

Risk and Protective Factors for Armed Violence Codebook

Methodology behind the “Preventing Armed Violence: An Evidence-Based Tool for Smarter Policy & Action” prototype

Center on International Cooperation

New York University

Created by Joanne Richards, Céline Monnier, Marta Bautista,

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**Center on
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Table of Contents

Objectives 2

1. Definitions 2

2. Rapid Review 3

Step 1: Identifying the research questions 4

Step 2: Identifying relevant studies 4

Step 3: Study selection 6

Step 4: Creating a matrix of risk and protective factors 7

Step 5: Collating, summarizing and reporting the results 8

3. Coding Instructions 9

Endnotes 13

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Objectives

1. Conduct a rapid review of the literature on risk and protective factors for intra-state armed conflict and terrorism/violent extremism (the term “rapid review” is explained in section two below).
2. Create a matrix to support decision-makers and practitioners to make policy decisions on peacebuilding and violence prevention.

Five New York University (NYU) student assistants and an NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC) programme officer will conduct this literature review. The literature review will be overseen by two NYU CIC senior researchers.

1. Definitions

A **risk factor** is a correlate that precedes the occurrence of armed violence and increases the likelihood that armed violence will occur.¹

A **protective factor** is a correlate that precedes the occurrence of armed violence and reduces the likelihood that armed violence will occur.²

A **static risk/protective factor** is a factor that cannot be changed by prevention programs (e.g., sex assigned at birth, age).

A **dynamic risk/protective factor** is a factor that can be changed by prevention programs (e.g., a feeling of exclusion).

Intra-state armed conflict is a contested incompatibility between a state and non-state armed group inside the state’s territory that causes at least 25 battle-related deaths per year.³ Intra-state armed conflict can be:

- Fought over control of government and/or territory.
- Have foreign involvement (i.e., internationalized intra-state wars).
- Be multi-party (i.e., involving a state and more than one non-state armed group).

The term **violent extremism** is often used interchangeably with terrorism, and there is much debate as to the precise definitions of these terms and the extent to

which they are conceptually distinct from other forms of armed conflict.⁴ We do not attempt to define these terms and will instead keep note of the various definitions used by different authors (see coding instructions below). However, for the purposes of our rapid literature review, we focus on terrorism/violent extremism conducted by organized groups and lone actors. **Lone actors** are individuals who plan, prepare and execute their attacks with a high degree of autonomy and who are not active participants of established terrorist groups or organizations (although they may be inspired by them).⁵

2. Rapid Review

A rapid review is an assessment of what is already known about a policy or practice issue, by using systematic review methods to search and critically appraise existing research.⁶ Rapid reviews aim to be rigorous and explicit in method, and thus systematic, but make concessions to the breadth or depth of the process by limiting particular aspects of the systematic review process.⁷

Rapid reviews have five steps:

Step 1: Identifying the research questions

Our research questions are:

- What is known from the existing literature about risk and protective factors for the onset of armed violence, including intra-state armed conflict, violent extremism and/or terrorism?
- What is known from the existing literature about risk and protective factors for recruitment into non-state armed groups, including those engaged in intra-state armed conflict, violent extremism and/or terrorism?
- What is known from the existing literature about risk and protective factors for the spillover of armed violence—including intra-state armed conflict, violent extremism and/or terrorism—into neighboring countries?

Step 2: Identifying relevant studies

To identify literature that is potentially relevant to our research questions we will conduct database and hand searches. The same search methodology (outlined immediately below) will be applied for each research question, however different key word searches will be applied.

- Review the Annual Reviews database and the Campbell Collaboration Library of Systematic Reviews—these are both databases that catalogue review articles. In the Campbell Library, we will also make use of the option to search for articles in English, French, Spanish, and Chinese.
- Review the Oxford Bibliographies database—this is a database that provides annotated bibliographies of key publications in a number of fields. We will review the bibliographies related to anthropology, childhood studies, criminology, economics, geography, international relations, neuroscience, political science, psychology, and public health in order to identify relevant review articles.
- Following the review of the aforementioned databases, we will conduct keyword searches in the following databases:
 - For **academic literature**: ProQuest Central; Web of Science; Scopus; Worldwide Political Science Abstracts; PsycINFO.
 - For **grey literature**: PAIS International (a multilingual database) and CIAO.

