Failed Integration, Alienation and the Rise of Homegrown Violent Islamist Extremism in Sweden

An institutional framework for analyzing Sweden’s terrorism prevention policy and practice

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Abstract

In this thesis, I try to analyze how Sweden prevents violent Islamist extremism. First, by using alienation and network theories I explain how various socio-economic factors create an alienating environment in which individuals who have inappropriate social network can move towards violent Islamist extremism. Second, by analyzing the policy and practice of preventive work with a focus on activities of the National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism I try to identify achievements and shortcomings in this area, and eventually suggest how preventive work in Sweden can be improved.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Research problem and Research Questions

According to Sweden’s security service (SÄPO), the country’s contribution to Islamic State’s (IS) foreign fighters has been around 300 individuals (SÄPO, 2016). In per capita terms, Sweden ranks the third place in the number of such fighters after Belgium and Austria among EU member states in this matter (Van Ginkel, B., and E. Entenmann, 2016) demonstrating serious flaws in Sweden’s counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention policy and practice.

Analyzing all aspects of the situation and offering comprehensive and concrete solutions for how to prevent terrorism and violent Islamist extremism is of course beyond the scope of a master’s thesis, however, since the number of academic pieces about the topic in Sweden is relatively low all the efforts can be useful.

Distinguishing counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention from one another, in this thesis I will only focus on terrorism prevention policy and practice in Sweden because compared to counter-terrorism it’s not well discussed. Counter-terrorism means those activities and operations conducted mainly by the police, intelligence and security agencies and judiciary in order to neutralize terrorists, while terrorism prevention is about more comprehensive actions, initiatives, and programs to tackle root causes and structural settings that can create environment in which individuals can turn towards terrorism and violent extremism (OSCE, 2014).

In order to analyze Sweden’s terrorism prevention, it is necessary to first analyze the causes and factors that make people move towards violent Islamist extremism. Therefore, my first empirical study analyzes the socio-economic factors in major suburban areas in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Örebro and Malmö with concentrated Muslim populations where most of Swedish IS fighters come from. I will, therefore, examine the objective factors possibly causing a Swedish young Muslim immigrant and/or a second generation Muslim immigrant to become alienated, such that he or her embraces violent Islamist extremism.

Then, after identifying the causes that create alienating environment, I will go through Sweden’s counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention policy, practice and institutional design and by content analysis of official documents and the activities of National Coordinator against Violent Extremism as the main actor in terrorism prevention, I will examine to what extent has
Swedish terrorism prevention policy and practice been able to tackle root causes in order to prevent terrorism?

Finally, building on the findings from various methods used in the thesis, and by analyzing the results of a questionnaire answered by civil servants whose task is to coordinate terrorism prevention activities in municipalities I address a final key question: What accounts for the gap between the specified potential causes of terrorism and the Swedish terrorism prevention policy design?

1.2 The Importance of Study: Stagnation in Terrorism Research

Recent terrorist attacks in various European cities alongside with the growth in number of EU citizens who have traveled abroad to fight for Islamic State have once again grasped the attention of politicians and researchers in order to reconsider the issue of counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention. To some extent, the situation is similar to the post 9/11 era when everyone was seeking solutions to prevent further attacks.

Terrorism and counter-terrorism as a research area is not completely new and of course didn’t emerge after 9/11 but at that point it became a hotspot for academics and politicians’ concerns. Despite much funding and investments in the field, counter-terrorism and especially terrorism prevention is still relatively underdeveloped both in thought and practice.

As Mark Sageman (2014) argues, we witness stagnation in terrorism research for two principal reasons. First, as Sageman illustrates, governments heavily invest in the field to promote academic explanations over the question but at the same time key agencies and organizations like the police and secret services are reluctant to share information and data necessary for the production of reliable materials. This is to some extent understandable considering the secrecy of the matter but the result is that scholars try to analyze the question without actually accessing what they need. Consequently, the theoretical aspect of terrorism research is relatively thick and the empirical aspect is relatively thin.

Since the intelligence communities do not want to share their material with university researchers, they try to train their own experts and Sageman after many years of working for U.S intelligence community concludes that those experts trained by secret services access data but lack sufficient theoretical understanding and methodological awareness. Moreover, academics have a more theoretical understanding but are not able to apply it so well as they
often lack data (Sageman, 2014: 570). This leads academia to a kind of false generalization because the theoretical contemplations are not really based on actual empirical data about terrorism (Newman, 2006: 755). This situation, however, is not new and over three decades ago Martha Crenshaw mentioned it as the “initial obstacle to identification of propitious circumstances for terrorism” (1981: 381).

The second argument emphasizes that there is a crisis of knowledge in the field not only due to the lack of data but also because the “faulty epistemology” that is usually pursued (Jackson, 2015: 34). As Zulaika explains the epistemological crisis of terrorism and counter-terrorism can be characterized by “the perversion of temporality, the logic of taboo, non-hypothetical knowledge, secret information, the passion for expert ignorance, mystical causation and dual sovereignty” (Zulaika, 2009). To some extent, the aforementioned problem occurs because terrorism research is politicized and is affected by propaganda, therefore, some scholars side with the mainstream media and emphasize the factors that are not important and turn a blind eye to factors that are actually significant. The role of Islam, for example, is one of the factors that have been extremely overemphasized and instead the socio-economic factors that can be seen as root causes have been for many years downplayed. Consequently, “propositions about terrorism lack logical comparability, specification of the relationship of variables to each other, and a rank-ordering of variables in terms of explanatory power” (Crenshaw, 1981: 380).
2. Background

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, changed the world in many ways. This incident at the dawn of 21st Century enormously affected the international politics and its effects in the attitude of states towards terrorism can still be traced, hence, it is unavoidable to mention 9/11 when writing about terrorism. Despite the influence associated with this U.S.-centered event, Sweden as an EU member is also profoundly affected by EU policies. Therefore, in this background section first I briefly explain how 9/11 and the War on Terror discourse set the Swedish agenda for at least a decade. Then by analyzing EU counter-terrorism strategy, I try to show how Sweden’s counter-terrorism strategy can be defined within the broader EU context.

2.1 9/11 and War on Terror

After 9/11, counter-terrorism efforts were mostly focused on military campaigns in the Middle East and heavy surveillance of Muslims’ communities in the US and Europe as terrorism was defined as an exogenous threat. This approach had a special emphasis on Islam as a source of terrorism and for at least a decade after 9/11, the war on terror was the dominant approach in fighting terrorism (Barber, 2003; Chomsky, 2001; Zinn, 2002).

In his book 9/11, Noam Chomsky argues that the security crisis of 9/11 represented a dramatic change because “for the first time, the guns have been directed the other way” (Chomsky, 2001: 12). By this, he means that a subset of the people who were conquered by western countries in the past now are taking revenge. Regardless of one’s political position, however, Chomsky is right at this point that 9/11 exposed the vulnerability of the West by showing that it could be attacked on the home front. He also reasons that the direct effect of these terrorist activities was more militarization and securitization of the civilian realm by imposing more surveillance measures and restricting individuals’ rights (Chomsky, 2001: 19). In his view, these responses to terrorism would undermine democracy (a paradoxical outcome) because a less democratic society is a better environment for the spread of terrorism. Chomsky believes that for the west to stop terrorism it is better not to simply demonize the others, but rather seek “to understand what lies behind major atrocities” (Chomsky, 2001: 37) by recognizing their own role and distinguishing the root causes. In this context, Chomsky means that Western countries should solve the problems internally by, for example, changing their foreign policy or conducting more appropriate social policies in order to achieve more equal societies with less discrimination.
Benjamin Barber’s book, *Fear’s Empire* has a similar standpoint to Chomsky’s. By using an historical perspective, he criticizes the concept of preventive war and argues that the U.S-Bush administration had a defective understanding of interdependence in a globalized world when it thought that by bombing it could destroy terrorism and by exporting U.S institutions it was possible to create democracy and preserve human rights in other societies (Barber, 2003: 17-18). Barber indicates that “fear is terrorism’s only weapon, but fear is a far more potent weapon against those who live in hope and prosperity than those who live in despair with nothing to lose” (2003: 21). Then he argues that by preventive war abroad and restricting individuals’ liberties at home, the U.S unconsciously helps to develop the fear’s empire that terrorists try to create (2003: 42). The militarization of foreign affairs is also a side effect of this strategy, which in turn, diminishes the other alternatives to have opportunity showing their strength to solve the problem (Barber, 2003: 92). He discusses that this understanding of preventive war comes from American exceptionalist reasoning in which the U.S is seen as morally unique. Therefore, American politicians think they have a right to preventive self-defense while they deny the same right for others (Barber, 2003: 100).

After exposing that preventive war is wholly inadequate to fight against terrorism, Barber suggests that preventive democracy is a more reliable solution because “democracy undoes the conditions that allow terrorism to flourish…Unlike counterstate preventive war, it addresses terrorism directly and cannot be twisted terrorism’s purposes” (Barber, 2003: 201). In an explanation, however, he clarifies that by democracy he doesn’t mean merely election and majority rule but a society in which people are not only passive spectators rather active citizens. Barber concludes that this is the only way to overcome the fear’s empire.

In *Terrorism and War*, Howard Zinn (2002) also argues that the war on terror is a result of impatience, lack of knowledge about the nature of terrorism and nonstrategic thinking. That is why in most of the cases, he explains, the U.S unconscious concludes that “you must do something, therefore bomb” (Zinn, 2002: 10). After 9/11, U.S military expenditures drastically increased in order to tackle the war on terror but as Zinn sees, it is the wrong approach because it is impossible to fight an asymmetric threat by classical military means. In his view, terrorism is more of a social problem than a military problem and social problems essentially require long-term strategies but due to the impatience and do-it-fast attitude, the U.S politicians fail to plan long-term solutions (Zinn, 2002: 26,62).
2.2 Counter-terrorism in the EU

Europe is currently witnessing a new trend in terrorism; namely homegrown terrorism. After 9/11 the focus of intelligence services was on preventing terrorists from entering EU’s borders, but the emergence of IS in Iraq/Syria drastically changed the situation since some thousands from EU countries traveled to Iraq/Syria to join IS as foreign fighters. According to the International Centre for Counter-terrorism, since the escalation of conflict in Syria in 2011 around 3,922 (a minimum estimates) to 5000 (a maximum estimates) individuals from EU countries joined IS. Already 30% of them have returned to their home countries, so the risk of terrorist incidents in Europe is believed to have been raised (Van Ginkel, B., and E. Entenmann, 2016).

