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## Paper on Possible Causes of Extremism

This paper is an aid to stimulating discussion for Session 9 on '*Tackling the Causes of Extremism*'. Some of the issues listed are not referenced but there is significant academic and practitioner based evidence which points to a multiplicity of issues that make an individual or individuals vulnerable to extremism/violent extremism. We should also acknowledge that the Prevent and Counter-Extremism strategy of Her Majesty's Government have also widened the focus for action against extremist narratives, rather than just on violent extremism.

### *What are the potential causes?*

There are a variety of theories, some of which include the 'Conveyor Belt' Type theory of people being led along a process towards extremism. This is heavily disputed by those who believe that people become susceptible and vulnerable due to a range of internal, physical and external events and experiences and yet, people do not necessarily move down towards a set path to extremism. These two theories are conflicting ones that play out on a virtually weekly basis in the UK and media sources.

Yet there are a number of possible factors when cases are reviewed regarding people who have been arrested and/or detained after being found guilty of terrorist related offences. Factors seem to include:

- **Mental health vulnerabilities** and emotional crises and undiagnosed mental health or emotional difficulties.
- **Racism and bigotry**: Anti-Muslim prejudice has been cited in some cases as one driver towards extremism and where activities by far right and anti-Muslim groups create counter-extremism loops.
- A deep sense of a **victimisation narrative** which is also promoted by some civil society groups and which can alienate and drive individuals into finding a sense of purpose by reading materials by groups like IS who promise 'justice' and a future free from prejudice and anti-Muslim rhetoric etc.
- **Ideology**: this is heavily promoted as *the* radicalising factor though it is realistic to assume that this alone does not change the behaviour and values of individuals and push them towards extremism.
- **Poverty, social and educational exclusion** – including reducing the aspirations and hopes of people in communities making them possibly prone to being influenced by those who promise hope, a better future and a change from the daily monotony of their lives.

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- **Gang type behaviour** and friendships and allegiances which can be a push and pull factor for young people. Gang type behaviour has been a factor in the promotion of extremist narratives within young people who are looking for status or recognition.

The issues are therefore complex and it should also be highlighted that local, national and international contexts can also be specific drivers towards extremism. Some convicted extremists have also mentioned **foreign policy**, though once again, this cannot be the *only* factor, but it certainly is one of a number that can impact on an individual.

Each country will therefore have its own unique set of local and national issues which could influence the narratives of extremism and the propagation of them and we must also bear in mind that extremism is not only related to one faith, culture or geographical boundary. This is also one of the reasons why it has become a global issue and will continue to be, given the fast and changing nature of amorphous groups today.

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