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Influence of Drivers of Radicalism and Violent Extremism at Macro and Meso Levels: The Case of Kosovo

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Abstract: This paper analyses the influence of drivers of radicalism and violent extremism on the macro and meso-level in Kosovo, as well as the prevention indicators. The findings demonstrate that the primary catalyst for radicalism and violent extremism in Kosovo is rooted in religious (mis)interpretations. This driver is intricately linked with the influences of digital socialization and transnational dynamics. Conversely, other drivers have relatively minor effects. Regarding prevention measures of radicalism and violent extremism, the research suggests maintaining the secular foundations vital to Kosovo's and Albanian ethnic identity and enhancing education, knowledge, employment opportunities, and social welfare systems play a pivotal role in fortifying societal resilience and preventing radicalization. Additional prevention measures encompass combatting political nepotism in the public sector and addressing urban-rural disparities to counteract radicalism and violent extremism. The study is methodically structured around nine focus groups involving individuals aged 12 to 30, along with 17 interviews conducted with representatives from Kosovo institutions, religious leaders, and experts, which is further supported by the analyses of secondary sources.

Keywords: Kosovo, violent extremism, drivers of radicalism, macro-level, meso-level

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Introduction

Academic research on radicalism and violent extremism in Kosovo has garnered significant attention since the rise of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the Al-Nusra Front, as well as their various attacks worldwide (Hashim 2014, 69–83). In this regard, this article aims to add to the body of academic literature an inquiry into the complex interplay of macro drivers, such as religion, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, digital literacy, political grievances, cultural factors, and transnational dynamics, which has contributed to the rise of radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo. This interplay of factors created a sense of disillusionment, grievance, and frustration among some segments of the population, making them vulnerable to extremist recruitment and radical ideologies.

However, the Kosovar authorities began responding to violent extremism only after it was reported that Kosovo has had a high number of foreign fighters per capita who had joined ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 57). Since then, representatives of state institutions have primarily viewed the threat of violent extremism through the lens of Islam. To safeguard the constitutional order and security of the country, the police searched 60 locations throughout Kosovo and arrested 40 Kosovar citizens suspected of having joined terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria in August 2014. Between then and January 2015, an additional 80 people were arrested on similar charges, including several influential radical imams (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 57). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these strategies in countering violent extremism remains a topic of debate among scholars and policymakers.

In this context, the paper seeks to explore the impact of radicalization and violent extremism drivers at the macro and meso levels in Kosovo. Macro-level analysis entails evaluating the effects of radicalism drivers at the state and supra-state levels, including the relationships between national authorities and society. On the other hand, meso-level analysis delves into the impact of these drivers within sub-state communities, specifically municipalities. Specifically, the research questions this paper seeks to answer are: What is the impact of the drivers of radicalism and violent extremism at the macro-level and the meso-level, and which are the prevention indicators resulting from meso-level analyses? By examining these questions, this study aims to add to the existing literature on this subject and enhance its comprehension from a macro and meso-level standpoint by analysing the intricacies of radicalism and violent extremism in Kosovo.

A focused inquiry into Kosovo offers a nuanced understanding of the specific factors influencing radicalism and violent extremism, allowing for an examination of how overarching national and international factors intersect with localized dynamics. Consequently, it contributes to broader theoretical explanations of radicalism and violent extremism.

After presenting the methodology, this paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the analytical framework and literature review on radicalism and violent

extremism; first from a broader perspective, followed by zooming in on Kosovo. The second section explores the impact of the drivers of radicalism and violent extremism at the macro-level and at the meso-level, and the third section discusses prevention indicators resulting from meso-level analysis.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-method approach, incorporating interviews, focus groups, and analysis of secondary sources. The study conducted at the macro level is largely based on primary sources, such as interviews with relevant stakeholders and official documents (Peci and Demjaha 2021). Interviews were designed in a semi-structural format, and the questions were adapted to the nature of the stakeholders, namely state officials, municipal officials, religious communities, international organizations, and civil society. In total, 11 interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders: the officials of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, senior police officers, senior municipal officials, high-level representatives of religious communities, senior officials of the European Union (EU) Office in Kosovo and a representative of civil society. The interviews took place in Prishtina, Ferizaj, and Gjilan in March and April 2021. All interviews were conducted in person, except one conducted online. In addition to the interviews, this study also relied on other primary sources, such as legal acts and official government documents, and secondary sources, such as scientific articles, books, and policy reports.

The case studies related to meso-level analyses were conducted in the Municipality of South Mitrovica, the Municipality of Gjilan, and the Municipality of Gjakova. The impacts of all preselected drivers of radicalism and violent extremism were thoroughly examined (Peci and Demjaha 2022), relying on primary sources, including focus groups with youths aged 12 to 30 years and interviews with experienced civil society activists in these municipalities.[1] These case studies were selected based on the unique characteristics of these municipalities. South Mitrovica was chosen due to its historical transformation from an industrial and multi-ethnic city to an ethnically divided and economically challenged area after the 1999 war, leading to ethnopolitical tensions. Gjilan was selected to examine the impact of transnational dynamics at the meso level, given its proximity to the Kosovo – North Macedonia – Serbia cross-border triangle and significant diaspora from these towns living in Switzerland and Germany. Gjakova was picked for its diverse religious landscape, with coexisting Sunni and Bektashi within Islam, along with Catholicism, Christian Orthodoxy, and the emerging presence of Protestantism after the Kosovo War of 1998–1999.

1 The research for these case studies involved 70 participants, with 62 contributing to nine focus groups and eight participating in interviews.

The study acknowledges several limitations. Foremost among these are constraints related to data availability and potential biases introduced by the perspectives of interviewed stakeholders. The dataset utilized in this investigation may be bound by the scope of publicly accessible information, potentially impeding a comprehensive understanding. Additionally, the viewpoints offered by stakeholders could be influenced by biases stemming from personal interests or beliefs. This paper acknowledges the inherent bias arising from the exclusive focus on respondents from Kosovo Albanian backgrounds. However, it is essential to emphasize that rigorous measures are employed to confront these limitations head-on. These measures encompass integrating data from various sources and the deliberate inclusion of a diverse range of stakeholder perspectives to enhance the robustness and credibility of the research outcomes.