In the aftermath of 9/11 and especially after the Madrid and London bombings, the EU reached a framework so called Counter-terrorism Strategy and entitled Europol\(^1\), Eurojust\(^2\), INTCEN\(^3\) and Frontex\(^4\) to tackle the fight against terrorism (Den Boer 2015; Rhinard 2008). As it will be discussed later in theory section the war on terror discourse framed terrorism as an exogenous problem that should be countered abroad, and consequently EU counter-terrorism strategy and most of European states’ strategies also followed this logic and adjusted their policies according to this understanding of terrorism.

For the EU as a project of peace and security, providing a high level of safety for its citizens is a priority (Art. 29 of the Maastricht Treaty). Moreover, according to the European Security Strategy, old threats such as large-scale invasions to national territories of EU countries are unlikely and they have been replaced by new threats that are “more diverse, less visible and less predictable” (Council, 2003: 3). The Internal Security Strategy for the European Union defines terrorism as one of the main challenges for the internal security of the union (Council, 2010). This shows that EU is highly concerned about terrorism but the problem is that because of the process of globalization and the EU’s its own internal policies (such as freedom of movement), terrorism has become more complex and complicated. Therefore, fighting terrorism demands an efficient apparatus with powerful legal backing. EU counter-terrorism strategy and its respective institutions have provided a forum for states to exchange information

\(^1\) The European Union’s law enforcement agency; [https://www.europol.europa.eu](https://www.europol.europa.eu)
\(^2\) The European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit; [http://www.eurojust.europa.eu/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.eurojust.europa.eu/Pages/home.aspx)
\(^4\) European Border and Coast Guard Agency; [http://frontex.europa.eu](http://frontex.europa.eu)
and intelligence regarding terrorism but they lack operational power since states hold it for themselves. As a result, some scholars downplay EU counter-terrorism strategy and argue that it may seem functional on paper but in practice, it is not efficient (Bures, 2011; Bossong, 2013).

Fighting terrorism in the EU is by nature different from the U.S since the later is a state with national law, rules, regulations, and policies while EU is an intergovernmental organization that acts as an umbrella over member-states. Although the Lisbon treaty gave more power to EU’s bodies, it is still the responsibility of single states to tackle problems and EU counter-terrorism strategy specifies that counter-terrorism is the responsibility of states (Council, 2005).

Nevertheless, the EU’s counter-terrorism strategy consists of four main pillars which are Prevention, Protect, Pursue and Respond. This categorization can be found in a single country’s strategy as well (in section 6 I will compare the EU’s strategy to the one of Sweden in detail). When looking at the institutions (EUROPOL, EUROJUST, INTCEN, FRONTEX) that are designated to conduct counter-terrorism strategy, one gets the impression that the efforts are focused on police work, intelligence activities, restricted visa-granting regulations and stronger border-control. Yet prevention is heavily neglected, vague and unspecified; it is usually equal to surveillance in order to discover terrorist cells and neutralize them before taking actions. This interpretation of prevention has lead European countries to impose heavy surveillance on neighborhoods in which Muslim immigrants live. This approach is dangerous since it can lead to the construction of suspect communities (Vermeulen, 2014).

After conducting field studies in London, Amsterdam and Berlin, Vermeulen concluded that this counter-terrorism strategy has reverse effects and can possibly contribute to the growth of terrorism since it results in more exclusion, marginalization, and stigmatization because the entire Muslim community is treated differently from the rest of the society (Vermeulen, 2014: 287-288). Although neither the EU nor nation-states explicitly identify homegrown terrorism as a religious (Islamic) problem, creating suspect communities shows that they are unconsciously deploying this approach (Vermeulen, 2014: 292). Preventing terrorism in a manner of containment is not sufficient because even under strict surveillance and restricted social status, terrorist networks are able to reconstitute themselves (Newman, 2006).
3. Theoretical framework and Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In the previous section, the main-stream approach to counter-terrorism was quickly explained and it was argued that counter-terrorism and preventive policies conducted both at the EU and nation-state levels appear to be inadequate since they traditionally do not consider prevention seriously. Prevention requires more long-term and deeper strategies because as it will be discussed, tendencies towards violent Islamist extremism are a result of accumulation of socio-economic problems.

As in most cases the terrorists and IS European fighters were either born or raised in European countries, they cannot be considered simply as exogenous problems but they are also partially an endogenous problem. Therefore, a well-established counter-terrorism strategy and terrorism prevention approach demands a careful examination of internal factors in European societies that lead individuals towards terrorist activities and violent extremism. This framework, then, ties the issue of counter-terrorism to immigration and integration because some empirical studies show that most of the homegrown terrorists are individuals with an immigrant background who seem to have difficulties in integrating into societies (Pisoiu, 2013; Piazza, 2009; Maynard, 2014).

3.2 Root Causes of Terrorism

The terrorist attacks associated with 9/11 resulted in a securitization of Muslim immigrants and enhanced the discourse of Blame it on Islam (Messina, 2007; Sageman, 2014). Undoubtedly the role of Wahhabism and Jihadism as ideologies behind violent Islamist extremism shouldn’t be dismissed but their role needs to be carefully examined. When these factors are regarded as the sole cause of terrorism and violent extremism, then this omits central causes. Therefore, statements such as “when one has been nursed on the mother’s milk of hatred and bitterness, the need for vengeance is bred in the bone” (Post, 2007: 37) don’t help us to understand the problem but rather encourage securitization which, in turn, create further complications (Vermeulen, 2014). Having this view leads authorities to take aim at Islamic population as a whole and as earlier discussed ends up creating suspect communities (Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 2012).
Another approach, the so called “root causes of terrorism”, argues that the “blame it on Islam” approach is just a simplification of the homegrown terrorism and violent Islamist extremism in Europe. This approach doesn’t reject the role of Jihadism, but argues that Islam is not a root cause and root causes should be sought in social conditions that individuals with immigrant background experience in their everyday life. This approach offers a complicated multidisciplinary framework by combining international relations, political economy, political sociology and political psychology. By focusing on failed integration as a root cause this approach claims that if European countries can achieve functional integration programs, then terrorism and violent extremism to a great extent can be prevented. The notion of exclusion is a key in this argument because, according to this approach, immigrants are economically, socially and politically excluded from the societies (Newman, 2006). The low level of education and high rate of unemployment are some factors that indicate the exclusion of immigrants and therefore some see immigrants as an “internal other” inside western societies (Herring and Stokes, 2011). The root causes approach also tries to identify a causal relationship between underlying economic, political and social conditions and the growth of terrorism (Newman, 2006).

Root causes, therefore, both objectively and subjectively can radicalize young Muslim immigrants who are excluded from society. The term “radicalization” is the standard expression most scholars use to explain the process that distinguishes individuals who join terrorist organizations from the rest in their community. Later in this section, I will argue that this term is not comprehensive and cannot explain exactly why among people who would be influenced by the root causes only a few become terrorists.

There are some other categorizations that indicate more or less the same thing, despite minor differences. These categorizations, interestingly, show that religious or specifically Islam doesn’t play a significant role as a root cause. Instead, many scholars mention the search for meaning. For example, a double sense of non-belonging is strong within the second and third generation of immigrants. They are mainly born and raised in European countries but cannot identify themselves with their elders’ countries since they never lived there and usually cannot even speak the language. Similarly, they can’t identify with the countries that they are officially citizens of, as they are unofficially excluded from them because of various forms of discrimination and socio-economic disadvantages (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 800).
3.3 Alienation and Dealienation: A Comprehensive Framework to Analyze Violent Islamist Extremism

As noted above, the Root Causes of Terrorism approach is able to explore the factors that smooth the way for violent Islamist extremism. Yet, we need to also examine why only a few of those who are experiencing the root causes choose to actively engage in terrorism. We need a more complicated theoretical framework to understand why an individual decides to commit terrorism and how it can be avoided. In this regard Crenshaw argues:

To develop a framework for the analysis of likely settings for terrorism, we must establish conceptual distinctions among different types of factors. A significant difference exists between preconditions, factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run, and precipitants, specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism (1981: 381).

It was argued before that the Root Causes Approach sees violent extremism as a matter of social exclusion and integration problems but in order to broaden the understanding about exclusion and failed integration some philosophical hints are useful.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1968) believes that individuals are able to change the structure by conducting their choices because the structure is contingent. It means that although individuals are shaped by objective structure but through their actions, they can shape the structure as well. In that sense then individuals are not merely passive products of structures (objective reality) but they have the opportunity to create their future and construct possibilities for freedom. Therefore, structure (objective) and agency (individuals-subjective) have a dialectical relationships in which they shape and reshape each other. However, this only happens when individuals use their freedom and subjective choices. But if an individual has a deficient relation to oneself, to others and to the world then s/he is alienated (Jaeggi, 2014: 5). An alienated environment is where individuals find their beings as insignificant, meaningless and impoverished. A place which is not their home, they don’t have any influence over it and they are merely passive objects of the external world (Jaeggi, 2014).

When reading official documents about integration and social inclusion of immigrants one realizes that the dominant approach is to “integrate immigrants into the society.” Yet, it is impossible for governmental agencies, organizations and civil servants to integrate others into a given society because limited integration programs cannot serve huge number of people with such broad differences in background, educational capabilities and professional skills, etc. (Hills, et al, 2002). Here, there is a danger of alienation in programs that are supposed to prevent
alienation because it is possible that individuals be forced to adopt a fixed identity or live in accordance with the dictates of others (Rae, 2011: 40-41). In other words, the programs don’t really develop the capacities of immigrant communities in economic terms. Social inclusion and integration should instead be thought as a dynamic, non-linear process in which individuals are able to choose a set of programs and activities that fit them and try to change their situation on their own. The idea is to expand the frontier of what Sartre called “contingency”.

Seymour Melman (2001) explored the idea that a root cause of terrorism was the terrorists’ alienation, i.e. their relatively lack of power and their attempt to secure power, even vicariously, i.e. through promises of rewards in the afterlife or rewards to their relatives after martyrdom (Feldman, 2017). Building on the work of Lawrence Cohen at Columbia University, Melman also theorized how de-alienation occurred, i.e. the individual cut off from various resources can gain power by developing various capacities such as by creating various organizations and associated networks through trade unions, cooperatives and the like (Melman, 2001).

Based on what has been explained, then it can be said that alienation has three major components which are: 1) powerlessness, 2) social isolation and 3) meaninglessness (Dean, 1961). Therefore, alienation takes both objective and subjective factors into account since they relate to each other as Sartre explained.

