

POLICE

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CONCLUSION PAPER*RAN POL "Scenario-planning and police capacities for future prevention and countering of violent extremism."**25-26 May 2023, Zagreb, Croatia (#623)*

Scenario planning and police capacities for future prevention and countering of violent extremism

Short summary

The article 'What the Zeitgeist can Tell us About the Future of Terrorism' ⁽¹⁾ by Rik Coolsaet and Thomas Renard (2022) highlights the importance of considering terrorism within its social, economic and political contexts. The authors argue that these contexts shape how individuals perceive the world, making it crucial to understand the broader zeitgeist or spirit of the times. By examining major social changes and developments, we can gain insight into the emergence and decline of terrorist trends. This understanding helps us grasp the underlying dissatisfaction and grievances that contribute to radicalisation and extremism.

In this context, the RAN POL Working Group has convened a meeting on 25 and 26 May 2023, in Zagreb, Croatia. Police experts from various Member States came together to assess and explore scenarios for the year 2028 and discuss what capacities the police need to effectively address extremism in different scenarios.

By utilising the Shell scenario planning model, participants developed four different scenarios for extremism in 2028. The scenarios were used to discuss recommendations for those eventualities:

- There will be a need for specialised units and experts, with appropriate training capacities and resources to be able to respond to the rapidly changing extremist landscapes, and to handle complex and high-risk situations.
- Misinformation and alternative media will make it difficult for police to differentiate between real and fake news, particularly in an era of extensive misinformation, AI and conspiracy narratives.
- As polarisation, radicalisation, crime and hate speech will occur online, there will be a need for digital tools and skills to stay up to date with new technologies and be effective in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).
- Community-oriented policing will remain a crucial element in the work of police. Thus, this concept needs to be fully integrated into police strategies and explicitly emphasised.

⁽¹⁾ See: <https://icct.nl/publication/zeitgeist-future-of-terrorism/>

Highlights of the discussion

Scenario planning methodology: The 2x2 Shell model

In 1973 everybody was surprised and shocked by the oil crisis. The Royal Shell company was not. It was one of the future, plausible scenarios they had explored in the years before. The idea of the Shell scenario planning approach is that by building and 'living' plausible scenarios, the capacity to identify and answer strategic questions will be enlarged. That was exactly what the police experts from all over RAN POL did in this meeting.

- 1) Step 1: Discuss the purposes and objectives: What are the key questions that need to be answered?
- 2) Step 2: Discuss factors and drivers and agree on two key drivers / axes / dimensions for the 2x2 grid.
- 3) Step 3: In small groups describe and draw the four thinkable worlds, the four scenarios, placed in the four corners of the grid.
- 4) Step 4: Focus on the role and capacities police need to do P/CVE (answering the key questions).

Based on a presentation by Caroline Vanhyfte (Belgium Police), the group discussed the approach. There are other ways of exploring what will happen in the middle to long term, but they are often data-driven, and were not deemed doable within the limitations of a RAN POL meeting. It was agreed the scenarios are not predictions. None of the scenarios in the Shell approach are good or bad. Some are more desirable, and others definitely not.

Exploring the drivers for extremism in the future

To be able to build four distinct scenarios, the group discussed the main, *discriminating* drivers. The discriminating drivers need to have an impact and have a large range of uncertainty in terms of scale and nature. For instance, AI and social media will undoubtedly have a big impact but that will be the case in all future scenarios. As more or less key drivers, the following were identified: climate change, economy, migration, trust in government and institutions, and political and social cohesion and inclusion. All of these could move in one direction or the other, in a negative or positive way. An example could be economical prosperity versus crisis. Vanhyfte also presented a complete list of drivers that can be used in scenario building, not all of them discriminating. It was decided that these 11 drivers could be used when a specific scenario from the grid is being described.