Analytical Framework and Literature Review

Despite a longstanding scholarly tradition spanning six decades (Neumman and Smith 2008, 2), the term "terrorism" remains contested and politicized, with multiple interpretations in both governmental and academic realms. International law lacks a universally accepted definition of terrorism due to the United Nations' inability to agree on its parameters. According to Higgins, "terrorism" doesn't carry legal weight but functions as a practical reference for activities widely disapproved of. Such activities often involve illegal methods or protected targets, regardless of whether the actor is an individual or a state (Higgins 1997, 28). Nevertheless, this has not prevented regional entities like the EU and national governments from defining terrorism. Europol, for instance, identifies five types: jihadist, ethno-nationalist and separatist, left-wing and anarchist, right-wing, and other forms of terrorism (Europol 2023).

Academic scholars grapple to find consensus on the fundamental drivers of terrorism, exemplified by over 50 potential causes identified by experts at the Club of Madrid in 2005 (Schmidt 2011, 272). In contrast, "radicalization" entered academic discussions after the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings, introduced by European policymakers as "violent radicalization." Since then, most studies have focused on elucidating radicalization and recruitment processes; however, the term's imprecise definition leads to varying interpretations among scholars and policymakers (Schmidt 2013). Indeed, the concepts of radicalism and terrorism have historically been seen as interconnected, forming a continuum in which radicalism serves as a precursor to terrorism, which is viewed as the ultimate manifestation of violent expression. According to this perspective, radicals follow a specific trajectory that begins with a shift in cognition and progresses toward the eventual stage of active engagement (Schmidt 2013).

On the other hand, Allan et al. have devised a theoretical model detailing the drivers of violent extremism. In this model, macro-level factors encompass governance failures, political grievances, economic grievances, and marginalization; meso-level factors encompass social and cultural elements, including religious, ethnic, and group identities; and

micro-level drivers involve individual aspects such as socialization to violence, cognitive vulnerability/disposition, and ideological training. According to this model, while each factor is essential, they may not independently provide enough justification for an individual to join a violent extremist cause or for a movement to adopt violence (Allan et al. 2015).

This article follows the analytical framework related to the drivers of violent extremism and institutional responses established by the research project CONNEKT.[2] Aimed at establishing a multi-dimensional map of drivers of violent extremism among youths aged 12–30 in eight different countries from the MENA region and the Balkans and identifying the interplay between them, this project has selected seven variables as potential drivers: religion, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, digital socialization, political grievances, cultural, educational and leisure opportunities, and transnational dynamics (Vidal i Bertran 2020, 305).

CONNEKT's selected drivers aim to comprehensively address radicalisation and violent extremism, focusing specifically on religious fundamentalism and the socialisation of religion within socio-religious contexts (cf. Kapidžić. Hirkić, and Turčalo 2025). The analysis extends to violent extremism rooted in economic and territorial inequalities, exploring perspectives on geographic, demographic, and socio-economic grievances with an emphasis on understanding the social meanings referenced by young people. The project also recognises the crucial role of political transitions in MENA and Balkan countries, acknowledging the impact of transnational dynamics and communication technologies on narrative creation. It highlights the role of diasporas as links between regions and in shaping new transnational solidarities, identities, and motivations. Additionally, the project takes an innovative approach by exploring cultural opportunities, encompassing educational, cultural, leisure, and non-formal education avenues, recognising their potential as accessible points for local agents and civil society actors to intervene in preventing violent extremism (Vidal i Bertran 2020, 305).

In this setting, the socialisation process emanates from the frameworks of social identity models of radicalisation, wherein affiliations with identity groups' perceptions and behaviours. Charismatic leaders serve to both inspire and steer extremists. This dynamic is explored in literature through the analytical lenses of traditional networks and charismatic authority (Vidal i Bertran 2020, 305). In this regard, Torok conducted examinations of the hypothesis suggesting that the online environment transforms into a self-imposed institution, resulting in individuals isolating themselves during the process of cultivating rationalisation (Torok 2013). Additionally, he examined the hypothesis indicating that the online environment serves as a pivotal mechanism for terrorists to manipulate thought patterns and behaviours, specifically targeting the amplification of radicalization (Torok 2013).

2 For more, see the project's website: https://h2020connekt.eu/the-project/.

In addition, the authors highlight family-based socialization into radical engagement, citing lineage affiliation with fighters or the influence of aggressive cultures as encouragement. Against this backdrop, solidarity paths and neighbourhood networks are considered critical in radicalization, surpassing ideology's influence. In this regard, social identity theory emphasizes group cohesion, causing dangerous biases, like polarization and groupthink, leading to extreme convictions and actions. The analysis also suggests that a solid and consistent identity may play a positive role in preventing violent extremism (Torok 2013).

Opp makes a valuable theoretical contribution with respect to grievances and social mobilization (Opp 1988). He suggests the existence of a reciprocal relationship: grievances might engender heightened participation in social mobilization (SMP), while concurrently, engagement in SMP could lead to an escalation in grievances. According to Opp, newcomers entering the fold of social movements encounter rationales that underscore the necessity and justification of the movement's objectives. Consequently, profound grievances might serve as a catalyst for heightened SMP, manifesting in both lawful and nonviolent actions, as well as in unlawful and violent acts. In a cyclic progression, he suggests, this participation, in turn, could potentially intensify the very grievances from which it originated.

On the other hand, the relationship between culture and violent extremism remains an underexplored area in the social sciences, although several scholars have investigated the connection between culture and violence in recent years. For instance, Gelfand has found a positive correlation between certain cultural aspects, such as gender inequality, fatalism, and cultural rigidity and the number of terrorist attacks (Gelfand et al. 2013, 495–517). Conversely, Kluch and Vaux maintain that terrorism is not related to any cultural dimensions, including power distance, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence-self-restraint (Kluch and Voux 2015).

Torrekens and de le Vingne highlight in their literature review that investigating radicalization processes among young individuals presents empirical challenges in the realm of extremism prevention (Torrekens and de le Vingne 2020). Research access often follows law enforcement actions or terrorism, resulting in data limitations. Consequently, investigative data tends to establish a specific profile for radicalized youths, potentially stigmatizing entire neighbourhoods. While context explains radicalization to some extent, it doesn't fully elucidate why specific young individuals, including those familiar with terrorists, choose different paths. This underscores radicalization's intricate nature and cautions against oversimplification (Torrekens and de le Vingne 2020).

Concerning poverty, the literature review indicates that terrorists don't typically come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and support for terrorism isn't strongly linked to economic deprivation – however, discrimination and perceived injustice matter, especially among minority groups. In this vein, sociopolitical inequality matters more than

economic inequality. Against this backdrop, the social deprivation theory suggests collective violence arises from a significant gap between expectations and possibilities. Radicalization is noted in contexts of multidimensional poverty with high unemployment, a source of frustration for those joining extremist groups (Torrekens and de le Vingne 2020).