These three components of alienation can be shortly defined as:

- Powerlessness: It is a well-known concept thanks to Karl Marx. Although Marx used this term to discuss workers’ separation from effective control over means of production (Marcuse, 1941), it can be expanded to other aspects of society as well. Powerlessness has a close relation to inequality in societies. Those who are experiencing inequality, injustice and have less opportunity to develop their potentials are disempowered as subjects (Jaeggi, 2014: 23) therefor unemployed people and those who lack meaningful jobs, whose education level is low are more likely to be alienated.

- Social isolation: It simply means separation from the rest of society. It’s thus important to keep in mind that social isolation doesn’t mean the loss of community but rather the

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5 A person is free “to choose the meaning of his world and free to try to actually change his world. Thus, we find the dialectical reciprocity pointed to earlier: the individual finds himself in a specific historical situation with specific structures and possibilities that shape and constrain his practical freedom. It is only by overcoming the constraining pressures of his social world in the form of objective structures, social norms, and the consequences of other’s actions, that the individual is able to actually and practically express himself in the world” (Rae, 2011: 95).
incapacity to establish meaningful relations to others and to the society (Jaeggi, 2014: 219). In this regard, Sartre argues that consciousness of the individual is essentially embedded in the social situation and the way one relates itself to others through membership and involvement in various different groups is a good measure to scale one’s isolation from the society (Rae, 2011: 91).

- **Meaninglessness:** It is “a situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior” (Seeman, 1959: 787). Accordingly, alienation is tied to the problem of a loss of meaning; an alienated life is one that has become impoverished or meaningless, but it is a meaninglessness that is intertwined with powerlessness and impotence (Jaeggi, 2014: 22). That is why alienated people often face identity crisis and since norms and rules of society are meaningless for them they are in conflict with authorities and usually commit petty crimes.⁶

All in one we can argue that “alienation is typically associated with isolation, hopelessness, powerlessness, loss, anxiety, frustration, despair, and/or loneliness. These sensations arise because the individual explicitly perceives and experiences some sort of disconnection between his perception of what/who he is and what/who he thinks he should be” (Rae, 2011: 1-2). In his book *Why Men Rebel*, Robert Gurr coined the term “relative deprivation” in order to analyze violent extremism. He argues that relative deprivation is the tension between one’s actual state of being and what one feels or perceives one deserves (Gurr, 1970: 25). Therefore, violent extremism and the act of terrorism occurs when the difference between an individual’s actual socio-economic situation and what s/he perceives doesn’t comply with one another.

### 3.3.1 Alienation and Electoral Turnout

It was discussed that powerlessness, social isolation, and meaninglessness lead to alienation from the society one lives in. The opposite to alienation is the possibility of a multidimensional access to social, economical and political aspects of the society in its broadest sense. Therefore, social inclusion is the prerequisite to well-being of both individuals and society as a whole (Bevalander and Pendakur, 2010: 74).

But how is it possible to measure that someone is isolated from the society and social reality that one lives in? There are theories indicating that alienation and social isolation have a direct

---

⁶ The role of socio-economic factors like unemployment and poverty in committing crime shouldn’t be dismissed.
relation to the likelihood of one’s participation in the political sphere meaning that the more one is integrated into the society the more likely one participates in elections. Therefore, participation in elections can be taken as a sign of social belonging to the society. Putting it in our theoretical context then we can conclude that if an individual is considered as alienated, subsequently, that person would be less likely to vote in elections (Byrne, 2005). Immigrants and foreign born traditionally vote less compared to native/born citizens but there are studies proving that various factors like education, employment, income, housing tenure, etc. can increase or decrease the probability of voting among people with foreign background (Bäck and Gilljam, 2006; Bevalander and Pendakur, 2010).

People vote when they think 1) they are part of the society, and 2) they realize that their votes can affect the decision-making process. Therefore, electoral turnout is a good measure for social inclusion since in European countries like Sweden it is free, voluntary and doesn’t have any negative consequence if one doesn’t participate (Hills, et al, 2002; Toye and Infanti, 2004; Bevalander and Pendakur, 2010).

3.4 Network Theory

All mentioned above can make individuals a fertile ground prone to violent extremism, yet compared to the whole population who experience social exclusion and alienation only relatively a few show a tendency to violent Islamist extremism.

For committing an act of terrorism and/or joining violent extremist groups two important factors are necessary beyond alienating social conditions: 1) being exposed to extremist propaganda and violent extremist ideologies (in our case IS propaganda and Jihadism), and 2) a social network in which violent extremism has some grounds. In this study, I won’t analyze the role of propaganda as there are plenty of studies analyzing Jihadism and IS propaganda in social media (Gustafsson, 2015; Ali, 2015; Atwan, 2015).

Regarding the social network, it should be stated that two major approaches to recruitment can be identified. The first one asserts that recruitment happens because Islamist militant groups have a dynamic and systematic recruitment system. Using a top-down framework, they actively targeting individuals who seem to be prepared to join violent extremist groups. This mainly is the case when analyzing older Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, etc. (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 798).
The second approach considers recruiting to terrorist and violent extremist groups as a bottom-up, non-systematic process. This view argues that there is no such thing as an active recruitment. Sageman, by using network theory, presented the idea of “bunches of guys”. He believes that radicalization and recruitment to violent extremist groups are usually a gradual rhetorical escalation within groups of friends (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 804) and is tied to a “multitude of informal local groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up” (Sageman, 2008: vii).

According to Sageman, these people usually start making contacts with terrorist groups when they are already radicalized and hold violent ideas. In some cases, individuals don’t make contacts at all and act on their own. This group is known as “lone wolves” who are inspired by violent extremist ideologies through their propaganda but don’t have any significant contacts with organizations (Sageman, 2004; Sageman, 2008). Network theory considers individuals as fully embedded in their environment, therefore, builds the analysis from the ground up looking at the relationships between individuals. The point is that people don’t join terrorist organizations and violent extremist groups by relying upon strangers. The situation is completely the opposite—people get encouraged and motivated by those who know for a long time and trust; mainly family members and friends (Sageman, 2008: 23-24).

Accepting the ideas of Sageman, Edwin Bakker studied the profile of 200 individuals who were involved in terrorist activities in Europe. He concluded that for most of them radicalization was a bottom-up process happening in the personal network of friends in their residential cities and neither external factors nor active recruitment by terrorist groups was involved (Bakker, 2006: 52). Moreover, it should be kept in mind that alienation doesn’t occur in a mechanical, deterministic way and it is impossible to identify relevant components in a visibly distinct order (Pisoiu, 2013: 250).

3.5 Swedish IS fighters

The aim of this sub-section is to apply the theoretical framework of the study by reviewing the existing literature on Swedish foreign fighters to initially find out if the theory can later be applied in empirical sections of the thesis. If so, then the existing academic work can be used as a good departure point and instead of repeating what already has been said I will build up on other academics’ works and contribute to the research field.
Regardless of the severity of the situation, the number of academic articles and publications analyzing the violent Islamist extremism in Sweden and Swedish IS fighters are surprisingly low. There are some journalistic accounts like, Jihad: *Swedes in the Islamic Terror Networks* (2013)\(^7\) and *Swedish IS fighters* (2016)\(^8\) that explain violent Islamist extremism in Sweden. There are also more general books like *Extremists: A story about political violence in Sweden* (2012)\(^9\) and *The Swedish hatred: a story about our time* (2016)\(^10\) that explain how and why different extremist movements spread out in Sweden.

The number of academic pieces is even more restricted. The major contribution is from researchers at the Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS) at the Swedish Defence University. They have published three reports which are *Prevention of Violent Extremism at Local Level* (Ranstorp et al., 2015)\(^11\), *Violent Islamic extremism and social media* (Gustafsson, 2015)\(^12\) and a recently published report *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq* (Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017).\(^13\) There is also another report published by Segerstedinstitutet at Gothenburg university called *Mellan det angelägna och det svårfångade*\(^14\) (Mattson et al., 2016). This study, based on interviewing a number of civil servants that work in the field, is useful for understanding how different actors work to prevent violent Islamist extremism.

The newly published report *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq* (Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017) is the most important piece since it analyzes data on 267 Swedish IS fighters that were provided by Sweden’s secret service (SÄPO) exclusively to them which is unprecedented. That makes this report unique because the analysis is based on reliable hard facts directly from the secret service and the sample (267) is very close to the total number of Swedish IS fighters, although the data contains only statistics and more general information (approximately 300).\(^15\)

This report gives a clear idea about time of travel, age, gender, geographical concentration, citizenship and country of origin, average time spent in the conflict area, numbers of individuals

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\(^{7}\) Svenskarna i De Islamistiska Terrorområden.

\(^{8}\) Svenska IS-krigare.

\(^{9}\) Extremister: En berättelse om politiska våldsverkare i Sverige.

\(^{10}\) Det Svenska Hatet: en berättelse om vår tid.

\(^{11}\) Förebyggande av Våldsbejakande Extremism på Local Nivå.

\(^{12}\) Våldsbejakande Islamistisk Extremism och Sociala Medier.

\(^{13}\) The report was originally written in English.

\(^{14}\) I couldn’t find an appropriate translation for this title, therefore, used the original title in Swedish.

\(^{15}\) There is no exact number however SÄPO’s estimation is around 300 people.
killed, number of returnees, number of fighters remaining in the conflict area, social media activities, and the financing of foreign fighters (ibid: 5). The weakness of this report is that important factors like education level, employment status and income rate of those foreign fighters are missed but in the next section I use data about geographical distribution provided by this report as an indicator to find out how living in some specific areas can play a role in alienating individuals.

These 267 individuals traveled to Syria or Iraq between June 2012 and September 2016; 106 of them (40 percent) have returned to Sweden, while 112 (42 percent) are still in Syria or Iraq. A total of 49 (18 percent) individuals were estimated to have died in the conflict (ibid: 75).

3.5.1 Age and Gender Distribution

The average age of Swedish IS fighters at the time of first travel to Syria/Iraq was 26, however, 78% were under 29. There are a few older individuals who make the average a bit higher although the majority is extremely young. Of the total fighters, 76 percent were men and 24 were women. Separating the average age of men and women then the average age for men was still 26 while the average for women was 25.

![Figure 1: The age distribution at time of first travel to Syria/Iraq](image)

Source: Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017: 81.

3.5.2 The average years of living in Sweden

Among the fighters studied, 75 percent had Swedish citizenships and 34 percent were born in Sweden. The average age of immigration to Sweden is 16.
Figure 2: The age distribution of IS foreign fighters when immigrating to Sweden

Source: Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017: 94-95.

3.5.3 Crime Background

There is no definite data about the criminal background of Swedish IS fighters. According to national police’s intelligence unit, however, many of them have previously committed crimes such as theft, narcotics, weapons crime, and assault etc. (Sverige Radio, 2016). Magnus Sandelin in his book *Swedish IS fighters* (2016) examined the profiles of 70 individuals and found out that about one-third of them had been convicted of crimes. Statements from intelligence agencies and journalistic accounts both prove that criminality is a common setting in this context (Sandelin 2016; Gustafsson and Ronstorp 2017).

