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban trigger a series of new anti-terrorism programs and legislation.
- Since 2015: the Paris attacks of 2015 marked a visible shift, putting violent radicalisation threats on the centre stage of politics and favouring, through a prolonged state of emergency, a focus on security at the expense of liberty.

Colonial legacies, formal equality, and ethnic blindness up to the 1990s

Violent radicalisation has gone through different phases in France's history. Particularly in recent years, France has been at the forefront of global media attention and political scrutiny following the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* and Bataclan attacks in Paris. However, France has a long history of such violence in which individuals of Muslim faith have been at the forefront, stemming from its colonial history and governance of Muslim-majority countries in north Africa, most notably Algeria (conquered and officially annexed as a French territory in 1830).[2] In the wake of the decolonization war (1954-1962) and Algerian independence—which affected France deeply, causing the end of the Fourth Republic, a new Constitution, and a general rethink of domestic and foreign policy—France briefly adopted what has been labelled the 'sanctuary approach': 'The idea was to avoid attacks by transnational terrorist organisations, such as ETA and Palestinian independence groups, by portraying France as a neutral country which tolerated the presence of these groups within the territory and avoided judicial and police prosecutions for their activities'. (D'Amato 2019a, p. 70).

However, a spate of attacks by different groups—the far-left military Action Directe, or AD; the separatist movements ETA and Breton Revolutionary Army); and, most importantly a 1978 attack at Paris-Orly airport by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine[3]—resulted in a national security plan, Vigipirate. This involved mainly investing more resources into surveillance and patrolling of public areas considered to be potential targets and created a threat-level scale (1 to 4), which is still in use.

In parallel, increased immigration from mostly majority-Muslim countries in the 1970s were met with assimilationist policies founded on formal egalitarianism and rooted in *laicité*, a principle enshrined in a 1905 law mandating the privatisation of religion adopted as the first article of the 1958 Constitution. *Laicité*, as discussed elsewhere (Modood and Sealy 2019), is not inherently antireligious, but in tandem with France's colour blindness policies has helped crystallize a specific idea of who can lay claims to an authentic 'French identity'.[4]

Despite the Vigipirate plan, in 1980 a bomb exploded in the Paris synagogue of Rue Copernic, killing four and wounding 46 (the attack was attributed to the PLO); the mid-Eighties and mid-Nineties saw more bomb attacks by militants affiliated with the Lebanese Hezbollah. It is noteworthy that 'although perpetrators professed, more or less

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[2] The French empire in the MENA region included (under the label of 'protectorates') Tunisia (since 1881), Morocco (since 1912), Syria and Lebanon (since 1920).

[3] Two people were killed and five injured in the attack, before the three attackers were shot and killed. A few months later, an attack by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) there was an attack on the Iraqi embassy in Paris which caused no casualties but in which 8 hostages were taken.

[4] As one interviewee noted "We require a certain assimilation from people who don't look French to us, or who don't embody what we view as French. It's very difficult for French people to change the image of what a French person looks like –I feel, for example, even though this is shifting and evolving a little bit, that a French person is still a white person." (ME1)

explicitly, connections to "Islamic radicalism", the political arena mostly interpreted these events as a consequence of foreign policy strategies. Religious extremism was not yet causally associated with terrorist events, at least in the political debate;. (D'Amato 2019a, 72). The attacks were largely seen as linked to France's foreign policy choices at the time: providing military and political support to several authoritarian regimes; intervening in favour of the Maronite Lebanese forces in the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990); and supporting Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). In short, while the number of attacks linked to some form of violent extremism in the 1970s and 1980s represent a long-standing transnational threat—and despite the fact that most of the perpetuators came from Muslim communities—such threat was not framed as 'religiously inspired' or 'religiously attributed' violent radicalisation until the 1990s.

The 1990s saw France's focus shift toward the religious dimension in politics. Following the Islamist party (the Islamist Front of Salvation, FIS) election victory in Algeria, the Algerian army declared a state of emergency and banned the FIS (with France's tacit approval), while a Reflection Committee on Islam (CORIF) was set up in France (1990). Meanwhile, France's decision to support the US-led mission against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (despite previous support of Hussein's regime) strongly impacted France's standing in the MENA region, with the move perceived as anti-Arabic and anti-Muslim (Shapiro 2010). The most serious attacks in France during this decade took place in 1995 and 1996, when the Paris metro and train (Regional Express Network, RER) were targeted. The 1995 attack left eight dead and over 100 wounded, and was led by Khaled Kelkal, a French-born citizen of Algerian origin from Lyon who was affiliated with the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA). In 1996, a similar attack targeted the tracks of the RER Gare de Port-Royal station in Paris, killing four and injuring over 100. The GIA was suspected of being behind the attack, but did not revendicate it. These events led to passage of a number of security measures (namely, allowing for provisional detention and night searches in cases classified as 'terrorist crimes') and the role of Islam and of France's Muslim minorities gained prominence in parliamentary debates, although government officials kept a relatively low profile on these issues. Increased powers allowing for searches without warrants based on suspicions were further allowed in the aftermath of 9/11, while a French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) was set up in 2003 by then-Ministry of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy. However, overall, the number and severity of attacks in the early 2000s in France was very low, as can be observed in the graph below.[5]:

The 2000s: societal tensions and a shift in narratives

This period extends over two decades and can be said to centre on the 2005 riots in the Paris *banlieues*. While not linked to religiously-attributed radicalisation, these events represent an important marker in a shift in perception which, in media narratives and public opinion, started linking marginalised Arab youth with violence. These narratives built upon wider security discourses that had taken hold, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. As observed in Figure 1 below, after the turbulent 1980s and 1990s, the immediate aftermath of 9/11 did not see any significant violent attacks in France. Yet, the academic discourse and public debate around Islam steadily crystallized and intensified, gaining currency as the main explanatory framework for the events taking place in Arab countries (Kepel 2002, 2004; Shapiro 2010; Van Zanten 1997).

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[5] In 2004 a bomb exploded by the Indonesian Embassy in Paris (causing some slight injuries but no deaths). The attack was claimed by the Front Islamique Français Armé (Armed French Islamic Front) that demanded the release of two GIA members imprisoned in France (Amghar, 2009).
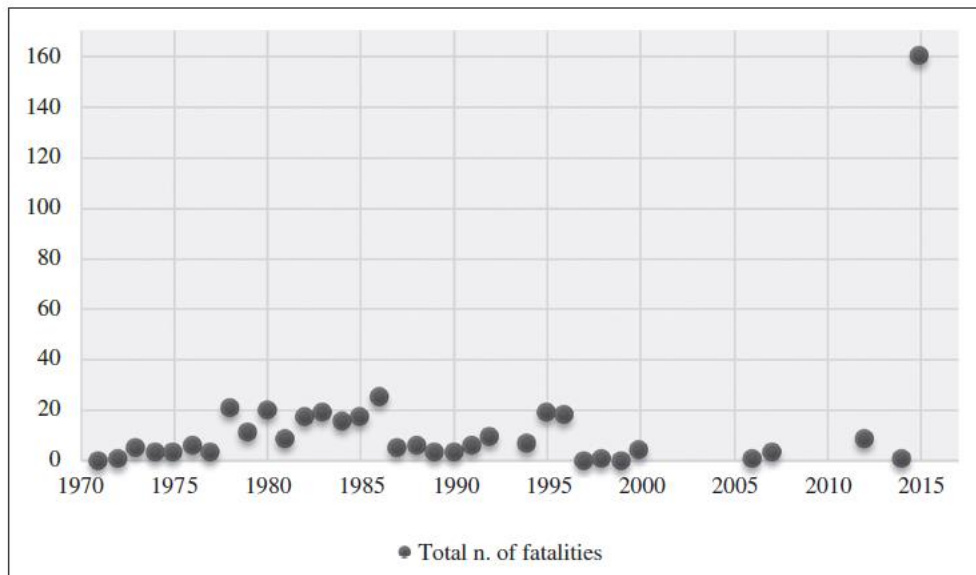
Figure 1. Total number of fatalities caused by attacks classified as terrorist by the French Ministry of Interior (1970-2015). See D'Amato, S. (2019), *Cultures of Counterterrorism: French and Italian approaches to terrorism after 9/11*, Routledge, p.67.