Vis-à-vis political opportunity structures, Torrekens and de le Vingne (2020) posit from the literature review that individuals perceiving a chance to express grievances through the political system are less inclined to support violence, ideologies, or factions, a perspective that aligns with functionalist sociology. In the Western Balkans context, the analysis highlights the importance of deep identity, religious, and ethno-political polarization, alongside the capability gap in state institutions. Furthermore, they emphasize that literature demonstrates how ideologies shape interpretative frameworks, framing grievances and humiliation. Leaders of radical movements, known as moral entrepreneurs, create frames of injustice reflected in communication and propaganda. Often tied to religion or history, these frames affect how people perceive grievances and assign blame. The model explains how grievances lead to animosity and, for some, violence justification, in which also international context and moral shock play roles. Cognitive shifts during radicalization alter perspectives, reducing openness to contrary evidence and endorsing violence, whereas education can foster simplified worldviews linked to cognitive radicalization. The role of education quality and type in this process is an ongoing question (Torrekens and de le Vingne 2020).

In light of this theoretical framework, the existing literature on radicalization and violent extremism has recognized multiple factors that contribute to the phenomenon of radicalization and foreign fighters in Kosovo. The influence of international charities and their proselytization activities has been identified as significant among these factors. Numerous authors have emphasized the role of Gulf-backed foundations and organizations in disseminating the Salafi/Wahhabi version of Islam in Kosovo, which is often associated with radicalization. These charities have allegedly played an active role in promoting radicalization and attracting young Kosovars to extremist ideologies through private mediators, extremist imams, and financial donations (Blumi 2005; Demjaha and Peci 2016; Shtuni 2015; Krasniqi 2019; Goshi and van Leuven 2017).

The emergence of these developments began to exert an influence on the secular fabric of Kosovo Albanian society. According to research conducted by the Gani Bobi Institute for Social Studies (2011), this fabric had been shaped by the non-religious character of customary law (Code of Lek Dukagjini), the secular essence of Albanian nationalism, and the era of communist rule (Gani Bobi Institute for Social Studies 2011, 5–6). Moreover, the poll findings in this study indicate that 78.2% of respondents believed that religions are not discriminated in Kosovo. On the other hand, 8% perceived discrimination against Islam, 0.2% against Catholicism, 0.2% against Protestantism, and 0.1% against Evangelism (Gani Bobi Institute for Social Studies 2011, 17).

Against this background, Demjaha and Peci argue that the religious ideological paradigm is responsible for significant changes in the social and identity landscape of Kosovo Albanians. Specifically, they suggest that there has been a shift from a secular ethnic identity and religious tolerance towards a more rapid adoption of ethnic religiosity, accompanied by a gradual increase in religious intolerance and extremism (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 82). Moreover, Shtuni argues that certain Islamic nations have used religion as a tool to further their foreign policy goals by advocating for a conservative Islamic way of life and religious identity, which contradicts Kosovo's religious traditions and values of Western liberal democracy (Shtuni 2016).

In this vein, according to some authors, inadequate functioning of state institutions, along with insufficient state influence, ineffective governance measures, and absence of political responsibility, are also significant drivers of radicalization and violent extremism. Furthermore, the prevalence of corruption, along with limited trust in local and central institutions, has also been recognized as a major contributor to the emergence of radicalization and violent extremism (Morina et al. 2019; Zaimi 2017; Krasniqi 2019; Shtuni 2016).

There are varying opinions among authors regarding the role of socioeconomic conditions in driving radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo. Some studies suggest that factors such as unemployment, poverty, and a weak educational system are either important drivers (Qirezi 2017) of radicalization or exacerbating factors of radicalization (Selenica 2019). On the contrary, some other scholars reject the significance of socioeconomic factors as a catalyst for radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo and instead highlight the relevance of other factors (Demjaha and Peci 2016; Shtuni 2016; Demjaha 2018). In this context, a study conducted in the municipalities of Podujevo and Suhareka, which have the lowest number of foreign terrorist fighters in Kosovo, revealed that this outcome can be attributed to the moderate leadership of Islamic communities in these areas and their cooperation with municipal governments. These collaborations prevented organizations from the Middle East from building mosques and imposing their preferred imams (Demjaha 2018).

On the flip side, cultural factors in Kosovo have mainly revolved around the issue of Islamophobia and the desire to support Muslims worldwide (Kursani 2019). Some scholars indicate that Islamophobia can function as a motivational factor for religious radicalization in Kosovo, given the conflict between the country's Western, secular identity and its Muslim, Eastern identity. Furthermore, researchers argue that Western stereotypes of Islam sustain Islamophobia in Kosovo, leading to the erasure of Kosovar Muslim identity (Speckhard and Shajkovci 2017; Ferizaj 2019). In the same vein, the urge to support Muslims globally has spurred many foreign fighters from Kosovo to participate in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. This is frequently connected to the legacy of the Kosovo War, during which NATO intervened to safeguard Kosovo Albanians from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's armed forces and paramilitaries. As a result, according to them, many Kosovars felt a duty and responsibility to assist the Muslims against the atrocities perpetrated

by the Assad regime in Syria (Goshi and van Leuven 2017; Hunsicker 2015; Shtuni 2016; Speckhard and Shajkovci 2017).

Regarding the influence of diasporas on radicalization within their home countries, a study undertaken by Ebi Spahiu has illuminated that the networks of ISIS supporters originating from diasporas, though not as extensive as the networks within the country, nevertheless exert a notable influence. This influence arises from foreign-based jihadist sympathisers employing familial bonds from their country of origin to augment their affiliations with regional networks. This phenomenon is especially pronounced among second-generation youths, who are keen on fortifying these associations to maintain a robust connection with their identity in Kosovo. While individuals or groups within the diaspora underwent radicalization in their respective host nations, there are noted discerned specific connections with their relatives and families in Kosovo, who underwent radicalization abroad (Spahiu 2020).

Furthermore, Qehaja et al argue there are differences between online and offline radicalization (Qehaja et al. 2021). According to them, a critical difference between offline and online radicalization is that spaces of offline radicalization are generally easier to identify, such as religious places of worship, educational establishments, and prisons. However, given the ubiquity of virtual communication, online radicalization seems complicated in pinpointing key venues of concern and devising effective responses. In addition, Qehaja et al highlight the prevailing tension in deploying counter-radicalization measures online without the state appearing to establish comprehensive interception abilities that can infringe upon the civil liberties and rights of citizens (Qehaja et al. 2021, 883).