Choice of drivers: PEST, STEEP, STEEPELD, PESTL, EPISTEL

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Drivers for the anti-authority-movement in the EU

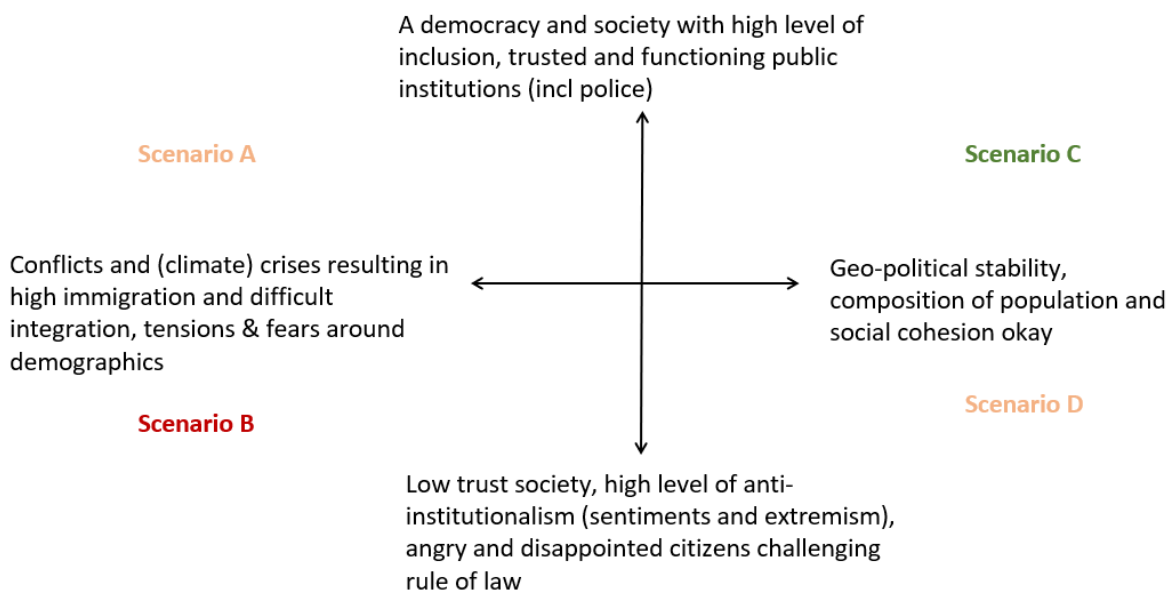
Which global factors might influence anti-authority radicalism towards violent extremist behaviour?

DRIVERS	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental	Demographics	Psychological	Military	Ethics	Informatics
PEST	P	E	S	T							
PESTLE	P	E	S	T	L	E					
PESTLED	P	E	S	T	L	E	D				
STEEP	P	E	S	T		E					
STEEPLE	P	E	S	T	L	E			E		
STEEPLED	P	E	S	T	L	E	D			E	
STEEPPM	P	E	S	T		E		P	M		
EPISTEL	P	E	S	T	L	E					I

The four plausible scenarios in 2028

Having explored and discussed the various drivers for extremism in the future, participants decided on two essential sets of discriminating drivers to be incorporated into a 2x2 grid: **(1) inclusivity and trust in public institutions**, and **(2) geopolitical and demographic stability** (encompassing factors such as climate, economy, migration and social cohesion). By utilising the Shell model, these drivers are shown in four distinct scenarios, as outlined in Graph 1.

Graph 1



In each of these scenarios the world will look differently. According to the participants who examined these scenarios separately, the society in **Scenario A** is stable, with high migration and demographic changes. There is a continuation of the migration crisis similar to 2015. This can result in social segregation and the emergence of parallel societies. There would be growth of large Muslim communities with high birth rates. There is a risk of clashes between street gangs and communities, fuelling both left-wing and right-wing extremism. There will be a long-standing polarisation and a rise in far-right and far-left movements in various EU Member States. Despite political stability driven by a strong economy, societies remain polarised with increased criminality, leading to the targeting of specific groups. While attacks on mosques occur, governmental institutions are not targeted. Additionally, the 'Great Replacement' theory will have consequences on governments and societal dynamics.

