



Tailoring Prevention: Shared Approaches to Tackling Violent Extremism in Malaysia

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By Cameron Sumpter

SYNOPSIS

Malaysia's MY-P/CVE framework reflects important contextual strengths, but its effective implementation can benefit from procedural lessons drawn from multi-agency coordination models developed in Europe and elsewhere.

COMMENTARY

Violent extremism in Southeast Asia has receded from public attention in recent years. Counterterrorism capabilities developed in the 2000s and sharpened from the mid-2010s have served the region very well. Major militant networks have been splintered and subdued, with the significant disbandment of the regional terrorist organisation Jemaah Islamiyah in June 2024 after 30 years serving as a notable example.

Nevertheless, the ingredients for extremist violence are as prevalent today as they have been since the major post-9/11 wars: conflict, atrocity, and instability in the Middle East; polarisation, division, and culture wars in the West; and the circulation of conspiracy theories in a chaotic online environment where algorithms reward antagonism.

This current situation may not signal a resurgence of established terrorist networks. Still, it seems to be fuelling a [rise in violent lone-actor attacks](#), alongside globally [persistent](#) mental health struggles following the pandemic. Many countries also see [younger people](#) turning to extremism and violence, such as the recent tragic incident in Jakarta, where a teenage boy detonated explosives inside a mosque.

The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) have thwarted several youths with similar mindsets in recent years. Examples include two unconnected teenagers espousing far-right extremist views, with one forming a fascist group with a Japanese teenager in 2021, and the other uploading a bomb-making manual to his Telegram account in 2024. A 13-year-old in Sabah was found with a bomb plot and prominent ISIS search history in 2022, while another teen evoked ethnocentric extremist views in threats towards a church in Kedah the previous year.

The RMP's counterterrorism unit (E8) identified each case before anyone was harmed, and officers worked with parents to develop a tailored plan that steered them toward more positive pursuits. Carefully managed interventions appear to have been successful, and the young suspects are now back on track.

In the terminology of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), these efforts are referred to as "secondary" interventions. While *primary* preventions focus on broad sections of society through counter-messaging and addressing structural issues, and *tertiary* programmes involve those who have already committed crimes, secondary interventions are aimed at those considered to be heading towards ideologically motivated violence.

Nations around the world have developed and implemented national action plans to prevent violent extremism over the past decade, particularly following a 2015 call by the United Nations. Many of these plans involve versions of the primary, secondary, and tertiary points of focus, acknowledging that interventions depend on the relative advancement of extremist internalisation.

Malaysia unveiled its own MY-P/CVE national action plan in 2024 with four key pillars: 1) prevention; 2) enforcement; 3) rehabilitation; and 4) reinforcement. The prevention and reinforcement pillars encompass primary initiatives, such as raising awareness, fostering community collaboration, enhancing communication, and promoting Malaysian identity. The third pillar, rehabilitation, presumably encompasses both secondary and tertiary interventions for inmates serving prison sentences, as well as those identified to be heading in that direction.

The architects of MY-P/CVE were clear that the national plan was designed with Malaysia's unique multiracial, multicultural, and multireligious society firmly in mind. Developed within Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's MADANI framework and its values of holistic governance and social inclusion, MY-P/CVE recognises the crucial importance of context in preventing violent extremism. Each nation grappling with the scourge of political violence and terrorism must chart its own course according to the strengths, principles, and sensitivities of its society and institutions.

While the style of interventions is ideally rooted in cultural and societal norms, countries have much to share and learn from each other regarding procedural aspects, such as case management methods and the necessary involvement of various stakeholders, who may not always be used to working together.

European Union member states and their municipal authorities have useful experience with these systems. Their efforts mostly date back to the mid-2000s when

al-Qaeda began targeting Europe, but also have roots in constructive multi-sectoral approaches to tackling youth and gang crime in the 1970s.

In the Netherlands, Amsterdam's municipal-led Information House on Radicalisation brings together specialists to provide tailored non-policing support, including housing, education, and mentorship. Grounded in research and developed with frontline practitioners, the platform operates as a coordinated, city-wide network that helps individuals stabilise their lives and pursue constructive opportunities.

Denmark's Aarhus model, inspired by the Dutch approach, formalises police involvement alongside social agencies, building on a longstanding system known as SSP (Schools, Social Services, and Police). These networks collaborate to provide targeted support and structured interventions, often pairing individuals with carefully selected mentors to help them develop new skills and perspectives.

Belgium has also developed a robust local approach, centred on multidisciplinary Local Integrated Security Cells that coordinate municipalities, police, and social services to assess cases and design tailored interventions.

These examples demonstrate how coordinated, multi-stakeholder systems can provide tailored support while adapting to local social dynamics – lessons that could guide Malaysia's ongoing refinement of MY-P/CVE.

Western Balkan countries such as Albania and North Macedonia have also implemented multi-agency referral mechanisms and fostered effective partnerships with civil society and community actors in recent years. Their living-memory history of conflict and state-building provides further perspective into what works and what may not work so well in different contexts.

Each nation and sub-national authority will eventually forge its own path towards sustainable prevention of violent extremism. The type of extremist ideologies present – and their relationship with the state or society involved – will shape the approach, as will each country's unique identity, customary practices, and institutional arrangements.

However, the crucial roles of diverse stakeholders at different stages of the prevention process, the methods for coordinating them, and the management of coordination and information-sharing are common procedural considerations for any nation pursuing a holistic P/CVE strategy.

Those responsible for operationalising and implementing national action plans for P/CVE therefore have much to learn from one another, particularly in the current environment, where existing challenges remain even as new and less predictable threats emerge, underscoring the value of collective experience and adaptive approaches.

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