A careful examination of the published scientific literature reveals that there is a limited number of academic studies on radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo. Most studies on radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo come from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both local and international, in the form of policy papers, policy reports, research papers, and a few articles published in scientific journals (Peci and Demjaha 2020, 8).

Analysis of the Impact of the Drivers of Radicalism and Violent Extremism at the Macro Level and at Meso Level

Within this section, our examination unfolds with an initial analysis of the impact stemming from predefined drivers of violent extremism on a macro-level in Kosovo. Subsequently, we proceed to assess the impact of these drivers at the meso level, undertaking investigations through case studies in the municipalities of South Mitrovica, Gjilan, and Gjakova.

The Driver of Religious Radicalization

Based on interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders on the impact of the drivers of violent extremism at the macro-level in Kosovo, it was found that the radical (mis)interpretations of Islam are considered the underlying driver of violent extremism in the country (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 11). However, these interpretations are a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged after the end of the armed conflict with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the deployment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo in 1999. At that time, several Middle Eastern "charity organizations" introduced previously unknown radical Wahhabi and Salafi interpretations of Islam, which caused tensions between secularism and traditional Hanafi and radical Islam within the Albanian Muslim community (Blumi 2005, 18–19).

On the other hand, some local imams adopted and modified these radical and violent interpretations of Islam to suit domestic circumstances (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 36). As a result, some religious extremists have spread hate and animosity against the Kosovo Islamic Community (BIK) by claiming that it does not represent Islam and that their rights can only be protected by an Islamic state, which will, as they believe, one day encompass the entire Islamic world (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 11). Additionally, some imams and self-proclaimed preachers have openly propagated extremist ideas, undermined Albanian national identity, and have been directly or indirectly involved in recruiting terrorist fighters who went from Kosovo to Syria and Iraq (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 11). The research on the meso-level also confirms these findings. The results show that religious preaching by several local Muslim clergy is a source of religious extremism, which is confirmed by the majority of young interlocutors who contributed to this study in South Mitrovica (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 9), Gjilan (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 30) and Gjakova (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 49).

An intriguing finding from the research in the Municipality of South Mitrovica is that none of the participants aged 12 to 15 offered any viewpoints on the interrelation between national and religious identity in their community. This suggests their feelings and ideas on national belonging and religious beliefs may be somewhat confused. However, a few female participants aged 15 to 18 had distinct thoughts on these matters, while none of the male participants in this age group provided any opinion. In contrast, participants aged 18 to 30 had well-defined views on the interrelation between national and religious beliefs. This suggests that among younger age groups in this municipality, there are indications of a shift from the secular nature of Albanian nationalism and ethnic identity towards religious affiliation (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 11–12).

Similarly, the research conducted within the Municipality of Gjilan unveiled a noteworthy outcome. Within the age group of 15 to 18 years, except for a single participant, the prevailing pattern emerges: religious affiliation takes precedence over ethnicity as the central aspect of identity. This observation hints at a departure from the traditionally secular underpinnings of Albanian nationalism and ethnic identification. Instead, it indicates a

growing tendency among specific segments of the youth in the Municipality of Gjilan to align themselves with the Muslim Ummah. However, a positive revelation comes to light: a unanimous consensus is observed among participants aged 12 to 15 years. National affiliation stands as the foremost constituent of identity, overshadowing religious ties. This finding implies that within the younger Albanian demographic in the municipality, a potential reversal is underway, where an inclination towards emphasizing national identity is gaining traction once again (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 38).

In contradistinction, the situation within the Municipality of Gjakova stands conspicuously disparate, defined by a nuanced tapestry of religious plurality. The research findings delineate a pervasive consensus cutting across all age cohorts and interviewees, positing national allegiance as a weightier construct than religious association. Anchored within the secular tenets characterizing Albanian nationalism, the ascendancy of ethnic identity vis-à-vis religious identity assumes the mantle of a cohesive determinant, fostering harmonious coalescence amid diverse faiths while concurrently mitigating proclivities towards virulent extremism (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 60).

These findings on the identity primacy in the mentioned municipalities have reaffirmed the results of a survey conducted in Kosovo in 2016 (Demjaha and Peci 2016). Among Albanian Muslims who do not practice religion in the South Mitrovica region, 55.2% identified as Albanian first and Muslim second, while 44.8% identified as Muslim first and Albanian second. However, among those Albanian Muslims who practice religion, 63% identified as Muslim first and Albanian second (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 107).

In the Gjilan region, 52% of non-practicing Albanian Muslims identified as Albanian first and Muslim second, while 32% identified as Muslim first and Albanian second, with 4% identifying as only Muslim and 12% identifying as only Albanian. Among practicing Albanian Muslims, 25.9% identified as Albanian first and Muslim second, while 59.3% identified as Muslim first and Albanian second (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 107).

In the Gjakova region, among non-practicing Albanian Muslims, 42.6% identified as Albanian only, 42.6% identified as Muslim only, 5.6% identified as Muslim first and Albanian second, and 9.3% identified as Albanian first and Muslim second. Among practising Albanian Muslims, 73.9% identified as Albanian first and Muslim second, 13% identified as Muslim first and Albanian second, and 13% identified as Muslim only. Among non-practising Albanian Christians in the same region, 73.3% identified as Albanian first and Christian second, 20% identified as Albanian only, 3.3% identified as Christian only, and 3.3% identified as Christian first and Albanian second. Among practising Christian Albanians, 52.9% identified as Albanian first and Christian second, 20.6% identified as Christian only, 17.6% identified as Christian first and Albanian second, and 8.8% identified as Albanian only (Demjaha and Peci 2016, 107).

The survey and research results presented from the focus groups with youths in these municipalities demonstrate that there are variations in the primacy of national and reli-

gious identities among different age groups and regions in Kosovo. In the regions of South Mitrovica and Gjilan, there is a shift towards religious affiliation as the primary identity among some members of the general population and youths, while in the region of Gjakova, national belonging is still considered more important than religious affiliation. Nevertheless, a concerning finding is the tendency of both Albanian Muslims and Albanian Christians to reject national belonging. This rejection can lead Albanian Muslims to feel a sense of belonging to the Muslim Ummah, and Albanian Christians to the Global Catholic community, which may erode the national identity of Albanians that is based on secularism and possibly become a source of religious extremism.

From the vantage point of framing theory and the lens of social movements,[3] these findings underscore the burgeoning consolidation of religious and ideological framing. This phenomenon assumes salience through its transformative role within Kosovar society, catalysing a consequential collision between the established realms of secular ethnic identities and emerging religious affiliations among Albanians.