Participants who built the world in **Scenario B** described it as the World of Dystopia. The polarising populist leadership uses control over legislative and judicial powers. Surveillance and monitoring of the population are on the rise, while a widening wealth gap and the retreat of the welfare state contribute to social inequalities. Isolation and segregation deepen, tensions based on ethnicity and religion escalate, and 'ghettos' form, grinding down social cohesion. Extensive state-led mass surveillance is met with countersurveillance efforts by opposition groups. Conspiracy theories and alternative media outlets thrive, fostering disinformation. The implementation of a social

credit system and digital exclusion worsens divisions. Restrictive measures and high imprisonment rates fuel misinformation. Islamist, Christian and apocalyptic cult groups coexist with far-right nationalist and left-wing revolutionary movements. Environmental and women's rights activists challenge established norms. Extremist factions target government institutions. This society seeks to restore social cohesion and justice amid complex challenges.

In **Scenario C**, police experts think society will be characterised by cultural diversity. There is economic growth with improved equal opportunities. Climate change and migration concerns exist and addressing these topics poses challenges, but hope remains for global cooperation. Science and institutions enjoy high levels of trust, but there is a perception of an elite. Also, there are risks of extremism and anti-government sentiment. Cultural narratives and identity preservation are valued, alongside movements challenging economic and governmental institutions. Trust in media coexists with potential threats from alternative sources.

The world in **Scenario D** is dangerous with persistent threats and high desire for a better society. Disenfranchised perspectives draw upon imaginary ideals, disconnected from reality. The society is heading towards dystopia, emphasising personal attributes and widening the gaps between rich and poor. Disillusionment fuels rejection of mainstream media and state institutions. Alternative media sources polarise and spread conspiracy theories. Wealthy individuals seek different laws and private security, while activist politicians and social media influencers set ambitious goals for the marginalised. Brain drain undermines trust in the government. The 'pulling up the ladder' mentality prioritises self-interest among the rich. Terrorism driven by revenge targets the state, deepening polarisation. Mainstream media faces attacks as a tool of the state. Criticism grows towards states' lack of equality and lenient punishments, worsening distrust in legislative power.

Recommendations for police capacities

Having identified and explored the four potential scenarios for extremism in 2028, participants proceeded to analyse the capacities that would be required by the police to effectively address the predicted worlds. Thus, the identified needs encompassed a range of areas, including intelligence capabilities, human resources and training capacities.

In **Scenario A**, where the population relies on the police despite lacking support for them, the following are the suggested recommendations for the needs and capacities that the police might require:

- **Diversity:** The police need to enhance diversity within their ranks to better represent the entire population, including minority groups and women. However, this might be challenging as it may lead to internal clashes within the organisation.
- **Digitalisation:** As polarisation, cybercrime and hate speech will occur online, there will be a need for digital tools and skills to combat cybercrime and staying updated with new technologies. Every frontline practitioner should be equipped with the necessary knowledge to tackle digital challenges effectively.
- **Multi-agency cooperation:** Building partnerships and trust with the communities being targeted by right-wing extremism and hate speech is essential. However, determining what information can be shared and fostering trust pose challenges in effective collaboration.
- **Specialised units:** Dealing with threats posed by small groups requires specialised units and experts. However, attracting and retaining these experts can be difficult due to better opportunities in the private sector.
- **Police should stay aware of misinformation as differentiating between real and fake news will be a challenge.** The police face difficulties in distinguishing between accurate and misleading information, particularly in an era of widespread misinformation.

- **Community-oriented policing:** It is important for the police to have an eye on society and implement community-oriented policing practices. However, this concept may not be fully integrated into police strategies, and may not be explicitly emphasised.