3.5.4 Geographical distribution

Sweden is divided into 21 counties and 290 municipalities. The majority (80%) of Swedish IS fighters come from four counties which are Stockholm, Västra Götaland\(^\text{16}\), Skåne\(^\text{17}\), and Örebro.

It is extremely important to know that the regional distribution in each county is not even and Swedish IS fighters in each area come from certain neighborhoods with a concentrated immigrant population. In 2015, the Swedish Police published a report about the criminal network in Sweden and identified 53 deprived areas and 15 of those were recognized as particularly exposed areas (Polisen, 2015). The majority (71%) come from those few exposed neighborhoods that are characterized by a high level of criminality, poverty and high unemployment rates, social stigmatization, and cramped housing conditions (Gustafsson and

\(^{16}\) Gothenburg is the capital of Västra Götaland.

\(^{17}\) Malmö is the capital of Skåne
Ronstorp, 2017:84-105). Even within those particularly exposed areas, some areas contributed more (see Table 1). It is worth noticing that most of youth riots that have happened in Sweden in the past ten years, were mostly in these areas (Polisen, 2015).

Figure 3: The amount of Swedish IS fighters from different counties

Source: Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017: 82-83.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Particularly Exposed Areas with Most IS Fighters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Örebro</td>
<td>Vivalla(^\text{18})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
<td>Angered (Bergsjön, Hammarkullen, Gårdsten, Lövgärdet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Husby, Rinkeby/Tensta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>Rosengård</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on Polisen, 2015; Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017.

3.5.5 Recruited by Family Members and Friends

The reason why concentration is in just a few areas can partially be explained by network theory. In most cases in the aforementioned areas individuals were recruited by their close friends and relatives, but there was not such active recruitment by IS. Some key persons inspired by IS propaganda started to make contacts with IS members in Iraq and Syria and then traveled there to join them. After that they tried to encourage and provoke their friends and relatives to join IS through social media mainly using Facebook (Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017; Sandelin, 2016; Gustafsson 2015).

\(^{18}\) Considering per capita Vivalla had the most IS fighters.
3.6 Summary

In this section, I tried to analyze Swedish IS fighter’s phenomena by applying alienation and network theories. I argued that living in an alienating environment has a crucial role in tendencies towards violent extremism. Additionally, there are two determinative factors why only a few among a huge number who live in alienating environments decide to join terrorist groups. First, they are exposed to propaganda. Second, they participate in an inappropriate social network in which at least one person is a supporter of violent extremism. The existing literature about Swedish IS fighters is summarized in as Figure 4, below.

Figure 4: The multilayered process of engaging in violent Islamist extremism

Source: Author based on Sageman, 2008; Rae, 2011; Jaeggi, 2014; Gustafsson 2015; Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017.
4. Methodology

4.1 Levels of Analysis

Three different levels of analysis can be distinguished when analyzing terrorism and counter-terrorism:

- Micro level: biographical analysis of individuals
- Meso level: social context of specific areas
- Macro level: overarching socio-economic conditions at national level

Each level has its own analytical advantages and disadvantages. The micro level is useful when analyzing a specific case to understand why exactly an individual committed an act of terrorism. The difficulties of this approach are: 1) accessing those individuals is in most cases impossible since intelligence agencies and judiciaries won’t usually permit researchers to interview them; 2) for getting the best result researchers need to have knowledge in clinical psychology (Sageman, 2008: 16). For aforementioned reasons I will not analyze the micro level.

The meso level is useful to understand why violent Islamist extremism escalated in some particular areas. I will, therefore, analyze the socio-economic conditions in four chosen particularly exposed areas in Sweden which are Husby-Rinkeby-Tensta in Stockholm, Angered in Gothenburg, Vivalla in Örebro and Rosengård in Malmö. According to the Swedish secret service, these are the areas where the majority of Swedish IS fighters came from. Various factors such as education level, unemployment, income rate and eventually electoral participation in these areas will be analyzed.

The macro level is another level of analysis that will be used in this study. Broad socio-economic explanations can form a genuine understanding of the wider social situation at the national level. This type of analysis sees society as a system and is useful to understand what kind of structure encourages and facilitates violent extremism. Since I use the meso level as well, then, I will compare all the factors in aforementioned areas with ones at the national level to find out how various socio-economic factors in the meso level deviate from the macro level.

C. Wright Mills in his book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) argues that for understanding social phenomena it is necessary to consider individuals (biography) in both a social and historical context and understand the interplay between them. Therefore, an ideal research
would be the one that could connect the dots between micro (individual), meso (regional) and macro (national) levels\(^\text{19}\). This project is obviously much bigger than a master’s thesis, nonetheless, as explained above I skip micro level due to practical matters and analyze only two different levels which are sufficient enough considering the limitation of a master’s thesis. The factors and measures drawn from the theoretical framework are summarized in Table 2. Meaninglessness and its measure can be analyzed mainly at the micro level and require set of methods like interviewing individuals engaged in violent extremism and/or interviewing people who live in exposed areas that were not used in this thesis. Therefore, I consciously excluded meaninglessness from this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alienation</td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>-Education level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Income rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Electoral Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Effects of surveillance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Sense of non-belonging to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Identity crisis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on Sartre, 1968; Rae, 2011 and Jaeggi, 2014.

Having two different levels of analysis necessarily requires using various research methods. I now briefly discuss what methods I will use and what are the sources of data for each method.

### 4.2 Statistical Analysis

Different statistics on the population with foreign background, unemployment, education level, income rate and electoral turnout both at the local and national levels will be used in order to compare the socio-economic situations of the designated neighborhoods to what appears at the national level. For finding relevant and reliable statistics for national level I used Statistics Sweden (SCB) which is the governmental agency responsible for producing statistics, and for statistics at local level I used each municipalities’ database. And eventually, for statistics about electoral turnout, I used the Election Authority’s database.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Levels of analysis can be categorized in other ways with regard to the nature of the topic. For instance, Kenneth Waltz identifies three levels which are: 1) the individual, 2) the state and 3) the system (Waltz, 1959).

Gathering data for the macro level was easy since clear-cut data was available on Statistics Sweden’s database. For analyzing data for the meso level in most cases I had to calculate data and produce desired statistics myself. The problem was even more significant for electoral turnout since each area itself had several voting places and for having more accurate data I had to calculate data from those voting places that were in intended areas. I reviewed the statistics several times for eventual errors and miscalculations, and under these reviews found and corrected some minor errors.

4.3 Content Analysis

I will conduct a content analysis of Sweden’s official documents about counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention. All documents are available online and can be downloaded from the Government, The National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism, the Security Service, and the police. The documents analyzed are described in Table 3. Content analysis of these documents helps me to find a clear understanding of Sweden’s counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention policy, practice, and institutional design and by comparing the result gained from this method to the results from other methods I will hopefully be able to pinpoint the shortages of Sweden’s terrorism prevention design (Bowen, 2009). The institutional design of Swedish terrorism prevention policy can be explicated by analyzing the discourse corresponding to the factors and measures explained in Table 2. Selected documents are basically all main documents published by government and the National Coordinator that define and draw the bigger framework for counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention activities in Sweden. Other agencies have other documents that were not included in this study because they didn’t have any added value beyond chosen documents. For example, the security service has an annual yearbook, in which a specific chapter is about terrorism. The reason that these yearbooks weren’t analyzed is that they only included a report over counter-terrorism activities conducted by the secret service and didn’t have any strategic importance. These yearbooks could be useful, if the aim of this study was, for instance, to analyze activities of the secret service.

21 Husby-Rinkeby-Tensta (Stockholm) is three different areas, Rosengård (Malmö) contains four areas and Angered (Gothenburg) contains five different areas.
22 http://www.regeringen.se
23 http://www.samordnarenmotextremism.se
24 http://www.sakerhetspolisen.se
25 https://polisen.se
26 There were English versions of three documents (Action plan to safeguard democracy against violence- promoting extremism (2011); Sweden’s national counter-terrorism strategy (2012) and Swedish counter-terrorism strategy (2015)).
4.4 Questionnaire

Terrorism prevention is a very complex issue, therefore, having knowledge and expertise of people who somehow work in the field is useful to achieve a better comprehension of Sweden’s terrorism prevention work, identify its shortages and offer some suggestion for improvement. Therefore, results from a questionnaire can be seen as supplementary data that enhance the findings of other methods (Bailey, 1987; Fairclough, 1992).

I used an online Google form to conduct the questionnaire and the target population was civil servants in all municipalities in Sweden whose work is to coordinate activities related to terrorism prevention.

As I explain later, after the establishment of the National Coordinator against Violent Extremism in 2014, the coordinator required all 290 municipalities in Sweden to designate a special person to coordinate all the preventive works in the municipality. The Staff at the National Coordinator office kindly provided me with a list that included the names and email addresses of local coordinator in all 290 municipalities. After sending email containing the
questionnaire link I realized that 18 addresses were faulty and couldn’t reach the destinations, Therefore the total amount that actually received the email is 272 persons. It means that the questionnaire sample (272) is 93.8% of the population (290) which is a great amount.

Total of 85 persons filled in the questionnaire and that makes the response rate to the questionnaire 31.2%, which is good considering the sensitivity of the topic.

I sent the email on June 25, 2017 and it was open for responses until August 11, 2017 so the recipients had more than a month to answer the questions. After sending the email I received autoreply emails from 79 persons indicating that they were on summer vacations, 12 persons replied and said they didn’t have enough knowledge to answer the questions, and 9 said that they don’t participate in student surveys. These people weren’t of course omitted from the total amount.
5. Particularly Exposed Areas: Daily Life as a Process of Alienation

5.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework and literature review showed that living in so called “particularly exposed areas” play a significant role in the process of alienation and prepare the setting and root causes to violent Islamist extremism and joining IS. In this section, I try to analyze various socio-economic factors in particularly exposed areas and by comparing data representing these factors to relevant national data try to find out how data attached to these factors deviate from the average level in Sweden.

As noted in the literature review, some specific areas contributed considerably more than the others to IS fighters, therefore, I will analyze four sub-regions (which are known to have most IS fighters) in four different cities in order to offer a more comprehensive picture of the living situation in these areas. In the first step, education level, unemployment rate, and average annual income will be analyzed, afterward electoral participation in these areas will be compared to the average national level.