Moreover, the research outcomes conspicuously showcase a noticeable attenuation in the vigour of ethnic identity, yielding ground to the ascendancy of religious identity. This transformative dynamic has, in turn, laid bare a constellation of identity conflicts that have permeated to the extent of effectuating identity exclusion across distinct strata of the Kosovo Albanian societal fabric. These evolving social identity patterns, in essence, underscore an inherent structural vulnerability within Kosovo's societal framework, one that encumbers its capacity to effectively thwart the surge of religious radicalism and, ultimately, the incubation of violent extremism.

The Driver of Digital Socialization

The research on the macro-level has found that social digitalization plays a significant role in fostering radicalism and violent extremism and is closely linked to the driver of religious (mis)interpretations. All participants in the study confirmed this connection. The study has revealed that most individuals radicalized in Kosovo were exposed to online lectures on platforms such as YouTube, as well as other online portals and social media. Additionally, certain websites and networks still promote lectures with extremist content from imams who have been imprisoned for their extremist activities (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 13).

The role of communication technologies in Kosovo's diaspora is particularly important in this context.[4] The case of Arid Uka is worth analysing. He was born in Kosovo in 1990, but his parents took him to Germany when he was only one year old. In March 2011, he

3 For further explanations see: Goffman (1974) and Snow (2013).

4 Out of the 255 foreign fighters from Kosovo who went to conflict zones, approximately 20% (48 individuals) were from diaspora (Perteshi 2019).

killed two US airmen and wounded two others at Frankfurt airport. During his trial, Uka claimed that he had been radicalized by Jihadist propaganda that he had come across online. Prosecutors also stated that he had no direct contact with any Jihadist groups (BBC 2012).

In this context, drawing upon research conducted at the meso level involving youths from the municipalities of South Mitrovica, Gjilan, and Gjakova, it becomes evident that the process of social digitalization assumes a pivotal role in the dynamics of radicalization and the proliferation of violent extremism. The research reveals that youths within these municipalities allocate a substantial portion of their time to interactions within the realm of social media, which concurrently serves as a principal conduit for their information consumption, encompassing content of a religious nature as well. However, this corpus of information is not uniformly trustworthy, and herein lies the crux of the matter: social media platforms frequently serve as conduits for disseminating extremist material and misinformation.

In view of the foregoing, several participants from South Mitrovica indicated that during the ascension of ISIS, extremist content pervaded social media platforms, but its prevalence has waned following its defeat. Conversely, respondents from Gjilan highlighted their recurrent encounters with religious content on social media that actively fosters gender, religious, and ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, it regularly disseminates extremist religious perspectives, frequently coupled with misinformation. In contrast, in Gjakova, most respondents underscored their primary reliance on social media as an avenue for acquiring insights into various religions. Within this sphere, some have chanced upon posts that propagate religious zealotry, while numerous social media pages centred on religious content contravene the tenets of the Quran or the Bible, perpetuating the propagation of disinformation. Moreover, according to these respondents, certain factions that advocate for illicit activities, encompassing paedophilia, prostitution and even terrorism, exploit social media as a recruitment platform (Peci and Demjaha 2021).

The meso-level exploration of youth dynamics within municipalities has unveiled a nuanced dimension. The centrality of social media as an information source is palpable, but with it comes a precarious terrain. Social media platforms serve as dual conduits – disseminating both legitimate religious insights and extremist narratives, often intertwined with misinformation. The vulnerability of the youth to these influences is unmistakable, as they allocate a significant portion of their time to digital interactions, becoming exposed to content that can potentially lead to radicalization. The interplay between social digitalization and religious radicalization, thus, emerges as a complex phenomenon with multifaceted implications since extremist ideologies find fertile ground in the virtual realm, exploiting the malleability of susceptible individuals.

The Driver of Transnational Dynamics

The research conducted at the macro-level notably underscores the pivotal role of the transnational dimension in propelling the trajectories of radicalization and violent extremism. Respondents accentuated that the origins of extremist ideologies are rooted in transnational sources, a prevalent trend across the Balkan region. Kosovo has encountered a profound incursion of extremist ideologies, predominantly emanating from the Middle East, facilitated through diverse religious entities. The research affirms that initial instigators and propagators did not emanate from Kosovo but rather hailed from neighbouring countries such as North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Sandzak region of Serbia. Moreover, the research exposes a substantial nexus between transnational dynamics and communication technologies, with online religious propaganda predominantly exhibiting transnational attributes (Peci and Demjaha 2021).

Given this context, the meso-level investigation conducted within South Mitrovica has generated intriguing insights concerning the influence of transnational dynamics on the dynamics of radicalization and violent extremism. As reported by the youthful participants in this study, those individuals who affiliated with ISIS were propelled primarily by religious convictions, profoundly swayed by propagandistic materials and misleading information pertaining to the Syrian conflict. A subset of these individuals became so thoroughly indoctrinated that they willingly relinquished not only their own lives but also those of their families in pursuit of this cause (Peci and Demajaha 2022, 15).

In the context of the Gjilan, research respondents have emphasized a significant development: following the 1999 war, several global extremist movements from the Middle East, along with individuals from North Macedonia, infiltrated Kosovo. Gjilan became a focal point due to traditional interactions and strong family ties between its inhabitants and those from Kumanovo and Skopje in North Macedonia.

A prevailing trend emerged, indicating that many individuals in Gjilan harbouring extremist inclinations or participating in conflicts within Iraq and Syria maintain familial connections with North Macedonia. Conversely, instances of members from the diaspora engaging in extremism were relatively limited. Furthermore, it has come to light that select Muslim clergy members from North Macedonia have been implicated in promoting animosity towards other religious communities, disparaging atheists, and propagating the concept of the Muslim Ummah (Peci and Demajaha 2022, 27–28).

In Gjakova, the research findings distinctly underscore the consequential role played by transnational dynamics in fuelling the currents of radicalization and violent extremism among the youth. The accounts provided by certain participants unveil a sequence of events: philanthropic entities hailing from the Middle East disbursed ostensibly charitable "aid" within local Gjakova mosques, with some recipients of this aid subsequently venturing to Syria. Moreover, the research has brought to light instances characterized by the dissemination of pamphlets by Arab organizations, these materials encapsulating re-

ligious narratives that interwove propagandistic elements propagating radical ideologies and endorsements of violent extremism (Peci and Demajaha 2022, 49).