These databases were recommended by the Head Librarian for Humanities and Social Sciences at NYU. To begin, we will conduct Boolean searches using various combinations of the key words stated in our research questions—for example, “risk factors AND onset AND intra-state armed conflict,” and “protective factors AND onset AND intra-state armed conflict.” If these search terms yield only a small number of results, we will then try alternative keywords (including various synonyms) such as “root causes AND outbreak AND civil war” and “resilience AND outbreak AND civil war.”⁸

- If relevant academic review articles are identified from these previous searches, we will also take note of the journals in which these articles are published, and conduct hand searches of these journals (i.e., go through the table of contents of different issues). In addition, if little grey literature is found as a result of the above search methods, hand searches will also be conducted. This will involve identifying relevant international organizations (World Health Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), visiting the websites of these organizations and reviewing their lists of publications.

Due to time and resource constraints, we will limit the above-mentioned searches to the last 10 years (i.e., 2014 to 2024). However, if this time period yields only a limited number of review studies, then the parameters for the literature review will be expanded (for e.g., non-review studies will be included, in addition to review studies). Database searches and hand searches will be undertaken by the two senior researchers and NYU program officer, however student assistants with relevant language skills (Chinese, French, Spanish) will assist as and when necessary.

Step 3: Study selection

After identifying literature that is potentially relevant to our research questions (step 2 above), we will then scrutinize this literature against a set of inclusion criteria.

To be included in the rapid literature review, a publication must:

- Provide a review of the literature.
- Be published between 2014 and 2024.
- Be written in either English, French, Spanish, or Chinese.
- Be either grey literature or a peer-reviewed academic article or book.
- Examine why onset, spillover and/or recruitment occur (and do not occur) in relation to intra-state armed conflict, violent extremism and/or terrorism as defined in section 1 above.

Literature that focuses on related questions, such as the frequency of terrorist attacks, and radicalization that does not lead to violence should be excluded. Literature on gangs and cartels should also be excluded, as should literature examining conflict between non-state armed groups that does not involve the state. However, if time permits, this literature could be included at a later stage.⁹ There are no restrictions regarding research methodology.

In order to assess potentially relevant literature against these inclusion criteria, the two senior researchers will import the results of the key word and database searches into Covidence—a computer program for conducting literature reviews. Using this software, the senior researchers (with assistance from student assistants where necessary) will review the title and abstract of each article, and select from three options—yes, no, maybe. Once this initial selection round has been

conducted, the two senior researchers (again with assistance from student assistants) will then examine the “yes” and “maybe” articles in more detail. This will be done by reviewing the full articles and selecting from two options in Covidence—include or exclude. This two-step approach is taken because abstracts do not always capture the full scope of an article.¹⁰ To ensure that there is agreement on which articles should be included and excluded, a calibration exercise will be conducted.¹¹ This exercise can be done in one of two ways:

- 5%–10% of the papers should be selected for independent screening by multiple reviewers (i.e., two senior researchers and two student assistants). If a high level of agreement among reviewers is not achieved (i.e., lower than 90 percent), then the reviewers should discuss their points of disagreement and then review (and possibly revise) the inclusion criteria. Another 10 percent of the papers should then be selected for a second calibration exercise to test the modified inclusion criteria.
- With two senior researchers—one senior researcher should conduct the initial review, with the second senior researcher verifying a portion of the papers, with the goal of 90 percent or better agreement. If a high level of agreement is not achieved, the same procedure outlined in the previous bullet point—discussion, revision, and a second calibration exercise—should be adopted.

Step 4: Creating a matrix of risk and protective factors

Once relevant articles have been selected, the main findings of each article should be coded by the student assistants and NYU program officer, following the instructions outlined in section 3 below. These instructions will be refined in consultation with the student assistants once they have read two or three articles and entered information into the Excel spreadsheet. Where possible, studies will be assigned to the student assistants on the basis of research background and interest. Articles will also be assigned on the basis of language ability.

To ensure that different student assistants are coding information in the same way, we will also conduct a calibration exercise. Pairs of student assistants will be assigned two to three papers and asked to code them according to the coding instructions. The student assistants, with help from the senior researchers, will then meet to discuss any discrepancies, and the coding instructions will be revised accordingly. A second calibration round will be conducted if necessary.

Step 5: Collating, summarizing and reporting the results

Once the articles included in the literature review have been coded in the abovementioned matrix, the two senior researchers will conduct a numerical and thematic analysis. The numerical analysis will provide descriptive statistics on the number of articles included, the themes of these articles, whether they focus on risk or protective factors, and their geographic coverage. The thematic analysis will examine a number of questions to be decided in consultation with the UK and other relevant policy entities. These questions could include, but are not limited to:

- Are any risk/protective factors, or combinations of factors, particularly salient?
- Are there any contradictions between the academic and grey literature?
- Are there any surprising findings?
- Are there any gaps in the literature?

The senior researchers will also report and reflect on any biases introduced into the literature review because of its rapid nature.