Khosrokhavar (2010, 2018) identified two sources of radical Islam in France, one internal and one external: the external source is the foreign networks (the GIA in the 1990s, al-Qaeda and ISIS more recently), while the internal source results from the 'Islamist effect' that predisposes disaffected youth towards radicalism. In particular, the banlieues have come to represent areas of urban degradation that affects primarily first- and second-generation migrants from the Maghreb who have come to be concentrated in these areas, resulting in a conflation of poverty, ethnicity, and Islam (Cesari 2005; also Gunn 2009: 982; and Rougier 2020). The idea behind the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Faith in 2003 was for the French state to have an 'official' interlocutor for the Muslim community in France to regulate Muslim religious activities. Similar councils exist for the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant communities, yet the one on Muslim faither received some criticism for fostering communitarianism and a 'clericalisation' of Islam in France (Boudreaux 2006).

Meanwhile, the attacks of 9/11 in the United States received widespread coverage and contributed to narratives about the threat posed by 'radical Islam', as did the Madrid train attacks of 2004 and the London attacks in 2005 (Smolar 2005).

According to several interviewees (CS1, PR1, CS2), France avoided an attack like those that hit Madrid and London in 2004-2005 because the riots taking place in the banlieue drew the attention of people who might have otherwise been involved in violent extremism. However, it is well-documented that there were a number of al-Qaeda cells in France thinking about the same thing at the time (CS1): 'It did not happen, partly because they were caught, partly because they were distracted'. But things had started to evolve. In late 2005, France experienced riots in several Paris banlieues, suburban low-income areas inhabited mainly by French of immigrant background, often North African. Although the tensions resulting in the three-week riots were in no way linked to religious radicalisation, being rather born out of economic struggle and social discrimination, they were linked to increasing securitisation in these areas and to forms of ethnic solidarity based around the racialised Muslim 'other' and their poor socio-economic position. The unrest in 2005 was triggered by the death of two local Muslim youths in their attempt to flee from the police, and while not religiously motivated or connected, the events marked a further escalation in security measures and discourses

around the rising crime rate which was largely blamed on people of North African origins. It is noteworthy that the inequality at the root of the social unrest of 2005 was—and still is—not only economic, but a racialised social hierarchy and status also play an important role:

> 'There is a very strong social status hierarchy here in France, and race is a huge part of it. It's not that in the UK there is no racism, of course, but classism is stronger there: so yes, BAME people are over-represented in low-paying jobs, but you also see white working poor people—they exist. In Paris, you don't see "white trash"—and I challenge you to find me a bathroom cleaner who's white. So, about the hierarchy: on top of the food chain, there's the 'Parisian' of course. On the bottom, it's either the blacks or the Arabs: depending on how fresh the memory of the latest terrorist attack is'. (PR2)

Against this background, in 2005 the police arrested a young French Arab man, Chérif Kouachi, on his way to join al-Qaeda. A member of the so-called Buttes-Chaumont gang,[6] Kouachi later went on to become one of the perpetuators of the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper in 2015.

Yet, in 2004-2005 viewing attacks as resulting from religiously-inspired violent radicalisation was still seen as something hypothetical that happened elsewhere (PR1, CS2, CS3), and cases such as that of Kouachi, who was arrested for attempting to leave France to join the ranks of the foreign fighters, were not perceived as a direct threat to 'the republic': after being arrested at the airport on his way to Iraq, he was tried in a low level court alongside robbers and drug dealers, were the maximum sentence is 10 years:

> 'I know it might sound naïve, but in the early 2000s the thinking was that if there were no attacks on French soil, it meant the system to fight terrorism was working. That things were fine. While there weren't fine at all'. (CS2)

Kouachi further radicalised in prison, which is a common phenomenon raised by several interviewees (PR2, RS1, CS3). With prisons often fostering a mix of non-ideological criminals with already-radicalised individuals and youth at risk, it seems that a high number of perpetuators of the attacks carried out in 2015 had established connections and expanded their networks in prison, exiting the detention system more radicalised than they were when they had entered it (CS2).

While Kouachi ended up serving some time in prison for terrorism-related crimes, like many others he was also later able to travel and receive training abroad by al-Qaeda, and eventually return to France.[7]

Crisis case studies

What stands out in Figure 1 is, of course, the 2015 attacks, which were the country's deadliest and most consequential in terms of both policy changes and of public resonance.

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[6] Buttes-Chaumont is a parc in the north of Paris, on the city's outskirts.

[7] At the time, in Europe there was no single watchlist or 'no fly list' or any legislation on the usage of PNR (passenger name record, which air companies collect on passengers) because of concerns over privacy, so there was no effective way to prevent an individual previously convicted for terrorist-related activities from travelling from a neighbouring EU country.

However, these were preceded by two incidents in 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban, where Mohammed Merah, a French youth of Algerian origins, killed three soldiers on 11 and 15 March, before shooting three children and a teacher at a Jewish school four days later, citing as motives the headscarf ban and France's role in Afghanistan and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

While these events were largely overshadowed by the high-profile events of 2015, namely the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in January and the coordinated attacks in Paris on 13 November, the years building up to them, and particularly the 2012 events, will also be outlined below, as they were also identified by a number of interviewees among of the main 'crisis events' of the last years.

2012: the war in Syria and the Merah affair

In 2012, the war in Syria dramatically changed the European security landscape. A new jihadist movement, considered more brutal than al Qaeda, emerged: ISIS. In 2014, ISIS formally split from al-Qaeda and declared a Caliphate. The recruits—from everywhere, but particularly France—in those years sky-rocketed: the calls were no longer about remote locations, nor selectively aimed at men. There were calls for youth, for women, for children. It was about going to Syria, which was relatively reachable in terms of connections and economic feasibility. Thousands of young European Muslims joined, but compared to al-Qaeda recruits, aspiring ISIS militants often knew even less about Islam (CS2):

> 'It was like happy hour: anyone who wanted to join the Islamic State could do so. It was well known that al-Qaeda had created filters. You had to show you were trustworthy, there were a series of tests and an apprenticeship; it was not all that easy. Whereas with ISIS, everyone was welcome, anyone could join. Even crazy people, violent people, petty criminals, adolescents. I even saw young people who were not yet radicalized going to Syria, because it was cool, it was 'la mode', they were curious and wanted to escape their boring lives. I had never seen anything like it before'.

From the moment the coalition began bombing the Islamic State in August 2014, ISIS developed a logic of revenge that intensified along with the bombings. According to experts, this meant that the radicalised individuals who wanted to launch actions in Europe gained in authority (RS1, CS3). In late 2014, ISIS started creating an external operations unit and developed a plan for a campaign of attacks in Europe; the unit would involve as many as 200 individuals to launch attacks in their countries. At the same time, hundreds more terrorists were returning to Europe without specific terrorist missions; hundreds more Europeans had been radicalized at home, without visiting Syria.

Among the latter was a young French man of Algerian descent, Mohammed Merah,[8] who radicalised in prison while serving short sentences for petty crimes in the 2000s. Described in news reports as a troubled individual with mental issues, he opened fire on 15 March 2012, killing two uniformed soldiers and injuring a third outside a shopping centre in Montauban, in southern France. A few days later, on 19 March, he opened fire again at a Jewish school in Toulouse, killing a rabbi and three children and wounding four others. Merah filmed all the attacks with a GoPro camera and turned the recordings into a video set to verses of the Quran. The video included Merah's pledge of allegiance

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[8] Merah traveled to Egypt, allegedly to learn Arabic, and to Afghanistan and Pakistan, but did not receive any training by al-Qaeda.

to al-Qaeda, and he cited as his motivation France's participation in the War in Afghanistan, the laws banning face veils, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.[9]

Despite the French President (Nicolas Sarkozy at the time) statement that 'the Islamic faith has nothing to do with the insane motivations of this man', these attacks, as well as the manhunt and their intensive coverage in the media[10] marked an important threshold in the narrative of 'Islamist extremists' in France's public debate. What received comparatively little coverage was the fact that the two soldiers killed by Merah were Muslim:

> Merah seemed to embody a deep tendency specific to young people of the second generation: Islamic radicalisation, identity withdrawal, the break with French society. However, if we look at the facts more closely, it is rather the opposite that emerges. […] The extreme emotion that gripped public opinion after Merah's crimes overshadowed an essential fact: his priority targets were not members of the Jewish community but young French Muslim soldiers. […] He was angry with the French army, but obviously especially with the young people of the second generation who come from the same social spaces as him. […] Jihadism makes the headlines; integration does not make the news. The army's recruiting pool is, for obvious social and generational reasons, the same as that of the jihadists, and the army is way more successful. By killing French Muslim soldiers, Merah may have wanted to kill his double and his opposite, which begs the exploration of another approach: for each Merah who joins the Taliban, how many French Muslims are in the troops fighting them?' (Roy 2012).