Based on the comprehensive findings garnered from research conducted at both macro and meso levels, a conspicuous revelation surfaces: the profound role played by transnational dynamics in fuelling the currents of radicalization and violent extremism among Kosovo's youth. This influence is unmistakably underlined by the dissemination of extremist ideologies across borders, facilitated chiefly by diverse religious entities originating from the Middle East, as well as individuals affiliated with them from neighbouring nations. The impact of this driver is high, yet it's noteworthy that the diaspora's contribution to transnational-driven radicalization remains relatively low.

This resonance of impact reverberates more resoundingly due to the synergy between these transnational dynamics and the omnipresent communication technologies. This dynamic interplay escalates the reach and potency of transnational influences, as communication technologies extensively disseminate information, including religious content. The amalgamation of these research outcomes underscores the pressing need for sustained scholarly exploration into the intricate facets of transnational dynamics, accentuating their manifold implications.

The Driver of Political Grievances

On the macro level, research unequivocally reveals that political grievances have emerged as a contributory factor in catalysing violent extremism within Kosovo, owing, in part, to the nation's intricate progression from an armed conflict into an independent state. The spectres of inadequate governance, systemic corruption, and a deficiency in accountability mechanisms have marred this transformative journey. This unsettling amalgamation of circumstances has fostered a conducive environment for incubating extremist ideologies. Through this research, it became palpable that certain radical religious leaders have adroitly exploited these prevailing conditions to advance their agendas. A recurrent narrative propagated by these leaders posits Kosovo as a "failed state" that is ostensibly under Western control, thereby perpetuating the perception of a suppressed Muslim populace. This discourse contends that the governing establishment is fundamentally secular and consequently at odds with the religious values ingrained within Kosovar society. However, an alternate perspective emerges from specific research participants, asserting that political grievances within Kosovo are predominantly grounded in ethnic affiliations, with religion assuming a subsidiary role in fomenting division (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 13–14).

The meso-level research undertaken in South Mitrovica highlights that the repercussions of the armed conflict and subsequent displacement of both Albanian and Serbian communities have intricately moulded ethnic divisions. These divisions, in turn, serve as a crucial backdrop influencing the emergence of political grievances as a catalyst for violent extremism. However, within this intricate fabric, it is noteworthy that certain participants

forward the notion that local elements do not exist in isolation; rather, external influences, such as the political tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, exert a discernible impact on the trajectory of radicalization. Furthermore, several youth participants pinpoint economic destitution, high unemployment rates, and a profound disillusionment with the national and local political landscape as potential radicalization drivers. Nevertheless, an alternate perspective emerges, with other participants contending that dissatisfaction with political elites does not inevitably culminate in extremism. In summation, the research findings cast an illuminating spotlight on a complex interplay: amid the backdrop of ethnic tensions pervading the Albanian and Serbian communities, the phenomenon of religious radicalism and violent extremism is inextricably tethered to the broader global currents of extremist political Islam. This linkage gains reinforcement through the involvement of specific groups from Gulf nations and local radical imams (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 7–8).

Within this context, participants engaged in the research in the Municipality of Gjilan unequivocally underscore the noteworthy presence of political discontent among the youth. Nonetheless, a distinct perspective emerges; certain participants posit that although political dissatisfaction does indeed pervade, it might not inherently correlate with the trajectory of extremism. Instead, they posit that extremist entities can potentially harness and manipulate such grievances to propagate and disseminate their ideologies (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 33). Similarly, the outcomes of this research in the Municipality of Gjakova substantiate a distinct perspective: among young participants, political grievances are not uniformly perceived as a propelling impetus toward radicalization. Instead, a nuanced perspective emerges, with certain participants highlighting that these grievances predominantly manifest as discontent with political parties or the efficacy of local and national governing bodies. Such sentiments, they emphasize, can potentially propel individuals toward radicalization in specific instances, particularly when vulnerable individuals find themselves ensnared in a sense of despair, having repeatedly faced disillusionment stemming from the political sphere (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 33).

Derived from these research findings, it becomes apparent that political grievances, while not constituting a direct instigator of radicalization and violent extremism, can potentially render individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies, primarily through discontent with political parties or governmental efficacy. In essence, the connection is more nuanced and indirect. Furthermore, the research conducted at macro and meso levels indicates that the phenomenon of radicalism and violent extremism is intricately linked with the global current of extremist political Islam. Pertinently, radical imams and religious extremist entities might exploit prevailing political grievances as conduits to propagate and disseminate their ideologies.

Viewed through the lens of social mobilization theory (Opp 1988), the findings garnered from this research unveil a nuanced understanding of the role that political grievances play in the dynamics of radicalization and violent extremism. While these grievances do not emerge as direct catalysts, their significance lies in their potential to create conditions that render individuals more receptive to extremist ideologies, including participation

in illegal social movements, as Opp prescribes (Opp 1988). In the framework of social mobilization theory, political discontent can be seen as a mobilizing factor that influences the receptivity of specific population segments to radical agendas. Disenchantment with political parties or governmental performance can be a catalyst that fosters a sense of frustration and alienation, thus opening a gateway for extremist actors to exploit these sentiments. Overall, the research outcomes, when examined through the perspective of social mobilization theory, underscore the intricate interplay between political grievances, individual vulnerability, and the strategic manoeuvres of extremist actors seeking to exploit these grievances.

The Driver of Economic Deprivation

The research conducted on the macro-level revealed significant findings regarding the link between economic deprivation and violent extremism. While it may contribute to radicalization, in some cases, poverty and social unrest cannot be considered the primary cause of violent extremism. Instead, these factors can create feelings of hopelessness and hinder economic independence. It is important to note that most individuals who were radicalized or had travelled from Kosovo to Syria were not from economically deprived backgrounds. However, some argue that a lack of employment opportunities, equal job prospects, and adequate education leads some young people to turn towards extremist groups. According to security institutions, there are cases where successful businesspeople had been brainwashed and felt obligated to give money to ISIS, considering it their duty above all else. In addition, some individuals or groups had travelled to Syria intending to become rich (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 11–12).

The research data acquired in South Mitrovica reveals that the impact of economic deprivation on violent extremism is viewed differently by participants. While some believe that economic deprivation and high unemployment levels contribute significantly to social injustice, none of the respondents justify violence to address these injustices. Others argue that economic problems affect people regardless of their religious affiliation, as they push individuals to migrate to Western Europe for a better life. Some even claim that economic deprivation and unemployment are the most significant factors that can drive individuals towards radicalism. Overall, participants in this research perceive economic deprivation as having an impact on radicalization and violent extremism (Peci and Demjaha 2022).