According to the national police there are 15 particularly exposed areas in Sweden (see Table 4). It is significant that out of those 15 Particularly exposed areas 6 are from Västra Götaland county and 4 are from Stockholm county and 33% and 25% of Swedish IS fighters are respectively from these two counties which make them first and second on the list.

Table 4: 15 Particularly Exposed Areas in Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Particularly Exposed Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Örebro</td>
<td>1. Vivalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>2. Hallunda/Norsborg (Botkyrka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Husby (Stockholm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Rinkeby/Tensta (Stockholm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Ronna/Geneta/Lina (Södertälje)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Västra Götaland</td>
<td>6. Bergsjön (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Biskopsgården (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Gårdsten (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Hammarkullen (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Hjällbo (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Lövgärdet (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some areas among these 15 particularly exposed areas are known to have the most Swedish IS fighters which are: Vivalla (Örebro), Husby/Rinkeby/Tensta (Stockholm), Angered\(^{27}\) (Gothenburg) and Rosengård\(^{28}\) (Malmö) (see Table 1). These areas have a population of mainly foreign background inhabitants. Table 5 shows how many percent in each area has population with foreign background compared to the national rate. Foreign Background means either born in another country or having both parents born in another country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population with foreign background</th>
<th>Deviation from national rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivalla</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
<td>+57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husby/Rinkeby/Tensta</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>+63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosengård</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>+62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angered</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>+53.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Population with foreign background 2016

Source: Author based on data from Statistics Sweden and municipalities’ databases.

5.2 Unemployment

According to Statistics Sweden, the average unemployment rate in 2016 was 6.9 percent which is 0.2 percent lower than the previous year\(^{29}\). Nonetheless, the development is not even for everyone since unemployment decreased only between the so called native swedes while it shows an increase between foreign born individuals. The unemployment rate between native born in 2016 shrank to 4.2 percent and it raised to 22.5 percent between foreign born (see Table 6). This difference shows a severe problem in integration programs for new comers since

\(^{27}\) Angered is a bigger area that contains those particularly exposed areas in Gothenburg named in Table 4.

\(^{28}\) Rosengård is a bigger area that contains those particularly exposed areas in Malmö named in Table 4.

\(^{29}\) Different Agencies use different methods. For example, Swedish Public Employment Service announced unemployment rate as 7.6 percent. I use data for unemployment from Statistics Sweden since all the other data for national level used in this thesis are from this agency.
group contains mainly people who came to Sweden as adults with education and experience from another country.

Table 6: Unemployment rate between native Swedes vs. foreign born 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>Deviation from national rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Swedes</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>-2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>+15.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on data from Statistics Sweden.

Unemployment rate in the four areas is in average 9.92 percent which is 3.01 percent higher than the national rate (see Table 7). Participants in the questionnaire conducted for this thesis also think the lack of meaningful employment is an important factor explaining why some individuals move towards violent Islamic extremism since 49.5 percent said it is very important, 50.5 percent said it is somewhat important and no one said it is not important (see Figure 5).

Table 7: Unemployment 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>Deviation from national rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6,9%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivalla</td>
<td>10,4%</td>
<td>+3,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husby/Rinkeby/Tensta</td>
<td>8,5%</td>
<td>+1,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosengård</td>
<td>11,7%</td>
<td>+4,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angered</td>
<td>9,1%</td>
<td>+2,2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on data from Statistics Sweden and municipalities’ databases.
5.3 Education

Statistics for education level shows that the amount of people in the four areas who have a university degree is on average 8.55 percent lower than the national rate while the amount who studied up to 9 years at school is considerably high and in average 10.65 percent more than the national rate (see Table 8).

Participants in the questionnaire think that low education level is partially important in the tendency towards violent Islamic extremism since 29.5 percent said it is very important, 56.5 percent said it is somewhat important and 14 percent said it is not important (see Figure 6).

Table 8: Education level 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Higher Education/Deviation</th>
<th>No info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivalla</td>
<td>27,2%</td>
<td>40,5%</td>
<td>26,1%</td>
<td>-5,9%</td>
<td>6,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husby/Rinkeby/Tensta</td>
<td>33,3%</td>
<td>36,1%</td>
<td>22,8%</td>
<td>-9,2%</td>
<td>7,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosengård</td>
<td>30,2%</td>
<td>38,7%</td>
<td>23,9%</td>
<td>-8,1%</td>
<td>7,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angered</td>
<td>31,9%</td>
<td>37,2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>9,9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on data from Statistics Sweden and municipalities’ databases.
Figure 6: How important is low education level in tendency towards violent Islamist Extremism?

Source: Author’s Survey, 2017.

5.4 Annual Income

In 2016, World Bank ranked Sweden as the 16th richest country in the world (The World Bank, 2016). Still, the difference between native Swedes and people with a foreign background is very high and the wealth doesn’t seem to be distributed equally (Beijron, 2016). As Table 9 indicates the average annual income in the four areas is 17,5775 SEK which is 39.3% lower than the average annual income in Sweden. It shows a huge difference in the level of income when comparing the much higher rate within the four areas on one hand, and the average in Sweden on the other. One reason is that these four areas had a higher unemployment rate and lower education level compared to average rates in Sweden. Participants in the questionnaire think that low income is also partially an important factor since 26 percent think it is very important, 63.5 percent think it is somewhat important and 10.5 percent think it is not important (see Figure 7).

Table 9: Annual incomes 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Annual income in SEK</th>
<th>Deviation from national rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>290000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivalla</td>
<td>122800</td>
<td>-167200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husby/Rinkeby/Tensta</td>
<td>222000</td>
<td>-68000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosengård</td>
<td>166000</td>
<td>-124000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angered</td>
<td>192300</td>
<td>-97700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on data from Statistics Sweden and municipalities’ databases.
5.5 Electoral Turnout

Electoral turnout in the last parliament election in Sweden in 2014 was 85.81%. That is a fairly high turnout rate and makes Sweden stand at the 27th place among 200 countries within the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance’s global Ranking (IDEA). It was discussed in the theory section that electoral turnout is an indicator of social belonging. Therefore, it can be claimed that for the average Swede feelings of social belonging are at a high level. The same cannot be said for people who live in particularly exposed areas since electoral turnout in the four areas for the last parliamentary election in 2014 on average was 58.75%, a deviation of -27.06% from national rate (see Table 10). The sense of non-belonging to the society can actually be seen as a consequence of other factors. Participants in the questionnaire think that sense of non-belonging to the society is one of the most important factors because 76.4 percent believe that it is very important, 23.5 percent think it is somewhat important and only 0.1 percent think it is not important (see Figure 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Electoral Turnout</th>
<th>Deviation from national rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>85.81%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivalla</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>-23.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husby/Rinkeby/Tensta</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>-26.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosengård</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-28.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angered</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-28.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author based on data from Sweden Election Authority’s database.
5.6 Summary

By analyzing some socio-economic factors in four particularly exposed areas in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Örebro and Malmö that are known to have the most Swedish IS fighters I tried to show that Swedish IS fighters’ phenomena can be explained by alienation theory and the root causes approach. The statistical analysis in this section demonstrated that the population in the particularly exposed areas were relatively alienated from both economic and political power compared to the average Swede. The proportion of inhabitants in these areas with a foreign background was 82.6%. Therefore, most inhabitants are less likely to interact with so called native born Swedes, a potential cause of (and evidence of) social isolation. Unemployment in these areas is 3.02% higher than the average rate in Sweden, the number of people who have a high level of education is 8.55% less, and consequently, the annual income is 39.3% less than the average. All these measures demonstrate relative powerlessness and thus alienation. As I explained in the theoretical framework, powerlessness affects social belonging in a negative way and electoral turnout is a good indicator to measure it. As people in the four examined areas voted 27.6% less in the last parliament election compared to the average national level, then it can be said that for many social belonging in these areas is extremely low. Moreover, the results from the survey conducted by author greatly support the findings from the statistical analysis.
The Statistical analysis in this section shed a light on the severity of the situation in so called particularly exposed areas as a fertile ground for violent Islamist extremism. By applying various measures and factors the analysis strongly suggested that alienation theory could explain Swedish IS fighters’ phenomena. Based on these results, in the upcoming sections I try to analyze how Sweden’s terrorism prevention strategy, policy, and institutional design identify the root causes and what are plans for tackling them.
6. A Gradual Progression of Policy and Strategy Design

6.1 Introduction

Sweden’s counterterrorism strategy evolved after the suicide attack in the heart of Stockholm in 2010 which was the first terrorist incident in the country by an Islamist extremist, hence, counter-terrorism changed a new field of more formalized policy and analysis in the country compared to many other European countries. This attack was fortunately unsuccessful and the only casualty was the terrorist himself, but that made policymakers consider counter-terrorism more seriously. Therefore, the older strategy untitled *National responsibility and international commitment – A national strategy to meet the threat of terrorism* published (Regeringen, 2007) was updated by the center-right government as *Sweden’s National Counterterrorism Strategy* (Regeringen, 2012) in 2012. As it will be discussed, this strategy didn’t achieve the desired outcome and no major difference can be identified between the two. Eventually, in 2015\(^\text{30}\), the Social Democratic government published a new strategy as *The Swedish Counter-terrorism Strategy: prevent, preempt, protect* (Regeringen, 2015).

In 2011 the government also published an *Action Plan to Protect Democracy Against Violent extremism* (Regeringen, 2011) and a complementary report *When We Care: proposals for cooperation and education to more effectively prevent violence-fighting extremism* (SOU, 2013). The complementary report is even more important than strategies themselves since it in details explains how the work should be conducted and what the institutional design should look like. As it will be discussed in this section, the strategy progression later resulted in the establishment of a “National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism.”

In this section I first compare Sweden’s counter-terrorism strategy to that found within the EU and then by analyzing two other key documents I try to analyze how the strategy moderately advanced from only counter-terrorism to a combination of both countering terrorism and preventing terrorism.\(^\text{31}\)

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\(^{30}\) The strategy was internally written in 2014 but publicly announced in August 2015.

\(^{31}\) I do not analyze the strategy published in 2007 because there is no major difference between this strategy and the one published in 2012.
6.2 The Earlier Strategy Inspired by the EU Framework

The European Union counter-terrorism Strategy was published by the council of the EU in 2005. When reading the strategy, it is obvious that the bureaucrats and policymakers who wrote and approved the document comprehended terrorism and violent extremism mainly as an exogenous issue since the document discusses repeatedly building good governance, promoting democracy and enhancing human rights in conflict zones and failed states. As shown in Table 11, the strategy has four pillars and prevention is one of them. Although root causes were named, it doesn’t fit in the overall structure of the strategy. For example, in two and half pages devoted to discuss preventing people from terrorism only one and a half sentences implicitly talked about internal conditions inside European societies which reads as follow: “we must also target inequalities and discrimination where they exist and promote inter-cultural dialogue and long-term integration where appropriate” (Council, 2005: 9). Moreover, earlier than this statement when discussing socio-economic factors, the strategy argues that these factors exist mainly outside of Europe and “within the union these factors are not generally present” (ibid).