What remains unquestionable is that the 2012 shootings represent a watershed moment in the timeline of religiously-attributed violent attacks in France.

The 2015 attacks: *Charlie Hebdo* and the Bataclan

On 7 January 2015 the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris were attacked by brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, associated with al-Qaeda, who shot and killed 12 and wounded 11. This attack was motivated by the publication of cartoons of the prophet Muhammad in the magazine in 2012, and by al-Qaeda subsequently placing the cartoonist Stéphane Charbonnier on the 'most wanted' list. On the same day Amedy Coulibaly, an ISIS affiliate who had befriended Chérif Kouachi in prison, carried out an attack on a Jewish supermarket in Paris, killing four before being shot dead by the police. Although he had been radicalised by al-Qaeda, Coulibaly claimed allegiance to ISIS.[11]

Perhaps because the target was the newsroom of a provocative magazine, the attack was seen as an attack on the free press as a whole and the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting captured the national and international imaginary in an unprecedented way. The display of solidarity through the slogan '*Je suis Charlie'* echoed across social and mainstream media around the world in impressive numbers, but the rally on national unity which saw millions of people marching in Paris on 11 January 2015 included over 40 heads of state. In November of that same year, a series of bombs were detonated at a football stadium, cafés, restaurants, and one at the Bataclan concert hall in Paris, killing 131 and injuring hundreds. The coordinated attacks sent shockwaves across France and worldwide: if the

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[9] The video was sent to the news agency Al Jazeera, which decided not to air it.

[10] The manhunt ended on 22 March 2012 when Merah was shot dead by the police.

[11] The Kouachi brothers declared allegiance to al-Qaeda instead, shortly before they died in a shootout with the police on 9 January 2015.

Charlie Hebdo shootings had gathered international attention and empathy, the attacks of November had an effect comparable to that of 9/11 in 2001. As an interviewee put it:

> 'We all remember exactly where we were when we found out. Not me, because I live in France, or because I work at a cultural centre, or because I am a member of a minority. Everyone'. (PR2).
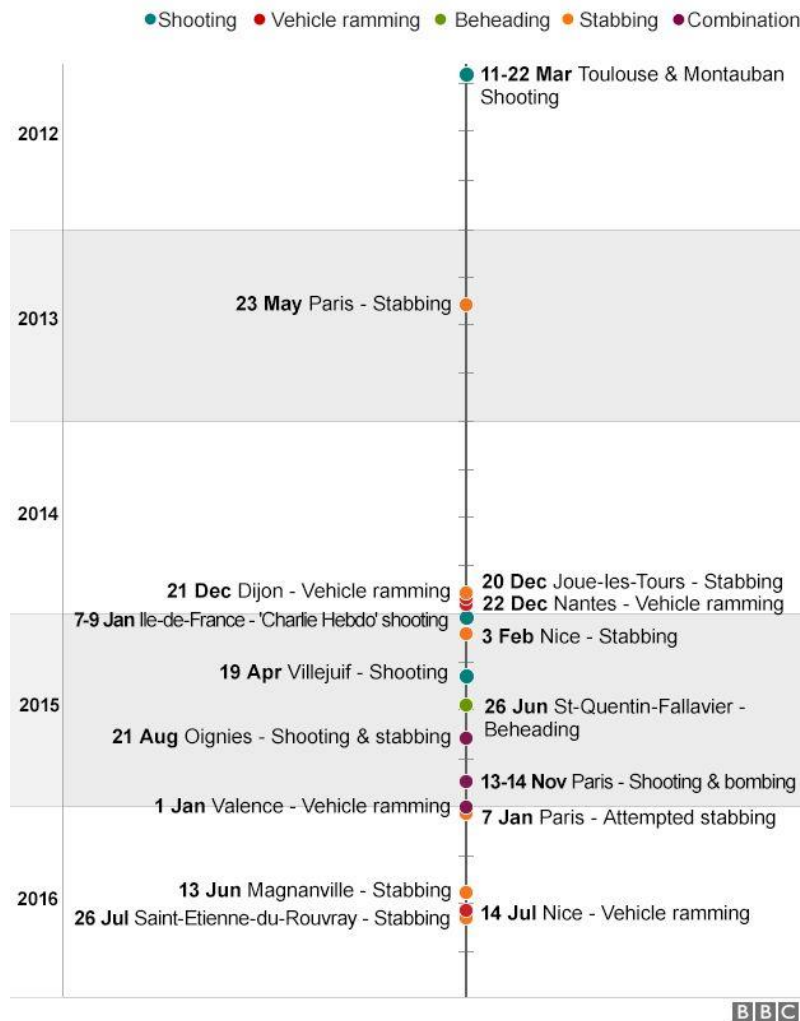
Timeline: Attacks in France

● Shooting ● Vehicle ramming ● Beheading ● Stabbing ● Combination

2012
11-22 Mar Toulouse & Montauban Shooting

2013
23 May Paris - Stabbing

2014

2015
21 Dec Dijon - Vehicle ramming
20 Dec Joue-les-Tours - Stabbing
22 Dec Nantes - Vehicle ramming
7-9 Jan Ile-de-France - 'Charlie Hebdo' shooting
3 Feb Nice - Stabbing
19 Apr Villejuif - Shooting
26 Jun St-Quentin-Fallavier - Beheading
21 Aug Oignies - Shooting & stabbing
13-14 Nov Paris - Shooting & bombing

2016
1 Jan Valence - Vehicle ramming
7 Jan Paris - Attempted stabbing
13 Jun Magnanville - Stabbing
26 Jul Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray - Stabbing
14 Jul Nice - Vehicle ramming

BBC

Figure 2. Timeline of the attacks in French Between 2012 and 2016, BBC, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33288542

Conceptualisations of (violent) radicalisation

The events described above led the French state to act assertively in adopting new measures, creating new governmental bodies, funding prevention programmes, and investing resources to address what is generally described as a process of (violent) 'radicalisation'. However, the term 'radicalisation' is never defined in the 2014 'Action Plan against violent radicalisation and terrorist networks' (PLAT), the 2016 'Action Plan against radicalisation and terrorism' (PART), or the 2018 'National Plan of Radicalisation Prevention' (Prevent to Protect). Antoine Jardin, a researcher from the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) who contributed to the study 'A

French Islam is Possible',[12] has claimed that radicalisation 'is not a rigorous scientific concept. "Radicalism'/'radicalisation" has become a catch-all word to vaguely designate what is perceived to be as an uncontrolled threat and a hazardous label for public policies in a context of rising jihadist violence since the attacks committed in France by Mohammed Merah in 2012' (2016). Similarly, the journalist Pierre Rimbert has complained that the French government has been employing 'radicalisation' as a 'dirty word' in different settings, using it sometimes to describe adherence to radical ideas, sometimes as a shorthand for social marginalisation, sometimes implying a 'continuum' between radical ideas and violent acts, therefore allowing a non-committal yet denigratory use of the term to portray progressive and unconventional views as dangerous: 'during the social movement against the labour law of spring 2016, hundreds of media articles and governmental reports denounced 'an all-out radicalisation' of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), whose activists exercised the right to strike' (Rimbert 2017).

Controversies surrounding the term 'radicalisation' are by no means an exclusively French issue, as there is little agreement even among international experts on what constitutes radicalisation and on how it happens (Hellyer & Grossman 2019). Yet the concept has become central in different settings to describe a multidimensional yet coherent process—a process characterised by consistent escalation, often based on an us/them ideology, and with 'religion' sometimes taken as such 'ideology' (Ibid).

In the French context, some interviewees used the terms 'radicalisation' and 'terrorism' interchangeably, therefore implying a violent component —whether it was acted upon or not—in religiously-inspired radicalisation. This equivalence can be better understood by looking at the framework through which radicalisation is seen in policy and legislation, and what it means in the programmes and measures that refer to it, even if they do not specifically define it.