Some participants from Gjilan think that economic difficulties might make some individuals more likely to turn to extremism and join conflicts to supposedly escape problems. However, there are also cases where individuals with good socio-economic status also participated actively in armed conflicts, which shows that economic conditions alone are not a reliable predictor of radicalization. Other participants confirm that socio-economic factors did not play a significant role in extremism since both wealthy and economically disadvantaged individuals have become involved in conflicts. Despite this, a few respondents note that unemployment, limited job opportunities, and inadequate access to social

welfare might increase the chances of some young people in Gjilan being susceptible to Islamic religious extremism and radicalization. Overall, while economic deprivation is not seen as a major driver of radicalization and violent extremism in Gjilan, it may still contribute to creating conditions that make some individuals more susceptible to extremist ideologies (Peci and Demjaha 2022).

The data from the Municipality of Gjakova reveals that economic deprivation has a significant impact on the lack of social resilience. Some participants report that certain 'charity organizations' from the Middle East exploit the vulnerable youth's harsh economic conditions by providing humanitarian aid, computer courses, and other benefits to recruit them for the war in Syria, serving their political aims. Another participant suggests that the increase in congregations in local mosques is a result of people seeking solace and solidarity due to poor economic and social situations, which can be exploited by extremist circles to target vulnerable youths. These findings suggest that unemployment, lack of job prospects, and limited access to a decent level of social welfare can push some youths in the community to seek spiritual comfort and socialization with radicalized and extremist groups (Peci and Demjaha 2022).

From the perspective of social deprivation theory (Greitmeyer and Sagiouglu 2016), the presented findings highlight the nuanced interplay between economic deprivation and the dynamics of radicalization. This theory posits that while economic factors alone may not serve as the sole catalyst, they interact with broader social conditions to influence the susceptibility of individuals to extremist ideologies.

The relationship between economic deprivation and the trajectory of radicalization, as perceived through the lens of social deprivation theory (Greitmeyer and Sagiouglu 2016), is marked by its intricate nature. It becomes evident that stakeholders hold diverse perspectives on the role of economic factors. Some argue that extremist groups adeptly exploit the economic and societal grievances of marginalized individuals, using these grievances to trigger radicalization. Conversely, another viewpoint asserts that economic deprivation might not exert substantial influence as a solitary factor in driving radicalization. However, a prevailing notion within the context of social deprivation theory is the recognition of specific economic triggers. This consensus highlights that unemployment, limited employment opportunities, and inadequate access to social welfare can intensify the likelihood of individuals seeking solace and companionship within the folds of radicalized and extremist groups. This aligns with the core principle of social deprivation theory, which contends that economic challenges can foster feelings of alienation and disaffection, thereby creating an environment conducive to extremist manipulation.

The Driver of Territorial Inequalities

The authorities in Kosovo do not view the imbalance between urban and rural areas as a cause of violent extremism. Although young people in rural regions experience worse

conditions than those in urban areas, including a lack of cultural and sportng facilities, the connection between geography and the number of individuals involved in violent extremism is not clear-cut. Rather than concentrating solely on specific municipalities, authorities adopted a comprehensive approach, and local authorities at the municipal level attempted to tackle problems in their respective regions (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 12–13).

Similarly, the research data acquired at the meso-level indicates that territorial inequalities in Kosovo do not contribute to radicalization or violent extremism. Even though youths in rural areas face more challenges compared to their urban counterparts, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that territorial inequalities play a significant role in driving violent extremism (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 18, 34, 55).

The Driver of Education, Leisure and Cultural Opportunities

The research conducted on the macro-level focused only on cultural factors and did not include education and leisure opportunities. There were varying interpretations of the cultural driver among interviewed stakeholders. While some argued that specific norms and behaviours of Kosovar society or the state's attitude towards certain groups could not be considered drivers of violent extremism, others pointed out that certain norms and behaviours, such as the social norms of not separating individual responsibility from their families or communities and a sense of victimization, can promote violent extremism. It should be noted that ethnic nationalism, prevalent in the entire Balkans and characterized by hate speech towards others, is also a significant driver of violent extremism, according to some stakeholders (Peci and Demjaha 2021, 14–15).

The meso-level research data acquired in South Mitrovica reveals that factors related to education, leisure, and cultural access play a crucial role in driving radicalization and violent extremism. The city's low education levels, limited leisure options, and diminishing cultural opportunities make youths susceptible to manipulation by radical imams. Additionally, the lack of public infrastructure leads to private sector exploitation, marginalizing economically disadvantaged individuals and potentially fostering connections with radical groups. This environment contributes to heightened vulnerability to radicalization and extremist ideologies (Peci and Demjaha 2022).

The data acquired in the Municipality of Gjilan indicates that education, leisure, and cultural opportunities hold a tangential influence over radicalism and violent extremism. While some participants regard education as pivotal for resilience, a subset contends that inadequate education may drive youths towards Middle East conflicts. Similarly, the research in Gjakova underscores the critical role of education in fostering social resilience. Participants emphasize that radical imams often exploit those with limited education. Conversely, others argue that robust education effectively empowers communities to resist radicalization and extremism (Peci and Demjaha 2022).

Analysing these findings through the lens of social deprivation theory allows us to understand the diverse nature of the results within the context of varying levels of social disadvantage experienced by individuals in these localities and their potential lower subjective socio-economic status. In this context, the theory posits that individuals with a lower subjective socio-economic status (SES) are more susceptible to violence than those with a higher SES (Greitemeyer and Sagiouglu 2016). This, in turn, can increase vulnerability to extremist ideologies and radicalization as individuals seek outlets for their grievances and a sense of identity. Conversely, the perspective that a low education level can be a push factor for youths to join conflicts aligns with social deprivation theory's notion that inadequate education amplifies susceptibility to extremist manipulation. Moreover, the limited leisure and cultural opportunities, particularly evident in South Mitrovica, can be seen as an aspect of social deprivation. According to the theory, deprived environments can foster a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment, which extremist entities may exploit to offer an alternative sense of belonging and purpose. In essence, the research findings underscore how the dynamics of education, leisure, and cultural opportunities intersect with social deprivation to shape the landscape of radicalization and violent extremism.