Table 11: Four pillars of EU counter-terrorism strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC COMMITMENT</th>
<th>PREVENT</th>
<th>PROTECT</th>
<th>PURSUE</th>
<th>RESPOND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To combat terrorism globally while respecting human rights, and make Europe safer, allowing its citizens to live in an area of freedom, security and justice.</td>
<td>To prevent people turning to terrorism by tackling the factors or root causes which can lead to radicalisation and recruitment, in Europe and internationally.</td>
<td>To protect citizens and infrastructure and reduce our vulnerability to attack, including through improved security of borders, transport and critical infrastructure.</td>
<td>To pursue and investigate terrorists across our borders and globally; to impede planning, travel, and communications; to disrupt support networks; to cut off funding and access to attack materials, and bring terrorists to justice.</td>
<td>To prepare ourselves, in the spirit of solidarity, to manage and minimise the consequences of a terrorist attack, by improving capabilities to deal with the aftermath; the co-ordination of the response; and the the needs of victims.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Council, 2005: 3.

The Swedish strategy published in 2012 has almost the same soul as EU’s strategy. Instead of four pillars, it has three which are prevent, pursue and prepare. The prevent section in Sweden’s strategy is exactly the same as the EU one, while pursue and prepare in the Sweden’s strategy
contain the same content as protect, pursue and respond in EU strategy (Council, 2005; Regeringen, 2012).

When discussing prevention, Sweden’s strategy says:

Preventing terrorism is intended to reduce the will of individuals or groups to commit or support terrorist crimes. This work includes efforts to try to identify and reduce potential breeding grounds for terrorism and violent extremism. Preventive work also includes strengthening the values on which our democracy rests (Regeringen, 2012: 9).

Although this formulation touches the surface of root causes approach when explaining how it should be conducted it reveals a flawed understanding about preventive work since it focuses on surveillance for preventing people from turning into violent extremism:

Preventive measures should provide further scope for reporting suspicious behavior and establishing contacts with individuals who have shown by their actions a will to commit or support terrorist crimes. Moreover, this work should contribute to greater awareness of the fundamentals of democracy and to a society that questions the propaganda about intolerance, threats and violence spread by violent extremism... Over and above work to safeguard and strengthen democracy in general, measures should have a particular focus on the individuals who have shown by their actions that they have started a process of supporting or participating in some form of violent extremism and associated violent acts (Regeringen, 2012: 9).

Based on this understanding about prevention, then the strategy names the police and the security service as main actors in this area which is not a sufficient choice since terrorism prevention is supposed to be steered at the stage that no crime has yet been committed. Therefore, involving police and the security service at this stage can result in stigmatization. The strategy emphasizes: “even though there are clear limitations on what the Swedish Security Service and other parts of the Swedish Police can achieve, these agencies have a central role in preventive work” (Regeringen, 2012: 11).

In sum, it can be said that this strategy is a good example of an older perception of counter-terrorism that considers the issue chiefly as a security problem and even when talking about preventive measures, focuses mostly on intelligence and police actions.

6.3 From Counterterrorism to Preventing Terrorism

In 2012 a new trend in violent Islamist extremism emerged in many European countries, including Sweden which was the phenomenon of IS foreign fighters. Only in this year, 36
individuals from Sweden traveled to Syria/Iraq to join IS (Gustafsson and Ronstorp, 2017: 78). The need for a new strategy was apparent. As a result, the government assigned a special committee to investigate the situation and come up with new suggestions. This led to the report entitled *when we care* (SOU, 2013) that was published in 2013 and can be seen as a breakthrough concerning how the government perceived terrorism prevention. In this report, signs of a shift from counter-terrorism to preventing terrorism can be tracked. The aim of investigation was to: “based on existing structures submit proposals for how a more effective prevention work both at national and local level can be developed and organized, and on the other hand to develop a training material about violent extremism which can be used to prepare and develop skills for those who in different ways participate in preventive work”

When analyzing why people engage in violent extremism the report concludes that a:

prerequisite for individuals to be drawn into such environment is that they have time to get involved. Individuals usually don’t have obligations like meaningful jobs and/or family commitments…It is also easier to get into violent extremism for those who have social ties to other individuals who are already active in extremist environments. At the risk zone are especially individuals with experiences of failed social relations mainly with a criminal background, who due to socio-economic conditions have difficulties to success

This analysis is consistent with the theoretical explanation for terrorism found earlier in this thesis. Departing from this exploration, then, by reviewing preventive work in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Finland the report tries to design an appropriate institutional framework to coordinate prevention work between various agencies that are active in the field. The model that the report suggests is to “coordinate centrally, act locally”. It means that the operative work to prevent violent extremism should be conducted locally by actors who do the fieldwork in order to identify problems that individuals meet in their everyday life. On the other hand, there is a need for a central coordination where knowledge can be gathered, produced and communicated to those actors in form of implementation of education and examples of effective preventive methods. The report also identifies that all activities that different agencies and authorities do should be coordinated under a central umbrella for avoiding double work and/or gaps between what different actors do (SOU, 2013: 63).

32 Translated from Swedish by author.
33 Translated from Swedish by author.
After analyzing different preventive models in the countries mentioned above, the investigations’ point of views is that municipalities alongside with police and secret service should be one of the key actors in preventive work. (SOU, 2013: 74). Nonetheless, the major contribution of this investigation in the development of prevention strategy was the suggestion that a national coordinator against violent extremism be established; a suggestion that later became a reality. The investigation’s assessment was that the National Coordinator should not work under the entities that directly engage in preventive work, but should be established either as an independent unit or as a specific part of the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) (SOU, 2013: 11).

6.4 The New Strategy

In this subsection I will describe how the new strategy (based on suggestions presented in the report published in 2013) involved a move towards prevention which was more rooted in endogenous forces promoting terrorism; this constituted an evolution from the earlier approach largely focused on exogenous (external to Sweden) causes of terrorism.

In August 2015 the Social Democratic government submitted the most recent counter-terrorism strategy to the Parliament. The strategy discusses Swedish-linked IS fighters as a major security threat to the country. The major difference between the two strategies is the way the later articulates prevention. The strategy has a rather updated point of view about preventive work and is comprehensively affected by the complementary report. This strategy is called “the new strategy” and when talking about differences from the previous strategy it states:

Particular focus is given to the area Prevent. Measures in this area are intended to counteract radicalisation and recruitment to extremist and terrorist groups, and to influence the intent of individuals to commit or support terrorist crime. In this way, the recruitment base for terrorism can be reduced” (Regeringen, 2015: 1). “The Government particularly wishes to focus on preventive measures in order to prevent more people developing an intent and capability to commit terrorist attacks in the longer term (Regeringen, 2015: 6).

A comparison between objectives of prevention declared in the strategies published in 2012 and 2015 (as shown in the Table 12) evidently shows a clear development in the way the government understands preventive work.
Table 12: Objectives of Preventive work in Sweden’s counter-terrorism strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy published in 2012</th>
<th>Strategy published in 2015</th>
<th>Key Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating a national action plan to defend democracy from violent extremism;</td>
<td>To identify and develop knowledge-based methods and measures capable of preventing radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism;</td>
<td>Acknowledging the need for further research about prevention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development of the measures and cooperation undertaken by several authorities; and support for and the development of cooperation with other counties.</td>
<td>For relevant actors at national, regional and local level to prioritize work to combat radicalisation and violent extremism and to collaborate on actions;</td>
<td>No difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For all actors to take a holistic approach so that measures to prevent, preempt or protect against terrorist crime or to deal with the consequences of a terrorist attack are taken in a manner that does not lead to more people becoming radicalized.</td>
<td>New objective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The new strategy also has a well-defined formulation about why people tend to violent extremism and mentions socio-economic factors as root causes. Therefore, the strategy emphasizes on measures that can reduce socio-economic problems inside the Swedish society such as functioning school system and functioning labor market (Regeringen, 2015: 9).

The previous strategy published in 2012 named the Police and the Security Service as the main actors in preventive work. In the new strategy, however, the role distribution is changed and other actors like municipalities and school system are appointed to play the main role and police, the security service and other traditional agencies that usually are active in counter-terrorism find themselves in a secondary and supportive role (Regeringen, 2015: 14-15).

Another significant move in the new strategy is that the National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism is appointed as a unit to coordinate activities of all agencies and authorities involved in terrorism prevention area (Regeringen, 2015: 9). Although National Coordinator started its work in June 2014, it was through submission of this strategy to the parliament that it officially received its mandate.
6.5 Summary

Analyzing two counter-terrorism strategies published in 2012 and 2015 demonstrates a gradual progression in Sweden’s terrorism prevention policy. The new strategy has relatively a better understanding of preventive work, sees socio-economic factors as root causes and appoints other actors besides police and the security service to take responsibility in preventive work and most importantly designates a national coordinator to coordinate and harmonize activities of all actors involved in preventive work.
7. Prevention in Practice: The National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism

7.1 Introduction

In this section by analyzing activities of the National Coordinator, I try to explore how prevention was implemented in practice and what achievements and shortcomings in this area can be identified.

Before analyzing its activities, it is necessary to mention that there were two alternatives related to National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism presented in the complementary report (SOU, 2013) which were either as an independent entity or as a special unit under National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ). The National Coordinator was established as an independent entity in June 2014 with a temporary two years’ mandate which was prolonged another two years. After three and half years of working the government has eventually decided that the National Coordinator should become a permanent center as a part of National Council for Crime Prevention (Bah Kuhnke and Johansson, 2017). The Coordinator also had an unstable leadership due to political reasons. The first coordinator Mona Sahlin (June 2014- May 2016) resigned as coordinator after a scandal in which she wrote a false income certificate to one of her bodyguards for requesting loan form bank (Ronja Mårtesson, et al., 2016). For a short period of time from June until December 2016 Hillevi Engström worked as the coordinator but she also resigned and went back to her previous job at Upplands Väsby municipality, and eventually from December 2016 Anna Carlstadt has held the position. Another issue is that the National Coordinator was initially sorted under ministry of Justice but later in Social Democratic government was sorted under ministry of Culture and Democracy. These instabilities have probably affected the activities of the National Coordinator, however, I cannot evaluate it since appropriate methods like interviewing the Coordinator’s Staff weren’t used in this study.