Created in 2006 as the 'Inter-ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency', it was rebranded in 2016 as 'The Inter-ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalisation' (CIPDR), which was charged with developing the 'Prevent to Protect' national plan to prevent radicalisation. The CIPDR's mission and scope, according to its official website, are to 'focus on the prevention of delinquency, the prevention of radicalisation and also, since early 2020, on the fight against separatism and on preventive and repressive actions against sectarian deviance. […] Since November 2019, the CIPDR has also coordinated with the prefectures the implementation of the new policy against Islamism and community withdrawal. And since January 1, 2020, Miviludes[13] is a part of it'.[14]

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[12] The report is available (in French) at https://www.institutmontaigne.org/publications/un-islam-francais-est-possible

[13] Miviludesis is a French governmental agency charged with observing and analysing the phenomenon of sectarian movements.

[14] See https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/le-cipdr/
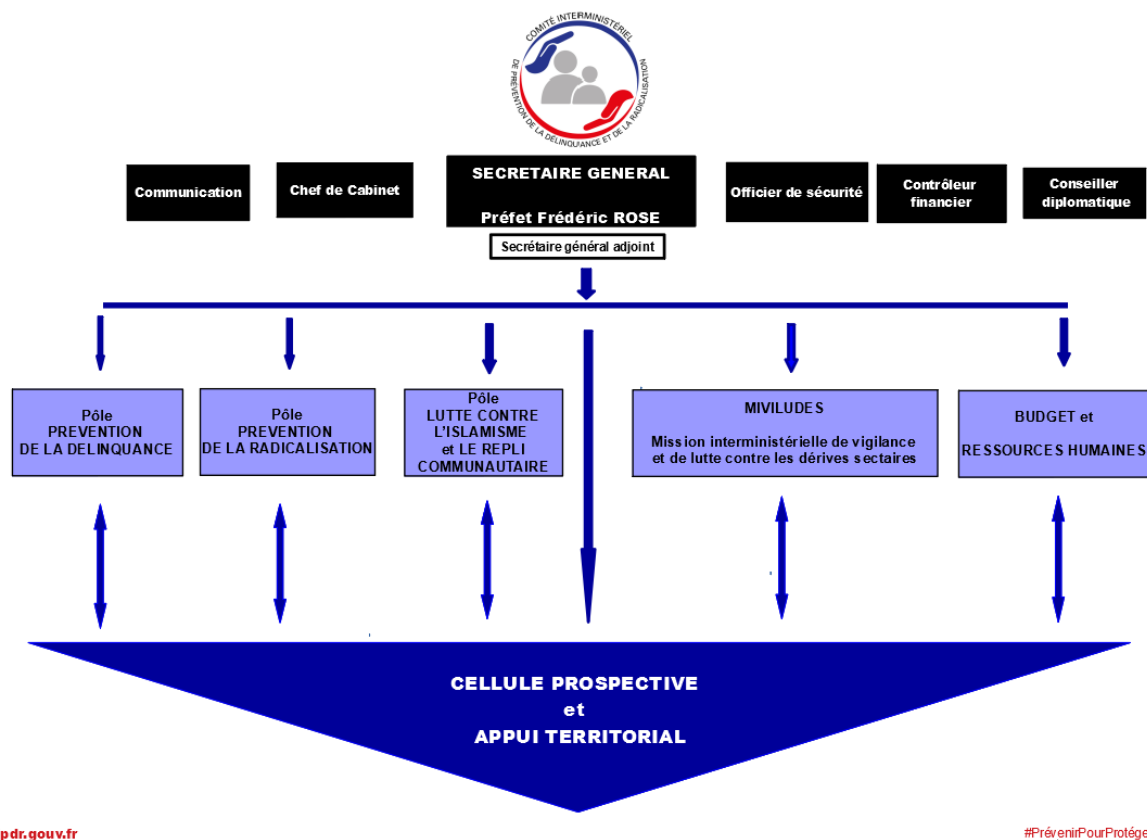
Figure 3. Organigramme of the General Secretariat of the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalisation. Available at https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/le-cipdr/organigramme/

The rationale for the 'Prevent to Protect' plan is explained in the following way:

> 'During 2016 and 2017, radicalisation continued to assert itself in France, like other European countries and beyond, as a lasting threat to the country's security and social cohesion. Faced with this threat, a public policy to prevent radicalisation, which articulates social and security logics, was built from 2014. The anti-terrorism plan (PLAT) of 29 April 2014 and the plan to fight radicalisation and terrorism (PART) of 9 May 2016 developed this prevention policy around early detection, training, responsibility both in open and closed spaces, and the fostering of research'.[15]

Two aspects stand out from these descriptions: on the one hand, radicalisation is seen at the very least as a threat to social cohesion (or even as the 'antechamber' of violence) to be prevented: regardless of whether it is an individual issue (causing individuals to become violent extremists) or a collective phenomenon (causing 'separatism'), it has a strong negative connotation. Therefore, the preventive dimension is key (RS1, PR2).[16]
On the other hand, to include 'radicalisation' as an additional feature to the existing Committee on Delinquency makes it look as if radicalisation were merely a 'type' of delinquent or deviant behaviour, which therefore justifies a security and criminalising approach (PR2, CS2).

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[15] Preamble to the 'Prevent to Protect' plan, available here (in French): https://www.gouvernement.fr/radicalisation-les-cinq-grands-axes-du-plan-prevenir-pour-proteger
[16] While it is important to distinguish the nature of the phenomenon—whether we are referring to violent or non-violent radicalisation (Hellyer & Grossman 2019: 10-11), this distinction is hardly present in the French debate and official documents.

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The result is the struggle to prevent an attitude which *might* lead to a potential crime, as argued by one interviewee (RS3):

> 'Do you know what inchoate offences are? Inchoate offences mean that you can get charged for a terrorist offense that you haven't yet committed – so you can get charged for training to become a terrorist, or for traveling to a place to train to become a terrorist. But prevention is not only about disengagement; it is also about *preventing* you from have something to disengage from. And this is quite a radically new way to think about this. [...] But I find a bit problematic how everyone seems to have happily embraced this PVE [Prevention of Violent Extremism] label: it is one thing to want to prevent people from joining a terrorist group, and it's another thing to prevent people from developing an affinity to what is labelled as an extremist ideology'.

Furthermore, the conflation of 'delinquency' with 'radicalisation' results in the framing of radicalisation as the overlap between a 'criminal behaviour' rooted in exclusion and a 'deviant religiosity' in what has been dubbed an 'Islamisation of criminal behaviour' (D'Amato 2019b).

What underpins the French 'Islamisation of criminal behaviour' approach

To understand the French 'Islamisation of criminal behaviour' approach, one must mention the complicated relationship of the French state with religion in the first place.[17]
According to public intellectual and renowned academic Olivier Roy, recent years have seen a general crisis of religious literacy, faced both by Catholicism and by Islam (Roy 2020). On the one hand, religious leaders are facing an increasingly critical mass of young people to whom they have lost their legitimacy (interview with Roy):

> 'Nowadays the comeback of religion is mainly taking place through self-taught, born-again Christians or Muslims. And these people are looking for what they see as 'the real thing'—salvation, glory...they don't care about religious culture. They don't care about culture at all'.

On the other hand, according to Roy, most of the 'radicals' who engage in violent acts do so precisely because of their lack of a religious background:

> 'It's why we cannot say that radicalisation is a consequence of a long process of Islamisation. It's more a matter of *Islamisation of radicalisation* than a *radicalisation of Islam'.* (Ibid.)

While some of those who perpetuated the 2015 attacks might have adopted an Islamist narrative (even if only superficially or instrumentally), one must also account for the fact that not all of those who contributed to the execution of an attack that is portrayed as 'religiously inspired' share the same ideology. According to several interviewees, the connection of violent radicalisation with ordinary criminality points towards the need to map and prevent how people acquire the financial, logistical, and operational capability to commit terrorist attacks (CS1, CS2, PR1). From this point of view, the

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[17] For more details on France's governance of religion, see Sealy and Modood, 2020.

ideology of the violent extremists is only one part of that picture, while much of the technical labour such as bomb-making can be provided by ordinary criminals who are just looking to make a profit, but hold only a generic sympathy for the jihadist cause, or none at all. The 'Islamisation' label therefore might end up being used to identify criminal acts in which the attack was executed or claimed or both by al-Qaeda or ISIS, but it is not necessarily helpful in preventing the recruiting of the 'rank and file' network that makes such acts possible in practice.