Possible Prevention Measures Resulting from Meso Level Analysis

The research data acquired at the meso-level reveals several key measures for mitigating radicalization and violent extremism within the Municipality of South Mitrovica. Firstly, the research underscores the belief in the pivotal role of education and knowledge in cultivating social resilience against radicalization. Additionally, securing employment opportunities that offer decent social welfare support is perceived by participants in this research as a critical factor in counteracting radicalization and violent extremism. Unemployed youths with limited access to social welfare and job prospects are believed to be more susceptible to radical Islamic influences. Ethnic identity is also perceived as a significant factor in bolstering community resilience against radicalization and violent extremism. In this vein, most youth participants in this study prioritize their ethnic affiliation over religious association. However, an identity shift towards prioritizing religious association was observed among the youths in the Municipality of South Mitrovica. This shift could potentially contribute to vulnerabilities to extremism. Therefore, educating the younger generation about the importance of maintaining the secular essence of Kosovo and Albanian national identity is crucial, promoting harmonious coexistence among different religious beliefs as preventive measures against radicalization and violent extremism (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 18–19).

The meso-level research data in the Municipality of Gjilan unveils several possible measures for preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Firstly, the research findings underscore the belief in the pivotal role of education in constructing social resilience against radicalization and violent extremism. Insufficient education renders young indi-

viduals vulnerable to indoctrination and manipulation, hampering their ability to counter extremist ideologies effectively. Secondly, the availability of employment opportunities providing access to decent social welfare is believed to be crucial in fostering social resilience. Unemployed youths, grappling with economic deprivation and restricted social welfare access, are perceived to be at a heightened risk of embracing radical Islamic beliefs. Additionally, the research emphasizes the belief in the significance of ethnic identity as a factor in cultivating community resilience against religious radicalization and violent extremism. Within the Municipality of Gjilan, participants aged 12 to 15 and 18 to 30 primarily identify with their national identity. In contrast, research participants of the age group of 15 to 18 predominantly associate themselves primarily with their religious affiliation, with few exceptions. For the younger participants in the research, a strong national identity is a substantial deterrent against radicalization and violent extremism. However, it is believed that community resilience potentially weakens when religious belonging takes precedence as a primary identity. In sum, the meso-level analysis provides critical insights into the multifaceted dynamics of preventing radicalization and violent extremism within the context of the Municipality of Gjilan. The interplay of education, employment, ethnic identity, and religious affiliation underscores the complexity of factors influencing social resilience and vulnerability to extremist influences (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 39).

The meso-level research data acquired in the Municipality Gjakova unveils a spectrum of preventive measures pertinent to radicalization and violent extremism. Firstly, the research findings underscore the belief in the pivotal role of education and knowledge in fostering social resilience against radicalization and violent extremism. Individuals with limited educational attainment are believed to be more vulnerable to manipulation and indoctrination by radical imams propagating fundamentalist Islamic ideologies. Secondly, the research data accentuates the significance of gainful employment offering access to adequate social welfare in nurturing social resilience against radicalization and violent extremism. Youths perceiving themselves as economically disadvantaged, particularly those within the Muslim demographic, are believed to be prone to embracing radical Islamic tenets. Thirdly, the research data underscores that in building community resilience against radicalization and violent extremism, primacy is placed on secular national identity over religious affiliation. Fourthly, the research data reveals that enhancing social resilience against violent extremism necessitates raising awareness regarding the adverse implications of the urban-rural divide entwined with inter-religious undertones. Lastly, addressing issues of "political nepotism" within public sector employment is believed to be a pivotal measure in bolstering societal resilience against the pull of violent extremism. In essence, the meso-level analysis in the context of Gjakova illuminates diverse indicators, from education and employment to national identity and socio-political awareness that collectively contribute to the complex landscape of preventing radicalization and violent extremism (Peci and Demjaha 2022, 58–59).

Hence, drawing from the meso-level investigation, the study has pinpointed several possible measures for preventing radicalization and violent extremism. One crucial measure is believed to be the preservation of secular values that are fundamental to Kosovo's con-

stitutional character and ethnic Albanian identity. Education, knowledge, employment, and social welfare systems are considered pivotal in building social resilience against radicalization. Finally, addressing the urban-rural divide and dismantling political nepotism in public-sector employment are considered important measures in preventing radicalism and extremism.

Conclusion

The research results provide explicit answers to the specified research questions. Regarding the impact of the predefined drivers of radicalism at the macro and meso levels, the research confirms that the most critical driver at both levels is religion – more specifically, religious (mis)interpretations, which are inherently intertwined with the drivers of digital socialization and transnational dynamics. The findings also highlight the growing impact of religious and ideological framing influenced by digital socialization and transnational dynamics. Notably, the secular Kosovo Albanian identity is weakening at the expense of religious identity. These evolving identity patterns expose Kosovo's societal vulnerability, hindering its ability to counter religious radicalism and extremism.

The analysis at the macro- and meso-level confirms that economic deprivation is not a substantial driver of radicalization and violent extremism, but it can contribute to the vulnerability of specific individuals to extremist ideologies. From the standpoint of social deprivation theory, the findings underscore the intricate interplay between economic deprivation and radicalization processes. This aligns with the fundamental premise of social deprivation theory, asserting that economic difficulties can cultivate sentiments of alienation and dissatisfaction, including lower subjective socio-economic status, ultimately establishing an environment favourable for extremist manipulation.

The research results also show that the driver of political grievances does not have a direct effect on radicalization and violent extremism, although dissatisfaction with political parties or government performance can contribute to individuals becoming vulnerable to extremist ideologies. Examined through the perspective of social mobilization theory, the outcomes derived from this study reveal a nuanced comprehension of the function that political grievances hold within the realms of radicalization and violent extremism dynamics. While these grievances don't directly act as catalysts, their importance lies in their capacity to foster circumstances that make individuals more open to extremist ideologies, potentially leading to engagement in unlawful social movements. In this context, the research findings highlight the complex interplay among political grievances, individual susceptibility, and the calculated tactics employed by extremist actors aiming to exploit these grievances for recruitment and radicalization objectives. Regarding the influence of education, leisure, and cultural opportunities, the research findings indicate that this driver does not significantly contribute to radicalism and violent extremism. Finally, the research findings have shown that the driver of territorial inequalities is insignificant at both levels of analysis.

When it comes to possible prevention measures to radicalism and violent extremism, this research has provided valuable insights. One of the most critical possible preventative measures is believed to be upholding the secular foundations integral to Kosovo's and Albanian ethnic identity. This is a strategic necessity in the complex radicalization landscape and helps guard against extremist influences. Additionally, increasing levels of education and knowledge, along with access to employment and social welfare systems, is crucial in building societal resilience and creating barriers against radicalization. Other identified possible prevention measures include eliminating political nepotism in the public sector and increasing awareness about the urban-rural divide.

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