In June 2016, the National Coordinator presented its national strategy against violent extremism to the Culture and Democracy Minister Alice Bah Kuhnke. In this strategy, three different forms of extremism (right wing, left wing and Islamist extremism) were analyzed and it was argued that right wing was the most active while Islamist extremism was considered as the most dangerous (Samordnare, 2016a: 7-8). Furthermore, this strategy and activities of the National Coordinators, in general, have a particular attention to the local level and what actors that are
active in the field (especially municipalities) do and how their efforts can be developed (Samordnare, 2016a: 6).

As noted before, traditionally the police and the security service were the key actors present in all dimensions of counter-terrorism and preventive work, and local actors like municipalities had not much room for maneuver. Beyond structural obstacles, there are also other reasons behind that as National Coordinator specifies:

The municipalities have previously not taken sufficient responsibility for preventing violent extremism. The reasons for a low activity level and low ability in preventive work at the municipal level is several. It’s about among other things, a fear of making mistakes and many municipalities have therefore chosen to avoid dealing with difficult and complex issues. It’s also about a lack of information and an ambiguity in what is the municipalities’ role in preventive work (Samordnare, 2016a: 19).34

Therefore, the strategy suggests that work against violent extremism should not be isolated from other activities within municipalities. It should be included in other promotion and preventive work, and it should be incorporated into existing democratization work. And it also recommends to political leaders in municipalities to take responsibility and give a clear mission to civil servants to be active in preventive work (Samordnare, 2016a: 20).

In the introduction section, I analyzed that one major problem in counter-terrorism activities has been the lack of information because intelligence agencies and security services usually don’t share their information with other actors due to security reasons. With awareness about this issue hence the strategy demands all the actors to share those information essential for preventing and countering violent extremism within the framework of legislations because access to information is assessed crucial for effective implementation of activities against violent extremism. For example, some actions like support for foreign fighters’ relatives may require information that municipalities lack. The police and the security service have signed several agreements on how to share information with one another and the strategy suggests such agreements should also be signed between municipalities, the police and security service in order to reach an effective and well-functioned preventive work (Samordnare, 2016a: 23).

34 Translated from Swedish by author.
With this framework of coordination, then, the National Coordinator conducted its activities. Below I analyze the most important activities of the National Coordinator in order to see whether it could improve preventive work at local level by engaging municipalities.

7.2 Coordinating Municipalities’ Activities

The coordinator's original directive appointed by government in 2014 can be summarized in four points:

1. Strengthen and support cooperation for protecting democracy against violent extremism at national and local level;
2. Establish a reference group for knowledge and information exchange;
3. Support actors who identify problems with violent extremism locally; and
4. Implement targeted education for civil servants (Samordnare, 2016b: 2).

One of the early tasks that the National Coordinator did was to ask every single municipality in Sweden to appoint one of their staff as coordinator against violent extremism. The assignments of these coordinators are somehow similar to the ones of the National Coordinator. They should gather all organizations and authorities inside the municipalities, whose work is in some way relevant to preventing violent extremism in order to harmonize their activities.

Moreover, in order to find a better picture about violent extremism in Sweden, the National Coordinator asked these local coordinators to prepare a situational awareness report about violent extremism in their respective municipalities and also they had to prepare an action plan about how they were going to prevent violent extremism.

7.2.1 Situational Awareness

One of main tasks of the National coordinator is to generate a national situational awareness about violent extremism in the country. The coordinator does it through municipalities meaning that it is actually the duty of each municipality to analyze the situation and write a document explaining the characteristics of violent extremism in their respective municipality. Situational awareness is very important in preventive work since it gives a clear idea about the quantity and quality of violent extremism in Sweden and it is needed because an effective preventive work should be based on actual facts, not just estimations (SOU, 2016: 125).
The National Coordinator sent a questionnaire to all municipalities in spring 2016. In that questionnaire 47 percent of municipalities said that they didn’t have any situational awareness documents, 47 percent said they had an unwritten situational awareness and only 6 percent said that they had a written document (Samordnare, 2016c). The National Coordinator conducted the same questionnaire in spring 2017 as well. This time 42 percent of municipalities said that they created a situational awareness document (Samordnare, 2017), which shows an increase of 36 percent compared to the last year. In this regard, it can be said that the National Coordinator has been somewhat successful to encourage more municipalities to discover and analyze violent extremism.

7.2.2 Action Plan

As discussed above, there are various authorities and agencies involved in preventive work, therefore, having an action plan is a prerequisite of an efficient work because it creates a clear division of responsibility and structure about what needs to be done and what responsibility each authority stands for. As the national coordinator requires, the action plan should clarify the boundary between the municipality, police and other actors. Municipalities should also share their action plan with one another in order to learn from each other and in a comparative manner improve their own action plans based on what they learn from others (SOU, 2016: 130).

In the questionnaire conducted in 2016 by the National Coordinator, only seven percent of municipalities said that they had a complete action plan, 21 percent said that they are close to finalizing their action plan, 28 percent were in early stages, five percent had received structures from the National Coordinator about how to create an action plan and 39 percent even didn’t start the work (Samordnare, 2016c). In the questionnaire conducted in 2017, it was 44 percent of municipalities that had a completed action plan which shows an increase of 37 percent compared to the last year (Samordnare, 2017).

7.2.3 Knowledge Centers

A wide-ranging preventive work with clear responsibility at the local level is crucial to a successful preventive work against violent extremism. At the beginning of its work, the coordinator identified that there was no local cohesion responsibility for strengthening society’s preparedness for local problems caused by violent extremism. Knowledge centers, therefore, were established in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Borlänge and Örebro on January 2016; operational
ability was achieved in March 2016 as a pilot study. The reason behind choosing these four municipalities was that they all had severe problem with violent extremism.

A knowledge center is the term used to mean that the experiences from what is being done in these municipalities can serve as a model for other municipalities. A knowledge center is not a building but a coordination function which is organized by the respective municipality. Experts from different agencies, authorities, and organizations gather under the umbrella of local coordinator who is usually a security officer at municipality (SOU, 2016: 135).

Under the pilot study, a working group (the local coordinators from the four municipalities and representative from the National Coordinator) met at eight different workshops. At these workshops, common challenges and implementation of prevention methods were discussed. The National Coordinator encouraged and supported the municipalities in the development of new methods and other relevant knowledge needed in the work against violent extremism. The work has been aimed at through knowledge and coordination of existing resources in order to strengthen local efforts against violent extremism (Samordnare, 2016b: 9). It’s hard to evaluate the outcomes of the knowledge centers because they have been in action a little more than a year and no report about their activities been published yet.

7.2.4 Reference Group

The coordinator’s original directive identified the need for a national reference group for knowledge and information exchange. The coordinator convenes the reference group at least three times every half year. The reference group has served as a forum for issues related to method development, and has also created increased contact between the authorities. The reference group includes the Crime Prevention Council, the Forum for Living History, Defense University, Criminal Care, Migration Board, Authority for Social Protection and Preparedness, the Youth Administration, State Aid for Religious Organizations, Police, the Government, National Board of Health, the National Board of Institutions, The State Media Council, the State Schools, the Security Police and the Municipalities of Sweden and County Council (Samordnare, 2016b: 10).

Beside Defence University all the other actors are governmental agencies which makes the reference group heavily state-centric.
7.2.4 To What extent has the National Coordinator been successful?

Regarding terrorism prevention in practice, the formation of the National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism as an institutional design was significant and extremely crucial for harmonizing efforts both at national and local level. The National Coordinator was moderately successful to make sure that all actors involved in counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention were on the same page, and could to some extent reduce double work between different agencies and avoiding the occurrence of gaps. The National Coordinator also succeeded in creating local coordinators in all municipalities and was successful to increase their awareness about preventive work. Participants in the questionnaire evaluated the work of the National Coordinator as partially successful. In answering to the question about the extent to which the National coordinator was successful, on a scale from one to ten, where one is not successful and ten is very successful, 57.7 percent chose between one to five and 42.3 percent chose from 6 to 10. The concentration, however, was in the middle as shown in Figure 9. In what follows, I try to explain what shortcomings in the preventive work can be identified and how it can be improved.

Figure 9: To what extent has the National Coordinator been successful?

Source: Author’s survey, 2017.

7.3 Shortcomings

In 2010 Sweden’s security service published a report about violent Islamist extremism in Sweden. In that report, the security service estimated that there were around 200 individuals involved in violent Islamist extremism in Sweden (SÄPO, 2010). In 2012 the wave of IS foreign fighters rose in Europe and until the end of 2016 around 300 individuals from Sweden traveled to Syria/Iraq to join IS.
Since the emergence of IS foreign fighters in 2012 an effort was made by Swedish government in the areas of counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention both in policy and practice. As explained in details, from 2012 to 2016 Sweden tried to change its understanding about preventive work and as content analysis of official documents demonstrated a slight shift can be recognized, however, all efforts were not sufficient enough because according to Anders Thornberg, head of the security service, the number of individuals engaged in violent Islamist extremism in Sweden has grown to around 2000 individuals (Löfgren, 2017) which is an enormous escalation compared to to amount in 2010. This means that regardless of heavy investment and different efforts during a six years’ period number of people engaged in violent Islamist extremism has become ten times bigger.

In this regard, participants in the questionnaire conducted for this thesis, in answer to the question how successful has Sweden been in preventing violent Islamist extremism, on a scale from one to ten, where one was not successful and ten was very successful, 82.4 percent chose between one to five and 17.6 percent chose from six to ten. It demonstrates that even people whose task is to fight violent extremism in Sweden think they have not been very successful.

Figure 10: How successful has Sweden been in preventing violent Islamist extremism?

I argued in the theoretical framework and the statistical data presented strongly suggests that socio-economic factors are root causes that play significant roles in the expansion of violent Islamist extremism in Sweden. These socio-economic factors are the accumulation of years of problems, therefore fighting them also needs some years to give results. Terrorism prevention in practice is still in its early stages and it takes time for the structure to be an integrated and embedded part of municipalities and other actors. As noted before, the National Coordinator could shape a basic structure for preventive work, however, the structure is still new and there
are lots of confusion especially at the local level about how to work best. There are still many shortcomings and room for improvement in preventive work which are briefly discussed below.

7.3.1 Root Causes

As the theory and empirical study indicate socio-economic factors like unemployment, low education, low income and sense of non-belonging to the society play a significant role in moving people towards violent Islamic extremism. These factors are recognized in strategies and other documents, still, in practice it doesn’t seem that there is a coherent and clear-cut national plan for diminishing these causes. This is the major problem in preventive work. Root causes were demonstrated as structural factors that create an alienating environment in which violent extremism can grow, hence, fighting violent extremism without having a clear and comprehensive plan won’t be much of success. After the finalization and total establishment of the prevention institutional design at the local level then the National Coordinator needs to immediately focus on designing better integration programs for people with a foreign background in order to tackle root causes.