On the other hand, if the goal of 'prevention' is seen as not merely preventing violent radicalisation, but also nonviolent radicalisation, the question changes: how did the people who have radicalised—including those who are at no risk of shifting to 'violent radicalisation'—reach those positions, and how to deal with them? As seen in the context of the 'affairs de foulard'—a controversy ongoing since the early 1990s regarding the wearing of the Islamic veil in public spaces by Muslim women— no one would seriously argue that head coverings are *in themselves* violent, yet they are routinely attacked as 'radical' in France (CS1, ME1).

As Hellyer and Grossman (2019) have argued, the two issues (radicalisation and violence) are neither mutually necessary nor automatically lead to the other, even though they are also not mutually exclusive: 'Many dream of committing violent action and never act on this impulse. Nor do all acts of violence rely on extremist ideology or affect in framing their motivation'. (p. 10).

The 'Prevent to Protect' plan in France however clearly identifies as a threat even those 'radicalised' individuals who might not be themselves engaged in violence, but are nonetheless engaged in rhetorical defences of violence (CS1):

> 'Hence the concern about social media, for instance. In which case, the distinction between violent radicalisation and non-violent radicalisation becomes a bit fictitious. And unless you count any form of use of violent language as violence, which perhaps some people would, you end up with a rather different set of questions. Particularly as the porosity or permeability between support for extremism and support for the violent forms of extremisms is very strong: people can move back and forth across that frontier'.

The processes through which individuals radicalise, and particularly the shift to violent forms of radicalisation, continue to be the object of a rich and at times heated debate, of which the following section attempts to capture the main arguments.

Drivers and processes of religiously inspired radicalisation

An Islamification of radicalism or a radicalisation of Islam?

Radicalisation as a social and security issue in France is not new, yet the ways in which it has become a political priority of successive governments, and one of the main public concerns over the past decade, is quite exceptional. This has prompted several different theories about drivers for radicalisation and different schools of thought about what some of the most important elements contributing to processes of radicalisation might be, particularly with respect to the religious dimension.

Since the goal of this report is neither to side with one causal explanatory factor nor to provide an exhaustive, detailed account of all possible motivational factors, we focus on the two most prominent French 'schools' or interpretations of the religiously-inspired

violent radicalisation process, embodied by two renowned radicalisation experts and public intellectuals, Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel.

On the one hand, Olivier Roy has put forward the idea that one the most important ways of understanding processes and drivers of radicalisation is to think about the social dimensions and conditions that can sometimes enable an individual, or indeed a group of people, to start to move towards radicalised violence (2017). According to Roy, these involve primarily three things. The first is a set of grievances which people have come to believe cannot be resolved by existing social or political mechanisms—such as democratic processes or lobbying for change at the institutional or the social level.

Secondly, the role of social networks and social influences needs to be taken into account since media and peer pressure have been shown to be fundamentally important to the processes of radicalisation:

> 'That is to say that if you are operating in a milieu or a context, where there are a lot of influences toward seeing violence as a solution to your problems, or violence as a legitimate response to your grievances—if you are in an environment, a social environment, where a lot of your friends, or a lot of people that you care about who are around you, are also involved in radicalising to violence, it can be both very seductive to go along with that, and it also can be very difficult or challenging to take a stand against that. Because then, of course, you risk becoming isolated from within a social group or social network. So, certainly social influence and social networks, not only in your immediate environment, but also broader social influences, including online, can also play quite a critical role'. (interview with Roy)

The third element that goes into radicalisation from Roy's perspective is very much bound up with the experience of humiliation:

> '...of either feeling, perceiving, or being made to feel that you are somehow lesser than, that you don't belong, that you are not as good as. So over and over, in the life histories on the testimony and experiences of a number of people who have radicalised to violence, experiences of humiliation, experiences of not belonging, the anger and frustration, the loneliness that can arise from those experiences has been shown to be quite important'. (Ibid.)

This last point, the deeply personal experience of exclusion, non-belonging and negativity which according to Roy turns individuals into aspiring 'negative heroes' of sorts, regardless of their religious background, is where lies the most significant disagreement with Gilles Kepel, an equally renown public intellectual and expert on this topic. .

According to Kepel, who has published extensively on religiously-inspired violent radicalisation in France, in order to comprehend the violent radicalisation processes, one must understand the terrorists' background, which he locates in the intellectual resources of Salafism (Kepel 2015; Worth 2017). In this sense, his perspective shares some points with Walter Laqueur. Beyond the focus on the religious dimension as a core one for violent radicalisation, Kepel theorises the process in broader terms and identifies three generations of terrorism on French soil. The criteria he uses to distinguish the generations revolve around the nature of the ideology, the mode of organization of the movements, and the trajectories of the individuals (2015).

The first phase in Kepel's view, which corresponds to the 1990s, is importing the Algerian civil war. This was about forms of Islam that focused at first on transforming Algeria; France was simply a secondary battle ground, mainly to attract visibility. The modes of organization were at the time the classic kind of paramilitary modes of organization, very similar to those of the IRA, the FARC, and the ETA in the 1970s. The trajectories were forms of conscription into paramilitary organizations: in a paramilitary mode of organization, recruitment is a key issue and tends to be very formal and multi-stage. It takes a long time to earn trust, which is connected to training and progressively more intensive demands in order to check the reliability of the new recruit as well as to overcome the suspicion of a recruit being an informant.

The second phase can be seen in the aftermath of 9/11 and the early 2000s. The are several differences with the first phase. First, the target was no longer regime change in Algeria: it was about achieving certain objectives in Europe—even though what those objectives are is not always clear (as they were promoted as generic forms of destabilization). Second, the mode of organization became more internet-reliant, focused on semi-autonomous cells that connected through communication channels devoid of a hierarchical chain of command—which represents a significant difference from the 1990s. And third, as a consequence, a beginning of a shift in profile took place because the organization was no longer classically paramilitary; with a blurring of the distinction between paramilitaries and logistical, ideological, and financial support, the organizations started shifting from a paramilitary logic toward more fluid franchise brandings operations.

If such (mediatic and organizational-structural) change corresponds, in Kepel's view, to the second phase, his 'third phase' also sees a shift in the ideology. His claim is that in recent years even the idea of a coherent transnational geopolitical agenda has been basically dropped in favour of a form of Millenarianism: there simply isn't a geo-political agenda that recent terrorist acts are designed to achieve. They are more expressions of commitment to a very abstract cause, which by definition can never achieve its result, and with which it is impossible to negotiate (2015).

This argument resonates with some interviewees (CS1):

> 'The British state started negotiating with the provisional IRA in 1972, at the same time as it introduced preventive internment, defiance of centuries of legal tradition. But because *there was someone to negotiate with*. It took a very long time, these were very secret negotiations through very strange channels, but the idea was that you needed to make some kind of deal with these people, and at the same time we will try to destroy them. Apartheid South Africa was negotiating with the ANC from 1985, four years before the release of Nelson Mandela, at the same time as it was reinforcing security pressure on ANC operatives within South Africa, and continuing a programme of targeted assassination outside South Africa. But again, because there was someone to negotiate with. In the current setting, there's no one. Literally no one to negotiate with'.

Roy, on the other hand, considers the idea of a 'third generation' a false category and claims that current jihadist fits exactly the same profile as in the second generation: petty delinquency. He also contests the idea that young men move from Salafism to terrorism, pointing to the fact that none of the terrorists who carried out recent attacks in France were observant Salafists.

One of the most contentious points in the debate remains that of the role of individuals and individualism. According to Roy, the core of the problem is marginalised, atomised

youth who have trajectories that are profoundly individual and have little or nothing to do with religiosity:

> 'The root causes of radicalisation are complex. But it's not a collective movement: it's a collection of individuals. And if we look at the individual motivation, the first thing you have is resentment—they resent society, they resent some sort of exclusion—not necessarily social or economic exclusion—and they dream to become some sort of a hero. [...] And, of course, they choose Islam because it's the only thing you have on the market today. Leftism is no longer a universal cause. So the only violent, radical, universal cause which is on the market is Jihadism. And this is, I think, the main reason for the fascination towards Jihadism. [...] Jihad has replaced revolution, and the Ummah has replaced the universal working class'. (interview with Roy).

One of Kepel's criticisms to this understanding of violent radicalisation drivers is that by privileging the question of individual trajectories, the bigger question of how a system created the circumstances within which they could become what they became remains unaddressed.