Scenario B: The police in this dystopia will be authoritarian and non-democratic. The police force may exhibit a reactive and authoritarian approach, lacking democratic oversight and accountability. There will be poor training and lack of diversity, resulting in limited perspectives and skills. In this world there is a high perception of threat and a tendency to adopt a siege mentality, leading to a closed and defensive approach. Here are what the police need in this world:

- **Higher numbers:** Increase the size of the police force to ensure adequate coverage and response capabilities.
- **Community-oriented policing:** This approach is also needed in this scenario to foster positive relationships and trust with the communities being served.
- **Improved warning system:** Enhance warning capabilities to effectively monitor and gather intelligence on potential threats.
- **Education and training:** The police will need to invest in comprehensive education and training programmes to deal with new attitudes towards the police. This also means the police will need to promote fairness, empathy and respect within the police force to improve community relations and minimise resistance.
- **Accountability and oversight:** Adopting the siege mentality may result in misconduct and impunity. Thus, police should establish mechanisms for democratic oversight and accountability to ensure responsible and ethical conduct.
- **Specialised intervention units:** Develop specialised units with appropriate training and resources for handling complex and high-risk situations.
- **Combat propaganda:** To counter disinformation and alternative media, police will need to develop strategies to counteract propaganda and disinformation that may influence public attitudes.

In **Scenario C**, the population trusts the police and there is a high level of stability in the society. Nevertheless, police should stay awake and think ahead to prevent any potential risk. This is what the police need to do in this peaceful world:

- **Develop good police strategies** to prevent and control extremism, including measures such as: prevention, arrest and addressing potential conflicts.
- **Improve the capabilities in gathering and analysing information** while developing effective and long-term strategies to prevent and address extremism. For example: technological advancements; utilising technology for collecting and analysing information. This includes tools for data screening, analysis and understanding social media to gather relevant information.
- **Foster efficient information sharing mechanisms** among law enforcement agencies and partners to exchange knowledge and organise coordinated actions.
- **Improve strategic communication practices** to control the informational space and counter misinformation.

In **Scenario D**, the police focus more on enforcing laws rather than community safety or cohesion. Also, the police primarily respond to incidents rather than engaging in proactive crime prevention or community engagement. This is what the police need in this world:

- Increased capacity: The focus on enforcing laws and being responsive will require a larger workforce to handle confrontations and react with force when necessary. However, it is important to balance recruitment numbers with maintaining high standards to avoid compromising public trust and minimising incidents of misconduct.
- As the police face negative attitudes and distrust, officers may be targeted and exposed to backlash, necessitating safety measures such as wearing masks and visible identification numbers.
- The police should be aware of challenges posed by overcoming public distrust and controlling the negative narrative.
- The police need to keep pace with evolving ideologies and societal changes to effectively respond to emerging challenges.
- Maintaining independence from political influences is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and integrity of the police. This would also foster trust in the police and law enforcement agencies.

Follow-up

A follow-up meeting can delve deeper into the development of these scenarios and explore various situations in which the police may need to operate and the corresponding capacities they would require.

Police experts have proposed organising similar scenario planning workshops in their respective countries to uncover potential future scenarios based on their national and local contexts. The scenarios are a helpful and, as it turned out, an inspiring step to answer the key questions.

Relevant reading

Rick Coolsaet and Thomas Renard wrote in 2022 'What the Zeitgeist can Tell us About the Future of Terrorism' (ICCT). The paper describes how terrorism can never be considered outside its social and political context, and outside the broader Zeitgeist, the perceived facts. Paper can be read at <https://www.icct.nl/publication/what-zeitgeist-can-tell-us-about-future-terrorism>.

The 2022 TESAT Report from Europol, was the first edition to include a look into the broader external environment and the effects that it may have on terrorism and (violent) extremism in the EU. TESAT 2022 can be found at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2022-te-sat>

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