3. Coding Instructions

Category	Coding Instructions
Factor for/against armed violence (long title)	Describe the risk or protective factor in detail. Be as specific as possible by using all the qualifiers used in the study. For example, “ethnic polarization in societies where a large ethnic minority lives side by side with an ethnic majority.” Include all risk/protective factors mentioned in the study. Note that risk factors are not triggers, and triggers should not be coded. Triggers are precipitating events that set off a sharp escalation in violence. For example, a country may have many risk factors for violence, but not tip into violence until a specific trigger, perhaps an assassination, occurs. Only code the factor if it is linked to behavior (i.e., the violent action itself, do not code if it is a risk/protective factor for radicalization, willingness to commit violence, or positive attitudes towards violence).
Factor for/against armed violence (short title)	Provide a few words outlining the risk or protective factor. Please note that in some instances the long title and short title may be the same, for e.g., if the risk factor is “being under 50 years old.”
Risk/protective factor for...?	Select one or more from the dropdown menu: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spillover • Recruitment • Onset
Type of armed violence	Select one or more options from the dropdown menu: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic conflict • Intra-state armed conflict (separatist/territorial) • Intra-state armed conflict (governmental) • Intra-state armed conflict (generic) • Violent extremism/terrorism (organized groups) • Violent extremism/terrorism (lone actors) • Violent extremism/terrorism (generic)
Definition of type of armed violence	Add a few words on how the type of armed violence (intra-state armed conflict, violent extremism, terrorism) in the article is defined by the authors of that article. If the type of violence is not defined, write “not defined.”
Factor type	Select whether the factor is a static or dynamic risk or protective factor, following the below definitions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Static risk factor (cannot be addressed through programming e.g., age) • Dynamic risk factor (i.e., that could be curbed through programming, e.g., prevention, development, Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programming) • Static protective factor (cannot be addressed through programming, e.g., age) • Dynamic protective factor (i.e., that could be curbed through programming, e.g., prevention, development, Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programming various means)
Explanation (i.e., why is this a risk/protective factor?)	Describe why this is a risk or protective factor in a few words. Focus on the micro-mechanisms underlying the increase or decrease in risk or protection. For example, ethnic groups are more likely to engage in organized violence when they are excluded from the political system and are unable to pursue their interests or redress their grievances in a peaceful manner. If no explanation is given, write “no explanation given.”

Factor interactions	How does the risk/protective factor interact with other risk/protective factors mentioned in the article? Provide a few sentences. If no interactions are mentioned, write “no interactions mentioned.”
Indicator(s)	Describe how the risk or protective factor is measured, e.g., risk factor: negative horizontal inequality, indicator: the country GDP per capita divided by the mean GDP per capita of the poorest group in society. If different articles included in the review study use different indicators, provide information on this. If no indicators are mentioned, write “no indicator information given.”
Domain	<p>What type of risk/protective factor is being explained? Select as many options from the dropdown menu as apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Economic) activity • (Economic) situation • (Economic) changes • (Rule of Law/Government) Justice • (Rule of Law/Government) Human Rights • (Political) Regime • (Political) Interference • (Political) Legitimacy of the state • (Political) Moments • (Security) Violence • (Security) Institutions • (Security) Armed Groups • (Situational) Locations • Demographic • (Psychosocial) Personality Traits • (Psychosocial) Values and Beliefs • (Psychosocial) Emotions • (Psychosocial) Past or Current Experience • (Psychosocial) Belonging • (Psychosocial) Education • (Psychosocial) Health • (Technology) Multimedia • (Environmental) Preservation/Degradation • (Environmental) Resources • (Environmental) Weather/Climate
Age	<p>Select one or more options from the dropdown menu if this risk or protective factor is most relevant for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children (0–18 years old) • Youth • Adults (18 years and above) • All ages • No differentiation—the article does not differentiate risk/protective factors by age.
Gender	<p>Select one or more options from the dropdown menu if this risk or protective factor is most relevant for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men • Women • Men and women • Trans/non-binary • No differentiation—the article does not differentiate risk/protective factors by sex.