Overall, looking at the political debates on these issues, it can be seen how both these perspectives have helped, to some degree, shape the official narrative of the state's counter-terrorism measures: on a conceptual level, religion (especially Salafism) is increasingly regarded in combination with criminality as one of the key explanatory 'ingredients' that leads to an 'Islamisation of criminality' (and thus the creation of an anti-Islamism unit within the CIPDR). From 2012 onwards, governmental white papers and legislative debates also show a gradual shift toward an increasing individualisation of the explanatory narrative, with references to 'lone wolves' and atomised individuals.

> 'French policy-makers developed an understanding of terrorism as a sort of 'Islamisation of criminal behaviour', but, facing forms of terrorist-crime, or, rather, criminal terrorism, the French sense of national security progressively lost its collective imaginary'. (D'Amato 2019b, pp. 344-345)

However, the recent focus on 'Islamist separatism' (Hafidi 2020) has to some extent swung attention back to the French Muslim community as a whole in the attempt to frame the Muslim minority as collectively responsible for individual acts of violence.

From these debates and controversies, some elements that emerged from the interviews push to retain some elements that belong to the different approaches. From Kepel's approach, the idea of different phases was raised by practitioners and civil society members who are not necessarily familiar with the scholarship on this topic. In short, there is little doubt that both the nature of terrorist organizations as well as their modes of recruitment have changed radically, and organizing such shifts according to different phases has its appeal, particularly since the affiliations to al-Qaeda and ISIS saw a significant change in their target recruits in recent years (CS1, CS2, CS3).

Most interviewees however refuted the idea of a direct connection between Salafism and violent radicalisation, noting that the profiles of the French attackers more closely fit the characterisation of marginalised youth triggered by experiences of humiliation, as argued by Roy. Merah, for instance, in the years prior to the attacks, had been rejected

by the French army because of his criminal record, had tried to join the Foreign Legion, had attempted suicide, and was diagnosed as a polar narcissistic personality.

The state and societal-led approaches

Largely as result of being confronted by the evolution of violent radicalisation, as well as developments in the European positions, the French state's approach towards religiously inspired or attributed violent radicalisation has changed over the years. This has led France, particularly after 2015, to develop 'hard' as well as 'soft' responses, on the one hand expanding legislative, criminal, and security measures while, on the other, adopting approaches more focussed on social exclusion. These can broadly be classified as security and preventive approaches, even though the two are strongly interlinked.

The security approach between 'terrorist crimes' and symbolism

The main legislation to counter violent radicalisation is France to date remains the 'Law of the fight against terrorism'.[18] Such law dates back to 1986, even though it was amended during the 1990s (in 1995, in response to threats associated with the GIA), and then again in the last decade (in 2012 and 2015, to add reparations for victims of terrorism). The French Coordination Unit for the Fight Against Terrorism (UCLAT, created in 1984) coordinates the sharing of operational information from all relevant authorities and services, including anti-terrorist judges and the prison administration, and is directly attached to the Office of the Director General of Police. A range of government ministries, police, and intelligence agencies are involved. Strategy development tends to be centralised from within the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of the Interior (CS2, RS1).

Vigipirate, created in 1978 and updated since, also continues to be the system which sets the threat level in France. Meantime, however, several other legislative measures have been approved. Training for practitioners and improving preparedness have also been a constant and expanded during the period. Anti-terrorism measures from the early 2000s, such as the 2001 Law on Everyday Security and a 2003 immigration law, expanded police surveillance powers of electronic and postal communication along with financial records, also widening law enforcement powers to search vehicles and premises, deport individuals convicted of criminal offences, and deport or ban individuals or groups that threaten public order. In 2006, France published a white paper that highlighted the need for a more comprehensive approach towards internal terrorist threats, and radicalisation was specifically mentioned in a white paper in 2013. Specific laws against terrorism were also introduced in 2008 (Loi 2008-1245)[19] and 2013 (Loi 2013-1168).[20] The conflation of 'radicalisation' with 'terrorism' in many government initiatives and in legislation, however, makes for an ambivalent framework: in general France's strategic approach has been characterised by violent radicalisation's treatment as a form of crime, therefore investigations are pursued in the same way as general criminal investigations, yet broad exceptions to the rights of suspects apply, since a range of exceptional measures are applicable to individuals suspected of

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[18] Loi n° 86-1020 du 9 septembre 1986 relative à la lutte contre le terrorisme. The original legislation as well as all the subsequent amendments are vailable (in French) at
https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000693912
[19] Loi n° 2008-1245 du 1er décembre 2008, available at
https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000019857148&categorieLien=id
[20] Loi n° 2013-1168 du 18 décembre 2013, available at
https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000028338825&categorieLien=id

'terrorist crimes'. A state of emergency declared in 2015 after the Paris attacks was not lifted until 2017 after being extended five times.[21]

Current legislation allows the police to hold suspects in custody for up to 120 hours and conduct searches in private homes at any time, at the request of a prosecutor. This legislation has evolved further recently with the promulgation of the Intelligence Act in 2015 and the June 2016 law strengthening the fight against organized crime, terrorism and their financing, and improving the efficiency and the guarantees of the criminal procedure that provides for the possibility of administrative detention for a maximum of four hours. The law extending the state of emergency of July 2016 notably signals the possibility for convicted terrorists who hold a foreign nationality to be stripped of French citizenship.

While this measure has been applied in relatively few cases, it was perceived as discriminatory and stigmatizing by many French citizens of immigrant origin (CS1): 'I think there was a very interesting moment, after the attacks of November 2015, when both the then president and the then prime minister went on the record very quickly, within weeks, with the idea that stripping dual nationals of citizenship when they engaged in acts of armed combat against France was a "solution" for the "problem." But of course, one of the problems was that it is not clear what problem this is the solution for; it was a symbolic solution to a problem that was not primarily symbolic'. The issue is also deeply political, as the Socialist party tends to attract the vast majority of the 'Muslim vote' (CS1):

> 'Local socialist constituency parties in the banlieues are dominated by people of Muslim origin, often economically dynamic and socially integrated, often members of the public service elite, but whose backgrounds are written into their name, and they often run in the cities where they grew up, where they have connections to many other people who are not part of the same kind of elite. For these people, the attack on dual nationality was a personal attack. They saw it as a deeply symbolic move of precisely the wrong symbolic character, telling them that they weren't truly French, effectively. Even though that wasn't the issue. But once you start using the legal category of nationality as a symbol, you inevitably create that kind of situation. [...] And this is why this proposal was taken to be so provocative. Because it was designating dual nationals as a kind of stigmatized minority – that's how it was perceived'.

The (rhetoric of) prevention approach and measures

Compared to the security approach, which builds on decades of strategies (even though some strategies have not always been successful in adapting to the ever-changing threats), 'prevention' is a fairly new approach, and one that has at least in part stemmed from the European Union. According to one interviewee

> 'PVE [Prevention of Violent Extremism] has become the EU official approach. The EU counterterrorism strategy is based on four pillars: prevent, protect, pursue, and respond: and 'prevent' is the first one, and therefore an important part of the EU counterterrorism architecture. [...]

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[21] New counterterrorism legislation subsequently replaced and codified certain aspects of the expired state of emergency. While such legislation is set to expire in 2020 unless extended, another state of emergency was declared in April 2020 linked to the Covid-19 health crisis. While the two states of emergency are clearly different in nature, they have had similar effects in allowing the Prime Minister to take extraordinary measures to protect the public.

> Prevention is not just some "accessory" that the EU gives you the choice whether to choose or not: it is inherent in how the EU views counterterrorism. However, the adoption and the extent to which this is really played out is up to the Member States'. (RS3)

Even though the two issues are intertwined in the French approach, while 'terrorism' is more strongly link to security measures, 'prevention' is generally used in reference to 'radicalisation'.

National action plans to combat terrorism and 'prevent radicalisation' have been developed since 2014 and updated in 2016, 2018, and 2019; additionally, a plan specifically for radicalisation was launched in 2018.

The Centre National d'Assistance et de Prévention de la Radicalisation (CNAPR) linked to the Coordination Unit for the Fight Against Terrorism (UCLAT) was also formed in 2014. At the centre of the plan was a nationwide hotline that individuals, families, or community members could call to seek advice or notify authorities on anything of concern (PR2). This would be followed up by localised and tailored assistance programmes working in partnership with local NGOs: specifically, Family Listening and Support Units (*cellules d'écoute et d'accompagnement des familles*), which are multi-agency bodies open to all stakeholders, whether institutional or from the volunteer sector, working locally on social issues, child protection, and urban policies. The goal of this 'soft' approach and the media campaign ('stop *djhadisme'*) was to prevent youth from buying into the online Jihadist campaigns. However, its results are difficult to assess, and interviewees held contrasting opinion on its efficacy (CS1, PR1, PR2, CS3).