Results from the questionnaire reveal that Sweden has not been successful in these areas because 56.5 percent of participants in the questionnaire think Sweden has not been successful in creating equal opportunity for people with foreign background to be economically independent while 43.49 percent said it has been partially successful and only 0.01 percent said very successful (see Figure 11). Moreover, 54.2 percent of participants think Sweden has not been successful in helping persons with foreign background to socially integrate into the society while 45.8 percent said it has been partially successful and no one said very successful (see Figure 12).

![Figure 11: How successful has Sweden been in creating equal opportunity for people with foreign background?](image)

Source: Author’s Survey, 2017.
7.3.2 Role of Civil Society

The role of civil society as a likely actor in preventive work was mentioned several times in strategies and other documents, but in practice, its involvement is strictly limited. It is understandable due to the fact that municipalities and other actors beside the police and the security service are themselves new in this arena and recently found a seat at the table, but for having a more successful preventive work civil society can play an important role in bridging between governmental agencies and individuals. As Figure 13 shows, 83.5 percent of participants in the questionnaire think that the civil society can help to limit or prevent violent Islamist extremism in Sweden, while 1.2 percent said it cannot help and 15.3 said maybe. According to the result from the questionnaire, Islamic community as a part of civil society can also be very effective in this area (as seen in Figure 14).

Figure 13: Can Civil Society help limit or prevent violent Islamist extremism?

Source: Author’s survey, 2017.
Figure 14: How effective can the Islamic community be in helping to limit or prevent violent Islamist extremism?

Source: Author’s survey, 2017.

7.3.3 Surveillance

I argued earlier that surveillance can work as a double-edged sword. It can help the security service to gather more reliable intelligence, however, an incorrect implementation of surveillance can lead to stigmatization. Surveillance is an inseparable part of counter-terrorism, however, taking into account the difference between counter-terrorism and terrorism prevention, then, the use of surveillance in the later should be limited and if necessary it should be carefully conducted because the side effects can be severe and it can backfire.

As shown in the Figure 15, 36.5 percent of participants in the questionnaire think more surveillance in areas with intense Muslims population will cause to anger or alienation and possibly more tendencies towards violent Islamist extremism, while only 16.5 percent think it will help to limit or prevent it, and 14.1 percent said it will have no significant effect. Additionally, 32.9 percent said they didn’t know the answer.

Figure 15: What do you think the effect of more surveillance in areas with intense Muslim population will be?

Source: Author’s survey, 2017.
7.4 Summary

Analyzing activities of the National Coordinator clearly shows that preventing terrorism and violent Islamist extremism in Sweden is in its early stages. The coordinator was partially effective in creating a forum for communication and exchange between various actors at the national level. Training programs for local actors, and making municipalities to prepare and document situational awareness reports and action plans were also two major achievements, however, as the increase in number of people engaged in violent Islamist extremism shows, the preventive work cannot be evaluated as a success.

The most important shortage in this area is how actors challenge root causes in order to eliminate alienating environment in particularly exposed areas. I argued that the best way to diminish alienating environment is to use contingency and create a situation in which people are able to choose between different options. In that case individuals can actively decide over their lives and use their free will. This require a broad and deep understanding about integration and terrorism prevention, and of course more material resources and investments in particularly exposed areas. Nevertheless, there is no coherent plan in this area although it seems necessary to pay more attention in developing more functional integration programs and more efforts for creating equal opportunities for people who live in these areas.

Moreover, the role of civil society should be clearly defined and municipalities should be encouraged to cooperate more with non-governmental organizations that have proven to have the capacity to contribute to preventive work. Last but not least the implementation of surveillance in preventive work needs to be limited or carefully conducted since it can backfire and damage all the efforts.
8. Conclusion

Theoretical and Empirical Findings

In this study, I tried to develop the *root causes approach* by using alienation and network theories. I argued that living in an alienating environment has a crucial role in tendencies towards violent extremism. Hard socio-economic factors like unemployment, low education, low income lead to social isolation and consequently increase the sense of non-belonging to society. I also argued that being exposed to propaganda and having an inappropriate social network can be seen as intermediate variables explaining why only a few among those who live in alienating environment move towards violent extremism.

The statistical analysis in this thesis shed a light on the severity of the situation in so called particularly exposed areas as a fertile ground for violent Islamist extremism. By deploying various indicators, the analysis showed that alienation theory helps to explain the growth in the number of Swedish IS fighters.

In the next step, I tried to analyze how Sweden’s prevention policy evolved in response to Sweden’s IS problem. The content analysis of related official documents demonstrated a slight progression in Sweden’s terrorism prevention policy. The last published strategy, therefore, has a relatively better understanding of preventive work and sees socio-economic factors as root causes. It also appoints other actors besides the police and the security service to take responsibility in preventive work. Most importantly, it designates a national coordinator to coordinate and harmonize activities of all actors involved in preventive work.

The establishment of the National Coordinator Against Violent Extremism helped to create a forum for communication between various actors both at national and local level, and educating civil servants who are involved in preventive work and making a basic blueprint for them. All these efforts, nonetheless, has not been very successful since the number of people engaged in violent Islamist extremism has drastically increased and data from author’s survey show that even people whose work is coordinate preventive work in municipalities think Sweden has not been successful in preventive people from moving towards violent Islamist extremism. It means that there are shortages which need to be overcome.

The most important shortage is the absence of framework to combat root causes in practice; a comprehensive national plan is needed for improving socio-economic factors in particularly
exposed areas, and generating equal opportunities for people with foreign backgrounds. Moreover, there should be more involvement of civil society in preventive work, and the way surveillance as a preventive tool is implemented should be examine the tradeoffs and inform policy design.

Limitations and Suggestions for future Research

In this thesis I decided to focus only on objective factors and subjective factors were totally excluded. The identity crisis which faces certain would be terrorists and psychological processes that make an individual to join violent Islamist extremism and eventually commit terrorism are important factors. However, analyzing these factors requires specific methods like in-depth interviews with people who have been engaged in violent Islamist extremism in order to understand their mindset. Another method can be conducting a questionnaire with a large amount of people who live in particularly exposed areas to understand how they experience the alienating environment.

Moreover, for understanding how actors work with prevention, a case study could be done where activities of some municipalities were analyzed in detail in a comparative manner. In-depth interviews with civil servants, especially local coordinators at municipalities, would be similarly useful.
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Databases

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Gothenburg municipality: http://statistik.goteborg.se

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: www.idea.int

Malmö municipality: http://malmo.se/Kommun--politik/Fakta-och-statistik.html

Statistics Sweden: www.scb.se

Stockholm municipality: http://statistik.stockholm.se

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Örebro municipality: http://www.orebro.se/kommun--politik/fakta-statistik--undersokningar.html
Appendix

The questionnaire form

Title: Survey- Sweden's Fight Against Violent Islamic Extremism

Background Info:

Hello!
My name is Morteza Eslahchi and I'm a master’s student in International Relations at Stockholm's university. I'm currently writing my master's thesis which is about Sweden's counter-terrorism policy and practice with a focus on individuals (mainly second generation immigrants who were born and/or raised in Sweden) who traveled from Sweden to Syria/Iraq to fight for the Islamic State.
I have received this survey.
My research will be aided considerably by gaining the input of professionals like yourself who are directly or indirectly engaged in the issue and that's why you have received this survey.
Regarding questions of confidentiality, I don't require any personal information. However, you can, however, optionally write your name and email address. I will not mention any individual’s name in my research.

Answering the questions takes 3 to 5 minutes and I sincerely appreciate your contribution.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Best Regards,
Morteza Eslahchi
Phone: 0725521798
Email: morteza.eslahchi@gmail.com

Information:

Name (Optional): …
Email (Optional): …
What is your professional field?

Civil Servant (Regeringskansliet, Kommuner, Landsting, etc.)
Intelligence and security agencies (Polisen, SÄPO, etc.)
Academia
Civil society
Other
Questions:

1. What do you think was the most important reason why around 300 individuals traveled from Sweden to Syria/Iraq to fight for the Islamic State?

   Religious reasons
   Socio-economic reasons
   Political reasons
   Some combination of these reasons
   Some other reasons

2. To what Extent is each factor important for explaining why persons with a foreign background in Sweden move towards violent Islamic extremism?

   1. Jihadism ideology and propaganda
      Not Important
      Somewhat Important
      Very Important
   2. Low education
      Not Important
      Somewhat Important
      Very Important
   3. Lack of meaningful employment
      Not Important
      Somewhat important
      Very Important
   4. Low Income
      Not Important
      Somewhat Important
      Very Important
   5. Sense of non-belonging to society
      Not Important
      Somewhat Important
      Very Important
6. Disagreement with Swedish Foreign Policy
   Not Important
   Somewhat Important
   Very Important

3. How successful has Sweden been in preventing violent Islamist extremism on a scale from one to ten, where one is not successful and ten is very successful.

4. To what extent is Sweden successful in tackling each specific area?
   
   1. Helping to politically integrate persons with a foreign background into Swedish society, e.g. promoting voting and other forms of political activity.
      
      Not Successful
      Partially Successful
      Very Successful

   2. Helping to economically integrate persons with a foreign background into Swedish society, e.g. promoting training for jobs, helping persons gain jobs, or otherwise gain skills for jobs.
      
      Not Successful
      Partially Successful
      Very Successful

   3. Helping to socially integrate persons with e.g. gain contact with Swedish society, cultivate links between those with a foreign background and native-born Swedes?
      
      Not Successful
      Partially Successful
      Very Successful
4. Creating equal opportunity for people with foreign background to be economically independent, e.g. promoting qualified jobs or entrepreneurial possibilities for persons with a foreign background

   Not Successful
   Partially Successful
   Very Successful

5. Can Civil Society (including schools, religious institutions, professional associations, etc.) help limit or prevent violent Islamic extremism?

   Yes
   No
   Maybe

6. How effective can the Islamic community be in helping to limit or prevent violent Islamic extremism?

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Not effective
   Effective

7. What do you think the effect of more surveillance in areas with intense Muslim population will be?

   It will help to limit or prevent tendencies towards violent Islamic extremism
   It will have no significant effect
   It will cause anger or alienation and possibly more tendencies towards violent Islamic extremism
   I don’t know or it will have other effects

8. In 2014 the Swedish Government created the National coordinator against violent extremism (Nationellasamordnare). To what extent has this agency been successful?

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Not successful
   Successful