<p>Studies used?</p>	<p>If the study is a review article: please list the overall number and type of articles included in the review study (e.g., 13 quantitative and 5 qualitative articles).</p> <p>If the study is not a review article: please list the information used in the empirical analysis (e.g., qualitative case study on Nepal; quantitative study on Colombia with 258 survey respondents).</p>
<p>Supported by evidence?</p>	<p>Please indicate if the study finds empirical support for the risk/protective factor by selecting one of the below options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature provides support for the risk/protective factor • Literature does not provide support for the risk/protective factor • Literature is inconclusive
<p>Overall review/specific article(s)</p>	<p>Please indicate if the risk/protective factor is supported by one or several articles or (in the case of a review article) if the empirical support for the risk/protective factor is the overall conclusion of a systematic review.</p>
<p>Balance of evidence</p>	<p>Please state how many articles (do not) support the risk/protective factor and list these articles using the Chicago citation style.</p>
<p>Strength of association</p>	<p>Provide information on the association between the risk/protective factor and the outcome of interest (i.e., onset, recruitment, spillover). Is the association strong or weak? If the article provides additional information relevant to the strength of association, please include it. For e.g., 41% of long actor cases were found to have previous criminal convictions. If no additional information on the strength of association is mentioned; please write “no information on association”</p>
<p>Level of risk/protective factor:</p>	<p>Select one or more options from the dropdown menu:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual: Individual level risk factors include personal history and biological characteristics of the individual that increase the likelihood of being a victim or a perpetrator of violence (e.g. sex, age, disability, education, alcohol/substance abuse). • Relational: Relationship level risk factors refer to the proximal social relationships that influence the risk of violent victimization or perpetration (e.g. relations with violent peers, dysfunctional family relationships). • Community: Community level risk factors refer to the characteristics of community contexts in which social relationships are embedded, such as schools, workplaces and neighborhoods, which influence the risk of being victims or perpetrators of violence (e.g. concentrated poverty, high unemployment). • Societal: Society level risk factors include factors that create a climate conducive to violence, those that reduce inhibitions against violence, and those that create and sustain gaps between different segments of society (e.g. legal and social norms that support violence, economic and gender inequalities). The broad societal factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited. These factors include social and cultural norms that support violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts. Other large societal factors include the health, economic, educational, and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequalities between groups in society. • Country: the risk/protective factor is a country level indicator such as GDP. • Transnational: the risk/protective factor works at the cross-border level, between neighboring states.
<p>Geographic focus</p>	<p>Does the article focus on a specific country/region/area? For e.g., a review of the causes of war in sub-Saharan Africa? If so, please list the country/region/area. If the study includes a range of articles and has no specific geographical focus, write “no specific geographic focus.”</p>

Source	Please write the full citation for the article with a hyperlink in Chicago style.
Type of Source	Please select the type of source from the dropdown menu: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic study (i.e., published in a peer reviewed journal article, or with an academic press) • Grey literature (i.e., policy literature, reports)
Publication year	Please list the year in which the article was published. If the article was first published online, use this date.
Additional information	Please add any information here that you feel is relevant but not covered by the other columns. (e.g. more details on the sample used for the analysis)

Endnotes

¹ David P. Farrington and Brandon C. Welsh, “Understanding Risk and Protective Factors,” in *Saving Children from a Life of Crime* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

² Ibid.

³ See Therese Pettersson, “Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook Version 23.1,” *UCDP/PRIO*, 1, https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/replication_data/2023_ucdp-prio-acd-231.pdf.

⁴ See for example, Kalyvas, Stathis N. “Jihadi Rebels in Civil War,” *Daedalus* 147, no. 1 (2018): 36–47, <https://direct.mit.edu/daed/article/147/1/36/27181/Jihadi-Rebels-in-Civil-War>; Véronique Dudouet, Anna Geis, Maéva Clément, and Hanna Pfeifer, “From Rebels to Violent Extremists: Evolving Conflict Trends and Implications for the Recognition of Armed Non-State Actors,” in *Armed Non-State Actors and the Politics of Recognition* (Manchester University Press, 2021), 237–.

⁵ This definition is broadly recognized in the literature, see for example, B. Schuurman et al., “Who Commits Terrorism Alone? Comparing the Biographical Backgrounds and Radicalization Dynamics of Lone-Actor and Group-Based Terrorists,” *Crime & Delinquency* (2023), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00111287231180126>.

⁶ Maria J. Grant and Andrew Booth. “A Typology of Reviews: An Analysis of 14 Review Types and Associated Methodologies,” *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 26, no. 2 (2009): 91–108, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x>; For a decision tree outlining different types of systematic review, see https://guides.library.cornell.edu/d.php?content_id=52561085.

⁷ Grant and Booth, “A Typology of Reviews,” 100.

⁸ Other possible synonyms to be included in Boolean searches include push and pull factors, enablers, resilience, correlates, drivers, etc.

⁹ Future literature reviews could focus on gangs and cartels, but also non-state armed conflict as defined by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme. See Therese Pettersson, *UCDP Non-state Conflict Codebook v 23.1*, 2023, <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads>.

¹⁰ Hilary Arksey and Lisa O'Malley, “Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological Framework,” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 1 (2005): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>.

¹¹ Ibid, 19–32.