In parallel and linked to 'stop *djhadisme'*, in 2015 the minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, jointly with the Committee on Equality and Citizenship, put forward 11 measures labelled 'great school mobilization for the values of the Republic', with the declared goal of promoting republican values and citizenship education in schools. One interviewee commented that

> 'the great mobilization was, in truth, not so great, in that it once again suggested that the root issue lays with minoritized groups, particularly the Muslim youth, and that all is needed is some good PR for them to embrace *laïcité* and the republican values such as equality—an equality that they know all too well the French state does not deliver' (PR2).

A 'harder' version of such principle can be found in the 'centres for prevention, reintegration and citizenship'[22], one in each of France's 12 regions. These were unveiled in 2016 by then-prime minister Manuel Valls as a flagship countering violent extremism (CVE) project, yet according to practitioners it is difficult to see how they differ in practice from the 'de-radicalisation centres' established in 2014 which are generally considered to have been a failure (CS1, PR1, PR2, RS1). The 'reintegration' centres were designed for approximately 30 individuals who were supposed to remain there for a little under one year (with permission to leave on weekends) as an alternative to detention. The programme aimed at individuals who had left for Syria but had not joined any terrorist organisation and included 'de-indoctrination' activities such as psychological support and workshops on religion and politics, as well as vocational training. However, the fact that these centres were to be run by the 'Establishment for

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[22] The centres were named 'de prévention, d'insertion et de citoyenneté', but were commonly referred to as 'centres de déradicalisation'.

public insertion of the defence' (EPIDE), a centre created in 2005 to deal with marginalised youth (18-25) who are neither in school nor employed, means that the approach was 'military-like' in discipline, and practitioners such as Claudia Dantschke (head of the office on de-radicalisation at Hayat Germany in Berlin), have criticized the approach as authoritarian and risking to reinforce radicalisation convictions, rather than counter them. [23] In practice, the only such 'prevention, reintegration and citizenship' centre that operated was Pontourny, which opened in June 2016 and hosted nine people for approximately nine months until it was closed in July 2017 (PR2, Georgesco 2019).

Public debate and media narratives

From the point of view of narratives and the media portrayal of (violent) radicalisation, the tone of public debate has shifted significantly compared to the 1990s; whereas a few decades ago the debate around the bombings and attacks happening in the Paris metro or RER were France's link to Algeria, with the emergence of new forms of post-colonial thinking, it is now become a debate about France itself. (CS1, PR2)

The debate about violent radicalisation having now become a 'French' problem and no longer a 'foreign' one, chimes with the social context in the banlieues, which has stagnated since the 2015 riots. As a neighbour of Mohammed Merah commented in the aftermath of the 2012 attacks,

> 'Our passports may say that we are French, but we don't feel French because we are never accepted here. No one can excuse what he did, but he is a product of French society, of the feeling that he had no hope, and nothing to lose. It was not al-Qaeda that created Mohammed Merah, it was France'. (Bilefsky 2012)

Therefore, the identitarian-citizenship approach has become the centre of gravity of the public debate around radicalisation, much more than in other EU countries.

This is something that permeates both policy understandings and much of the media and civil society. One interviewee who works for a respected French newspapers recalled when legislation passed in 2011 regarding the face veil (ME1):

> 'In France, the burqua ban was very popular in the public opinion. People were happy to impose sanctions on women that the public regarded as not conducting themselves in sort of a 'French' way...it's a very French issue, how far does the state have to go, this issue of assimilation, of communitarianism. [...] I think it has to do with France's obsession—I'm not saying this in a bad way, just in a factual way—France's obsession with secularism, with assimilation, and with how France was built on this republican model, where everyone supposedly is equal in front of the Republic and everyone in the public sphere looks the same, has the same chances, through public school, public services, and so on'.

As a news outlet, while voices of women who wore a full-face veil were eventually included, the process was not as smooth nor 'natural' as it might have been elsewhere, 'because we had trouble knowing what we thought about it. And in France we need to know what our opinion on this law is before we go out and interview people'. (ME1)

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[23] See https://icsr.info/2016/06/15/france-tests-tough-love-de-radicalisation-approach/

Similarly, conventional reporting worldwide is struggling to adapt to a new speed of communication in which 'the sources that people go to, the news landscape in general has shifted because of social media' (ME1). Social media has certainly changed the ways in which people are informed and what they learn, and, to some extent, has contributed to polarising opinion, which is increasingly palpable in political narratives as well.

On 18 February 2020, President Macron gave a speech directed explicitly against political Islam, claiming that 'Islamist separatism [*separatism islamiste]* is incompatible with freedom and equality, incompatible with the indivisibility of the Republic and the necessary unity of the nation' (Hafidi 2020). According to one interviewee (RS1), this is a well-rehearsed populist rhetoric around *laïcité* that aims at distinguishing between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Islamists' who want to separate from the French Republic, yet one that continues to prove effective (RS2):

> 'It is something which has almost turned into an ideology. It's, I would say, in a sense, ideologized secularism. The idea is that religious, *the religious*, is a problem as such-- and that any religion has a potential of threatening the secular society. So *laïcité* is now striving to chase religion from the public space, to keep religion in the private realm. So, we have a growing gap between faith communities and the dominant secular culture of France'.

This is also connected to much broader concerns about institutional racism, but reconfigured in a specific French way, raising the issue of the mismatch between the official French discourse about itself and the lived reality of many French citizens (CS1):

> 'The French state promises far more to its citizens than, say, the British state; but it does not deliver more. And the gap between promise and delivery creates specific forms of resentment. And strikingly, every time this happens the response of the French state is to promise even more: including the promise that France is inherently a non-racist country, because of the principle of republican equality, which is a promise that is largely meaningless, since it completely misunderstands the nature and concerns being expressed'.

Specific security reactions in the wake of 2015

How the 2015 attacks were possible, from a police/security perspective, can be partly explained by the fact that, after wiretaps and surveillance had not yielded any evidence for over three years, the police had stopped monitoring the Kouachi brothers in mid-2014. This was around the time when Amedy Coulibaly, whom one of them had met in prison, was released. One interviewee claimed that he initially struggled to make sense of the collaboration between Coulibaly, who pledged his allegiance to ISIS on the one hand, and the Koauchi brothers' allegiance to al-Qaeda on the other (CS2):

> 'How was the association between al-Qaeda and ISIS even possible? But it came down to a matter of relationships. Basically, they met in prison, they stayed in touch...and personal connections sometimes go beyond a group's strategy. They may fight each other in Syria, but this doesn't prevent them from acting together in France'.

The Kouachi brothers' plan was not the only one to go undetected. Around 2014 and 2015, large numbers of ISIS recruits who had travelled and radicalised in Syria returned

to Europe,[24] where a fragmented EU security system struggled to cope with the number of cases, and the French system was overwhelmed. Adding to the returnees those who self-radicalised on the internet, as one interviewee put it, 'The question was not if something would happen, but when and where'. (PR1).

The impossibility of monitoring all the individuals flagged as 'at risk' of violent radicalisation also helps explain why the attacks of November 2015 were not anticipated or prevented:

> 'It's a huge challenge for the security forces. Because infiltrating an organization is very different from tracking all the individuals that might possibly be attracted to an ideology. It's a scale change, in terms of resources in particular. And it takes 35 people to put someone under 24-7 surveillance. Imagine doing that for potentially 5000, which is a rough estimate of the people who are potentially highly dangerous in France...literally impossible. [...] We do not have the resources, nor the culture in our society, I would say, to put 24/7 surveillance on thousands of citizens every day' (CS1).[25]

From the perspective of the security authorities, in the wake of the November 2015 Bataclan attack, there was not only unease on the French side but also on the Belgian side, where it was later discovered that the bombs had been made and from where the coordinators directed the attacks:

> '130 people were killed in the attacks, and most of the killers were already known to the authorities: 6 were wanted for international arrest warrants for terrorism; 1 was under police surveillance; at least 7 were on terrorist watchlists, 12 were arrested at some point either going or coming back from Syria... their [the Belgian] intelligence hadn't been as good as it could have been, but ours hadn't either' (CS3).

Five days after the attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, an ISIS-affiliated Belgian-Moroccan citizen who had coordinated the Paris attacks, was tracked down to an apartment on the outskirts of Paris, where he was killed in a shootout with police. It was only then, however, that the police realised that there were still members of the plan with higher rank than Abaaoud and who were still in Belgium.

An operation was therefore launched to arrest the suspects who were still in Brussels, while immediately after the attacks France declared the state of emergency that was extended five times before eventually expiring in November 2017.[26]

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[24] According to one interviewee, approximately 5,000 European nationals went to Syria and Iraq, and approximatively one-third came back (CS2).

[25] Similarly, another interviewee noted: 'There were so many cases related to Syria in 2014 that the people who should have been watched simply could not all be monitored. We simply didn't have the means to do so—we still do not have them— to monitor all of this. That brings up the issue of having to make choices. That is, among the huge range of possible targets and of potential terrorists, one must choose some and not others' (CS2).

[26] The 2015 attacks were not the last actions resulting from violent radicalisation to take place in France: in 2016 a truck was driven into crowds celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, killing 86 and injuring hundreds; in April 2017 a police vehicle was shot at, killing one officer and wounding two others and a tourist; and in October of that year, two women were stabbed at Marseille's main train station (all attacks were claimed by ISIS). However, none have caused the same effects in the political or public realms as those of 2015.

Best practices

A generally positive assessment was made by most interviewees regarding interfaith dialogues programmes, which are however mostly born out of small grassroots initiatives: the 2014 Action Plan against violent radicalisation and terrorism does mention the role of faith leaders. There has been some interfaith dialogue through formal connections between religious groups both at the state and local levels, however, this falls short from providing religious leaders with significant resources or mediation tools since this would be seen as fostering a 'communitarian approach', recognizing the positive role of religious authority within the community (CS1, CS3, PR2).

One measure widely cited as a successful example by interviewees was the AMAL programme ('hope' in Arabic), a pilot programme by the Ministry of Justice to prevent jihadi recidivism in jail. Given the issue of youth radicalising in prison, strategies for prisons were also a focus of the 2014 French strategy, and AMAL involves interacting individually or in a group with inmates linked to Syria—especially returnees—or involved in terrorist activities, and comprises a range of measures both during and after imprisonment, when follow-up is multi-agency. So far is has been piloted in two maximum security jails in the Paris suburbs, with apparently positive results; however, it has been noted that the same entity in charge of the programme's development and implementation—the Foundation for Strategic Research—has also been tasked with its evaluation.

Direct work with civil society (mostly on education and employment, but also in offering specialised support for at-risk youth) also exists but tends to come through funding provided to local authorities and is focussed on poorer areas (PR2). Examples of such initiatives are:

- the Sauvegarde93 project, with support for families ranging from psychological to legal;
- the Narvalos Katiba, an apolitical collective who counter jihadist narratives online and especially on social media by parodying jihadist propaganda, identifying, and reporting the accounts that propagate it, and infiltrate cyber-jihadist networks to prevent attacks;
- the Center for Action and Prevention against the Radicalisation of Individuals (CAPRI), an independent secular association leading community activities, workshops, and events aimed at discussing issues around religion as well as deconstructing fake news, radical arguments, and conspiracy theories; and,
- the Atelier of Research, Treatment and Intercultural and Social Mediation (ARTEMIS), a well-established association embracing numerous organisations and services in the social and medico-social field. It promotes a multidisciplinary approach and mediation as a method of intervention in promoting prevention to violent radicalisation.

Despite the positive effect of some of these measures and pilot projects, the overall framing of 'prevention' linked to 'radicalisation' has struggled to detach itself from a controlling and policing approach, or from developing a 'preventive' approach that does not incorporate elements of 'counter-radicalisation'. This has led the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH), a governmental organisation tasked with monitoring human rights in the country, to harshly condemn the measures adopted by the French government through its 'Prevent to Protect' plan in 2016:

'The fight against 'radicalisation' has become a priority objective of public policies, enjoying in addition wide media coverage. Today, it establishes legislative and administrative measures of scale such as the action plan against radicalisation of May 9, 2016, containing approximately 80 new measures, relating to intelligence, public security, education and urban policies. These measures call into question the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms even though they are not based on a solid and proven concept of the concept of "radicalisation", but essentially on the goal of predicting behaviour in order to avoid any further terrorist act. The result is a profound change in perspective since it is no longer just a question of preventing the actual commission of a terrorist offense, but rather of detecting people who are likely to fall into an ideology which could lead them, eventually, to engage in a violent action project. This detection policy is accompanied by so-called counter-radicalisation mechanisms which risk breaching fundamental rights and freedoms'.[27]

In short, while there have been efforts to address issues of socio-economic deprivation, as well as of ethnic and religious inequalities, in many ways a security-led character has been forced upon many preventive actions.

One positive note raised regarding public perceptions was that while political and legislative action has been focused mostly on the threats and fears relating to religiously attributed or inspired radicalisation in the past years, public opinion seems to be more tolerant of religious diversity than what might be assumed from political rhetoric. As one journalist put it:

'What we thought would mark the campaign in 2017 would be 'religion, religion, religion', and that is not at all what we found on the ground. […] When I was covering the French national election in 2017 as part of a team of reporters, we did a lot of on the ground reporting all over France to ask people what are your preoccupations for these next elections? What preoccupies you in life in general? What we found was that people's preoccupations was not religion, it was not Islamization, it has nothing to do with that. It was simply the economy, it was having enough food on the table, it was about being able to give a good education to their kids, being able to work, to have a decent life, which is exactly what is mirrored in the gilets jaunes movement. So there is this weird thing in France where our politicians get elected on insecurity, they speak a lot about Islamisation and so on, but when you talk to the French people, it's not their main concern' (ME1).

Concluding remarks

France represents one of the most sensationalistic cases of religiously-inspired violent attacks in recent history, yet it also offers a rich historical example of how the nature and framing of violent radicalisation can evolve.

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[27] See Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, Avis sur la prévention de la radicalisation, available at
https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexteArticle.do?idArticle=JORFARTI000036758064&cidTexte=JORFTEXT000036758063&categorieLien=id

While the 2015 events undoubtedly marked a scaling up of security measures and discourses, what emerged from the first-hand accounts of practitioners, researchers, and experts was that the 2000s and early 2010s—with the passage of the law banning the full-face Islamic veil in public places (2011) and the Toulouse and Montauban attacks of 2012—also constituted an important period in which media and political narratives around 'Islamist radicalism' took hold in the mainstream (CS1, PR2, CS2, CS3).

While debate continues around what drives violent radicalisation, it appears that the nature of violent attacks has changed over the years and that religion serves as a superficial tool for channelling feelings of social exclusion and of not belonging rather than being the trigger of radicalisation in the first place.

In increasingly interconnected societies, geopolitical events also play an important role in terms of practical training and recruitment of youth. However, while the external threat of al-Qaeda or ISIS might be overcome by military means, the internal issues in France cannot be dealt with solely through a security approach.

Increasingly, patterns of social immobility, effective segregation, and above-average unemployment rates in urban peripheries, all combine to create 'zones of exclusion' for those who live on the margins, with Islam becoming a form of identification for France's Muslims in the banlieues, as a way to resist their systematic discrimination and alienation from political participation—an interpretation shared by many practitioners (PR1, CS3, PR3).

Against this backdrop, perceptions of insecurity among the majority have been exploited narratively through linkage to Islamisation and harnessed politically by some parties to stoke yet more fear and division.

However, even though the French political spectrum has seen a strong polarisation in its discourse around religious minorities following the 2015 attacks (with the extreme right receiving the most votes in the first turn of the 2017 presidential elections), some hopeful initiatives have also emerged from France's civil society and grassroots organisations, as well as innovative 'soft' projects (such as AMAL, a preventive programme piloted in some prisons) that seem to offer more promising results than a solely securitised approach.

Appendix: Interviews

Code	Position descriptor
CS1	International civil servant
PR1	Practitioner working for a private foundation to counter marginalisation
ME1	Journalist/ editor
CS2	Former counter-terrorism prosecutor
RS1	Researcher
PR2	Practitioner working in an intercultural public project
CS3	Local civil servant
RS2	Public intellectual and academic
RS3	Researcher

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Contact: anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu

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